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From the Law of the Father to the Ethics of Care: Reimagining the Family, the Church and the Police in the Films of Pedro Almodóvar

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Doctor of Philosophy

February 2018

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This thesis is submitted in total fulfilment of the degree of Doctor of Philosophy

Abstract

Having made twenty feature films since his punk-inflected debut, *Pepi, Luci, Bom y otras chicas del montón* (1980), Pedro Almodóvar is, internationally, the best-known contemporary Spanish director. His filmography defies simple characterisation, although many have commented on his subversion of gender, genre and traditional markers of Spanish identity. This PhD thesis draws on such discussions, but makes an important contribution to the scholarship by reorienting the focus from the individual to the community. I analyse the representations of three institutions across this corpus: the family, the Church, and the law. Not only is each a regular motif of Almodóvar's work, they share a nexus to the dictatorship of Francisco Franco, who co-opted them to maintain his regime's ideological authority. Tracing the ways in which Almodóvar both deconstructs and reimagines these institutions, I explore the extent to which his films suggest that a postmodern aesthetic can give rise to a meaningful ethic. Whilst the director's transgressive attitude to established social order is refracted throughout his films, for instance in their labyrinthine narratives and genre hybridity, I conclude that he puts forward an ethical framework for community in the democratic era.

Given the diversity of Almodóvar's works, this thesis draws on a range of conceptual tools. In particular, I adopt the analytical frames offered by feminist and queer understandings of time and space. These conceptual tools foreground different modes of experiencing the world, and allow me to highlight the ways in which Almodóvar's alternative temporalities and privileging of feminine spaces contribute to his deconstruction of conventional institutions and gender hierarchies. These concepts offer an innovative methodology for approaching these films and allow me to chart ruptures and continuities in the representations of the family, the Church and the law. My research provides not only a comprehensive analysis of the three institutions side-by-side, thus far missing from the literature, but contributes to an understanding of the primacy of community in Almodóvar's corpus. Whilst these films catalogue various ways in which the family, the Church and the law

repress and control individual characters, I propose that the filmmaker nevertheless remains hopeful about alternative social configurations.

This analysis leads to the conclusion that the director has certain requirements for meaningful communities, primarily that they be grounded in the "ethics of care". A feminist approach to morality, the ethics of care is mentioned only briefly in the wide-ranging scholarship on this director. I extend this by further unpacking the ways in which his preferred communities fit within its parameters. This emerges from the ways in which Almodóvar reimagines (or fails to reimagine) each institution considered by this thesis. Each chapter focuses on one of these institutions and I conclude that Almodóvar is most hopeful about the possibility of creating alternative families, whilst the Church and formal agents of the law are less able to be reimagined according to his ethical framework. Ultimately, this thesis offers us new and tangible ways of thinking not only about community in these films, but more generally in our own lives.

Declaration

I declare that this thesis comprises only my original work towards the degree of Doctor of Philosophy and that I have made due acknowledgement in this thesis to all other material used.

I also declare that this thesis is fewer than 100,000 words in length, exclusive of tables, maps, bibliographies and appendices (as relevant).

Meribah Ruth Rose

Acknowledgements

A thesis is in many ways like a child; it takes a village to raise it. I have been very lucky with my village and it would be impossible to individually thank everyone who has contributed to this long, and at times arduous, process.

My deepest thanks to my supervisors, for their support, intellectual rigour and insightful feedback. I thank Alfredo Martínez-Expósito for his perceptive and helpful comments on how this project could be strengthened and deepened, as well as his enthusiasm. I thank Lara Anderson for her discerning advice, her friendship, encouragement, and the wonderful professional opportunities she has offered me. Thank you also to Jacqueline Dutton, who has been a great support and sounding board throughout this process.

I am grateful to the University of Melbourne and the Government of Australia for the award of an Australian Postgraduate Award (later converted to a Research Training Program Scholarship) and to the Faculty of Arts for the Melbourne Abroad Travel Scholarship. I am also very appreciative of the numerous exciting teaching and research opportunities I have encountered across the Faculties of Arts and Law, which have extended me professionally and personally.

My heartfelt gratitude to my three parents and siblings, for their faith in me, proofreading, cheering and counsel. This would not have been possible without you. Thanks also to my nephew Raff and niece Gemma, who both arrived during the thesis and provided a much-needed reminder that there is life outside academia. I look forward to being a better daughter, sister and aunt now that this is over—and to meeting Dwayne, whoever you turn out to be.

I very much appreciate my own community of circumstance, which has provided me with much encouragement, support and good company throughout this process. These include Madeleine Roberts, Emily Cheeseman, Belinda Parker and Charlotte Ryan. A special thank you to those who generously read sections of this thesis and made insightful and constructive suggestions—there is no doubt this is a better piece of work thanks to you: including Howard Choo, Lily O'Neill, Claire

Loughnan. I also benefitted from the extraordinarily generous proofreading expertise of Alice Allan. A special thank you to Jacinthe Flore, who has been a dear friend, colleague, and confidante throughout this endeavour. Your friendship is one of the best things to come out of this!

Finally, my deepest thanks and love to Stuart. You have only known me whilst I have been engaged in this Sisyphean task and it has been at times an incredibly needy third wheel in our relationship. I am so excited for us to finally be on our own!

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Note regarding translations

Quotes in Spanish have been left in the original. All translations from French are my own, unless otherwise stated.

Introduction

A. Revising community in the films of Pedro Almodóvar

It is nearly impossible to summarise the career of Spanish director Pedro Almodóvar pithily.[1] Having made twenty feature films since his punk-inflected debut, *Pepi, Luci, Bom y otras chicas del montón* (1980), today Almodóvar is, internationally at least, the best-known contemporary Spanish director.[2] His filmography defies simple characterisation, ignoring genre boundaries and exploring a wide range of themes. Whilst his filmmaking style is eclectic, there is an aesthetic and narrative consistency that gives the adjective "Almodovarian" meaningful content.[3] Visually, his works are distinctive due to a preference for vibrant colour and unusual point-of-view shots.[4] Structurally, they often include intertwining narratives and competing timelines (see Carcaud-Macaire 2000, 172), and there is a marked tendency to "self-plagiarise" characters, motifs and plotlines.[5] These recurrent configurations mean that these films "speak to each other, interweave, come and go as their heroes do in the romantic labyrinths erected by their creator" (Strauss 2006, xii). Certainly, despite the heterogeneity of this corpus, the director returns consistently to a few core concerns: identity, memory, and community.

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1 Various excellent overviews of the director's corpus exist, including both monographs and edited volumes: Smith (2000); Allinson (2001); D'Lugo (2006); Acevedo-Muñoz (2007); Epps and Kakoudaki (2009). One of the most recent volumes dedicated to the director is *A Companion to Pedro Almodóvar* (eds Vernon and D'Lugo 2013).

2 There is a significant contrast between the way Almodóvar's works are viewed inside and outside of Spain: D'Lugo (2006, 8-9); Rox Barasoain (2008, 12); Bou (2011, 43); Marsh et al (2012, 210); Martínez-Expósito (2012); Cerdán and Fernández Labayen (2013); Aguado (2014). See also Triana-Toribio (2000) for an account of the changing attitudes to Almodóvar within Spain.

3 See Mira (2005). Mapping the migrations of themes from Almodóvar's early, unpublished short stories to his films, Smith, for instance, notes the "constant cohabitation of comedy and tragedy" across his works (2009a, 448).

4 Almodóvar has described his use of colour as a form of revenge for the imposition of monochromatic life on his mother (Colmeiro 1997, 115-116).

5 Paired narratives or characters are too numerous to list in full. Examples include: the double assassins (*Matador*); Lola's sons, both named Esteban (*Todo sobre mi madre*); Pablo's two lovers, and the parallel affairs between Antonio and the siblings (*La ley del deseo*); the mother and daughter who share a name and a lover (*Tacones lejanos*); the double paedophile priests (*La ley del deseo* and *La mala educación*); and the reuse of footage from *Mujeres al borde* in the film-within-a-film in *Los abrazos rotos*.

In this thesis, I explore the ethical principles that underpin the director's preferred forms of community. I consider the representation of three institutions visible across this corpus: the family, the Church and the law.[6] Directing our attention to this trio facilitates a focused approach to the Manchegan's 20 films, whilst also highlighting the continued significance of community to his narrative universe. When I talk about "community" I am not using it as a term of art, but rather in its most general sense, as a form of being together or a network of relations. I draw implicitly here on the work of French philosopher Jean-Luc Nancy, who offers a radical reconceptualisation of community that resonates throughout this project. Whilst my intention is not to offer a Nancean analysis of this corpus, my approach has been influenced by the way Nancy's understanding of community denies fixed boundaries, and encourages us to think of it as requiring not conscious effort, but rather as something that is given to us with our very being. For Nancy, "[c]ommunity is given to us with being and as being" (1991, 35; see also Welch and Panelli 2007, 353). I argue that in Almodóvar's films, this helps us make sense of the myriad ways in which community is established as a key part of his characters' worlds. With this in mind, the aim of this thesis is to articulate what community means more particularly in Almodóvar's films. I therefore set out with a definition of the term that is able to adapt to the findings of my analysis. It is one of my central contentions that community is one of the most important and consistent themes of his work.[7] Each of the family, the Church and the law can be considered both a community (when we consider the social configurations that emerge under its auspices), and also an institution (when we zoom out to its historical and cultural positioning). If community and institution seem to be used interchangeably, they are nevertheless distinguished in these terms. Moreover, I only use "community" when it comes to my arguments about Almodóvar's alternative configurations, which are by their nature concrete social units rather than abstract principles.

---

[6] For simplicity, I primarily refer to this institution as "the police", given that this body is the most evident representation of the law in this corpus. However, in addition to examining the representation of the police, chapter three also addresses other embodiments of the law, such as lawyers and judges.

[7] Community is understood here in its broadest sense, as including the types of social configurations that fall within the family, the Church and the law.

I deliberately avoid a universalising or uniform approach. Instead, my analysis is driven by the films themselves and the different issues they raise with regards community. As Ann E. Kaplan notes: "If deconstruction has taught us anything, it is to suspect high-modernist, totalizing theories" (1992, 7). That said, there are various connections between the analyses of the various films offered by this thesis. These include questions regarding gender, alongside a focus on the social and historical significance of Almodóvar's post-Franco filmmaking context. Approaching these films through the lens of gender also underscores the key concepts and, I argue, offers significant insight into these representations of community and the individual: the notions of "women's time" or "queer time"; and the feminist examination of space and place. These critical frames reveal the centrality of community in this filmography. Using these frames to explore the various ways in which each institutional "community" is deconstructed and (sometimes) reimagined, I seek to determine the limits and possibilities of Almodóvar's communities, alongside the ethical framework within which they exist. I suggest that Almodóvar's rejection of fixed notions of identity has meaningful consequences for his filmic communities, which are most evident when we invoke the feminist "ethics of care." This moral philosophy is therefore, alongside time and space, a third pivotal analytical frame for the analysis offered in this thesis.

While I agree with Brad Epps and Despina Kakoudaki's refusal to read a narrative of "maturation" into Almodóvar's career (2009, 3), it is nevertheless possible to suggest groupings of films. If, as Paul Julian Smith suggests, Almodóvar's early "rose period" was followed by his "blue period," as "filmic extravagance gives way to austerity and directorial innocence to experience" (2003, 150), then from *Hable con ella* (2002) Almodóvar enters what I describe as a "black period".[8] With the exception of *Los amantes pasajeros* (2013), his most recent films explore ever-darker themes, becoming increasingly less hopeful. These categories become significant especially in chapter three, which focuses primarily on representations of the law but also pays attention to those films in which the law's absence seems

[8] Colmeiro (1997) and Faulkner (2013) both discuss the use of pink and black in this corpus with reference to literary and cinematic genres, but not with regards the tone of his films themselves.

incongruous given their focus on crime and violence. This is the case, I contend, primarily in the films of the black period and this raises questions about the social order that emerges in the Almodovarian universe when the formal institutions of law are abandoned.

In a widely-cited interview, Almodóvar once claimed to make films as if dictator Francisco Franco never existed (Strauss 1994, 30),[9] but this political context is undeniably relevant to understanding his filmmaking styles and concerns.[10] As Smith contends in his seminal monograph on this corpus, "images can never be inherently transgressive or hegemonic, and must always be placed in historical debates around cinema, censorship, and sexuality" (2000, 5). This filmmaking career took off during the Transition,[11] with Almodóvar's first feature released in 1980 at the height of *la movida madrileña*, the countercultural movement that flourished in Madrid after Franco's death.[12] Yet the dictatorship is not referenced explicitly until 1997, when *Carne trémula* (1997) briefly mentions the *estado de excepción* declared in 1969.[13] If this democratic-era filmmaker has accordingly been charged with failing to commit politically (see Epps and Kakoudaki 2009, 12; Marsh 2004, 53), his response is partly to reject the conflation of history and politics. Almodóvar's films challenge any narrow view of political engagement. In his early works: "frivolity became for all practical purposes, a political posture in itself… the seeming

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9 Almodóvar's refusal to acknowledge Franco recalls the essay of Juan Goytisolo, written 5 days after Franco's death: "In Memoriam F.F.B 1892-1975" (1978, 11-19). This piece never mentions the dictator by name, but speaks eloquently of the suffering that occurred under his reign. Franco took power after the Spanish Civil War (1936-1939) and remained in power under an authoritarian military dictatorship until his death in 1975. For further context on this regime see: Graham (2005); Payne (2011); Payne and Palacios (2014); Paxton (2013).

10 Olvido Alaska (who plays Bom) states: "Para Pedro sí tenía significado un antes y un después de Franco. Para mí no, porque tenía 12 años y jamás fui consciente de que lo que hacía no lo hubiera podido hacer equis años antes." (in Gallero 1991, 372) Many scholars assert the importance of this context: Vernon (1995); Fuentes (1995); Allinson (2001); Pavlović (2007); Ibáñez (2013).

11 According to different accounts, the Transition commenced either with Franco's death on 20 November 1975, or during the dictatorship with *el desarrollismo*; and lasted until either the 1978 Constitution, the attempted coup in 1981, or the 1982 electoral victory of the PSOE (see Pavlović et al 2009, 129; Rodríguez Ortega 2014; Vilarós 1998, 1).

12 As Triana-Toribio notes in her volume on Spanish national cinema, countless words have been spent discussing and defining the *movida*, and "as with most subcultural and non-official movements any attempt to summarize soon becomes reductive", so I will avoid falling into this trap (2003, 174 FN 37).

13 For more detail on this historical event, see Laviana, Arjona and Fernández (2006).

apoliticism of the era was the only sane response to the left's 'pointless political activity'." (Vernon 1995, 11; see also Gallero 1991, 271) This lack of active political engagement is consistent with the social climate of the time as described by Tatjana Pavlović et al (2009, 129), who posit: "The social legacy of dictatorship, erasure of collective memory, and embracing of a politics of forgetting (the *pacto de olvido*) produced a strong feeling of disenchantment… followed by an extremely low level of active political involvement".[14]

Yet, as is implicit in my approach to these films, Almodóvar has clearly been aware of engaging in the creation of a post-dictatorship culture. In an oft-quoted 1987 interview with Marsha Kinder, the filmmaker comments that Spaniards of the "new" Spain "have lost the fear of earthly power (the police) and of celestial power (the church)" (1987, 37). If this involves a competition between these two fonts of authority, Marvin D'Lugo suggests this resolves in favour of the police via a process whereby a "new secular morality has displaced the old tyranny of the Church" (1991, 58). In a similar vein, María Antonia García de León views the Manchegan as representing a Spain that has moved beyond the burdens of the dictatorship (1989, 159). This thesis argues that contributing to this "new Spain" requires Almodóvar to engage with the institutions of the Franco regime, which accordingly remain visible across his films. In a highly influential 1991 article "Almodóvar's City of Desire," D'Lugo's analysis of the representation of Madrid reveals (1991, 50):[15]

> a coherent textual order that actively appropriates the social constructions of Francoist culture—the family, the Church, the police—and mobilizes them into the emerging expression of new cultural 'desires.'

What D'Lugo reveals in his analysis is the significance of these three social constructions for Almodóvar's post-Franco ethical (and political) project. They therefore offer an ideal starting point for any consideration of Almodóvar's ideas

[14] Various scholars comment on Almodóvar's representation of history and memory: eg Brémard (2005); Gutiérrez-Albilla (2011); Ibañez (2013).

[15] The article has influenced both subsequent discussions of the Madrid in the post-Franco context—Kinder (1992); Rascaroli and Mazierska (2002); Poe (2010); Amago (2011); Gutiérrez-Albilla (2011); Jerez-Farrán (2011); Amago (2011); González del Pozo (2012a); Rodríguez Ortega (2014)—and scholarship on the figure of the police: Vernon (1993); Allinson (2001); Conrod (2012). For a more geospatially focused account of the representation of Madrid, including various observations about Almodóvar's filming locations, see Sánchez Noriega (2014).

about community. This is only reinforced by the prevalence of these institutions across the corpus.

Building on D'Lugos's analysis, each of the following chapters takes one of these institutions and considers it as a site of ideological contest, asking to what extent Almodóvar reimagines it for a post-dictatorship Spain. The conclusions I come to differ for each. The choice of community has been driven by their prevalence across this filmography, together with their historical significance; it is no coincidence that each of these communities was co-opted by the Franco regime to maintain its ideological authority.[16] This coheres with their conceptualisation by Louis Althusser, whose work suggests that certain institutions influence our ways of viewing the world so that our own consciousness becomes "both a product and a guarantee of the power structure" (Zake 2002, 219). Such institutions include the ideological state apparatuses, a term Althusser uses to describe a plurality of mechanisms that work to support and reinforce the dominant ideology through processes of socialisation and interpellation. If Althusser categorises both the family and the Church as ideological state apparatuses (1977, 143), the police form part of the unified entity he names the "repressive state apparatus." This operates in the public domain and regulates through more active means, having been granted the power to discipline any individual breach of society's rules (Althusser 2014, 153).[17] Whilst the approach taken here does not share Althusser's Marxist orientation, his notion of repressive and ideological state apparatuses nevertheless provides a useful conceptual framework for the present analysis of the family, the Church, and the police. As Brian Goss notes, Althusser's theoretical framework supports the claim that "a large share of Almodóvar's corpus presents everyday struggle against dominant ideology and its institutional bases" (2009, 65). As this thesis argues, the institutions discussed here are persistently shown to be damaging to those who

[16] Another parallel between these institutions is that each has also functioned as a patriarchal structure within which masculine violence becomes normalised, which is not to deny that men too have experienced repression within such contexts (see Caballero Gálvez and Zurián Hernández 2016, 870). For further discussion of acts of violence in Almodóvar's films, see: Zecchi (2001); Wu (2004); Blanco Cano (2006); Evans (2009); Aldana Reyes (2013); Lev (2013); Robbins (2012); Saenz (2013); Caballero Gálvez and Zurián Hernández (2016).

[17] For Althusser, the law belongs to both categories (1977, 143).

encounter them, as well as anathema to the establishment of meaningful forms of community.

If Althusser's theorisation of power is at times too blunt, conceiving of state power as monolithic, he nevertheless concedes that the apparatuses that support it are diverse. His approach to power therefore contrasts with that of Michel Foucault, who argues that relations of power "are not univocal; they define innumerable points of confrontation, focuses of instability, each of which has its own risks of conflict, of struggles, and of an at least temporary inversion of the power relations" (1979, 27). Nevertheless, as Gema Pérez-Sánchez suggests, we might encounter a "productive moment" in Althusser's metaphor of the "(sometimes teeth-gritting) 'harmony'" achieved between the repressive state apparatus and the ideological state apparatuses, where power might be contested, and agency grasped (2007, 16).[18] This emerges, I contend, in Almodóvar's exploration of the various ways in which the family, the Church and the police work, whereby each is seen to support traditional values aligned with the Franco regime. Nevertheless, his films also at times place these institutions in conflict. If the Church is at times explicitly framed as a refuge from the law,[19] the police conversely are seen as intruders when they enter domestic spaces, and are often neutralised by resourceful mothers.[20]

Whilst Almodóvar's films catalogue various ways in which these three institutions serve to repress and control individual characters, I propose that the filmmaker is ultimately hopeful about the possibilities afforded by community. Moreover, these representations have something to tell us about the ways in which meaningful community can be formed, as well as the role community plays in our

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18 Althusser himself also noted that the ideological state apparatuses can be the site of class struggle (1977, 147), which suggests that they can be more generally a space for ideological resistance.

19 This is the case in *Entre tinieblas*, where the nuns' mission is to shelter women fleeing justice. The tension between the two institutions is foreshadowed by Sor Estiércol's comment that the police are the natural enemies of nuns. A similar opposition is foregrounded in *Matador*, where the Church and the law offer competing means of resolving Ángel's alleged crimes. The film literally juxtaposes these authorities when Ángel and his mother attend a church replete with "excessive Catholic iconography" (D'Lugo 1991, 58) so Ángel can confess, but he proceeds instead—via a jump-cut—to the police station. For a detailed discussion of tensions between the law and religion in *Matador*, see D'Lugo (1991) and Conrod (2012).

20 See chapter three on page 198 below.

lives. This accords with Anne Walsh's claim that "[w]hat saves Almodovarian films from the dominance of postmodern disillusionment, evidenced in total disorder and lack of control, is the theme of solidarity frequently invoked among the characters" (2011, 104; see also González del Pozo 2012a, 29). In an aesthetic sense, as discussed below, this postmodern attitude is reflected in the director's subversion of gender and genre. In this introductory chapter, I outline the key concepts that underpin my approach, before providing a brief summary of the remaining chapters. First, however, I offer a necessarily condensed overview of the literature on Almodóvar.

B. Literature Review: Reading Almodóvar

i. The diversity of Almodóvar studies

It is impossible to do justice to the well-established academic canon on the enigmatic Manchegan and his diverse oeuvre. In this section I mention only seminal texts and key trends, organised thematically rather than chronologically, in order to highlight continuities and contrasts between the various texts. I provide a detailed account of the literature relevant to the communities discussed in this thesis in the opening section of each chapter. Such references are generally omitted here, to avoid duplication.

The attention and accolades showered on Almodóvar by significant film journals *Sight and Sound* and *Cahiers du cinéma* paved the way for his international success,[21] and the filmmaker has been the subject of numerous high quality edited and single-author volumes, whilst also being included in almost every volume on Spanish culture and cinema over the past 35 years. Broadly speaking, texts on Almodóvar's films take a heterogeneous approach, eschewing any attempt to find unifying trends in the critical literature, let alone in his work itself. Whilst some offer insights into the corpus as a whole,[22] shorter works often focus on narrower

[21] The publication houses associated with these journals have also published a number of texts on the director: Strauss (1994); Evans (1997); Acevedo-Muñoz (2007); Sotinel (2010). *Cahiers du cinéma* has also published numerous of his screenplays in bilingual French-Spanish format.

[22] These are organised either chronologically (eg Smith 2000; Edwards 2001; D'Lugo 2006; Acevedo-Muñoz 2007; Castro 2010), allowing less capacity to foreground individual character types; or thematically (García de León and Maldonado 1989; Allinson 2001; Obadia 2002; Rodríguez 2004; Urios-Aparisi 2010a). There are also a number of Almodóvar films that have earned their own dedicated monograph. If Peter Evans' text on *¿Qué he hecho yo para merecer*

questions such as intertextuality,[23] or his use of music.[24] There are also collated volumes of interviews, primarily conducted in the first decade or so of Almodóvar's career (Vidal 1990;[25] Willoquet-Maricondi 2004), of which Strauss (1994) stands out for the insights it provides into both the director's filmmaking approach and his persona.[26] The existence of non-academic texts designed to provide an introduction to his filmography and/or persona (Correa Ulloa 2005; A. Davies 2007; Sotinel 2010) speaks to the director's general appeal.

Early scholarship focused primarily on the more subversive aspects of this filmography: the representation of marginalised sexuality, alternative portrayals of gender, and the camp aesthetics.[27] Ernesto Acevedo-Muñoz (2007), for instance, approaches Almodóvar's films through the lens of aesthetics and style, highlighting also the significance of the cultural and historical context. Whilst such themes remain of scholarly interest, more recent literature is reoriented towards the director himself, including his style of self-promotion, his career as a model for the "authenticity-driven career" (see Svejenova 2005), and an increasing focus on autobiographical matters. There is equally a heightened interest in Almodóvar as a (or even the) preeminent contemporary Spanish filmmaker and what this means for Spanish culture, both locally and internationally (see Loew and Luna 2005; Goss 2009; Matz 2012).

In the introduction to an edited volume on Spanish literary history, Brad Epps and Fernández Cifuentes propose that Anglo-American perspectives define the Spanish academy as "forever national, even hypernational" and traditionalist—as opposed to the Anglo-American tendency towards "innovation" (2005, 18). In this

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esto! (1997) canters through an impressive range of topics, offering an insightful close reading of the film, José Quiroga's text on *La ley del deseo* (2009), and Silvia Colmenero Salgado's on *Todo sobre mi madre* (2001) offer similarly detailed analyses.

23 Navarro-Daniels (2002); Aronica (2005); Evans (2005); Fuentes (2005); Markus (2005); Acevedo-Muñoz (2006); Evans (2007); Martínez-Carazo (2009); Mirguet (2011); Poyato Sánchez (2012a and 2012b); Poe (2013); Kercher (2013); Herrera (2014); Martín (2014). Poyato-Sánchez's monograph covering films from *Carne trémula* to *Hable con ella* has a focus on intertextuality (2015).

24 Cornejo Arruebarrena (2005); Lippmann (2005); Vernon (2005); Vernon (2007); Vernon (2009); Poe (2010); Thau (2012); Vernon (2013).

25 This text was first published in 1988.

26 This Spanish-language text was republished in English in 2006, with updated interviews.

27 See Smith (2000); Lev (1995); Yarza (1997); Prout (1999); Maddison (2000a); Shaw (2000).

context, the foreign reception of Almodóvar—who by the end of the 1980s occupied a "central place in the narrative around contemporary Spanish cinema" (Cerdán and Fernández Labayen 2013, 179)—is part of a broader trend where Spanish culture is approached differently by internal and external scholars. As Smith notes, Almodóvar's films have received limited academic interest within Spain, with local scholars "unsympathetic to his highly coloured narrative and *mise-en-scene*," which did not coincide with how they saw their national tradition and aesthetic (2009, 440; see also Smith 1996). Spanish audiences saw "a sketchy caricature of modern life" (Martínez-Expósito 2013, 93), whilst internationally Almodóvar has become the "embodiment of post-Franco Spain" (Smith 2000, 2).[28] Whilst I include both Spanish and English language materials, the latter feature more prominently. This thesis fits more clearly with the academic tendencies of the Anglophone scholarship, due in part to its greater emphasis on cultural and historical context.

Almodóvar's works have received attention from a range of fields, including but not limited to Spanish screen studies, queer and gender studies, film studies, cultural studies, and philosophy. The breadth of this literature is illustrated by the approach taken by the monographs and edited volumes on his work, even if these primarily feature the work of Hispanists. The first such volume to be published in English was *Post-Franco, Postmodern* (Vernon and Morris, 1995). Although organised so as to include a chapter on each of Almodóvar's films up to that point, the varied contributions to Kathleen M. Vernon and Barbara Morris's text situate the director's work within a broader social, political and cinematic context, highlighting the director's postmodern playfulness and transgressive attitude. This is consistent with much of the English-language literature, which often focuses on providing Spanish cultural and historical context. This is, for instance, partly the intention of Smith's *Desire Unlimited* (first published in 1994), which offers an eclectic and thoughtful account of each of the director's films, leading the way in its weaving together of

[28] The discord between local and international views of Almodóvar was only exacerbated by his growing international success, both critically and at the box office (Cerdán and Fernández Labayen 2013, 171-172; cf Allinson 2001, 4).

relevant historical and cultural context with matters of reception, cinematic technique, and queer and gender theory.[29]

The proceedings of a 2003 international conference dedicated to the director, and co-sponsored by his production company, El Deseo, were published as *Almodóvar: el cine como pasión* (Zurián Hernández and Vázquez Varela 2005).[30] This extensive tome covers diverse topics, including numerous papers dedicated to historical and cinematic context, and the director's aesthetics and style alongside the usual themes of gender, genre, and intertextuality.[31] Such diversity is mirrored in the next English-language volume, *All About Almodóvar* (Epps and Kakoudaki 2009); in the bilingual *How the Films of Pedro Almodóvar Draw Upon and Influence Spanish Society* (Matz and Salmon 2012a), which highlights the increasing influence of Almodóvar's films on Spanish culture—both within Spain and in perceptions of the country internationally; and *A Companion to Pedro Almodóvar* (D'Lugo and Vernon 2013), which extends this discussion to the filmmaker's global positioning.[32] These volumes range from the staples gender[33] and genre[34], to violence (Evans 2009; Lev 2013; Saenz 2013), to broader issues such as the director's engagement with the past—both his own and the nation's,[35] and questions of reception and filmmaking

[29] Smith has continued to shape the discussion of Almodóvar's work, bringing together commercial and aesthetic themes throughout his discussions (2005, 144). From his early focus on gender and sexuality (1992; 1994; 1996; 1999/2000), Smith has turned more recently to reading this corpus through the lens of television studies (2004a; 2006a; 2009b) and in light of the director's earlier short stories (2009). On this last theme, see also Zurián (2009 and 2013b).

[30] Some of these papers were reprinted in a special section of the Journal of Spanish Cultural Studies in 2004 (see Smith 2004b).

[31] Many of these papers have been published in other formats, notably: Kinder (2004); L. Williams (2004); Wu (2004); Gutiérrez-Albilla (2005a); Pastor (2006); Evans (2007); Vernon (2007). I generally refer to these versions of the texts.

[32] See, chiefly, D'Lugo (2013a; see also 2013b and 2013c). On the same topic, there is also the 2014 special issue of Miríada Hispánica, "Almodóvar Global," which features essays from Aguado, D'Lugo, Goss, Morgado, and Herrera, amongst others. As Martínez-Carazo states in the introduction to that volume, Almodóvar embodies cinema's position as a key cultural form of globalisation (2014a; see also 2014b).

[33] See Ballesteros (2009); Bersani and Dutoit (2009); Matz and Salmon (2012c); Brager (2012); Allbritton (2013); Lev (2013); Saenz (2013); Zurián Hernández (2013a).

[34] Allinson (2009); Medhurst (2009); Kakoudaki (2009); L. Williams (2009); Kinder (2013).

[35] D'Lugo (2009); Kinder (2009a); Pedrós-Gascón (2012); Gutiérrez-Albilla (2013b); Pérez Melgosa (2013); Zurián Hernández (2013b); Smith (2013a); Mira (2013).

practice.[36] The difficulty of offering a totalising account of Almodóvar's works is highlighted by the heterogeneity of these texts.

ii. The auteur, gender and genre

Three key trends in the literature are important to my approach. The first is that focusing on the director's stylistic sensibilities, which frames his work in terms of auteur theory.[37] This enables me to treat his works as belonging to a cohesive (if not necessarily coherent) body of work, with Almodóvar himself the key creative figure.[38] The second is the extensive literature that addresses issues of gender in his films. This grounds my analysis of his films as subverting traditional, patriarchal order throughout his engagement with the three institutions focused on here. The third, albeit less significant, is the scholarship which discusses genre. I draw on this at points throughout this thesis to highlight the ways in which the subversion of formal generic elements dovetails with the social critique offered by this corpus.

Almodóvar's status as auteur is relatively settled. Josetxo Cerdán and Miguel Fernández Labayen conclude that as early as 1993, the Spaniard "could be said to embody the status and function of film auteur… as a personality, a signature, a reading strategy, a discursive mechanism" (2013, 143).[39] Auteurism has been described as "an attitude, a table of values that converts film history into directorial autobiography" (Sarris 1976, 246). Numerous scholars demonstrate an interest in the autobiographical traces of Almodóvar's works,[40] whilst this concept informs the approach of D'Lugo's monograph *Pedro Almodóvar*, which foregrounds the director's "early self-construction as a popular film auteur" (2006, 7; see also Edwards 1995).

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36 Nisch (2012); Matz (2012); D'Lugo (2013); Díaz López (2013); Cerdán and Fernández Labayen (2013); Seguin (2013).

37 Whilst this concept remains contested, having emerged "rather haphazardly" (Wollen 1976, 530), at its core it denotes a high level of control by a director along with recurring aesthetic and narrative motifs (Kinder 2004, 247). This is not to say that Almodóvar has complete control over his films; in fact, his professional relationships are, as Allinson notes, crucial to his auteur status (2001, 4).

38 Indeed, Goss includes Almodóvar with Lars von Trier and Michael Winterbottom in his volume on "global auteurs", defined by the degree to which each is "the single most important figure" in the production of their films (2009, 41).

39 See also Vernon and Morris (1995, 14-16); Triana-Toribio (1999); Kinder (2004, 245-246); Rodríguez Ortega (2008); Epps and Kakoudaki (2009, 3-4); Smith (2009a, 449); D'Lugo and Smith (2012).

40 See Pingree (2004); Fuentes (2009); D'Lugo (2009); Mira (2013); Smith (2013a).

D'Lugo's text offers an insightful chronological discussion of the director's films, highlighting various matters that contribute to his unique filmmaking style, including genre, intertextuality and, as with Smith, cinematic technique.[41] Meanwhile, Núria Triana-Toribio suggests that Almodóvar "set the terms of reference by which other producers/directors operate *vis á vis* marketing" (2008, 262-263) and Epps and Kakoudaki's 2009 edited volume includes a section titled "The Auteur in Context".

Whilst my approach does not rest on the notion of the auteur per se, these analyses ground my characterisation of Almodóvar's films as artistic works that can be approached as a form of philosophical or ethical thinking. Most particularly, accepting Almodóvar as auteur highlights his status as "the single most important figure" in the production of his films (Goss 2009, 41). Of course, this high level of control over his corpus is not to suggest that Almodóvar has total creative licence—indeed, Almodóvar's professional relationships are, according to Allinson, crucial to his approach (2001, 4). Nevertheless, an auteur's films often exhibit aesthetic and narrative patterns (Kinder 2004, 247; Wollen 1976) that reflect a close nexus between their artistic and intellectual interests, inviting analyses of their works that go beyond the aesthetic. Indeed, D'Lugo and Smith insist that auteurist films "*required* exegesis to illuminate their aesthetic and conceptual coherence" (2012, 134; emphasis added). In the same volume, Smith highlights the relationship between Almodóvar's auteur status and his postmodern rejection of metanarratives (2012), suggesting a synergy between the director's eclectic style and a specific philosophical framework. Indeed, it has been argued that in Almodóvar's films the "interface between style and content… gestures towards possibilities for subjects to enact interventions in their material circumstances and thus, to re-work their relation to the external world" (Goss 2009, 74). This resonates with the aims of this project, which explores the relationship between individual and community across

[41] In an earlier article, as mentioned, D'Lugo plots a tension in these films between "celestial" and "earthly" law (borrowing from Kinder 1987), proposing that the police in particular validate the new social order through their witnessing of scenes of sexual liberation (such as the finales of *La ley del deseo* and *Matador*). In this seminal article, D'Lugo suggests that the tension between the Church and the law resolves in favour of the police (1991, 58). D'Lugo's later contributions turn towards memory (2008; 2009), and transnational questions, both narratively and in terms of production (2002; 2013a; 2013b; 2013c; and, with Dapena and Elena, 2012).

the director's corpus. Classifying Almodóvar as an auteur foregrounds the patterns visible across his corpus, underpinning this project's attempt to articulate a coherent approach to community across these films.

That said, individual works have equally invited consideration of their ethical and philosophical concerns. *Hable con ella*, notably, has sparked extensive interest from philosophers, including the edited volume *Talk to Her* (Eaton 2009a), which emerged from a meeting of the American Philosophical Association, alongside numerous articles published in *Film and Philosophy* (Shpall 2013; Bacchini 2014; Conlon 2016).[42] In approaching questions of community and ethics in Almodóvar's works, I draw methodologically on this expanding field of film and philosophy, which invites us to read films as offering ways of exploring philosophical and moral questions (see Read and Goodenough 2005; Colman 2009; Carel and Tuck 2011; Cox and Levine 2011). Whilst approaches to "film philosophy" vary, with some rejecting the notion that film offers anything beyond conventional written texts, a "moderate thesis" has been put forward that positions film as distinctly capable of considering certain philosophical issues (see Cox and Levine 2011). Within such an approach, films are viewed both as a tool to illustrate a theoretical perspective, and as "themselves reflective, world-creating, philosophical achievements" (Freeland and Wartenberg 1995, 3). My engagement with the communities in his films draws on this, treating his films as philosophical texts in their own right.[43] If some of these ideas have been explored in the existing literature on Almodóvar, often in terms of a potentially feminist ethical project (see Prout 1999; Gutiérrez-Albilla 2011), they are generally not explicitly framed within the field of film and philosophy. Whilst I do not offer a squarely film-philosophy analysis of these films, I have been encouraged by work in the field to dig deeper into the ethical dimensions of Almodóvar's work, which are—I argue—key to his ongoing academic significance. Certainly, my engagement with community throughout these films is grounded in the claims of

[42] Some of this literature is discussed in more detail in chapter three, where I discuss this film in relation to the police absence, from page 216.

[43] To a certain extent, I also treat them as an illustration of the ethics of care, but this has not been my intention, it has come through my close engagement with the texts themselves.

film philosophy about the potential of this medium to offer unique ethical and philosophical insights.

The director's challenge to fixed notions of identity is key to my approach. Many read Almodóvar's works as offering various political possibilities, including a radical agenda of gender and sexual inclusion. Such discussions address the critical engagement with the concept of gender generally,[44] as well as the challenging of traditional models of femininity (Girelli 2006; Matz and Salmon 2012c). Such engagement with gender has ramifications for the communities that emerge from the shadow of the director's institutional foci: the family, the Church and the law. As Marie Piganiol claims (2009, 93):

> Almodóvar has always refused to postulate any 'true-self'… Almodóvar's deconstruction of patriarchal society through his staging of transsexuality leads us to question the legitimacy of the old system centered on masculinity. It also allows us to have a new look on differences and reconsider our social values in a more humanist way.

Accordingly, for Piganiol, as for Smith, there is "truth in travesty" (2000, 2).

Since its inception, cinema has offered a space in which to reflect, explore and challenge the relationship between gender and national identity. Writing about the Spanish context, Steven Marsh and Parvati Nair argue that "cinema has also provided a key means by which to refigure national identity" in ways that often "rel[y] upon a revision of gender perspectives and imaginations" (2004, 3).[45] Given its status as microcosm for broader society, this is nowhere more apparent than in the depiction of the family.[46] Yet it is also true for Almodóvar's representation of the Church and the police. The director's reimagining of masculinity and "masculine" institutions, particularly the police, has been seen by many as his way of engaging with the

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44 Smith (2000); Lev (1995); Pastor (2006); Goss (2008); Yanof (2008); Pelayo García (2011).

45 This followed from the co-opting of the figure of the woman as an allegory for the nation and the Franco regime's privileging of the self-sacrificing mother, one who must minimise her individuality for the sake of the "el grupo que te da la razón de existir, los hombres." (Donapetry 1998, 46)

46 As Ballesteros notes, establishing the family as emblem of the nation was part of the Franco regime's ideological strategy (2001, 271-272). Indeed, Kinder has suggested that "the most common trait shared by melodrama and fascism is the privileging of the family as the primary site where ideological issues can be displaced and naturalized" (1993, 72).

Transition, albeit indirectly.[47] Such analysis supports my arguments about the three institutions discussed in this thesis being significant for the reimagining of community in Spain. Indeed, despite this apparently transgressive attitude, Acevedo-Muñoz describes the "essence of Almodóvar's aesthetics" as: "the desire to make logic out of chaos, and to rebuild the family and the nation out of its own fragmentation and the trauma of the past" (2007, 7).

Various scholars offer insightful commentary on the subversion of gender and sexual boundaries, foregrounded by the long line of characters whose bodies are transformed through surgery, costume or performance, generating new possibilities for the human experience.[48] For Smith, in his "celebration of fluidity and performance, in his hostility to fixed positions of all kinds, Almodóvar anticipates that critique of identity as essence that was later to become so familiar in academic feminist, minority and queer theory" (2000, 3). Such elements of the filmography have often been read through the lens of Judith Butler's assertion that gender identity "is performatively constituted by the very expressions that are said to be its results" (1999, 25).[49]

For Butler, this is exemplified by the drag performance (1999, xxiii; see also Butler 1990), a common motif in these films.[50] The transvestite comes to represent the instability of gender, sexuality and identity in this corpus (Smith 1999/2000; Ballesteros 2009; Piganiol 2009). Numerous texts also include discussion of this corpus in a broader discussion of the body, desire, or sexuality. For instance, Almodóvar's work features in numerous volumes on queer culture and cinema, whether concentrated on Spain or beyond.[51] Such positioning of the director within queer culture is, as Chris Perriam notes, "borne out in popular reactions as mediated

47 Marsh (2004); Fouz-Hernández and Martínez-Expósito (2007); Trybus (2008); Conrod (2012); Caballero Gálvez y Zurián Hernández (2016).

48 See Lev (1995); Shaw (2000); Santarén (2005); Girelli (2006); Pastor (2006); Marsh (2009); Piganiol (2009); Gutiérrez-Albilla (2012); Aguado (2012); Cervantes (2014); Morgado (2014); Fleche (2016).

49 See: Smith (1999/2000); Martínez-Expósito (2013); Pastor (2006); Piganiol (2009); Marcantonio (2007).

50 Examples include Agrado (*Todo sobre mi madre*), Zahara (*La mala educación*), and Femme Letal (*Tacones lejanos*).

51 See Smith (1992); Maddison (2000b); Perriam (2013); Levy (2015); Perriam and Waldron (2016).

in the gay press" (2013, 80).[52] At times, texts foreground Almodóvar's work through cover art (Marsh and Nair 2004; Fouz-Hernández and Martínez-Expósito 2007; Faulkner 2013), or title (Smith 1992; again, Fouz-Hernández and Martínez-Expósito 2007).

Genre also figures prominently in this scholarship and is useful for my analysis given that Almodóvar's subversion of its conventions often coincides with broader social commentary. If the director's transvestite characters represent his attitude towards individual identity, Javier Herrera proposes that his "mirada travestida" echoes his bowerbird-like "theft' of rhetorical, generic and other cinematic elements in search of his own inimitable style (2012, 63; 2013). Herrera's conceptual transvestite embodies a cinema that reinvents itself through repetition and imitation; which, whilst highly original, is dependent on existing genres for inspiration and meaning. Melodrama, chiefly, is read as serving a range of functions in these films, from a fulcrum for understanding the director's global positioning (Gabilondo 2005; Marcantonio 2015), to reflecting his love of classic Hollywood cinema (see Rodríguez 2004; Perales Bazo 2008).

Melodrama has also been understood as articulating the director's interest in communication and compassion,[53] whilst also underpinning the subversive approach to gender.[54] For Mark Allinson, the director's metacinematic engagement with the genre is "full of anti-illusionistic gestures, self-reference, and parody, all of which undermine the 'naturalizing' logic of cinema" (2001, 123), whilst Triana-Toribio has drawn attention to the formal elements, highlighting the excesses of Almodóvar's *mise-en-scène* in early films (1996). Additionally, melodrama has also been seen as providing a fluid emotional space in which the director is able to redeem all acts, including sexual violence (Kinder 2004). Alongside melodrama, Almodóvar returns often to another key "women's genre": the *españolada*, a Spanish style of

[52] Whilst Perriam cautions against reading Almodóvar's films too strictly through the lens of his own sexuality, given his refusal to self-identify as gay or to allow his films to be pigeonholed as "queer" (2013, 80), the director's success in some part depends on his ability to market to an international queer community (see Mandrell 1995, 41).

[53] Zurián Hernández (2005); Marcantonio (2007); Kakoudaki (2009); Labanyi, Martín and Rodríguez Ortega (2012, 251).

[54] Smith (1992); Nandorfy (1993); Vernon (1993); L. Williams (2004); Hardcastle (2007a); Thau (2007); Kinder (2009b); L. Williams (2009); Camino (2010).

melodrama that peaked in the 1930s and 1940s. This cinematic style was "strongly associated with the Franco regime's efforts to manipulate and control images of Spanish national identity" (Hardcastle 2007b, 15; see also Navarrete Cardero 2009; Moreno-Díaz 2015), and was linked to a particular vision of motherhood. Whilst the Fascist-era melodrama served as propaganda for the regime, Mercedes Camino and Marsha Kinder note its subversive potential, achieved "either through excess and contradictions that are part of the genre itself or through radical innovations" (Kinder 1993, 55).[55] There is debate, discussed below, about the extent to which Almodóvar's mothers engage these innovations. Other scholars have commented on the director's use of comedy,[56] film noir,[57] and horror.[58] Such commentaries generally focus on the ways in which this corpus engages and challenges generic conventions. I consider such matters genre in chapter one, in particular, which highlights how Almodóvar plays with "women's genres" in his representation of the mother.

iii. Community and ethics

If key lines of inquiry in the scholarship address Almodóvar's representation of gender and rejection of fixed identity markers, such themes also inflect discussion of his communities. In what follows, I trace the outlines of these trends, whilst the introduction to each chapter reviews the literature on, respectively, the family, the Church, and the law. Almodóvar's appropriation and "rehabilitation" of traditional communities depends in part upon his unsympathetic portrayal of characters that represent traditionally male-dominated institutions. These films take clear aim at conventional modes of community, suggesting that they fail to offer space or support for self-expression or solidarity. Indeed, in her meditation on cinematic and political memory in *La piel que habito* (2011), Carla Marcantonio observes that Almodóvar's filmography has long been "integrally concerned with the ways in which

55 Kinder also identifies aesthetic traces of the *españolada* in Almodóvar's films (1993, 260).

56 Smith (1995); Medhurst (2007); Reeve (2009); González del Pozo (2012b); Marsh et al (2012).

57 Evans (1993); Morgan-Tamosunas (2002); Amago (2007); Marcantonio (2008); Fuentes (2009); Arroyo (2011); Labanyi, Lázaro-Reboll and Rodríguez Ortega (2012); Pastor (2013).

58 Swanson (1999); Wu (2004); Aldana Reyes (2013); Gutiérrez-Albilla (2013a).

we understand and conceptualize identity and political community" (2015, 54).[59] Those communities that fail to evolve beyond their conventional limitations are dealt with pitilessly; their members often condemned to be "representados a través de la deformación paródica" (Aronica 2005, 77).[60]

Numerous scholars focus on the director's foregrounding of feminine solidarity, highlighting the way Almodóvar's favoured communities are premised on the bonds established between women.[61] From his first feature, there is a marked interest in female friendship, with Almodóvar's female characters notable for "su capacidad emocional y la consciencia de cierto denominador común entre ellas como si se tratara de una comunidad invisible" (González del Pozo 2012a, 29). Smith, for instance, notes recurring scenes of domestic, female intimacy, suggesting that they imply (1992, 180):

> not only a sense of continuing community amongst women from which men are inevitably and unthinkingly excluded but also a possibility for new kinds of female relationship when the twin pleasures of cinematic narration and lesbian role-playing coincide.

Similarly, Piganiol, in her discussion of the representation of transgenderism and transsexuality in this corpus notes that womanhood is praised "through their extreme solidarity and generosity, through their ability to give and share." (2009, 92; see also Pavlović 2007, 159; Garlinger 2004, 118, 129). The focus on female solidarity arises perhaps as a corollary of the director's preoccupation with the oppression of the female voice (Medak-Seguín 2011, 1). Barry Jordan and Rikki Morgan-Tamosunas have traced Almodóvar's representation of women from his earliest films to *La flor de mi secreto* (1995), noting his "rounded and sensitive characterisation of his

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59 Whilst the psychoanalytic turn in film studies has influenced many readings of this corpus, *La piel que habito* seems to lend itself particularly to such readings (see Sabbadini 2012; Lemma 2012; Harrang 2012; di Ceglie 2012). This thesis does not take this approach, but it is a significant trend in the literature, from the early analyses by Kinder to more recent literature, such as the 2012 special section of the International Journal of Psychoanalysis on *La piel que habito* (Sabbadini 2012; Lemma 2012; Harrang 2012).

60 Evans also suggests that *Mujeres al borde*'s male characters are punished "for their embodiment of the supremacist values identified with the discredited pre-1975 political order." (1997, 27)

61 Despite this, no literature offers a comprehensive overview of feminine solidarity within this corpus. Whilst this falls outside the remit of my project, such an investigation would offer an interesting counterpoint to the present discussion of the director's engagement with communities traditionally lead by men.

female protagonists and the positive representation of female relationships and support networks" (1998, 115).[62]

Two of Almodóvar's most recent films have generated much discussion of this topic: *Todo sobre mi madre* (1999) (Kinder 2004; Goss 2009; Ballesteros 2009; Bersani and Dutoit 2009; Camino 2010) and *Volver* (Kinder 2007; Goss 2009; Marsh 2009; Gutiérrez-Albilla 2011). Feminine communities in these films are generally read as empowering and premised on tolerance and care. If much of this literature is concentrated on relationships between women, others have addressed communities that might arise between women and men; or men and men. Stephen Maddison offers an important contribution in this regard, highlighting the importance of heterosocial bonds between women and gay men (2000a; 2000b). He suggests that *Todo sobre mi madre* "accommodates and enjoys difference, where that difference signifies against homosocial practice" (2000a, 282), which has often served to exclude women and gay men. The female community formed in this film is, according to Maddison, a key site of diversity and tolerance—whilst men are excluded, women of all kinds (and anatomy) are welcome.[63] In relation to the more recent *Hable con ella*, meanwhile—a film in which women are largely silent—Kakoudaki has suggested that the Almodóvar's work reveals "a utopian desire for a sense of community that is political and emotional" (2008, 4; see also Sabbadini 2007).[64]

Certainly, the director's deconstruction of traditional communities has been linked to his subversion of hegemonic gender ideals. Almodóvar's commitment to alternative identity is integral to his approach. It is, at least in part, only through understanding the cultural and historical context in which Almodóvar's films arise

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62 Nevertheless, Jordan and Morgan-Tamosunas also note that some of his films have been criticised for representing women as "empty-headed neurotics" or seeming to condone sexual violence. This latter issue is discussed further in chapter one, from page 96 below.

63 However, Maddison has also cautioned that identification between gay men and women can serve to allay anxiety about homosexuality, hence Almodóvar's heterosocial expressions—the identification as a "woman's director" and promotion of his relationships with female cast members—may be read as undermining the director's (queer)political potential (2000b, 149).

64 I return in more detail to the literature on this film and the limits and possibilities of communication it proposes in chapter three, from page 216.

that we can understand the extent to which they are ultimately effective in the subversion of the politico-cultural institutions considered here.

As Butler highlights of the subversive potential of parody, this aesthetic mode is not in and of itself disruptive. Rather, the parodic effect, the ultimate subversion, "depends on a context and reception in which subversive confusions can be fostered." (1999, 189) Whether considering individual identity or community, Almodóvar's representations privilege fluidity, movement and tolerance. My focus is on the structuring principles of Almodóvar's preferred modes of community. Yet there are those who would question whether Almodóvar truly is the "woman's director" of his reputation. Views on this issue are conflicted. As Karen Hollinger notes in relation to the representation of female friendships, "films can, and often do, trigger responses in different audiences and at different times that range from conservative to progressive" (1998, 6).[65] As she observes, a given text may contain both progressive and "recuperative" elements. Various discussions of Almodóvar's representation of mothers draw this out, as discussed in chapter one.

The prevalence of key polemics from the recent Spanish past (power, gender, identity)—not to mention institutions central to maintaining the Franco regime (the family, the Church, the police)—also belies his purported disavowal of historical memory. A complex relationship with Spain's culture and history has marked Almodóvar's films from the start. If the filmmaker has been charged with apoliticism, Smith defends him on the basis that they generally arise "from an ignorance of or indifference to" the national context (2000, 2-3; see also Aguado 2012; Ballesteros 2013, 468). The appropriation of national cultural icons, for instance, has been framed as an attempt to rehabilitate traditional Spanish culture.[66] More recent films, such as *La mala educación* (2004) and *Volver* (2006), have invited scholars to suggest a more direct engagement with Spain's history and questions of memory and forgetting, both individual and communal (see D'Lugo 2008; Golob 2008; D'Lugo 2009; Beilin 2012; Amago 2013, 23-37; Garcés 2013; Gutiérrez-Albilla 2013b; Ibáñez

[65] Whilst Hollinger's work is on female friendship in Hollywood cinema, her comments are apposite for understanding the complexity of Almodóvar's representation of feminine communities.

[66] On religion: Donapetry (1999); Prout (1999); Acevedo-Muñoz (2007). On bullfighting: Gutiérrez-Albilla (2011); Kinder (2004); Lev (1995). On the bolero: Knights (2006); Poe (2010).

2013; Cervantes 2014). I contend that such themes are often worked through by reimagining these institutions of Spanish tradition. Accordingly, the subversion of social conventions by his characters can be read as not simply a marker of postmodern playfulness, even if: "No filmmaker better conveys [a] sense of gender fluidity and possibility" (Yanof 2008, 623). Rather, the director's subversion of individual marks of identity foreshadows his engagement with conventional communities, which he undermines in order to explore their possibilities for reconstruction.

Much of the analysis focuses on Almodóvar's representations of "alternative" communities, suggesting, for instance, that he reclaims the family for more therapeutic and supportive purposes.[67] I argue in this thesis that Almodóvar's championing of community is congruous with wider socio-political uses of the term, which "continues to be invoked as a hope, a vehicle and a responsibility, via which numerous social and political challenges might be overcome" (Welch and Panelli 2007, 349). Yet the inverse is not necessarily shown to be true in his films—there are instances across this corpus where communities are shown to be destructive to the individuals within them. The communities that are favoured here are those in which care transcends. This is captured by Kinder's assessment of the core message of *Todo sobre mi madre*: "not only are all genders and sexualities cultural constructs but that the ability to love and identify across barriers of gender, sexuality and class is a courageous leap of faith" (2004, 253). This is consistent also with the minor thread in the literature that positions Almodóvar's alternative communities within the feminist "ethics of care" (Prout 1999; Martin-Márquez 2004; Gutiérrez-Albilla 2011), which I turn to shortly.[68]

Although many scholars have touched on the themes and questions addressed in this thesis, no extended analysis to date has considered family, religion and the police in parallel. Moreover, there are no recent publications that consider the representation of these communities—or the lack of community—across the filmography in depth. It is these gaps in the literature that this thesis hopes to

[67] This is discussed in detail in the opening section of chapter one, page 40ff.

[68] See page 30ff.

address, whilst also further developing an understanding of the ethical framework for Almodóvar's alternative communities.

C. Three key concepts: Time, space and the ethics of care

The chapters that comprise this thesis engage with three pivotal concepts: time, space, and the ethics of care. Time and space, more so than ethics, have long been enduring concerns within film studies (see Everett and Goodbody 2005), with space in particular an ever-present, and increasing, focus of the literature on Almodóvar from D'Lugo's seminal article (1991) to more recent analyses. These analytical frames focus my discussion of the characters and institutions in a way that draws out points of continuity and change both across and within films. Whilst not front and centre of the analysis throughout this thesis, these concepts have been influential in guiding my approach. It is by drawing my attention to the director's exploration of alternative notions of time and space that I have identified not simply his subversion of convention, but more importantly the establishment of a new ethical framework, grounded in the ethics of care. In my analysis of each specific community, I trace its failings back to the values and ideology of Francoist Spain, but the conclusions I reach about the possibilities of rescuing these communities from this legacy are driven by the films themselves and have been influenced by concepts drawn from the academic consideration of time, space and the ethics of care. I now turn to each of the three central concepts in detail.

i. Time

In a chapter on Almodóvar's early short stories, Fran Zurián Hernández refers to "Relato superficial de la vida de Miguel" in which people find themselves in a world where time runs backwards—they are reborn upon their death, and die upon their birth. This "reverse time", Zurián Hernández posits, "echoes Almodóvar's own composition process, in which he saves what he has written and, with time (sometimes years later), recycles that same material, reworks it, and develops its meaning." (2013b, 48) This thesis takes a palimpsestuous approach to Almodóvar's own works, paying attention to the ways in which he reimagines his own characters, plots and themes. Whilst the palimpsest is not referenced explicitly throughout this

thesis, this notion of revisiting ideas and characters has heavily influenced my writing and analysis.

The concept of the palimpsest—a metaphor drawn from the practice of writing over erased earlier writing (see Dillon 1997)—has a wide range of applications, from philosophy to architecture, biochemistry to geography (see Genette 1997; Dillon 2005; de Groote 2014) and is apt for discourses that draw on time and/or space. A palimpsestuous approach allows a nuanced layering of meanings, refusing the possibility of a single, monolithic reading and revealing the complex web of social, cultural and historical dynamics. Whilst many insightful analyses of Almodóvar's work offer more concrete conclusions, here I embrace the ambiguity of his works, avoiding simple or conclusive readings. A palimpsestous (rather than palimpsestic) reading is not concerned with the material existence of the palimpsest, but rather "describes the structure with which one is presented as a result of that process, and the subsequent reappearance of the underlying script" (Dillon 2005, 245). This provides a way of conceptualising the director's temporal and spatial revisions of the family, the Church and the law. This is evident in the thesis structure itself, which approaches each chapter fresh, exploring the different ways Almodóvar finds to deconstruct and, potentially, reimagine these institutions.

The complexity of the palimpsest is matched by the notion of "women's time", a series of alternative temporalities that draw attention to different ways of experiencing and tracing time. Almodóvar, I argue, problematises conventional understandings of time in a similar way to his destabilisation of any notion of a cohesive, stable identity. The approach taken to time in this thesis draws on notions of "women's time" and "queer time." Women's time, in Julia Kristeva's early articulation, is proposed as an alternative way of experiencing the world to masculinised ideas of time such as historical and "epic time". These temporalities emphasise linearity and progress and dominate hegemonic narratives. In Kristeva's terms, this conceptualisation of time shifts our focus from "departure, progression and arrival" to cyclical or monumental time, at the same time foregrounding an "intuitive" approach to knowing and being (1981, 17). If the time of history conceives of "time as departure, progression and arrival" (Kristeva 1981, 17), then "female

subjectivity is divided between cyclical, natural time (repetition, gestation, the biological clock) and monumental time (eternity, myths of resurrection, the cult of maternity).” (Apter 2009, 3) Certainly, since Kristeva’s initial articulation, women’s time has been extended beyond its potentially biologically essentialist roots, to account for a broader range of phenomena and experience (see Apter 2010; Lim 2016). For our purposes, decentring linear causality and progress directs closer attention to the ebbs and flows of emotion and interpersonal connection, along with infusing the everyday with greater meaning.

As Tania Modleski points out, these temporal modalities have been associated with one of Almodóvar’s preferred genres: melodrama, which foregrounds the “cyclical” modes of time linked stereotypically with female subjectivity (1984). Drawing on Kristeva’s work, Modleski notes how the “woman’s film” (often synonymous with melodrama) often contrasts two conceptions of time: that of cycles and repetition; and “the time of history”, or epic time, generally characterised as masculine (1984, 23). In this respect, Almodóvar’s work contrasts with his much-loved Hollywood cinema, in which linear progression is generally achieved through “rationalised” editing, as “much of the quotidian was [viewed as] mundane and therefore not worthy of recording… only in scenarios that involve literally ‘a race against the clock’ does each moment become packed with meaning” (Powell 2012, 159). Instead, Almodóvar often grants screen time to moments that might according to this logic be considered “not worthy,” drawing attention to the mundane tasks of his female heroines, in particular. Such domestic “women’s work” is, Modleski observes, “repetitive and routine… and does not involve specified sequence of progression” (1983, 67). His films foreground cyclical time in their focus on domesticity and the mundane—although women’s time should not be thought of as solely confined to notions of the embodied life cycle. Smith in particular has linked Modleski’s characterisation of feminine temporalities with Almodóvar’s use of melodrama, notably the recurrence of melodramatic “non-linear narrative based on repetition and reversion” (1992, 170).

Certainly, these narratives often elide linear causality, placing them in line with the possibilities women’s time offers for rethinking causality (Apter 2009, 17). In

refusing the progress-driven or linear causality of "historical" temporality, the understanding of time proposed by Kristeva also ushers in the possibility of abandoning the search for a progressive evolution in Almodóvar's films, instead inviting us to think of Almodóvar's films as returning to specific themes and motifs without regard to progress. This possibility is also hinted at by understandings of queer time, a temporal modality that is non-linear, non-consequential and offers the possibility of resistance to deterministic understandings of history and human action. Whilst they foreground, in contrast to women's time, non-heteronormative life narratives (Halberstam 2005), that is narratives not focused on coupledom and procreation, queer temporalities also offer (Jagose 2009, 158):

> a mode of inhabiting time that is attentive to the recursive eddies and back-to-the-future loops that often pass undetected or uncherished beneath the official narrations of the linear sequence that is taken to structure normative life.

For Judith Halberstam, queer time offers a "useful framework for assessing political and cultural change in the late twentieth and early twenty-first centuries" (2005, 4). Whilst queer time refuses the focus on natural cycles highlighted by certain accounts of women's time, the two approaches coincide in their refusal of linearity. Halberstam posits that "queer time" is "those specific models of temporality that emerge within postmodernism once one leaves the temporal frames of bourgeois reproduction and family, longevity, risk/safety and inheritance" (2005, 6).[69] Elizabeth Freeman (2010) has explored queer temporalities in the representations of various artists and writers, her analysis revealing the ways in which temporal gaps and non-linear narratives offer ways of establishing meaningful, transformative dynamic between past and present. This has been picked up in analyses of Almodóvar's work, notably that of Dean Allbritton (2015), who argues that queer time offers interpretations of narrative loops—such as the circular plot of *Volver*—as not only referring back, but also offering meditations on what *could* be (2015, 61). The notion

[69] Halberstam's use of the term "postmodern" corresponds to Smith's use of the term in relation to Almodóvar's work. He argues that these films are postmodern "not in the common sense in which the term has been used (particularly in Spain), as a label for a particular style. Rather it is because these films tend to unsettle traditional notions of epistemology and ontology (of knowledge and identity)." (1992, 202)

of "queer time" resonates also with the work of Kinder (2009a), who coined the term "retroseriality" to offer a way of understanding the dynamic intertextuality of Almodóvar's films, which seem to cross-reference each other continually, almost without concern for which film came "first".[70]

Framed through the notions of women's time and queer time, Almodóvar's complex narratives—which often layer competing timelines and repeating storylines and characters—can be read as themselves implicated in reimagining the communities discussed in this thesis, thereby offering new possibilities for ethical interpersonal engagement. Drawing on these notions of time offers a politically potent way of reimagining events, from individual moments of daily life to broader historical narratives. As outlined in the substantive chapters of this thesis, in films such as *¿Qué he hecho para merecer esto!* (1984) and *Carne trémula* Almodóvar deploys this potential to explore whether the family, Church and the law can be reimagined.

ii. Space

Space is another way in which the director undermines the authority of the traditional social order. His films play with hierarchies of space, revealing the power of intimate, domestic spaces conventionally coded "feminine". The targeted discussion of space in this thesis draws on an extensive body of work dedicated to understanding the gendered meanings that operate throughout everyday spatial life.[71] If geography is a discipline whose boundaries and objects of study are contested (see Aitken and Valentine 2015), the disciplinary boundaries of feminist geography are similarly fluid (Dixon and Jones 2015). Nevertheless, it can be stated that feminist geography, as with other fields of feminist inquiry, foregrounds questions of power. Feminist geographers such as Doreen Massey, Gillian Rose and Linda McDowell reveal the ways in which space—and thinking about space—constructs power relations. This includes the longstanding focus on the division between public and private spaces as a mechanism for oppression (G. Rose 1993,

[70] D'Lugo suggests that rather than "remakes," Almodóvar's films can be understood as "alienated memories". This captures their complex engagement with earlier works, which serve as important but at times ambiguous reference points (2014, 56).

[71] Massey (1992); G. Rose (1993); Massey (1994); McDowell (1997); Dixon and Jones (2015).

17), whereby women have been controlled through demands on their time and energy, whilst also being vulnerable to violence.

Gillian Rose, whose 1993 text *Feminist Geography* put feminism on the roadmap of geographical inquiry, makes an important contribution to this discussion. Drawing on Haraway's seminal 1988 article on the production of knowledge, Rose argues that knowledge and power are "inextricably connected" (1997, 318; see also Cope 2002). Feminist geographers must, therefore, engage reflexivity in order to foreground the context and agency of the researcher, although Rose acknowledges that there is no position from which full transparency can be achieved (1997; see also Moss 2002; McDowell 1997; England 2015).[72] As Massey reminds us, "gender relations vary over space" (1994, 178), and accordingly so do power dynamics. Methodological questions such as this are inherent to the subversive potential of feminism; as Teresa de Lauretis points out, feminist theory must be understood as much in terms of *form* as content (1990, 358). This dovetails with the challenge these films pose to hierarchies of knowledge and established power structures, as outlined above.

At a more substantive level, feminist geographies have analysed the different spatial experiences of men and women, or drawn attention to "the significance of movement to social positionings, identity, and experience" (Dyck 2002, 236). Tim Cresswell and Deborah Dixon, introducing a volume on geographies in film, propose that "when questions of how identities arise, how they are maintained, and how they are transformed are raised, it is the complex relation between identity and space that must be problematized" (2002, 6). Such concerns have guided my approach to Almodóvar's spaces.[73] Feminist geography has also investigated gender as a social construction, which extends to concepts such as the nation state (see Dixon and Jones 2015). This coincides with my discussion of the family, which draws

[72] G. Rose's *Visual methodologies* raises similar issues in relation to the study of visual objects (2012; first published in 2001).

[73] I draw less explicitly on queer geographies, although their importance for understanding sexed experiences of space, as well as visibilising queer spaces, cannot be understated (see Bell and Valentine 1995; Binnie and Valentine 1999; Halberstam 2005). As articulated by Halberstam, "queer space" describes "the place-making practices within postmodernism in which queer people engage" (2005, 6). This thesis leaves open potential lines of inquiry addressing Almodóvar's films from such perspectives.

on literature that positions this institution as a metaphor for the State, embodied sometimes by the father and at others by the mother (see Carbayo-Abengózar 2001).[74] If the representation of the body in these films equally suggests interesting geographical analysis (see eg Marcantonio 2007; Kakoudaki 2008), my focus is primarily on the representation of domestic and urban spaces. The latter has specifically been identified with the emerging post-patriarchal world of Almodóvar's films (see eg D'Lugo 1991; Marsh 2004). Such a characterisation potentially places the city in conflict with the "traditional" space of the village, although even this space is sometimes reimagined by Almodóvar for the matriarchal future (see D'Lugo 2004; C. Ruiz 2007; Gutiérrez-Albilla 2011).[75]

Studies of space have challenged the public/private divide and its privileging of masculine social subjects (see McDowell 1997; Longhurst 2002). Extending my analysis into this very space, I draw on this scholarship to extend my reading of Almodóvar's homes, which make the "private" highly public by entering people's kitchens, bedrooms and bathrooms. On the one hand, Almodóvar visibilises violence within the home, generally at the hands of male family members, and thereby contributes to a trend in the literature which undermines notions of the home "as a domain of 'safety', of a stable 'femininity', and of a 'non-political domesticity'" (Wright 2010, 59). On the other hand, the director's work seems to explore whether "feminised" places can be sites of resistance. This problematises the idea of home as a site of oppression (see G. Rose 1993). By providing such a complex and ambiguous representation of home spaces, this corpus evokes the words of bell hooks, who argues that at times of "estrangement and alienation… Home is that place which enables and promotes varied and everchanging perspectives, a place where one discovers new ways of seeing reality, frontiers of difference" (1990, 227). At the same time, the power granted to the domestic—which makes it clear "that men

[74] George Lakoff has offered an engaging and insightful account of the nation as family metaphor in the US context that is useful (1996, 153-161), which suggests that this often draws on a "strict father" and "nurturant mother" dynamic. Each parent embodies a different function of the State: one to regulate and punish, the other to ensure citizen welfare.

[75] Various other scholars have considered both Almodóvar's urban and rural spaces: Triana-Toribio (1996); Richardson (2002, 147-157); Campbell (2005); C. Ruiz (2007); Macdougall (2014); Rodríguez Ortega (2014); Pérez Ríu (2017).

should not enter women's spaces" (Navarro Martínez and Buitrago Alonso 2016, 301)—could be seen as reinforcing the director's romanticising of the maternal. Yet Almodóvar also invites us into domestic spaces that are unkempt, that smell bad (or appetising), and that require effort to be maintained. There exists therefore a tension in the director's representation of domestic space that is not easily reconciled: it is both cherished and traumatic, a source of power, and a site of violence.

By drawing out particular spatial issues in these films, such as the feminine space of the convent foregrounded in *Entre tinieblas* (1983), I add complexity to my investigation of Almodóvar's communities. Along with his engagement of different temporal modalities, space contributes at times to the director's deconstruction of the family, the Church and the law. At the same time, highlighting movements or exclusions from space presents different possibilities for resistance and counter-narratives. Accordingly, as discussed in the following chapters, space contributes to Almodóvar's exploration of new models of community.

iii. Ethics of care

Paying close attention to alternative temporalities and spaces in Almodóvar's narrative world leads us to the ethics of care, an alternative approach to morality born of the efforts of philosophers to provide women's perspectives on such questions. It therefore offers an alternative ethical framework to the "masculine" ethics of justice (see Tronto 1987; Gilligan 1993a; Larrabee 1993; Stopler 2005). The ethics of care is oriented towards grounding normative values in "feminine" ways of being, which is in part premised on the maternal as a way of conceptualising an ethical framework (eg Tronto 1993 and 1995; Noddings 1995 and 2010; Gilligan 1993a). If the theorisation of motherhood by Nancy Chodorow (1978) and Sara Ruddick (1980; 1989) marked a "maternal turn" in critical thinking, scholars such as Carol Gilligan, Nel Noddings and Joan Tronto took this in the direction of moral philosophy. For Noddings, this came out of her quantitative research, which suggested that women "often define themselves as both persons and moral agents in terms of their capacity to care" (2003, 40). These psychological structures are expanded upon within the more formalised ethic of care. I outline here briefly some

of the key principles of this ethics, which are further detailed in the substantive chapters as I investigate the ways in which Almodóvar's communities are premised on this framework.

An ethics of care "starts from a theory of the self as relational" (Robinson 2011, 40). Where some have critiqued the pioneering work of Gilligan in this sphere by asserting her work concerned relationships, rather than the more theoretical field of ethics (Noddings 2010, 22), Almodóvar's films illustrate in vivid terms the ways in which interpersonal relations underpin ethical decision-making. For instance, the moral strength of a character such as Manuela (*Todo sobre mi madre*) is clearly illustrated by—and directly draws upon—her relationships to the people around her. Similarly, Tina's spirituality (*La ley del deseo*) offers her a means of connecting with her adopted daughter. This corpus makes apparent the costs of failing to live up to these precepts, frequently foregrounding the harms caused by failures of care.[76] Almodóvar's communities align with the ethics of care not only in this emphasis on relationality, but also in his mistrust of traditional institutions. For Noddings, a "commitment to caring" demands "a duty to promote scepticism and noninstitutional affiliation" (2003, 13). She goes on to highlight that "no institution or nation can be ethical" because it is necessarily general. Whilst laws are not in her view empty:

> but they are limited, and they may support immoral as well as moral actions. Only the individual can be truly called to ethical behaviour, and the individual can never give way to encapsulated moral guides, although she may safely accept them in ordinary, untroubled times.

If the ethics of justice is premised on principles of universality, Noddings accordingly rejects any attempt at a totalising approach or relativism, seeking instead to "preserve the uniqueness of human encounters" (2003, 5). She continues: "Since so much depends on the subjective experience of those involved in ethical encounters, conditions are rarely 'sufficiently similar' for me to declare that you must do what I must do." (2003, 5)

[76] Conversely, it is without interpersonal connections that the world of *La piel que habito* becomes devoid of ethical concerns. This film illustrates, I argue, the closely imbricated nature of community, ethics and identity.

The specificity of caring, of responding to the concrete and individual needs of the one being cared-for is emphasised throughout the works of Noddings and Gilligan. In Gilligan's terms, the ethics of care can be articulated as (2014, 103):

> grounded less in moral precepts than in psychological wisdom, underscoring the costs of not paying attention, not listening, being absent rather than present, not responding with integrity and respect.

Almodóvar's ideal mothers demonstrate such "psychological wisdom" through their privileging of the needs of others. Moreover, as with these characters, there is criticism that this ethical framework reinforces the subordination of women.[77] Even as this ethics is premised on caring for the other, however, reciprocity remains at the heart of caring relations; for Noddings, in an ideal situation, the roles of the parties would change at different times (2003, 58). If this is not apparent in these films, I would suggest it is due to the limited capacity of certain of Almodóvar's heterosexual male characters to care. Such characters are accordingly, as I demonstrate, excluded from his alternative conceptualisations of community.

The ethics of care has been critiqued as offering an essentialist approach to gender, relying on gendered roles in its very conceptualisation (see Lauritzen 1989; O'Neill 1990; Card 1995; Held 2014). Gilligan, for her part, has responded to such criticism by asserting that "the care perspective… is neither biologically determined nor unique to women" (1993b, 209).[78] What her work hopes to do, however, is to foreground different ways of approaching moral problems, notably those that arise in relationships. Moreover, whilst this framework is premised on the way "women" approach such issues, and draws on notions of the "maternal," it adopts a social constructionist approach to womanhood, which is conceived and created through prescribed qualities and activities. Much as certain critical scholars, and Almodóvar himself, work to destabilise such constructs, as Susan Bordo notes: "Our language, intellectual history, and social forms are 'gendered'; there is no escape from this fact and from its consequences on our lives" (1990, 152). As Noddings notes, if the ethics

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77 This is consistent with certain critiques of Almodóvar's idealised mothers, discussed on page 96ff below.

78 Whilst Noddings, for her part, writes about the one providing care as feminine and the cared-for as masculine, she acknowledges that there is no fixed gender assigned to either role (2003, 4).

of care "conserves many traditional values" it is "not each one for its own sake. Rather, it conserves them as a requirement of caring" (2003, 107).

If notions of gender have perhaps shifted in the past three decades, the question remains whether "manhood" is incompatible with a morality grounded in the ethics of care. This is especially true in the context of this corpus, given the different ways that Almodóvar presents men and masculinity. In her work, Noddings has identified the way that "male-proud traditions" have denied boys and men the opportunity to develop their nurturing side (2010, 248). It would seem to follow that it is such "traditions," and the masculinities they promote, which have led to men's exclusion from the ethics of care. It remains to be seen the extent to which, given the ethics of care is grounded in "feminine" instincts, the ethical framework in these films is available to everyone.

In any event, I agree with Virginia Held when she proposes that by challenging patriarchal understandings of community and ethics, challenging people to reconsider the way they live, the ethics of care is in fact highly revolutionary (2014, 107-108). I explore in the chapters that follow the extent to which this is true of Almodóvar's alternative communities more generally. As with the ethics of care, a grounding of women's identity in maternity is a source of power in Almodóvar's films. This also informs new ways of understanding identity and community, which are perhaps conventionally understood as more "feminine", but which, I argue, are in Almodóvar's universe potentially open to anyone. Redemptive politics such as the ethics of care have been declared incompatible with the postmodern condition (see Prout 1999).[79] Against this, I argue that Almodóvar's films ultimately reimagine the ethics of care within a postmodern aesthetic and political framework. For all their playfulness, I explore whether these films, in their celebration of self-expression, communication and compassion, nevertheless offer an ethical message.

[79] Hutcheon, for instance, has noted that postmodernism's contradictory discourses have been found "empty at the center" (2002, 38), whilst other scholars have gone so far as to suggest that postmodernism is "at least indifferent and at worst destructive of ethics and politics; they have shown knowledge to be so many facets of value, thus, undermining the ability to found the ethical response" (Douzinas and Warrington 1994, 7). See also Fischer (1998), discussed in section E.ii of chapter three below (especially from page 228), who views Femme Letal as embodying the "void" at the heart of postmodernism.

D. Three communities: The family, the Church and the police

"From the Law of the Father to the Ethics of Care" explores the representation of community in Almodóvar's filmography. Each chapter examines the representation of a different traditional institution, charting the director's deconstruction of three of the institutions co-opted by the Franco regime and associated with traditional gender roles and social structures. I begin each chapter with a literature review specific to the relevant community. In the introductory sections, I chart the ways in which the community was tied to the Franco State, whilst also considering its representation on-screen. The general view of the literature seems to be that even if the Manchegan is strongly critical of traditional institutions, his films nevertheless explore their possible inclusion in contemporary Spanish identity. In my substantive analysis of each chapter, I pay close attention to the various ways these communities fail, drawing on a wide range of concepts, but with special attention to time, space and the ethics of care. Even as these films deconstruct various communities, I consider the extent to which the director engages in a constructive exercise, and reimagines them. This will, I hope, offer insight into the conditions necessary for meaningful community in this filmic universe.

The first chapter considers the family. If, as Isolina Ballesteros notes, recent social transformations in Spain have seen the loss of the family's symbolic importance (2001, 276), this is not apparent in this filmography, as the family continues to be foregrounded for its central role in identity formation, along with the ongoing significance of mothers in an individual's life. Indeed, María DiFrancesco has argued that Almodóvar's on-screen families "require viewers to reconsider the functional nature of the family within Spanish society and to acknowledge the instrumental role that family plays in human life" (2009, 50). I argue that the many, varied families both indicate the director's scepticism of traditional institutions, and also point towards a fundamental need for meaningful connection. The analysis commences with an examination of the rupture of the traditional family, exemplified in early works such as *¿Qué he hecho yo!*. I first trace the ways in which Almodóvar undermines the patriarch. The rupture of conventional families is also premised on

maternal failures, although these are generally treated with greater empathy. For Almodóvar, the mother is an object of admiration but also at times of pity. However, as I demonstrate, mothers that take on patriarchal qualities are treated with less tolerance. I then consider Almodóvar's alternative families, examining the extent to which they suggest that this community can be reimagined. My focus here is on the lynchpin of such arrangements: Almodóvar's maternal ideal. In the final section of chapter one, however, I ask whether these families involve a problematic return to traditional values through their championing of maternal self-abnegation.

Chapter two turns to the director's representation of a second institution, the Church. The first two sections consider the two Almodóvar films that most clearly focus on this institution: *Entre tinieblas* (1983) and *La mala educación* (2004). I analyse these in reverse chronological order, however, to follow the pattern established in chapter one. Through my analysis of *La mala educación*, I trace the way in which Almodóvar deconstructs the Church and highlights its destructive potential, in many ways similar to that of the authoritarian father. This film focuses on the traumatic consequences of child sex abuse within the Church, foregrounding the institutional context of this violence in its portrayal of the bleak, isolated lives of its protagonists. From this care-less landscape, I turn to *Entre tinieblas*. Initially seeming to offer more hope for meaningful community, I investigate to what extent the feminine convent in this film offers an alternative vision of religion that can be accommodated in post-Franco Spain. Whilst the tolerant space of the convent seems to allow for a community premised on individual needs, it is ultimately disbanded at the film's end. This potentially undermines the extent to which it can be considered an effective reimagining of the Church. Finally, I consider a form of religious observance that is arguably de-institutionalised: Tina's spiritual practice in *La ley del deseo* (1987). Through her home-based altar and her idiosyncratic prayer routine with daughter Ada, I explore the ways in which this ritualised behaviour connects Tina with others and potentially gestures towards a more meaningful and sustainable form of religious observance.

The focus of chapter three is the law and again, I chart the ways in which this institution is undermined and reimagined across these films, principally through the

police, the law's embodiment. The director seems less optimistic about the possibility of this institution entering the new social order, perhaps due to it being more visibly associated with patriarchal authoritarianism than the Church. As with the family and the Church, the police (as representatives of the law) also perpetrate patriarchal violence. However, as I demonstrate, the police soon become incompetent. I explore to what extent this reflects the director's scepticism of the institution, before turning to the marked absence of the law in the films of the "black period". A key question through this discussion is how to interpret the absence of the police. Does their irrelevance suggest that the new social order does not require regulation, that it can self-regulate, or is the answer somewhat darker? Finally, I examine one of the only law officers to figure within any sort of Almodovarian community: Juez Domínguez/Femme Letal. This character suggests perhaps that the director is prepared to allow the law fluidity and welcome it into his alternative communities. This is complicated, however, by the judge's maternal ethos and I explore in the closing section what this suggests for the law in more generally in Almodóvar's world.

Much has already been written about the director, but there is as yet no comprehensive analysis of any of the three institutions discussed here, and much less any discussion of the three side by side. What I hope to achieve here is not only to offer the first detailed analysis of family, the Church and the law across the entire filmography,[80] but also to contribute to an understanding of the primacy of community in Almodóvar's films, and of the parameters under which his preferred forms of community flourish. Beyond being excellent cinematic objects, these films are also therefore legible as philosophical texts, offering us insight into the basis of community and its place in our lives. As Noddings notes, laws and regulations, whilst not entirely useless, "may support immoral as well as moral actions. Only the individual can be truly called to ethical behaviour" (2003, 103). Almodóvar's critique of the institutions of traditional Spain is congruent with this claim. These films reveal that the ethical response is the one that pays close attention to "the particular

[80] Whilst, as detailed in chapters one through three, each of these communities has been the subject of previous analysis, no current monograph on this corpus approaches any one of them comprehensively, let alone addresses the nexus between them.

person in a concrete situation" (Noddings 2003, 24). Fixed and stable rules might provide useful guidelines for our behaviour, but they are incapable of offering truly ethical responses to the complex issues thrown up by identity, desire, and belonging.

Chapter One: Mothers and fathers and transgender, oh my!

A. Overview of chapter one

This chapter charts the disruption of the traditional family model across Almodóvar's films. In an interview with Núria Vidal, the filmmaker declared: "En realidad, estoy absolutamente en contra de la familia. Me parece el mayor invento de la sociedad, y no sólo la moderna, para controlar al individuo." (1988, 172) Despite positioning himself against the family, this community is a "ubiquitous" motif across this corpus (Allinson 2001, 63).[1] Whether foregrounded by the title—as in *Todo sobre mi madre*—or emerging through the unravelling of an intricate narrative web—as with *La mala educación*—the family offers Almodóvar seemingly endless narrative possibilities. Indeed, he has stated that the family is "a dramatic subject of the first order" (Rouyer and Vié 1988, 21). In this same interview, he continued that whilst originally he viewed the family as oppressive, he ultimately came to understand its importance. This reveals a tension in the director's approach: on the one hand, the family is a site of control and restriction; on the other, it is a primary site for community, support and care. I argue that these films consistently explore this ambiguity, without necessarily achieving resolution.

Moreover, rather than searching for a linear evolution, it is useful to engage the concept of women's time in our understanding of the representation of the family. If *¿Qué he hecho yo!* is the first time this community is foregrounded, the associated themes—the authoritarian father, paternal abuse, patricide, the maternal ideal, and feminine solidarity as an alternative to the traditional family—reappear habitually in subsequent works. I am not suggesting later films simply rework earlier narratives. These narratives return to certain motifs and paradoxes without seeking to resolve them, in accordance with the way women's temporalities decentre linear causality and infuse the everyday with greater meaning. In the same manner that

[1] Although this appraisal was made almost two decades ago, the family remains central to Almodóvar's films, *Los amantes pasajeros* being an anomaly.

the increasing emphasis on time across various academic fields has become a way of drawing out questions of gender, reorienting fields that are not feminist *per se* to include feminist concerns (Apter 2010, 17), I suggest Almodóvar's playing with time similarly foregrounds women's daily lives.[2] The discussion of the family below investigates the consequences of this for the way his characters relate to each other.

This chapter undertakes a comprehensive survey of the director's parental figures, focusing on illustrative examples. By delving into a taxonomy of such characters, I offer new insights into the dynamics of rupture and reimagining of the family. I do not, however, claim that Almodóvar simply repeats character or relationship "types" throughout his filmography. The first section of this chapter traces the deconstruction of the traditional family through a critique of authoritarian fathers and patriarchal mothers.

As Allinson puts it: "Fathers fare badly" in these films (2001, 63). Indeed, Almodóvar once suggested: "When I'm writing about relatives, I just put in mothers, but I try not to put in fathers. I avoid it. I don't know why." (Kinder 1987, 43) Yet paternal characters loom large over this corpus. I broadly classify them into two categories: abusive, or absent. Below, I trace the various ways in which this filmography foregrounds paternal violence and ultimately disposes of such figures, with Antonio (*¿Qué he hecho yo!*)—who has traces of both types[3]--my primary example. Whilst it might be tempting to declare an evolution in Almodóvar's representation of the father, this depends heavily on one's perspective. I return to this issue in the final section of this chapter.

Meanwhile, the mother is portrayed with more compassion and variety. Nevertheless, I have identified three key types: the "bad" mother; the ideal mother; and the male (but nevertheless feminine) mother. The first category is defined in more detail in the first section of this chapter, which argues that such maternal figures are generally aligned with patriarchal authority and it is for this reason that they are excluded from the director's alternative families. In the second section of

[2] By women, in line with the approach of this corpus, I do not only mean those born biologically female, but all who identify as women.

[3] See section B.ii.b of this chapter.

this chapter, I turn to the two other maternal types. Almodóvar once stated that despite his cynicism towards the family, he focuses on "what is authentic in family relations" (Rouyer and Vié 1988, 21). This section explores the centrality of the maternal to his "authentic" alternative families. The pivotal role of the mother reveals, I contend, Almodóvar's disruption of hegemonic gender relations, together with the need for greater fluidity in family roles, underpinned by an ethic of care. Yet the persistence of the ideal mother arguably replicates rigid gender norms. By way of conclusion, in the final section this chapter questions whether Almodóvar's idealisation of the maternal reflects a return to traditional values.[4]

Almodóvar has been described as a family therapist, as he moves "his characters through reenactments of family tension, unbalances fixed hierarchy of power among characters, and eventually proposes more flexible transactional patterns" (Hardcastle 2007a, 84). Although the Manchegan rejects its conventional iteration, I argue that he nevertheless sees family as serving an important role. Through the analysis of various families across this corpus, the guiding question is whether Almodóvar is able to reimagine this community in more tolerant and optimistic ways that align the family with the ethics of care.[5]

i. The family in Almodóvar's films: Context, overview and literature

As affirmed by Tiffany Trotman in her introduction to a volume on changing representations of the Spanish family, the concept of "family" is not fixed, but evolves over time (2011, 1). The shifting discourses of the family during the Franco regime and subsequent Transition offer insight into Almodóvar's approach to this institution and its symbolic significance. Under Franco, the family occupied a quasi-sacred position, perceived as "un emblema de la Nación en peligro, que urge proteger y redimir" (Ballesteros 2001, 271). Despite the Franco regime's early hostility to filmic production (Marsh and Nair 2004, 4), it soon adopted the family as a cinematic allegory for the Spanish State (Ballesteros 2001, 271; Acevedo-Muñoz

[4] As discussed from page 96 below, this is because the ideal mother in many ways conforms to rigid gender norms, particularly the ideal of the *ángel del hogar* and feminine domestic virtue.

[5] Discussed further on page 91ff below, the ethics of care is defined in the Introduction, section C.iii.

2006, 183). In early Franco-era films in particular, “female roles are clearly gendered along the paradigm of Catholic womanhood that became the hallmark of a regime that was buttressed by the victimization of the ‘maternal’, suffering ‘good’ woman” (Camino 2011, 18). Yet if the representation of the family shifted across the dictatorship, its symbolic importance continued into the Transition (see Norriega 2014, 81-83).

Generally an individual’s first significant community, the family also plays a central role in socialisation (Alberdi 1999, 9). It also figures as a microcosm of the broader socio-political context, which it potentially contests or supports. Certainly, Althusser categorises the family as an ideological state apparatus: a (private) institution which reinforces the State’s power and ideology (1977, 143-145). The traditional family structure—relatively homogeneous due to lack of political or social freedom (Alberdi 1999, 14)—imposed a clear hierarchy, pursuant to which women were subservient. However, the work of sociologist Inés Alberdi has exposed the post-Transition transformation of the Spanish family, most clearly with regards to gender. Alberdi notes: “La familia es una de las instituciones que mejor refleja el cambio que se ha producido en la sociedad española.” (2006, 30) With the 1978 Constitution, Alberdi argues, the guiding norms of the Spanish family became individual freedom and gender equality. The growing social status of women led to more equal partnerships, smaller families and higher rates of divorce. In the new social climate, “las ideas de igualdad de género son respetadas a nivel teórico, aunque todavía sus niveles de aceptación práctica son reducidas” (Alberdi 1999, 20; see also Alberdi 2004). Just as Franco-era cinema drew on the family to reinforce the nationalist project, this cultural form equally drew on the family in the reimagining of Spain, and continues to do so. For Almodóvar, the family is hence a site of ideological contest. His portrayal of family deviance enables him to engage critically with historically repressive aspects of Spain’s past. Numerous scholars have commented on this thematic thread. Anne Hardcastle, for instance, observes that Almodóvar’s families “struggle against repressive, inflexible social codes that enforce power hierarchies, punish deviance, and link social/familial life to a legacy of fascist control.” (2007a, 82)

Franco-era films often centred on the figure of the mother, who took on a renewed cultural significance. Kinder, for instance, argues that Spanish cinema engaged in a "distinctive cultural reinscription of the Oedipal narrative… to speak about political issues and historical events that were repressed from filmic representation during the Francoist era" (1993, 197). Moreover, the symbol of the mother-nation became "omnipresent" (Ballesteros 1999, 51), as the mother ascended to "semi-divine" status (González del Pozo 2012a, 30).[6] Such status was, however, undermined by the real-life expectations of women's domestic servitude and "feminine" virtues that limited them to the domestic sphere.

If on-screen mothers in the early dictatorship fitted the self-sacrificing model of the Hollywood maternal melodrama, in its final years and the first few years of the Transition, they took on an authoritarian air (Kinder 1993, 198-200). This was partly in response to the power vacuum left by the father's on-screen absence. The mother became, as Andrés Zamora puts it, "the displaced incarnation of authoritarian power, its source of violence" (2016, 140; see also Zamora 2009). Yet such power was "illusory", as these female roles perpetuated patriarchal discourses and were aligned with masculinised notions of power, rather than assuming genuine matriarchal authority (Gámez Fuentes 2004, 26).[7]

The maternal figure has been deployed "in various ways in democratic Spain to address complex political and personal issues. This is symptomatic of the process of social reconstruction, especially in reference to its dictatorial past" (Gámez Fuentes 2003, 43). The representation of the mother in Spanish cinema took a turn in the years following the Transition, with the "patriarchal mother" replaced by more positive iterations (Kinder 1993; Zamora 2016). This was part of a broader, and ongoing, socio-cultural project of redefining national identity. In her study of the mother in Spanish cinema and literature of the post-Franco period, María Gámez Fuentes argues that "las figuras de lo materno constituyen y articulan las fisuras por

[6] Spanish screen representations of the mother have accordingly received significant attention in the critical scholarship: Besas (1985), Hopewell (1986), Kinder (1993), Gámez Fuentes (2003), Gámez Fuentes (2004).

[7] I would argue that maternal authority would be qualitatively similar to, and governed by, the ethics of care, as discussed in section C.iii of this chapter.

las que retornan los conflictos no resueltos entre presente democrático y pasado franquista." (2004, 23; see also Kinder 1993)

Given this social and cinematic context, it is unsurprising that Almodóvar's on-screen families have long been considered a site for negotiating the Transition.[8] As Acevedo-Muñoz asserts: "the essence of Almodóvar's aesthetics… [is] the desire to make logic out of chaos, and to rebuild the family and the nation out of its own fragmentation and the trauma of the past." (2007, 7) Almodóvar's families remind us that homogeneous or unambiguous family models are a fantasy and highlight the impossibility of producing—even fictionally—the "modelo de familia promovido y subvencionado en el pasado por el franquismo y la Iglesia católica" (Ballesteros 2001, 295). Instead, Almodóvar's films offer a unique range of alternative familial forms, reflecting Alberdi's research on the significant changes to the "real" Spanish family that occur as his filmmaking career takes off.

These films are replete with families that could have protagonised Franco-era films (Sánchez-Alarcón 2008, 339).[9] Such families are viewed as a source of "confinement" (D'Lugo 2006, 56), apparent from Almodóvar's earliest films. Whether it is the trapped housewife (eg Gloria in *¿Qué he hecho yo!*), or the abused child (eg Queti in *Laberinto de pasiones* (1982)), traditional families are "trauma-laden" (Goss 2009, 88). This is reinforced by the director's complex narratives. Hardcastle notes that shifting directorial focus between various symptomatic characters "reveals a dysfunction that lurks ultimately in their patterns of interactions, not in a specific, 'deviant' member of the family" (2007a, 83). Yet, as suggested by both Smith (1992) and Allbritton (2015), Almodóvar's complex and palimpsestuous narratives are themselves implicated in reimagining the family. Such approaches connect Almodóvar's alternative families to the pivotal concept of women's time. Despite the prevalence of families in this corpus, no existing scholarship addresses the representation of this community comprehensively.

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[8] This chimes with a broader agenda identified in his films of rehabilitating Spanish icons. See the literature review above for a more detailed discussion.

[9] Almodóvar has stated: "If anything is a feature of our end of century, it is precisely the break-up of the traditional family." (Strauss 2006, 186)

Two main themes run through the literature. The first line of scholarship focuses on the breakup of the traditional family and highlights its reconstruction via (progressive) alternative families. Such communities are often positioned within the feminist ethics of care (Gutiérrez-Albilla 2011; Martin-Márquez 2004; see also Prout 1999). Similarly, numerous scholars have commented on the female-centredeness of Almodóvar's alternative families.[10] Such communities are infused with feminine solidarity, sidelining men (or at least cis, heterosexual men).[11] The second views the director as inherently conservative due to his idealised portrayal of mothers.

Many scholars note in passing the dissolution of conventional family structures in this filmography, but few analyse this in detail. Instead, most turn quickly to Almodóvar's reimagining of this community. The scholarship suggests—in line with my contention—that his deconstruction of its traditional forms ultimately reclaims the family for a more therapeutic and supportive space. As has been noted time and again, a feature of such arrangements is that they welcome members with non-biological connections, alongside more loosely related, often same-sex groupings (see Smith 1992, 170; Strauss 2006, 186; Sánchez-Alarcón 2008, 339).[12] The predominately same-sex families of Almodóvar's earliest films (eg *Entre tinieblas*, *La ley del deseo*) not only offer the promise of a supportive, close community,[13] but also shed light on the biological family of origin, which in Smith's terms is "revealed as the locus of perversion." (1992, 192) Meanwhile, the director's alternative families are spaces in which the individual can "express herself in a more authentically differentiated way" (DiFrancesco 2009, 56), whilst also offering an experience of positively individuated self. Hardcastle proposes that such households reflect Almodóvar's "ideal for a new Spanish society that respects individuality,

10 See Goss (2009, 88); DiFrancesco (2009); Maddison (2000a, 281); Allinson (2001, 85-87).

11 Conversely, the reimagined family may include men who are are either openly gay (Miguel, *¿Qué he hecho yo!*; Pablo, *La ley del deseo*), or coded as queer (Esteban, *Todo sobre mi madre*).

12 Sánchez-Alarcón suggests that such "random" families might combat loneliness, evoking the work of Kakoudaki, for whom Almodóvar's "poetics of coincidence" establishes bonds between people who might otherwise be strangers (2008).

13 As DiFrancesco observes, even queer relationships can be oppressive: Luci and Bom's relationship reproduces a heteronormative dynamic, with Luci the female/submissive, and Bom male/dominant (2009, 56). The more progressive possibility DiFrancesco identifies in the "lesbian family" of the Marquesa, Yolanda and Sor Rata (*Entre tinieblas*) is discussed in chapter two below.

interdependence, and change—characteristics at once crucial to a functional family system and to democracy." (2007a, 84) This, for Venkatesh, "gesture[s] towards the inclusive notions of the Queer, where what is at stake is the potential for deviating from and non-conforming with hetero*normalcy*" (2014, 356; original emphasis). Later films, whilst they may not foreground homosexual families, nevertheless challenge the biological imperative, continuing to legitimise a broad range of household configurations (Pérez Baena 2000, 185).

The symbolic function of the mother mentioned above provides important context to Almodóvar's on-screen families, suggesting that his maternal figures not only reveal something about his ideal communities, but also comment on the country's passage to democracy. Whilst some Almodovarian mothers embody Franco-era authoritarianism, others reinforce the "inexorable" nexus between the maternal and the feminine (Martin-Márquez 2004, 501). Nevertheless, there is a significant, and at times subversive, power in the maternal voice. In *Tacones lejanos* (1991), Becky's singing is so compelling that her daughter, Rebeca, is compelled to buy a radio off her prison-cell neighbours in order to turn it off.[14] Becky's lack of maternal sentimentality is, however, ironically foregrounded by her dedication of the song to her daughter. Moreover, the lyrics of the bolero she performs, "Piensa en mí",[15] focus on the singer ("Think of *me*, when you are suffering"), despite being directed to an anguished lover. This evokes the dynamic of the mother-daughter relationship: for Rebeca, Becky has long been a source of pain, but her mother also embodies the love and care she craves.[16] For Kinder, this celebration of mother-daughter love "adds new maternal resonance to Almodóvar's ongoing project of

[14] The pain associated with this voice contrasts with its restorative function in *La flor de mi secreto*, where her mother's voice on the answering saves Leo (played by Marisa Paredes, who also plays Becky) from an overdose. Meanwhile, Gutiérrez-Albilla highlights the primordial significance of the mother's voice in *Volver* (2011, 323), and Kinder observes the importance of merging voices in *Todo sobre mi madre* (2004, 252).

[15] The song was written in 1937 by Mexican Agustín Lara, appointed an honorary Spanish citizen by Franco. The song's provenance therefore raises questions of Francoism and popular memory (see Brémard 2005), yet another example of Almodóvar's fusion of the very personal (Rebeca's complex relationship with her mother) with broader socio-historical issues.

[16] This scene's sentimentality contrasts with the "jailhouse merengue" Rebeca witnesses: Susana, having broken into jail to protect her daughter, leads a "flashdance" across the prison yard to the tune "Pecadora". Susana and her daughter offer a counterpoint to the mother-daughter protagonists that also hints at the film's conclusion.

making the 'marginal' central" (1993, 261-262; see also Martin-Márquez 2004, 508). The power of the maternal voice is not merely restorative; it is also productive. In a review of *Volver*, Smith paraphrases the director as saying: "mothers are the source of storytelling as well as life" (2006b, 18).[17] Indeed, storytelling—or self-narration—"is central to identity formation" (McNay 2000, 81).[18]

Much of the scholarship focuses on the question of whether Almodóvar's mothers are problematically romanticised. Whilst Allinson explicitly rejects such claims (2001, 63), numerous scholars critique this corpus for glorifying the self-sacrificing mother and reducing such figures to nothing more than her nurturing capacity (Camino 2010; Corbalán 2008; Zecchi 2005; Cruz 2002; Martin-Márquez 1999). This points to a deeper ideological debate. Namely, whether these representations return to the conservative patriarchal ideal of motherhood as the primary site for women's activity and self-expression. Camino, for instance, suggests that even strong female characters such as Manuela and Raimunda "remain confined within the traditional roles of their female forebears, namely the cinematic 'mothers' of the *españoladas*" (2010, 627). In a similar vein, Barbara Zecchi observes in *Todo sobre mi madre* the "absorption of the concept of womanhood into the category of maternity" (2005, 148). If Camino and Zecchi see Almodóvar's vision of motherhood as unduly prescriptive of feminine activity, Jacqueline Cruz (2002) is highly critical of the lack of on-screen female sexuality.[19] Indeed, even when present, maternal sexuality is portrayed as only either clandestine, or unfulfilling. Meanwhile, Susan Martin-Márquez argues that although *Todo sobre mi madre* does offer a portrait of the self-abnegating, masochistic mother critiqued by Camino and Zecchi, it also provides a countervailing model of motherhood as rebirth (2004, 508).

Criticisms along the above lines suggest that Almodóvar's maternal ideal is a regression to that privileged by the Franco regime: "[l]a madre asexuada y

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17 See also D'Lugo (2006, 2), who suggests that in *Todo sobre mi madre* the mother is a "creative source" and an "inspiration to her son".

18 This is not to suggest that Almodóvar's films align with narrative-based theories of identity formation, given that his characters often defy coherent, chronological and/or unified life narratives. Nevertheless, his representation of mothers seems to position maternal storytelling at the heart of identity and community.

19 I return to these critiques in the conclusion to this chapter, section D.ii.

transmisora de la conciencia nacional" (Ballesteros 1999, 59). If Almodovarian mothers are never explicitly moralising, the issue is whether, as Lucy Fischer articulates it, they are celebrated through stereotype (1996). Certainly, the idealisation of the maternal feeds into patriarchal structures, focusing women's attention away from other important issues, including non-motherhood forms of self-fulfilment and empowerment (Hollinger 1998, 23).

The literature to date covers key issues in the director's representation of the family, highlighting the ways in which Almodóvar deconstructs the traditional model and connecting his families to his broader reimagining of Spain. What I contribute in the following sections is a more comprehensive engagement with the family across these works, principally the father and mother, along with a more systematic articulation of the framework for Almodóvar's alternative families. Whilst this corpus privileges fluid expressions of gender, it is unclear how to reconcile the subversion of conventional gender norms—prevalent in his early films—with the traditionally "feminine" qualities of his favoured mothers. This pervasive trope therefore potentially undermines the director's apparently progressive approach to gender, as well as complicating my reading of his alternative families. I return to this tension in the final part of this chapter.

B. Broken embraces: The failure of the traditional family

i. Overview

The family is present from Almodóvar's first feature, whether as Pepi's father's authoritarian voice down the phone (*Pepi, Luci, Bom*), the marquesa searching for her daughter (*Entre tinieblas*), or the various troubled families in *Laberinto de pasiones*. It is not, however, until his fourth feature, *¿Qué he hecho yo!*, that the family takes centre stage. I trace here this narrative's deconstruction of traditional family values and structures, which I argue reveals their inability to sustain meaningful relationships. Such ruptures are achieved primarily through the disposal

of the patriarch and the sidelining of those mothers associated with traditional hierarchy.[20]

This section first elaborates my taxonomy of Almodóvar's fathers, before considering in detail the representation of Antonio (*¿Qué he hecho yo!*), whose death is necessary for the emergence of a community governed by care. I argue that the motif of patricide—also present in *Volver*—is a way of reinforcing the issue of paternal violence, and implies that murder is the only reasonable way to respond. More drastic, perhaps, than the banishing of the police,[21] I contend that killing the abusive father nevertheless fits into a similar pattern of challenging traditional social order and power structures across this filmography.[22] The dissolution of the traditional family does not stop with the abusive father. *¿Qué he hecho yo!* also includes one of this filmography's most neglectful mothers.[23] She therefore falls into the first category of Almodóvar's "bad mother", the second being the authoritarian or repressive mother. Gloria's abandonment of her sons is foregrounded through the film's engagement with the genres of melodrama and neorealism. From Gloria, this section turns to other bad mothers, who allow us to explore continuities and ruptures in the director's portrayal of the break-up of the traditional family.

ii. The patriarch: Authoritarian, abusive, absent

a. Burying the abusive father

As Ana Corbalán observes, the nuclear family was idealised during the dictatorship, at which time *franquista* ideology "equiparaba a la sociedad española con una gran familia liderada por la figura del padre" (2008, 154). If Franco was the "father" of the nation, at the domestic level the father was the supreme authority. In Almodóvar's films, this power is exercised primarily through violence, whether

[20] I do not focus here on the relationship between the traditional family and the Church, but there are significant overlaps in values and expectations imposed on women by these two institutions (see Morcillo 2000).

[21] This is discussed in chapter three, section C.

[22] It could also be argued that the police are excluded because women are more capable of managing men's violence.

[23] If *Volver* similarly depicts a father's death, Raimunda is distinctly less neglectful than Gloria, although her maternal qualities also do grow after her partner's death.

physical, emotional or the abuse of neglect. Here I work through Almodóvar's abusive fathers, offering a comprehensive account that has not been offered elsewhere. While abusive fathers come in many guises, in this corpus they generally fit within the model of the man who "impone su fuerza y poder a las mujeres" (Caballero Gálvez and Zurián Hernández 2016, 864),[24] as well as their children, of course. Their violence is directly linked to a traditional conceptualisation of masculinity, which creates a rift between these fathers and their children.

Almodóvar's focus on childhood trauma "typically at the hands of parental (patriarchal) and church authority, speak[s] to a deeply suspicious posture toward these traditionally valorized founts of authority" (Goss 2009, 89). This also reflects the director's broader scepticism of traditional power structures and his rejection of Francoist-era authoritarianism. Paternal abuse is often sexual, although this is generally not shown on-screen. This at times downplays the gravity of such violence. In *Laberinto de pasiones*, for instance, a father projects his desire for his absent wife onto his daughter, her dispassionate compliance consistent with the strictly enforced submission of women under Francoism (Caballero Gálvez and Zurián Hernández 2016, 859; Moreiras-Menor 2014). When she finally escapes, it is to a situation that in appearance has the same configuration.[25] *La ley del deseo* offers a similarly ambiguous depiction of sexual violence, but here there are two abusive fathers: one biological, the other religious. The "victim" in both cases is Tina, one of the most significant transsexual characters of Almodóvar's oeuvre.[26] The fact that Tina's sex change was instigated to please her father is never scrutinised in the film. Rather,

[24] Caballero Gálvez and Zurián Hernández outline two other categories of masculine violence in these films. One is the "psychopath," further sub-divided into men motivated by hatred of women (eg Diego, *Matador*), and those "quienes matan a sus esposas cuando saben que ya no van a ser suyas, cuando ellas anuncian que quieren ser libres y romper la relación de sumisión" (eg Sancho, *Carne trémula*; Ernesto, *Abrazos rotos*) (2016, 869). This seems to me to overlap with their first category of the "macho ibérico", given such violence focuses on asserting authority. The other category is the "innocent" whose behaviour is influenced by trauma (eg Ricky *¡Átame!*; Víctor, *Carne trémula*).

[25] Queti undergoes plastic surgery to look like her idol, Sexilia, adopts her identity, and is subjected to the advances of Sexilia's father, who believes she is his daughter. This scenario hence mirrors the one she has just left. Nevertheless, it does offer an escape from the abuse of her own father (Sánchez Conejero 2008, 28).

[26] Tina is the focus of my discussion of Almodóvar's attempt to reimagine religion (or more accurately, de-institutionalised spirituality) in chapter two, section D.

the character claims agency over the procedure.[27] Nevertheless, the lasting emotional impact of the abuse is foregrounded in her romantic challenges. Through such casual representations of paternal violence, these films hint at its prevalence, even if they occasionally fail to capture its emotional consequences.

This is addressed in *Volver*, which offers a brutal depiction of patriarchal abuse, but also foregrounds its devastating impact. It therefore links such violence more clearly to the country's difficult recent history than the previous examples mentioned.[28] In a narrative focused on the extraordinary power and passion of motherhood,[29] fathers are solely characterised by violence leading to Smith to declare this film Almodóvar's "bitterest attack on machismo" (2006b, 18). Again, there are two fathers: Paco, husband of protagonist Raimunda, and ostensibly the father of her daughter, Paula; and Raimunda's own father, long dead in a house fire that she believes also killed her mother. If the most surprising of this narrative's long-buried secrets is that Raimunda's mother is still alive, the most disturbing is that Paula is not Paco's daughter, but her grandfather's: Raimunda was raped by her father and gave birth to her own sister. As Goss (2009) observes, the harmful familial silence that dominates the early part of *Volver* echoes the "pact of silence" that followed Franco's death.[30] This film illustrates how the inability to communicate about traumatic events negatively impacts the formation of community.

In a vicious cycle of violence, Paula is in turn assaulted by her father figure, a man who is both ineffective and abusive.[31] His authority is undermined by the revelation that he is unable to support the family.[32] When he reveals that he has lost his job, Raimunda's immediate response is that she will have to find additional work, her reaction suggesting that she is either already the primary breadwinner or at least

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27 Pastor argues that Tina's sex change is "legitimized rather than… presented as a transgression of the norm" (2006, 10).

28 The representation of violence here is more in line with the grim *La mala educación*, considered in detail in chapter two, section B.

29 For an in-depth discussion of Raimunda, see from page 81 below.

30 The so-called pact of silence has been discussed (and debated) extensively in literature on the Transition: Labanyi (2009); Jerez-Farrán and Amago (2010); Aguilar (2017).

31 There are also parallels between their wives. Just as Gloria's life is dedicated to menial tasks, Raimunda's long workdays are emphasised by a montage of her working in a kitchen, as a cleaner, and in the airport. She finds more fulfilling employment only after Paco's death.

32 This echoes Antonio's financial difficulties, as outlined on page 54ff above.

willing to take on the role. Although he fails to provide as a traditional father "should", Paco has a marked sense of entitlement that cannot be understood except by reference to historic norms. He is more concerned with the outcome of the soccer match than finding a new job and Raimunda's impatience is clear when she snaps: "te puedes ir despidiéndote del fútbol. Se acaba el Canal Plus."

Another, more subtle, dimension of Paco's violence is exposed through his sexual encounter with Raimunda, revealing "the violence at the core of non-reciprocal sexual relationships" (Gutiérrez Albilla 2011, 335). The night before his death, Paco attempts to "seduce" her as they lie in bed. She expresses no desire, whilst he exhibits no concern for her pleasure. When Raimunda states she is exhausted and must rise early, he simply responds "ya me lo curro yo," diminishing her to a purely passive role. Raimunda turns her back. A close-up of her profile shows her eyes brimming with tears, as Paco masturbates and orgasms next to her. Paco's disregard for mutual care reaches its zenith the next day, when we learn from Paula that he drunkenly attacked her in the kitchen. As she leads her mother to his dead body, the girl explains that she drew a knife simply to threaten him, but was forced to follow through when he refused to stop. Paco's death itself causes no trauma, although it does create more "work" for Raimunda. Having just returned from her cleaning job, she promptly gets to work mopping up blood. Raimunda's professional and maternal roles accordingly overlap, true also for Gloria.[33]

This task is interrupted by a neighbour knocking at the door with the keys to his restaurant—a place that provides Raimunda with a route to independence. A trace of blood is visible on her neck and when asked if she is hurt, Raimunda responds "son cosas de mujeres", a humorous moment in an otherwise tense sequence. If, as Zamora notes, this oblique reference to menstruation reinforces the centrality of the maternal in this film (2016, 151),[34] there is another truth in this

[33] See page 61ff below.

[34] The reference to menstruation at such a dramatic moment recalls Kristeva's division of women's time between cyclical, natural time (eg that of the menstrual cycle), and monumental time (recalling the resurrection of the maternal cult). While Raimunda appeases her neighbour by referring to the former, this narrative privileges the latter category given the centrality of the maternal and the framing of Irene's return as a resurrection. The throwaway line also suggests a

throwaway line. As these films demonstrate, masculine violence has long been a "woman's thing," or part of "women's troubles" (as the English subtitles translate it). Whilst Raimunda's statement implicitly confirms this, it also excludes her (male) neighbour from the house. Women must deal with such "troubles" on their own.

The devastating truth of this is revealed during the assault. Paco "reassures" Paula that he is not her father, in an attempt to justify his actions, hinting at the family secret behind her conception. The parallels between Paula's and Raimunda's experiences—and the intergenerational legacy of trauma—are reinforced by the fact that the housefire in which Raimunda's father died was lit by her mother, upon discovering the abuse. As another character tells Raimunda: "Tu padre había nacido para hacer sufrir a las mujeres que le querían." If the brutal deaths of the two patriarchs seem just punishment, they also allow space for a feminine community to emerge.[35] Paco's death serves as a catalyst for the return of Raimunda's mother, Irene,[36] and also brings Raimunda closer to her own daughter. As Mirguet proposes: "*Volver*'s characters, struggling to transcend a past of abuse and silence, evoke the new Spanish generation, fighting to break away from the censorship and cultural oppression of the Francoist period." (2011, 31; see also Goss 2009, 105) The death of the violent patriarch, the film's logic proposes, offers a way to overcome this history, and develop deeper familial relationships.

Ultimately, these films sideline the father all together. As Kinder has suggested, Almodóvar treats fathers as he does Franco: "as if they never existed" (1987, 43; see also García de León and Maldonado 1989, 77).[37] If, as chapter three investigates, the absence of police seems to allow for a new social order, burying the father similarly provides space for the alternative family. Even if "a lack of guiding parental (especially patriarchal) authority generates problems for these deracinated, even

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casual attitude towards bodily functions that aligns with the representation of domestic spaces and activities across these films.

35 As discussed in chapter three, section C.i, such "alternative" justice is coded feminine in part through its location in "feminised" spaces, principally the kitchen.

36 We will see shortly that in *¿Qué he hecho yo!*, the death of the patriarch instead brings about the return of a child.

37 Similarly, Vidal notes: "Con dos excepciones, los padres están siempre ausentes en el cine de Almodóvar." (1988, 255) Yet Vidal's two exceptions—Pepi's father (*Pepi, Luci y Bom*), and Virginia's (*Entre tinieblas*)—are also substantially absent in my view.

troubled characters" (Goss 2009, 87), they at least escape the trauma caused by the oppressive patriarch. Characters whose fathers never appear on-screen are so numerous that Goss describes Benigno (*Hable con ella*), as another in the long "line" of characters without fathers (2009, 107). This stretches from Almodóvar's first film—in which Pepi's father is merely an annoying voice down the phone line[38]—to his most recent, *Julieta* (2016), in which Antía's father dies whilst she is an adolescent.[39] At other times, abandonment is due to illness, such as the Alzheimer's of Sister Rosa's apparently sweet father (*Todo sobre mi madre*); family intervention, such as Carlos's maternal grandparents in *Mujeres al borde* (1988); or work, such as Antonio's father, a member of parliament who resides in Madrid (*La ley del deseo*). Even where an authoritarian mother takes his place, the absence of the father is a significant step in Almodóvar's rehabilitation of the family.

In contrast to the absent mother who, I argue, is sorely missed, these absent fathers are largely irrelevant. The significance of this is reinforced by the two films most explicitly rooted in Spain's recent history: *Carne trémula* and *La mala educación*. In the former, there is no mention of the protagonist's father, despite the narrative starting with his mother going into labour.[40] It is fitting, I argue, that the father does not figure in a film to contain "one of the director's rare references to Spain's political transformation," visible in the change "from the cold, deserted Madrid streets of a Christmas night under military rule and the state of emergency, to the busy, carefree consumerist feast in the same streets under the rule of law" (Martínez-Expósito 2008, 143-144). *La mala educación* has been described as Almodóvar's "first truly historical narrative" (D'Lugo 2006, 115). Here, the only father depicted is of the religious kind—again a sexual predator—but his violence echoes that of other fatherly figures, both fictional and real. I argue that this chorus of ghostly patriarchs reflects the director's desire to not only make films as though

[38] Whilst her mother is equally absent, Pepi's conversation with her father underscores his physical absence.

[39] Other deceased patriarchs include the Marques (*Entre tinieblas*), not only a father, but also the convent's benefactor and Ángel's father (*Matador*), whose widow evidently does not miss him, describing Ángel as "loco como tu padre", promptly followed by "¡Qué en paz descanse!"

[40] As she appears to be a prostitute, it is implied—albeit not confirmed—that his father was a client.

Franco never existed, but to reconfigure the family, and Spain, in similar terms. This requires the removal of the patriarch, who Almodóvar seems to find impossible to reimagine.

b. What Antonio did to deserve that

¿Qué he hecho yo! offers one of Almodóvar's clearest depictions of the dissolution of the conventional family, unpacking the symbolic inheritance of the dictatorship. As has been observed, Almodóvar's early families are, at least initially, often of a kind that could have protagonised pre-democracy films (Sánchez-Alarcón 2008). This is no exception. A film that marks the end of Almodóvar's "underground period [yet] still shows traces of the *la movida* sensibility" (Pavlović 2009, 171),[41] even its title characterises the family as a source of punishment. Through close attention to the mother and father, roles that frame both the family and the narrative, I explore the way this film challenges the rigid gender divide which structured—and hierarchised—the Francoist family (see Morcillo 2000; Gómez Nicolau 2012). Whilst I agree with María Sánchez-Alarcón's (2008) view that this film illustrates Almodóvar's view that the traditional family structure has been exhausted, the family is not wholly rejected.

In a small, anonymous high-rise apartment in outer Madrid reside Gloria, her boorish husband Antonio, their two sons (Toni and Miguel), and Antonio's mother. Relations amongst them replicate the neglect of the metropolitan environment, a consequence of Franco's efforts to discourage urban immigration (see Vernon 1993, 33),[42] whilst the protagonist's liberation is achieved through Antonio's "convenient" death (D'Lugo 1991, 55). The patriarchs' elimination is reinforced by the *abuela*'s "return" to her village with Toni; representing Antonio's past and future respectively.

If Almodóvar's fathers are either abusive or absent, Antonio manages to be both. He is uncaring, and occasionally violent, towards his wife, generally neglectful

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41 In a similar vein, Valeria Camporesi proposes that it was with this film that Almodóvar began to be taken seriously as a filmmaker (2014, 60). For a more general discussion of this film consult Vernon (1993); Smith (2000, 51-64); D'Lugo (2006, 37-44); Acevedo-Muñoz (2007, 49-62).

42 D'Lugo observes that this is an "ironic reworking of the neorealist tradition of narratives of migration to the cities" (2010, 127).

of his sons and fails to fulfil his responsibilities. This characterisation both reflects and subverts the *franquista* paternal ideal. Indeed, Antonio belongs to those Almodovarian fathers who "serve as transparent embodiments of traditionalist patriarchal order" (D'Lugo 1991, 51). Given this symbolism, and in line with D'Lugo's analysis, I view the director's contempt for the father as part of his broader social critique, which here primarily targets inequitable gender hierarchies. As Alberdi observes, the traditional Spanish family was organised discursively along gendered lines, with the dependence of women ensuring the reproduction and protection of family members (1999, 20; see also Venkatesh 2014, 364).[43] Women provided maternal and domestic service, whilst men were the undisputed head of the household.

Although Antonio clings brutishly to this traditional authority—marking him a "macho ibérico" (Caballero Gálvez and Zurián Hernández 2016, 864)—the film undermines his position in various ways. For instance, his (unsuccessful) forbidding of Gloria's friendship with prostitute neighbour, Cristal, is ridiculed by the narrative's commentary on the parallels between prostitution and marriage.[44] As Vernon observes, Antonio's self-appointment as "champion of moral *decencia*" reflects his association with "an archaic values system ill-suited to current economic and social realities" (1993, 37).

Antonio expects obedience from his wife, an early scene showing him barking orders at her to provide dinner and iron a shirt, clearly viewing his wife's primary role as attending to his needs. If Gloria's long working days are followed by the expectation that she manage the household alone—pushing her emotional, physical and temporal resources to their limits[45]—Antonio's evenings are spent at leisure. This underscores dramatically the differing demands on men's and women's time within this family structure. If Antonio's occupation as a taxi driver embodies mobility, his wife is locked into the domestic realm. His constant demands on her

[43] In Althusserian terms, the family is also the root of the reproduction of labour power (1977, 143), a point relevant to the film's critique of consumerism (see also Connell 2005 on the ways production relations shape the dominant gender order).

[44] See from pages 58-58 below.

[45] To cope, she turns to No-Doz (or *minilips*), a supplement designed to relieve fatigue and keep a person awake and alert even when they are feeling tired or drowsy.

time are a means of asserting patriarchal authority, ensuring she cannot exit the cycle of drudgery and self-effacement. When neighbour Cristal comes by to request a whip, Gloria remarks on her luck: "Solita, sin tener que ocuparte de nadie."

Yet Antonio's dominant position is precarious. Even as he enjoys his meal—waited on by Gloria—he is denied beer or wine, and his mother refuses to share her Vichy water unless he pays 30 céntimos. This highlights his limited authority, possibly due to his failure to fulfil the traditional mandate of provider. If this reflects broader shifts in Spanish familial roles since the Transition (Alberdi 1999; 2004; and 2006), women have long contributed financially to the household.[46] The symbolic power of the "man-as-provider" is evident in Antonio's vehement objection to Gloria working. The traditional family delineated immutable gender roles organised around the objective of procreation (Alberdi 1999, 20; Morcillo 2000, 34; Gómez Nicolau 2012), challenged by the necessity of Gloria's income. She not only supplements the family income, but—as Ballesteros puts it—takes on "la responsabilidad de ser la única proveedora de la familia en un estatus social de permanente escasez" (2001, 61). Meanwhile, the hypocrisy of Antonio's opposition to her employment is underscored when he is shown to be oblivious to economic pressures of which his wife is, conversely, hyper-aware. When she demands to know how she should pay the mounting bills, from rent to the doctor and the children's clothes. "Sólo piensas en lujos", Antonio retorts.[47]

These comments also reveal a lack of care for his family. He shows little interest in his sons' wellbeing. This is underscored when Miguel returns to the apartment and asks whether his father missed him. Gloria responds that Antonio was too busy to notice. She, however: "sí te eché mucho de menos. Me alegro mucho de que hayas vuelto." Whilst the quasi-absent father has little interest in his child's welfare or whereabouts, even the neglectful mother—who entrusts her child to a pederast dentist[48]—rejoices in his presence.

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46 Roca i Girona discusses issues of women's paid employment during the Franco period (2005).

47 This comment offers an interesting contrast to Paco's concern for canal plus, mentioned above on page 51. Meanwhile, Antonio's claim that he could earn much more if he were not so scrupulous is undermined by his scheme to falsify Hitler's memoirs.

48 I discuss this plotline below on page 65ff.

Gloria's frustrations culminate when Antonio storms into the kitchen, an archetypal feminine space (see Floyd 2004) to which she has retreated to prepare their supper.[49] He slaps her for refusing to iron his shirt, and as her blood drips onto pet lizard, Dinero, she declares: "No se te ocurre volver a ponerme las manos encima." This hints at other moments of violence, and marks the end of Gloria's tolerance for her husband's *machista* ways; she transitions from frustrated, passive housewife, to someone in charge of her situation.[50] Gloria and Antonio struggle briefly before she strikes him on the forehead with a hambone.[51] Almodóvar finally empowers his protagonist, notably through her husband's death, which allows her to exit the care-less milieu of her traditional family.

We feel no grief for Antonio's death, which the narrative suggests is necessary for the protagonist's liberation. If, as "un tirano, machista, autoritario y preponente" (Morgado 2014, 159), he apparently holds authority over the structures that trap Gloria within the domestic sphere—perpetually worried about money, chronically under-satisfied, and bound to the small apartment—this is undermined by the absolute lack of concern at his death. Such indifference also reinforces Antonio's estrangement from his family (Vernon 1993, 37); Gloria, her sons and the *abuela*, more nostalgic for her *pueblo* than her dead child, continue as if he had never been there.

In her struggle with Antonio, as in the film generally, Carmen Maura's naturalistic performance as Gloria subverts the melodramatic mode, which is characterised by "stylistic and/or emotional excess" (L. Williams 1991, 3). Indeed, unlike the classic Hollywood heroine, Gloria is "characterized more by lack of affect (due perhaps to drugs or lack of sleep)" (Vernon 1993, 32).[52] This unusual performance style works, I argue, to engage the audience's sympathy in her plight more actively than the "excesses" of traditional melodrama. In the aftermath of Antonio's murder, for instance, Gloria remains emotionally detached as she visits her

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49 I consider in chapter three from page 198 the way this scene reflects a growing feminine power.

50 This challenges the traditional dichotomy of melodrama: feminine/passive vs masculine/active.

51 This is not the only Almodóvar film to use traditional Spanish cuisine as a weapon, as explored in chapter three, page 202ff.

52 In an early interview, Almodóvar noted that the character "no tiene deseos en su interior" (Vidal 1988, 146).

neighbour to establish an alibi.[53] Instead, the audience must respond emotionally to this final conflict on her behalf, along with the daily injustices she has experienced. Gloria's apathy also, I suggest, underscores a rejection of direct, linear progress. In its engagement with feminine subjectivity—and with women's time—the film complicates the notion that Gloria can be freed simply by removing the patriarchal "obstacle", even if Antonio's patriarchal "success" is persistently undermined.[54] These apparently conflicting motifs make it almost impossible to derive a single coherent message from the film.

Symbolically destroying the past (see Camino 2005, 332), the literal death of the father provides an opportunity to construct a new family, no longer premised on a gendered hierarchy that subjugates women. Yet Antonio is not the only element that must be eliminated for this alternative to emerge;[55] I argue that the *abuela* too is implicated in the patriarchal order through association with her son, in addition to her lack of solidarity with her daughter-in-law. Almodóvar's only genuinely multigenerational household, [56] the *abuela*'s presence underscores the self-perpetuating nature of the traditional family: the heterosexual couple is charged with having and raising children until they, in turn, participate in the social economy of procreation. Crucial to this is a progressive narrative within which the couple advances from one key milestone to the next, each party occupied with his or her respective roles. The intergenerationality of this is hinted at when the *abuela* declares that Antonio's feet smell exactly like his father's: "un olor intenso, fuerte; yo casi no puedo respirar." She breathes in deeply, eyes closed as she conjures up her dead husband.

The *abuela*'s alignment with conventional social order is exposed—again ironically—by the *copla* "La bien pagá", an absurd musical interlude that brings to the fore themes of gender and performance via the reference to singer Miguel de

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53 The lack of concern makes sense, I contend, when viewed in light of the lack of effective police, as discussed in chapter three.

54 If Gloria is equally undermined by the film's narrative, this is only to the extent that she is linked to the traditional family. Ultimately, she is redeemed through her reconciliation with Miguel.

55 The alternative family is discussed in detail in section C of this chapter.

56 Although such arrangements are ever less common, the "extended family model was the ideal espoused during the Franco years" (Trotman 2011, 2). Despite this, intergenerational support remains important in Spain, with relatives performing high rates of aged care (Alberdi 2006, 35).

Molina,[57] as well as the mise-en-scène.[58] It begins with two camera operators visible,[59] as the camera pans to Almodóvar himself, his lip-synching, extravagant gestures and dramatic strutting parodying the sentiment of the lyrics.[60] This is further subverted by events occurring in Gloria and Antonio's bedroom. As numerous scholars have suggested, the crosscutting between Toni and his grandmother before the television and the matrimonial couple implies an equivalence between marriage and prostitution (see Smith 2000, 54; Ballesteros 2001, 69; Camino 2010, 337), given the song's reference to a woman being "well paid" by her lover. This parallel is reinforced by Gloria asking for money between kisses as Antonio pushes her onto the bed.[61] For Almodóvar, the editing highlights ironically that "Gloria es la mujer peor pagada en el mundo" (Vidal 1988, 114). This is not only in financial terms, but also emotional and sensual:[62] her reluctant submission is characteristic of "nacionalcatolicismo", in which "la sumisión de la mujer a su marido, padre o cualquier miembro hombre dentro del nuclear familiar era un aspecto incuestionable" (Caballero Gálvez and Zurián Hernández 2016, 859).

Such nuance is lost on the *abuela*, who simply comments: "Qué bonitas son las canciones de mi época."[63] If, as suggested by Smith (2000, 54), this character links the family with the past, her nostalgia for music "of her era" reflects also her acceptance of the values of the period. As Carlos Jerez-Farrán proposes, although

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57 This singer often performed music designed for the female voice (Vidal 1988, 114).

58 Despite its subtext of prostitution, the song was celebrated during the Franco era for its idealisation of female subordination and male economic supremacy (Jerez-Farrán 2011, 205).

59 This recalls the film's opening, in which Gloria passes a film crew on her way to the *kendo* studio.

60 The theme of falsification—a possibly negative correlate of performance—runs from Fanny McNamara dressed as Scarlet O'Hara, to Cristal's fake orgasm and Antonio's forgeries.

61 The line is further blurred when Gloria is co-opted by Cristal to watch an exhibitionist client.

62 Gloria's own desires are irrelevant here, although Almodóvar proposes that if the couple had a mutually satisfying sex life, the situation would be more bearable (Vidal 1988, 115). This does not play out in other films. Diego and María's (*Matador*) sexual chemistry results in mutual suicide, and Pablo and Antonio's passion (*La ley del deseo*) is disastrous: Antonio murders Pablo's ex-lover and commits suicide. The only exceptions seem to be *Carne trémula* and *¡Átame!*. Moreover, the question of consent between Gloria and Antonio is difficult to unpack. Ballesteros appears to be alone in describing Antonio as "el marido-violador" (2001, 62). Lev (2013), for instance, does not include this example in her analysis of rape across Almodóvar's work, although she does consider Cristal's prostitution. In my view, the inclusion of the poster for *Pepi, Luci, Bom* on the set of "La Bien Pagá"—in which Pepi, also played by Maura, is raped in her home—hints at marital rape. The scene also recalls the encounter between Paco and Raimunda mentioned at page 51 above.

63 Her obtuseness is reinforced when she helps Toni with his homework and confidently proclaims Ibsen and Balzac were Romantics, and Lord Byron and Goethe were Realists.

the *abuela* is broadly benevolent, she represents "un obstáculo que se debe eliminar por ser, en parte, responsable por el androcentrismo patriarcal y misógino que ejemplifica su hijo" (2011, 203). Regardless of whether the *abuela* is aware of the goings on in the bedroom, the cross-cutting suggests her entertainment is partially at Gloria's expense. This impression is fortified by their generally indifferent relationship. While their overlapping roles could result in feminine solidarity, the *abuela* is instead aligned with her son. Accordingly, the masculine haunts her relationship with Gloria and circumscribes family relations, precluding any community between them.

This contrasts with the comic and warm relationship between the *abuela* and Toni.[64] If the *abuela* is aligned with the patriarchal through her maternal relationship, her grandson is marked as Antonio's heir through inheritance of the paternal name (see Jerez-Farrán 2011, 200-201; Camino 2005, 337). In one of the few scenes depicting father and son, the older man teaches his namesake to imitate his signature, initiating him into the family talent: forgery. This "reproduction of male privilege through writing" is exacerbated by Gloria's illiteracy (Smith 2000, 54);[65] she is excluded from this knowledge economy. Yet even as the film highlights the self-perpetuating logic of the traditional family, the cycle is broken when Antonio is killed, and his mother and primary heir promptly leave Madrid for the family *pueblo*.[66] The alternative family requires not simply removing the patriarch, but all those attached to the traditional order. Through Antonio's death and the departure of his heir apparent, Toni, and the *abuela*, this narrative refuses the linear account of procreation and inheritance privileged by the traditional family.

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64 Her closeness to Toni also contrasts with her stinginess with her son. Not only must he pay for a bottle of mineral water, she also asks him to keep his bones for her dessert—reminiscent of her character in *Entre tinieblas* who offers bones to Sor Estiércol's pet tiger.

65 This is mentioned when Toni asks for help with his homework. Toni notes that his father too is illiterate. This is incongruous with Antonio's forgeries, but the discrepancy is not resolved.

66 The return to the village is viewed by Zecchi as inscribing them firmly in the status quo (2005, 155), whilst Pérez Melgosa argues for a progressive function for the village, observing that in numerous Almodóvar films, the return to the "utopian village" is "filled with promises of physical and emotional healing, ebullient life force, and personal freedom" (2013, 195).

iii. The "bad mother": Neglectful or repressive

a. Gloria: Almodóvar's first neglectful mother

¿Qué he hecho yo!, Almodóvar has stated, is "a film about motherhood… In it are reflected different embodiments of the maternal." (Blanco, cited in Vernon 1993, 36) It destabilises the maternal through its multiple mothers: neglectful Gloria, mean-spirited Juani, and the indifferent *abuela*. Allowing these mothers their differences without demonising them contrasts with *nacionalcatolicismo*'s very narrow image of women (see Camino 2011, 44-45). Focusing here on the film's protagonist, whilst she is for Almodóvar, the mother "pure and simple" (Vernon 1993, 36),[67] she is far from idealised. It is against Almodóvar's own maternal ideal—driven by the ethics of care—that Gloria falls short. She belongs, I argue, to the category of the "bad mother". If mothers such as Manuela (*Todo sobre mi madre*) or Raimunda (*Volver*) sacrifice themselves in favour of their children, here Miguel and Toni are the ones sacrificed for Gloria. The film chronicles various maternal shortcomings: drug-addiction, an inability to adequately feed her sons, and selling Miguel to a paedophile to free up household resources. Classifying Gloria as "bad mother" reveals the critical potential of this character and provides an important starting point for my exploration of the mother in Almodóvar's works, which raises issues of gender, Spanish identity and changing social norms. Her failings as a mother—closely tied to her inscription in the patriarchal family structure—also preclude her from forming meaningful community. It is only when she escapes the shadow of the patriarch that the alternative family emerges. If Smith suggests that the postmodernist juxtaposition of "radically heterogeneous ('incommensurable') elements" refuses any totalising interpretation of this film (D'Lugo and Smith 2012, 132), I propose that it explicitly critiques the patriarchal structures of traditional family life through the genres of melodrama and neorealism.

Gloria's situation is best understood when considered through the dual lenses of her position within a traditional, patriarchal family and her economic subjugation within a system that encourages consumerist impulses, but denies her the means to

[67] Almodóvar himself asserts that he "defended" the mother in this film (Kinder 1987, 42).

achieve them. I concur with Pavlović's conclusion that the narrative "highlights the misery of the housewife's identity, constantly lost in a domesticity in which she is not recognized, but paradoxically on which she depends to establish her as a social subject" (2009, 172). Moreover, this film illustrates the entry of "women's work" into the economy.[68] Although outsourcing domestic work has a long tradition, often indicative of socio-economic factors, I argue that Gloria's employment highlights the decline of the traditional household, reflected in the concrete dissolution of Gloria's family. As Almodóvar notes, this film makes the housewife a social polemic (Vidal 1988, 82): melodrama and neorealism combine to shine a stark light on the highly gendered distribution of household responsibilities.[69] Almodóvar's deployment and subversion of these genres maintains audience empathy with Gloria even as she arguably fails in her maternal role.

Melodrama, a "women's genre" long associated with representations of the family (Smith 1992, 170; Evans 2013, 479; Allinson 2009, 142; Doane 1984; Gledhill 1987), has also long drawn a link between femininity, passivity and masochism (Wu 2004, 264-265; Modleski 1984).[70] In *¿Qué he hecho yo!*'s on a maternal protagonist and her "ostensibly female concerns" (see Doane 1992, 70)—feeding her children, her appearance, her marriage—the film can be positioned within this genre. Moreover, the sub-genre of the "maternal melodrama" focuses on the figure of the self-sacrificing mother. If she is arguably reinvigorated in Almodóvar's later films, the circumstances of Miguel's "adoption" subvert this melodramatic motif. Given its focus on scenes of the everyday, melodrama has frequently been associated with ideological critique (Bainbridge 2007, 106),[71] whilst here neorealism is similarly deployed to foster empathy. Although Almodóvar denies this genre's influence (Vidal 1988, 92), its traces are apparent in the unadorned documentation of working-class life (see Bazin 2004; Cardullo 2011, 22-23; Shiel 2006): from sequences showing

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[68] Gloria and Cristal are each paid to provide services that might otherwise be provided by the wife/mother. In Gloria's case, in particular, such work remains undervalued.

[69] This is not to suggest that neorealism and melodrama are opposed; indeed, some scholars perceive a close nexus between these two modes (eg Marmo 2017; Konewko 2016, 25-28).

[70] For further discussion of Almodóvar's engagement with this genre: Smith (1992); R. Stone (2001, 125); L. Williams (2004); D'Lugo (2006, 6); L. Williams (2009). I note that the boundaries of melodrama are contested (Hardcastle 2016), although I do not engage with this debate here.

[71] This is one way in which it draws on neorealism, another relevant genre I turn to shortly.

Gloria cleaning other people's homes, to the starkness of the urban landscape, and the shabby costumes.[72] Whilst this film may not share the explicitly ethical project of Italian neorealism (Konewko 2016, 23-25),[73] Smith argues that Almodóvar puts the genre's conventions to use in his "respectful attention to the everyday detail of human lives" (2000, 59; see also Camino 2005, 337; Ballesteros 2001, 57).

These are not simply abstract concerns. The deployment of genre is an important means of offering social critique. Indeed, Vernon (1995, 6) alerts us to the fact that in *¿Qué he hecho yo!*, the:

> intertextual and international network of references serves to question the role of film itself, not only in reflecting the ideologies and values of the society in which and for which it is created, but also film's complicity in perpetuating those societal structures.

As Nancy Chodorow describes it, feminine domestic work "involve[s] continuous connection to and concern about children and attunement to adult masculine needs, both of which require connection to, rather than separateness from, others" (1978, 179). Gloria, however, is a "madre atípica" (Soliño Pazó 2011, 88), begrudgingly taking on traditional female duties but failing, practically and emotionally, to fulfil them. Her verbalisations of frustration draw attention to the drudgery of the role and her permanent state of dissatisfaction, whilst also highlighting an incongruity between her actions and words. When Toni vomits on his grandmother, for instance, Gloria is not immediately concerned with his wellbeing. Rather, she berates her son for creating more mess for her to clean up.[74] As Smith notes, this sequence—from a disastrous burnt chicken dinner, to Toni's illness—"represents a grotesque deformation of the Catholic ideal of the married woman" (2000, 53). Gloria makes it clear that the traditional maternal role provides little gratification for the woman/mother herself. As Camino observes, her "existential frustration allows us to appreciate the lack of options for women, especially poor

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[72] Gloria's cheap and darkly coloured clothing "delata con crudeza la condición social marginal del personaje" (Sánchez-Alarcón 2008, 336). For her wardrobe, Almodóvar borrowed clothes from relatives, a cost-saving device which also meant the clothes looked worn (Dapena 2013, 501).

[73] Debate continues about the extent to which these genres manage to offer effective social critique (on neorealism see Fabbri 2015; Ruberto and Wilson 2007, 10-15; O'Leary and O'Rawe 2011; on melodrama see Garlinger 2004; Kaplan 1992, 67-71).

[74] In a characteristic repetition, this mirrors an earlier scene in which Gloria too was fully clothed in the shower; yet when she finds the *abuela* in the same state, Gloria offers no empathy but exasperatedly exclaims she will catch pneumonia.

women, in a social context in which machismo reigns." (2010, 333; see also García de León and Maldonado 1989, 78) Gloria's complaints subtly rewrite the script of motherhood, rejecting the demands of discipline and obedience placed on women by the *Sección Femenina* (see Morcillo 2000, 24-26). Gloria thereby points to the need for a family premised on more mutual and responsive forms of care.[75]

Gloria's first charge of maternal neglect stems from her inability to adequately nourish her sons, established when Miguel arrives home hungry. In a highly Almodovarian point-of-view shot, the boy's fruitless search for food is viewed from within the appliance itself, its contents laid bare: half an onion, half a lemon and a mouldy can of tomato sauce. The framing foregrounds Miguel's basic needs, his visual importance reduced in comparison to the cavernous fridge, whilst the food remnants emphasise what is not available. Following the analysis of waste in Almodóvar's films offered by Adrián Pérez Melgosa,[76] this scene "provides a humbling description of [Miguel's] psyche" (2013, 189), his limited options reinforced by Gloria's suggestions for addressing his hunger: bargaining with his lover (his friend's father) for food,[77] or one of her "minilips" (No-Doz) to suppress it.[78] Finally, the issue is solved when Cristal invites Miguel to supper. In an ironic twist, the prostitute condemned by Antonio is more capable of nourishing his son than he is. The scene ultimately highlights Gloria's failure to live up to the ideal of the "nourishing mother" that emerges in Spanish cinema of the late 1980s and 1990s (Zamora 2016, 148-151).

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75 The only, albeit momentary, escape for Gloria comes in the form of a sexual encounter at the kendo studio she cleans. Ultimately, however, Gloria is left unsatisfied, as the man—later revealed to be Polo, the police officer charged with investigating Antonio's death—is unable to maintain his erection. The moment's futility is emphasised by the mise-en-scène: when the camera pulls back from the couple to allow Gloria to exit the frame, her would-be lover remains in shot alongside a sign: "No malgastemos el agua. Cierren bien el grifo." This reinforces the "waste" of this encounter—not just Gloria's time, but also water. For further discussion of this scene, see Ballesteros (2001) and Vernon (1993).

76 Pérez Melgosa draws on the notion of rhopography, a term that describes still-lifes depicting "trifles, leftovers, scraps, garbage" (2013, 188), positing that Almodóvar thereby inverts the hierarchy between character and detritus to offer new accounts of Spain's national trauma.

77 This recalls Gloria's unsatisfying (and unsuccessful, in terms of her request for money) encounter with Antonio, as well as foreshadowing the bargain with the dentist.

78 Miguel declines because they make him nervous, obliquely explaining Gloria's tenser reactions: despite her general apathy, she occasionally erupts in frustration, such as when Toni and the *abuela* bring home a lizard.

Alongside these difficulties, Gloria's transaction with the lascivious dentist is the primary reason I characterise her as a "bad mother". This dovetails with the film's engagement with the maternal melodrama, in which a recurring trope is the sacrifice of a child "for their own good". This brings together passive and active attributes seen by classical Hollywood cinema as incompatible in a single female character (Heins Walker 1998, 277). Gloria best fits this model in the moment that equally most destabilises her maternal role: the transaction with the dentist who "adopts" Miguel.[79] Whilst the surrender of her child is exemplary of Hollywood maternal melodrama, there is an ironic slippage in the casual negotiations over the terms of the adoption—the dentist and Miguel discuss art classes and electronics—and Gloria's lack of maternal concern at the physical and emotional threat.[80] The scene exemplifies Almodóvar's "absolute lack of moral hypocrisy or moralistic panic" (Medhurst 2007, 135).[81] Here, the "material need (to have one less mouth to feed at home, and to partake in consumerism) takes priority over maternal love or ethical integrity" (Pavlović 2009, 174). It is again up to the audience to interpret events through the lens of maternal concern.

Any threat posed by the dentist is, however, undermined by his characterisation. Although his desire for the boy is evident, he is ridiculous because of his affected accent, odd posture and tic: he nods his head frenetically whilst talking. Indeed, Miguel seems more composed than his would-be abuser becoming an "accomplice" to the bargain, to borrow Ballesteros' term (2001, 65). Miguel makes clear his refusal to be subjugated to the dentist's desires, but his main display of agency is through his material demands. This problematises any reading of the scene as reflecting simply his greater bargaining power.

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79 See Medhurst (2007) for an analysis of the comedy of this scene.

80 This response is possibly influenced by her marriage; perhaps for Gloria, all relationships are transactional.

81 The exchange also reinforces solidarity between women and gay men given "its uncompromising assumption that material needs take precedence over sexual integrity it displaces the burden of guilt onto those who are responsible for poverty and deprivation" (Smith 2000, 60).

In a similar vein, Gloria's primary motivation appears to be buying a hair curler,[82] which "works against the sentimentalizing tendencies of the traditional maternal melodrama" (Vernon 1993, 36-37; see also Morgado 2014, 162) and foregrounds the film's critique of consumerism.[83] For women, as Ballesteros observes, the consumerist trap is twofold: not only are their needs never realised through the system of acquisition and exchange, but the system actualises their objectification (2001, 66). Even efforts at personal care reinscribe Gloria in the patriarchal framework that forecloses the possibility of community. It is unsurprising that a film with such a strong critique of gender also offers this potentially strident critique of consumerism, given that women's role as consumers compounds their subjugation as reproducers.

The film's critique of consumerism is refracted through Almodóvar's memorable point-of-view shots from domestic appliances, which demonstrate—according to the director—that "los electrodomésticos son los únicos testigos de la vida de esta mujer" (Vidal 1988, 94). This also underscores the double subjugation of the working-class mother: her long working day extending into her domestic life. If the fridge only amplified Miguel's hunger, similar shots from the bowels of a washing machine,[84] or from an oven—as Gloria attempts unsuccessfully to feed her family—highlight only that these items fail to lighten Gloria's domestic burdens. Such reverse-angle shots jar with the otherwise realistic tone of the film, although they are, as Vernon observes, common in television commercials (1993, 35).[85] These

[82] The importance of appearance is also emphasised by Patricia, whose house Gloria cleans (thanks to Cristal's referral). If Patricia is worried that paying a cleaner might mean she cannot afford a facelift, her husband Lukas's assurance that she is fine is undermined by his visits to Cristal. Moreover, later he urges his wife: "¿Pór que no te maquillas un poquito?" This reinforces the significance of appearance, as well as the burden of beauty expectations.

[83] There is not space to consider this here, but it is interesting that film itself is seen to contribute to the consumerist impulses of the modern era (see Kaplan 1992, 61-62).

[84] There is a similar shot of Raimunda, her face reflected in a washing machine at her workplace. Yet whilst Gloria seems taunted and diminished by the appliance, Raimunda stares at it boldly.

[85] The visual language of advertising is referred to throughout this corpus, including commercials for: "Bragas Pontes" (*Pepi, Luci, Bom*), *Ecce Homo* detergent (*Mujeres al borde*) and coffee (*¿Qué he hecho yo!*), see footnote no 88 of this chapter.

sequences thereby link Gloria's struggles to the mediatic manipulation of women's desires.[86]

Another technique used to similar ends is the "dificilísimo" travelling shot of Gloria and Juani's window-shopping (Almodóvar, cited in Vidal 1988, 95), whereby the camera observes the women from within the shops. This sequence inverts the standard tracking shot in which the camera and not the location moves, juxtaposing a series of fixed shots that track the women through successive shops as they walk by. If the camera is here, as Ballesteros puts it, a sadistic observer of Gloria's consumerist desire (2001, 65; see also Pavlović 2009, 174), it also implicates women in their own objectification. This is foregrounded when Juani tells Gloria that her hair looks awful, and—in an Almodovarian coincidence—Gloria promptly sets eyes on a curling iron in a shopfront. The camera closes in on the two women gazing at the item and shrinks their world to issues of personal grooming. Even though they are together in this trap, they are unable to provide mutual support—either emotional or material.[87] This sequence suggests that a corollary of consumerism is heightened competition between women, precluding solidarity. Instead of meaningful community, the housewife encounters a "un paraíso de objetos de consumo" that offers gratification "frente a la frustración constante de su vida emocional, sexual, y profesional" (Ballesteros 2001, 64).[88]

Juani's insistence that Gloria buy a hair curler if she doesn't have time to go to the salon unwittingly underscores one of Gloria's major challenges: time, both a limited resource and a bitter marker of the repetitiveness of her days. This recalls early articulations of "women's time," which connected feminine subjectivity to cyclical experiences of time, amongst other things. As Modleski highlights,

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86 See also Martín Palomo and Muñoz Terrón for a more sociological perspective on this film's account of consumerism and the Transition (2015).

87 Juani refuses to lend Gloria her curler, although it seems to belong to her daughter, Vanessa. Juani's miserliness is reinforced when she offers to lend Gloria her umbrella if Gloria accompanies her, and Gloria comments: "por una vez que me prestas algo."

88 The film offers a more brutal demonstration of the dangers of consumerism for women via a television commercial inspired by Fritz Lang's *The Big Heat* (Herrera 2013, 356): A conventionally attractive woman recalls a one-night stand who tripped as he brought her coffee in bed. Shown initially in profile, she turns to camera to reveal the other side of her face, deeply scarred, declaring: "Nunca olvidaré esa taza de café." This parodies advertising's attempts to control our desires, and viscerally highlights the tension between women's desires and their desirability.

melodrama tends to be associated with the "anterior temporal modalities" identified by Kristeva: "cyclical" modes of time linked stereotypically with female subjectivity. In the "woman's film," the "feminine" time of cycles and repetition is often juxtaposed with "the time of history"—generally characterised as masculine (Modleski 1984, 23). In keeping with Chodorow's notion that "women's work" is "repetitive and routine… and does not involve specified sequence of progression" (1978, 179), Gloria's life is marked by a sense of inevitable repetition. By foregrounding this, Almodóvar encourages empathy with Gloria, whilst denying the audience any clear answer as to how her difficulties can be resolved.

As long-suffering wife, mother to two precocious sons, daughter-in-law, and *asistente*—to name only some of her roles—Gloria fits Almodóvar's predilection "por la mujer que suporta el dolor y se sobrepone a él" (Perales Bazo 2008, 287). This hints at the various mechanisms through which, despite being one of Almodóvar's "bad mothers", Gloria is ultimately forgiven. The first, as just outlined, is the unflinching portrayal of her daily grind. As Ballesteros contends, these circumstances forgiveness for any stinginess, maternal disinterest or cruelty, suggesting that "la única culpa de la madre es la de pertenecer a un sistema que deposita en ella toda la responsabilidad de las relaciones sexuales y emocionales adultas" (2001, 63-64). Through its remarkable mixing of genres and styles—blending melodramatic pathos with neorealism, parody with the brazenly camp—this narrative highlights the competing demands on Gloria's time and energies. She is also redeemed through contrast with Juani, whose maternal failings are discussed shortly. If Gloria neglects Miguel and Toni, her empathy and care with Juani's daughter reflect the ethic of care, bringing her closer to the ideal mother.

Finally, Gloria's absolution is confirmed through Miguel's reappearance.[89] Left alone in the claustrophobic apartment, her younger son arrives just as Gloria seems ready to launch herself off the balcony. Miguel's arrival therefore both redeems and rescues his mother, through the establishment of an alternative family.

[89] This is discussed in more detail at page 97ff below.

Gloria's redemption through the return of her son contrasts with a later Almodóvar mother, Marilia of *La piel que habito*, who is unable to redeem herself after a long separation from her children. One of Almodóvar's darkest visions of neglectful motherhood,[90] Marilia appears in a narrative which reveals the terrible consequences of a lack of community. As Smith notes, although this film engages with a range of key Almodovarian motifs—from the avenging transsexual to the centrality of performance—it abandons the social concerns present in earlier works (D'Lugo and Smith 2012, 135); I would characterise this world as devoid of the ethics of care. This is exemplified by Marilia, mother to protagonist, Robert Ledgard, and Zeca: one adopted to a wealthy family, the other abandoned to the streets. Both have been damaged by her maternal neglect, with neither able to form significant interpersonal bonds. If Ledgard is zealously single-minded in his pursuit of brilliance,[91] Zeca demonstrates a similar disregard for others. Escaped from prison during a carnival, Zeca arrives seeking refuge from his mother, his disguise of a tiger suit visually alluding to his "animalistic" instinct.[92] Indeed, all his interactions are violent: he physically struggles with his mother before restraining her, and subsequently rapes his Vera, his brother's hostage.[93]

Marilia's maternal failings are potently revealed in her "confession" to Vera.[94] Her two sons were both born insane, she declares: "llevaba la locura en mis entrañas". The revered womb becomes here a source of horror. This impression is

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90 A maternal pair is again present: Marilia is contrasted with Vicente's mother, whose bond with her son is reinforced by her ongoing efforts to find him. If this relationship sustains Vicente (see Harrang 2012), it also underscores the emotional distance between Marilia and her sons.

91 The paternal failings of this character are discussed from page 94 below.

92 The costume also recalls pet tiger niño (*Entre tinieblas*), symbol of the nuns' unchecked desires.

93 Discovering the pair mid-coitus, Ledgard shoots his half-brother, although he does not know that they share a mother. The situation is further complicated by the fact that Zeca had an affair with Ledgard's deceased wife, Gal, who committed suicide after being horrifically burned in a car accident whilst running away with him. Ledgard has transformed Vicente into Vera, an uncanny replica of Gal. It is unclear whether Zeca knows the fate of his lover, or Vera's identity.

94 Unlike the false confession of Becky (also played by Marisa Paredes), discussed from page 230 below, this does not lead to warmth between the women, or between mother and son. For Almodóvar, Paredes seems to be the antithesis of the maternal. Motherly instinct is often eclipsed by professional ambition: acting (*Todo sobre mi madre*), writing (*La flor de mi secreto*), singing (*Tacones lejanos*).

buttressed by Marilia's complicity in Ledgard's violence towards Vicente/Vera.[95] As Waldron and Murray suggest, Marilia "appears unredeemable", her cursed entrails "coinciding with the common stereotype of insanity in women that recurs in the horror and thriller genres" (2014, 62).

As Esteve Riambau observes, Gloria's exchange with the dentist is the first in a long line of maternal rejections explored in this oeuvre (2008, 239), one that includes Marilia. The mother who leaves is generally driven by self-interest (as seems the case for Marilia) and accordingly fails the maternal—and Almodovarian—mandate to consider her child's needs. She nevertheless embodies home and comfort, as revealed in a brief exchange between Gloria and Miguel upon his return. Certainly, whilst Almodovarian mothers often abandon their children,[96] such figures are treated with greater compassion than their paternal equivalents. Unlike a father, whose absence is rarely felt—Esteban's longing to know his in *Todo sobre mi madre* is an exception—a mother is keenly missed. For Almodóvar, the "mother represents the law" (Kinder 1987, 43) and it seems that maternal absence give rise to a failure of the ethics of care. Conversely, Almodóvar's fathers lack authority over such matters. Whilst their absence allows space for alternative families, it does not weaken the bonds of care.

b. Juani and the repressive mothers

Whilst Gloria and Marilia neglect their children materially or emotionally, the secondary maternal characters of *¿Qué he hecho yo!* include "a very typically Spanish mother that appals [Almodóvar], the kind that, if the child falls down, on top of it all she beats him for it, very violent" (as cited in Vernon 1993, 36; see also Kinder 1987, 42): Juani. This character fits what has been described as the "patriarchal" or authoritarian maternal type. As reflected in Alberdi's work, until recently, the father

[95] This evokes the notion of the "monstrous womb," a longstanding aesthetic tradition which represents the maternal body as grotesque or abject: see Creed (2012, 43-58), for an insightful, psychoanalysis-driven discussion.

[96] Maternal desertions across these films include Becky's long absence (*Tacones lejanos*), discussed in chapter three, section E.ii; the ghost-like Irene (*Volver*); Queti's mother (*Laberinto de pasiones*), whose disappearance triggers her father's psychotic break, in which he projects his sexual desire onto his daughter; Tina's lover (*La ley del deseo*), who abandons Ada to Tina's care; and Víctor's mother (*Carne trémula*), who dies whilst he is in prison.

was "outward-facing" in traditional Spanish families. García de León and Maldonado therefore describe the family as a "gineceo", ruled by the mother (1989, 77-78). However, in the father's on-screen absence, certain cinematic mothers adopt emerge as an alternative source of authoritarianism (Kinder 1993, 198-200). Juani is one such example: vicious towards her daughter, Vanessa; unkind to other women; and lacking self-awareness.

Juani's every interaction with and about her daughter is mean-spirited. Informing Gloria that Vanessa wants to be an actress, she comments: "con la cara… que tiene". When Vanessa's school recommends she see a psychiatrist, Juani is outraged because as a child she helped her mother with the house; she seems determined to ensure that Vanessa becomes as frustrated and resentful as she. In a reversal of other appliance reverse-angle shots, Juani forces Vanessa to "watch" the washing machine.[97] Through these examples and her interactions with Gloria, I contend the film builds up a nexus between Juani and the consumerist, patriarchal structure in which these women are trapped. Certainly, Juani's authoritarianism is in part highlighted by contrast with the more relaxed, albeit negligent, Gloria.[98] Her unkindness provides space for a closeness to grow between Vanessa and Gloria. In Gloria's flat, the girl's special telekinetic powers become a magical gift when she re-wallpapers in moments, controlling the brush with her mind in a wonderfully hallucinatory scene. A repressive mother, who cannot appreciate her child, Juani is therefore excluded from any alternative community. Conversely, Gloria approaches Vanessa with empathy and care, and is rewarded in return.

Other repressive mothers are explicitly linked to the Church, which in Almodóvar's cinema is represented as a site of *machista* violence (Caballero Gálvez

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97 Juani is duly punished for her lack of care. Vanessa telekinetically knocks over a vase and when her mother responds with violence, Cristal—there for a dress fitting—storms out, taking her business with her. Almodóvar has said that Vanessa develops these abilities as a defence and to irritate her mother, in homage to Brian de Palma's *Carrie* (Vidal 1988, 107).

98 This is often the case with Almodóvar's mothers, such as the strictly religious Berta and the kooky Pilar (*Matador*), or Manuela and Sister Rosa's unnamed mother (*Todo sobre mi madre*), with the former trusted with the nun's son, Rosa's tension with her mother reflecting the burden of the Franco legacy (see Gámez Fuentes 2003, 41). If Maddison suggests that Rosa's father's Alzheimer's deplete his wife's maternal energies (2000a, 279), she is nevertheless rehabilitated when she greets Manuela and her grandson with open arms, whilst her husband has disappeared. This confirms Almodóvar's greater sympathy for mothers.

and Zurián Hernández 2016, 870).[99] This is the case with Berta, mother of the sexually immature and guilt-ridden Ángel (*Matador*). This example illustrates the damage that can be done by the authoritarian mother. Almodóvar himself has said that he finds "this kind of mother very hateful" (Kinder 1987, 43)[100] and there is a stark contrast between the dogmatic Berta and selfless mothers such as Manuela (or even the distracted Gloria). A devout member of the Opus Dei, Berta imposes a rigid and repressive ideology on her son that the narrative implies leads to Ángel's spying on neighbour Eva, and even the attempted rape (although Diego's taunts are a more proximate catalyst). She is variously described as "castrating" (Donapetry 1999, 70), and "the monstrous, self-mortifying, pre-democratic fascist ideal" (Evans 1993, 328).

Berta bears striking similarities to the mother of another character played by Antonio Banderas, Antonio in *La ley del deseo*. Antonio's unnamed mother is, Acevedo-Muñoz suggests, "evidently the cause of many of her son's problems" (2007, 89). Whilst German, this matriarch reflects the authoritarianism of the Franco regime, given her strict sense of order and control. This is referenced when Antonio advises lover Pablo to sign off his letters with a woman's name because "Mi madre es alemana y le gusta espiar."[101] His mother is thereby characterised, albeit implicitly, as homophobic. Antonio's concerns are shown to be true not only by his mother's incessant interest in his whereabouts and his activities in the bathroom, but also when she provides letters from "Laura P" as an alibi for her son. This reflects also her confidence when dealing with the police: she has no compunction lying to them.

Each of these families is dominated by an authoritarian mother who cares little for her child's individual needs. Whilst the director generally avoids a Manichean approach, such characters are represented without redeeming qualities. Nevertheless, they serve an important role in the transition to democracy. As posited by Acevedo-Muñoz (2006, 183):

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99 The Church is discussed in detail in the next chapter.

100 Kinder in the same article describes Angel as "sexually disturbed… by an evil repressive mother who belongs to Opus Dei" (1987, 35).

101 This is confirmed when Antonio's mother enters his room without knocking and rifles through his pockets. Other evidence of her spying is provided when the *Guardia Civil* arrive to interview her son. She supplies letters between him and "Laura P" as proof he was in love with a woman.

> such dysfunctional parent-child relationships are suggestive of the nation's traumatic track to recovery from the forty-year dictatorship. The nuclear family is reconstituted in a revision of the nation-as-family allegory exploited in Franco's days.

The repressive potential of the family remains alive in these Almodovarian mothers, suggesting that the family requires substantial revision before it can be rehabilitated. What is notable in each case is her alignment with the patriarchy, whether through association with a specific institution, such as the Church, or with values such as consumerism or heteronormativity. These mothers are therefore closer to Almodóvar's fathers than their neglectful counterparts.

iv. The failure of the patriarchal family

Across these films, the traditional family is revealed as limiting and potentially damaging. Patriarchal family structures are dismantled through the undermining of authoritarian figures, not just fathers but also mothers who have internalised hegemonic gender norms. Yet the family is not abandoned all together. I have illustrated this in particular through my analysis of *¿Qué he hecho yo!*, which depicts the literal death of the patriarch, and the departure of Toni and the *abuela*—the characters most aligned with patriarchal structures. In their absence, a new pact emerges between Gloria and her younger son. Despite her failings, she is ultimately offered a place within a meaningful, alternative community in which both she and Miguel will thrive.

I argue that whilst the filmmaker critiques the mother who abandons, neglects or represses her children, he never abandons her altogether. If the father must "die" or be removed, even the bad mother is generally offered some form of redemption. Unlike the father, the mother is fundamental to the alternatives Almodóvar establishes in the wake of the traditional family's breakdown. The next section outlines how this is linked to the maternal origins of the ethics of care. The dyad of Gloria-Miguel tells us something about Almodóvar's notion of the alternative family. If some read this final scene as reinscribing Gloria within a patriarchal framework—given the suggestion that her life is "saved" by the reappearance of her son—I argue

for a more progressive reading. Their pairing foreshadows, in my view, Almodóvar's championing of communities grounded in mutual care and affection.

C. Laws for an alternative family

i. What is the alternative family?

Habitually used in fields such as sociology and social work, "alternative family" denotes a family structured other than according to the two-parent heteronormative model (Battle and Browne 2007; Biblarz and Raferty 1999, 322; Trotman 2011, 4). The term is used to describe families that are lesbian/gay, headed by a woman, or are single-parent. In each case, the household subverts the traditional model of the patriarchal, male-led family, and can be seen as the corollary of broader social shifts, such as increased divorce rates (Bengtson 2001; Oinonen 2008, 52). Without relying on notions of "real" families in my analysis of these cinematic iterations, it is nevertheless worth noting that the visibility of such families within Almodóvar's filmography mirrors their growing presence in Spain, where there is an increasing diversity of household configurations (Alberdi 2006; Poveda, Jociles Rubio and Rivas 2011, 134; Moreno Mínguez 2000). This section unpacks the elements of Almodóvar's alternative families. The chosen examples illustrate, I argue, the primacy of the family as well as the need for its evolution.

Of the three institutions considered in this thesis, this one most inspires the director's optimism.[102] As D'Lugo has observed, despite a disdain of convention, "one of the constants of Almodóvar's cinema [is] the search for alternatives to the traditional family" (2002, 85). These are often, but not always, brought together by chance rather than biological kinship, offering support and love along the lines of Almodóvar's family ideal: "la gente que te rodea, la que te coge la mano por la noche si tienes frío y te da un vaso de leche antes de acostarte" (Vidal 1988, 172). Examples

[102] He is not unique in this: a 2004 survey by the Spanish Centre for Sociological Research found that family is the institution Spaniards value most (cited in Platero 2007, 330).

are visible from his earliest "lesbian families," to the pairing of Manuela and her adopted son with which *Todo sobre mi madre* ends.[103]

Whilst Almodóvar's first feature rejects mainstream institutions, it concludes with a sequence that seems to destine Pepi and Bom to remain together (see DiFrancesco 2009, 53). For Smith, this implies "not only a sense of continuing community among women… but also a possibility for new kinds of female relationship when the twin pleasures of cinematic and lesbian role-playing coincide" (1995, 31). In his third film, Almodóvar returns to the female-centric family. Although the convent ultimately fails, it is replaced with two alternatives: one comprising the Marquesa, Yolanda and Sor Rata; the other Sor Víbora, the priest and pet tiger niño. Such "lesbian" communities implicitly deconstruct gender norms as they reconfigure the family. Similarly, the alternative configurations in films from *¿Qué he hecho yo!*, to *Tacones lejanos* and *La ley del deseo*, rely on the mutability of kinship and gender.[104] Almodóvar's alternative families leave hanging questions of gender roles, allowing each member to perform a range of functions, yet they are paradoxically structured around the maternal, due to their emphasis on the "ethics of care", highlighted below in my analysis of the characters Manuela and Raimunda. This is not simply a move from masculine to feminine values—any such blunt assertion would go against Almodóvar's concerted subversion of fixed identity markers. Although women dominate Almodóvar's alternative families, I propose that anyone is welcome, subject to certain requirements: an ability to accept fluidity and instability, an open mind, and a preparedness to respond with attentiveness to the concrete needs of others (see Tronto 1995; Gilligan 2014). However, whether this fluidity is undermined by the idealisation of the maternal remains to be seen. I return to this question in section D of this chapter.

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[103] I am less confident that the heterosexual couples of Ricky-Marina (*¡Átame!*) and Víctor-Elena (*Carne trémula*) fit this paradigm. Whilst each is unconventional in its own way, these pairings do not challenge gendered norms and/or kinship structures along the lines of other examples discussed here.

[104] A further factor is the significance of choice. Even where a family might seem "conventional", the characters' conscious commitment to it may mean that it fits within this paradigm. It is on this basis, for instance, that examples such as Letal and Rebeca (*Tacones lejanos*) or Gloria and Miguel (*¿Qué he hecho yo!*) can be characterised as alternative families.

ii. All about the mothers

a. Manuela and Raimunda: Reluctant heroines

Almodóvar's alternative families are undeniably structured around a maternal ideal. I focus here on how this gestures towards a particular moral framework: the ethics of care.[105] If the mother is venerated across his films, she reaches her zenith in bold, selfless Manuela and Raimunda. These characters clearly illustrate my arguments about Almodóvar's characterisation of the mother and the ethical framework she embodies. Another important factor is that even Almodóvar's maternal archetypes engage with their maternal side *despite reservations*. This goes to the ways in which Almodóvar's alternative families are established through choice, rather than kinship. In the following pages, I trace the ways maternal attributes are foregrounded, alongside the broader ethical framework they inspire.

The protagonist of *Todo sobre mi madre*, Manuela, is a revision of a minor character from *La flor de mi secreto*.[106] She lives with her son, Esteban, in Madrid until his 18th birthday, when he dies in a car accident. She then travels to Barcelona—a city she left when pregnant—to find Esteban's father, drug addict and transsexual Lola.[107] Manuela is both a biological mother and, in a sense, a beneficiary of Almodóvar's broader understanding of motherhood, seemingly defined by her ability to provide care: from her occupation as a nurse in a transplant unit, to the film's very title, not to mention her various maternal ministrations. Although her story is marked by the grief of losing her son, the protagonist reclaims motherhood at least twice: first, as carer for nun Rosa, who dies of AIDS; and later when she adopts Rosa's son, Esteban. A mother-son pairing thereby bookends the narrative. At each juncture of Manuela's story, her caring impulse wins out. Indeed, her care and

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105 In section D of this chapter, I turn to how this might undermine any progressive agenda.

106 Manuela illustrates Almodóvar's habit of recycling his own ideas (see Zurián 2013b). For further analysis of this transtextual transplant, see: Rivera-Cordero (2012); Poyato Sánchez (2006); Prout (2004); Martin-Márquez (2004, 505).

107 This character embodies the destabilisation of the traditional family, although his/her absence is a source of pain for Esteban. The other conventional household is that of Sister Rosa, but her father is lost to Alzheimer's and her mother regards her with a frosty bewilderment. Former drug-addict and actress Nina is the sole woman to experience "conventional motherhood" (Zavales Eggert 2014, 389), but this is mentioned only briefly. The narrative accordingly evinces little interest in the traditional household.

integrity bring together a wider alternative family in this film, comprised of the women she encounters in Barcelona, including transsexual prostitute Agrado, actress Huma Rojo and Sister Rosa. As Kinder identifies, this narrative focuses on "female bonding across different classes, nationalities, and generations" (2007, 7). Whilst some view Manuela as problematically self-sacrificing, I argue a more radical perspective is possible when it is read in light of the ethics of care. I advance here the argument that the film's emphasis on the maternal is oriented towards a particular moral framework. As introduced above, the ethics of care emerges in part from a theorisation of the maternal impulse (see Noddings 1984).

The maternal in this film is foregrounded through mise-en-scène in two key ways. The first is through the use of Antoni Gaudí's Basilica of the Sagrada Familia; the second is through the early framing of Manuela through her son's eyes. Almodóvar's use of the Barcelona streetscape is most prominent in a moving scene dominated by the Ismaël Lô song *Tajabone*,[108] where we see Manuela's return to the city after Esteban's death. Her journey begins with a train entering a tunnel—itself seen by Martin-Márquez as a visual metaphor for the birth canal (2004, 504-505). The camera shifts to a night-time aerial panorama of the city, offering a dramatic perspective of the Sagrada Familia. As Manuela gazes out from a taxi, the cathedral's reflection is momentarily superimposed over her face. This highlights both the film's focus on family, and her centrality to this community (see Craig 2010, 169). If this posits Manuela as a secular iteration of the Virgin Mary (Martin-Márquez 2004, 503),[109] the montage thereby demonstrates a reverence for Manuela.[110] The Sagrada Familia also hints at the unconventional arrangement that emerges when Manuela adopts Sister Rosa's son.[111] This reflects the ethics of care, given that Manuela

[108] For interesting interpretations of the song's relevance to the film's themes more generally, see: Craig (2010); Vernon (2009); Amago (2007).

[109] This underlines the nexus between family and the Church in Spanish iconography and the close relationship between the three institutions discussed in this thesis.

[110] Goss (2009) argues that the depiction of Manuela avoids idealisation by including behaviour that is manipulative and self-interested. As for Barcelona itself, it is here "glorified" (see Thau 2007, 196), although this impression too is undermined by the depiction street-based prostitution, including related masculine violence.

[111] This echoes the biblical family, in which a virgin mother and adoptive father care for the "miraculous" Jesus: Zavales Eggert (2014, 389); Navarro-Daniels (2002). In the younger Esteban's case, the miracle is his apparent recovery from AIDS.

attends to the concrete needs of the ailing Rosa, as well as those of her infant son. The protagonist's care in turn leads to a new family based not on biology, but on conscious commitment. Here, the landmark cathedral is used as an architectural symbol of the film's key themes, illustrating the ways space and meaning production can overlap in this corpus.

In the brief moments of Esteban on-screen, his adoring gaze reinforces Manuela's maternal powers, as well as connecting these to another key theme: performance. This includes two notable examples of the pair in an audience: watching *All About Eve* on television, and at a theatrical production of *A Streetcar Named Desire*. In both scenes, a fixed angle shows them side-by-side, Esteban turned away from the entertainment and instead contemplating his mother. Such moments draw attention to the bond between these two and more generally foreground the importance of heterosocial bonds between women and gay men—both marginalised under traditional gender orthodoxy.[112] Of course, the references to these two pieces go beyond mere quotation.

One paratextual reference is of course the film's play on the title of *All About Eve*.[113] For Maddison, this instates an immediate "association between the general practice of female identification in gay culture and the concept of motherhood" (2000a, 278).[114] *A Streetcar Named Desire*, meanwhile, traces a line through Manuela's narrative: it is where she met Esteban's father, where she lost her son, and it is ultimately crucial to her recovery after his death.[115] If time fractures to work

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[112] See Maddison (2000a; 2000b). Although Esteban's sexuality is never confirmed, various scholars read him as gay through his attachment to his mother, the gift of Capote's *Music for Chameleons*, and these intertextual references: Craig (2010, 167); Sofair (2001, 42); Maddison (2000a, 277). Such bonds are also privileged in the Gloria-Miguel pairing.

[113] See Genette (1997) for a comprehensive classification of the various ways in which a literary (or cinematic) work may reference other texts.

[114] While *A Streetcar Named Desire* less overtly connects motherhood and queer spectatorship, Joan Wylie Hall (1995) gives an engaging account of how Stella and Blanche embody various ideas of womanhood and maternity. The play is read by many as subverting heteronormative ideals: Sánchez Gómez (2011); Costa (2014); Dorwick (2003); Maddison (2000b, 14-62).

[115] Manuela's positive, community-building experiences with theatre contrast with the more isolating experiences of creativity of characters such as Enrique, Becky and Pablo. The theatre is also tragically what brought Manuela to Barcelona in the first place—as it is where Esteban dies. As a result of this, Manuela "insinuates" herself into actress Huma Rojo's life, highlighting that even this apparently selfless character can be motivated by self-interest (see Goss 2009, 105).

against community in *La mala educación*,[116] in *Todo sobre mi madre* coincidence brings characters together, primarily around Manuela. The recurrence of Tennessee Williams' play in her life illustrates the significance of coincidence to Manuela's journey. Rather than being truly random, such repetitions indicate her ongoing concerns with identity, motherhood and community. Thematic and aesthetic repetitions deny Manuela linear progression, instead offering a means to deeper self-understanding and connection.

Maddison views the intertextual reference as "almost too appropriate", given the symmetry between *A Streetcar Named Desire*'s exposure of dysfunctional gender norms—rewritten by Almodóvar to offer Stella a more optimistic ending in which she leaves Stanley with their child—and the way Manuela "form[s] alternative bonds with other women in order to reconcile herself with the difficulties men have caused in her life" (2000a, 268).[117] This is reinforced by Manuela's scathing critique of women's complicity in allowing men to sabotage their lives, offered to her new friends, describing such accomplices as "arseholes". These intertextual references hint, I argue, at a relationship between spectatorship and identification via which emotional and political bonds are established, linked moreover to fluid understandings of womanhood and maternity.[118] By strongly connecting ideas of family to the theme of performance, Almodóvar underscores here the mutability of his alternative communities. As Ballesteros posits, this film "deals, among other things, with the power of live performance to activate agency and to create solidarity among women" (2009, 80).

That motherhood is framed as performance does not undermine its importance; it simply introduces a range of new possibilities for both "mother" and "mothered". The film's complex maternal web gestures towards a new vision for Spain in the post-Franco era. Through her many maternal iterations, Manuela offers

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116 This is outlined in chapter two, section B.iii.

117 This contrasts starkly with Cruz's (2002) critique of this intertextual allusion, discussed below at page 100ff. She argues that in contrast to the play, Almodóvar's film denies women any desire beyond motherhood.

118 Of course, one of the most significant ways in which this film unpacks this theme is through the speech of Manuela's friend, La Agrado, in which she outlines a radical view of authenticity as fluid and based on one's own vision, rather than some essential nature, see: Campbell (2005); Bersani and Dutoit (2009); Goss (2009); Nisch (2012, 107); Martínez-Expósito (2013).

a vision of transition: not yet entirely free of the shadow of traditional ideologies, but moving beyond a fixed understanding of motherhood. As Gámez-Fuentes puts it, this film "acknowledges both the versatility of positions through which that very idea is constructed and the negotiations involved in order to become visible as women and mothers in any particular context" (2003, 43; see also Zamora 2009, 371). To adopt Maddison's terms, Esteban's death (2000a, 278):

> neatly separates the emotional and political idea of motherhood from the performance of such a role in the context of family. Esteban's death also allows Manuela's mothering of other characters in the film to be denaturalized… [and become] specific, localized and meaningful performances.

The mise-en-scène of Esteban's final appearance again unites maternal power and performance. Chasing after Huma Rojo for her autograph after a performance of *A Streetcar Named Desire*, Esteban is struck by her car. His death is shown not via a shot of Esteban, but via an unusual point-of-view angle from the street showing his distraught mother. Manuela's tear-stained face, framed by rain-soaked hair, fills the screen as her son dies, his last glimpse of the world (as perhaps his first) being of his mother. As Martin-Márquez contends, this composition positions Esteban as the film's centrepoint, a focus that endures after his death (2004, 501), his ongoing presence made literal through a transplant.[119] Joshua Chambers-Letson proposes that this act "fosters a practice of sharing out while allowing for the appearance of community" (2014, 14). This interpretation contends, notably, that Esteban's death is the catalyst for the female community that forms around Manuela.[120]

Chambers-Letson turns to the work of philosopher Jean-Luc Nancy, who proposes that it is death which reveals community (1991, 15).[121] It is significant, Chambers-Letson suggests, that Manuela "repeatedly refuses to communicate the nature of her son's loss", this inability "to communicate the incommunicable" in turn becoming the foundation of the community (2014, 21). Community is therefore understood in Almodóvar's films, as in Nancy's work, as a space to which we bring

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[119] Esteban's heart is donated through the national transplant scheme in which Manuela works.

[120] Allbritton (2015) similarly sees a constructive potential in Almodóvar's representation of death in *Volver*.

[121] I return to the work of Nancy and its potential relevance for Almodóvar's alternative communities in the conclusion, section B.

those experiences beyond expression and/or comprehension. This stems, in Almodóvar's communities, from their diversity and tolerance. As Maddison posits, *Todo sobre mi madre* "accommodates and enjoys difference, where that difference signifies against homosocial practice" (2000a, 282). By foregrounding the nexus between Manuela's maternal attributes and performance—through narrative, camerawork and mise-en-scène—this film drives towards certain conclusions about Almodóvar's favoured communities. These must be flexible enough to accommodate diverse members and experiences, and must respond to such diversity with individualised attention and care. Such communities—or alternative families, perhaps, given the mother's ongoing centrality—therefore fit, I contend, within the paradigm of the ethics of care.

This is demonstrated yet again in the next film of this corpus to focus on the mother: *Volver*.[122] Its protagonist, Raimunda, is described by Smith as "the latest in a long line of tenacious and inventive mothers, risking all for a beloved daughter" (2006b, 18).[123] Again, the film highlights in various ways this character's maternal qualities. Most markedly, the narrative illustrates her boundless willingness to protect her daughter, Paula, when the adolescent girl kills Raimunda's partner, Paco, during an attempted sexual assault. Even the moment in which Paula tells her mother of the death emphasises their solidarity.

Instead of Paco's death, we see a montage of Raimunda at work. The film thereby values her daily drudgery above his life, echoing, I suggest, the neorealism of *¿Qué he hecho yo!*. The colour red then takes over the screen; this is revealed to be the side of a bus, as the vehicle drives off and reveals Paula. Standing in the rain, she is clearly anxious, bouncing up and down while her eyes dart around. This inverts the scene of Esteban's death. In each case, red dominates, and mother and child are shown in a rain-drenched streetscape. Whilst it is the step-father who dies here, rather than the child, in both cases this leads to deeper solidarity between women.

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[122] *Volver* is one of the only films during the black period to include a maternal paragon. Most of these films focus on men, and are notably pessimistic about the possibilities of community, see from page 216 below.

[123] Played by Penélope Cruz, Raimunda certainly bears more resemblance to Manuela than to the character played by the same actor, the ill-fated Sister Rosa.

The framing is again significant. Initially, it underscores Paula's isolation: a medium shot capturing her alone in the streetscape. Raimunda soon appears by her side and for the first time, we see physical affection between them. This closeness is consolidated when they arrive home, where Paco's body awaits them on the kitchen floor. If their relationship to this point has been defined by Raimunda's frustration at Paula's teenage habits, it is here reconfigured around care. Raimunda launches into action, responding to the situation pragmatically. As well as cleaning the blood off the floor, she finds a way to dispose of the corpse—first in a restaurant freezer, then burying it at his favourite spot by a river.[124]

Whilst her boorish partner's death offers Raimunda the opportunity to reimagine her life, the narrative's focus is on the way this event galvanises feminine solidarity. This is evident in Raimunda's restaurant, an opportunity that miraculously arrives upon Paco's death.[125] This career change foregrounds her "maternal" skills, although in a more positive light than we saw with Gloria, reflected in her first *menú* which announces *Cocina casera "española*". The bill of fare is improvised from local delicacies bought and bartered from her neighbours: *carne de cerdo* from Regina; and *morcilla* and *mantecados manchegos* from Inés.[126] Raimunda announces that in her restaurant she wants people to see that nothing will be frozen; the food will all be organic and fresh from day to day. Of course, the audience knows that the freezer is taken up with Paco's body, but the comment also speaks to her cooking style, linked conversely to her practical approach to care. If the restaurant's success is thanks to Raimunda's community, this is thanks not only to their material support, but also their cooking—although little food preparation is ever shown—and their assistance with Paco's body.

Raimunda's transition from airport cleaner to chef sees her move between diverse spaces.[127] The protagonist—as with Gloria—moves comfortably across

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124 It is notable that even this act shows care for the man's wishes.

125 Mentioned at page 51 above.

126 These are from Inés' *pueblo*, linking rural space to women and to success in their endeavours.

127 The representation of urban and rural space is considered by Barros Grela, who argues that the representation of the *barrio*—combined with phantasmagorical elements—establishes an identity paradigm based on fluidity. For Barros Grela, Irene's return suggests a familial inheritance that coincides with the return to the village, providing an alternative to postmodern

Madrid and between the city and their home village, and she operates with efficiency and confidence within a variety of environments. These include the village cemetery and her various workplaces. A persistent focus of her attention is cleaning. This activity, according to Eduardo Barros Grela, dissipates her subjectivity, "como uno más de los espectros que habitan efímeramente el impersonal espacio de los aeropuertos" (2007, 25). This analysis draws on the idea of the airport as "non-place"—defined by Marc Augé (2008, 63) as a space that is not "relational, or historical, or concerned with identity".[128] The glass-framed transit lounges can be contrasted with the homely and inviting space she creates in the restaurant that she takes over illicitly.

Without characterising *Volver* as a food film, this genre evokes the character's recreation of herself throughout after Paco's death. As James Keller notes, "the preparation and consumption of elaborate meals and dishes signifies the material process of producing a film" (2006, 6). The genre's inherent metatextuality is reinforced by the fact that Raimunda's first customers are a film crew. Food becomes a semiotic marker for Raimunda's care for others. Her professional culinary turn may be read as "an extension of the more primal breast-feeding prerogative" (Zamora 2009, 365). Certainly, her "maternal" physique is accentuated through unusual camera angles, such as a birds-eye view of her washing the dishes, her cleavage showcased by the camera's "cheeky" positioning (Smith 2006b, 18).[129] Indeed, Penélope Cruz wore a prosthetic posterior for the shoot (Conrad 2006), serving to make her physically more maternal. Moreover, when Raimunda visits her

urban space, "sin dejar de atender a la contradicción derivada de la búsqueda de un pasado que conlleva, irremisiblemente, la re-escritura de ese pasado" (2007, 20). Gutiérrez-Albilla (2011) similarly posits that *Volver* recuperates a utopian rural space as a counterpoint to the dominant, patriarchal (and historical) paradigm. Both analyses foreground themes of nostalgia, memory and history.

128 It is unclear whether the airport fits this definition for Raimunda, given that it is where she works. The non-place is determined in relation to the individual user, with key to its definition being relational issues (Augé 2008, 82); the airport may be a non-place for a traveller, but not for a pilot or airline worker.

129 Her "motherly" attributes are reinforced through costuming, make-up and some additional padding (Cruz 2006). Marsh suggests that the prosthetic posterior "ironically links her to a filmic tradition that purports to be naturalistic … Italian neorealism" (2009, 351).

aunt with sister Sole, she is primarily concerned about whether the elderly woman is eating.[130]

In turn, the kitchen nourishes the protagonist, who inhabits the restaurant as naturally as if it were her home. This is highlighted by the tango-flamenco she performs, "Volver".[131] As suggested by Julián Gutiérrez-Albilla, the "return" of the lyrics recall "the painful return of the traumatic past in the present, the traumatic return from the present to the painful past, or how our present and past existence is subjected to the fate of remembering our traumas and our incompatible memories" (2011, 323).[132] That the song shares its title with the film highlights the centrality of such themes.

The major "returns" of the film pivot around the maternal. If the first return is the deepening bond between Raimunda and her daughter, the second is the reunion between Raimunda and her own mother, Irene. Irene's reappearance from apparent death highlights the importance of the mother, even where she fails to live up to Almodóvar's ideal. As with Gloria's reunion with Miguel, this motherly reconciliation points to a greater tolerance for maternal neglect. If the familial situation which presides over the film's beginning highlights the high cost of not paying close attention as mandated by ethics of care, the dénouement points to the possibility of redemption, offering a key moment of care and mutual recognition. When Irene finally reconciles with Raimunda—the daughter she feels she has failed—the striking scene of the two sitting on a park bench offers a visual indication of both the intensity of their bond, and the difficulties they have overcome—reflected in

130 It is later revealed that Irene has been cooking for her sister since her apparent death; food offering a means of showing care for her too.

131 Cruz's lip-synching underscores the performative aspects of identity and motherhood. In a characteristically metatextual move, this also alludes to the fact that Spanish television has "long featured lip-synched musical performances" (Goss 2009, 70). Moreover, the emphasis on performance resonates with Manuela's relationship with theatre.

132 Goss similarly notes that the "crimes of the patriarch that have damaged the delicate geometry of the characters' relationships" (2009, 112). If Manuela criticises women for being complicit in the problems caused by men, here this is revisited in a way that allows women to reestablish communication and care.

Raimunda's awkward, almost horizontal posture as she finally embraces her mother.[133]

The narrative itself is a third "return". In an early interview with Kinder, Almodóvar describes a project with evident parallels to *Volver* (1987, 43). A woman warns her daughters that they will destroy the world, frightening them into running away. Once the two girls are grown, "the mother suddenly appears like a ghost in order to drive them crazy, really crazy, because she behaves like a ghost" (Kinder 1987, 43). The mother is only silenced when her daughters kill her in a duel. Whilst the film released almost 30 years later abandons some of this violence, it remains focused on the question of whether the mother's role in her daughters' lives is positive or negative.[134] For Irene, this centres on her failure to protect Raimunda from her father's incestuous abuse. Nevertheless, she is redeemed through her sacrifice for another abandoned daughter, Agustina.[135] Irene "returns" to the village where she had cared for her sister, Paula, in order to nurse Agustina through the final stages of cancer. This can be framed in palimpsestuous terms as offering a new version of the underlying script of mother-daughter rivalry and care.

This complex exploration of familial abuse, neglect and reconciliation reflects Gámez-Fuentes' observation that the mother has "been used in various ways in democratic Spain to address complex political and personal issues" (2003, 43). Whilst not suggesting that family trauma can easily be healed, *Volver* suggests that the mother is the best place to start such a process. Killing the patriarch (to the extent that feeble Paco fits this description) not only liberates Raimunda from the financial and emotional constraints he represents, but allows her to overcome the legacy of childhood abuse. By layering these themes with the prosaic details of Raimunda's life—not to mention the fact that Raimunda almost discovers Irene's presence due to the very particular scent of her farts—the plot's spiral structure brings together

133 As mentioned already, Irene disappears after she learns that her husband had assaulted Raimunda under her nose, burning down the house whilst he is in bed with his lover, Agustina's mother.

134 The two narratives also share a certain concern for how one might "move on", a theme of *Volver* that for Treglown marks a new direction in this filmography (2013, 195).

135 As Smith suggests, Agustina has "neither mother nor children but only ghosts to care for her" (2006a, 18). It is, paradoxically, their proximity to death which brings Irene and Agustina together, whilst also redeeming Irene for her failures of care and attention.

mundane and monumental temporalities. If Kristeva's notions of time suggested a division between these two, arguably feminine, subjectivities (1981), this narrative dissolves any such distinction.

The maternal ideals of Manuela and Raimunda share an orientation towards others that drives their respective narratives. Such figures develop and maintain identity through meaningful relationships, whereby they offer support un-judgementally and in very practical ways. If this aspect of Almodóvar's mothers is at times criticised,[136] this is also a radical revalorising of the maternal and the ethic of care. Disengaged from biology or kinship, the maternal becomes a powerful ethical drive in Almodóvar's films, gesturing towards new possibilities for his communities. The mother impulse—at its richest in *Todo sobre mi madre* and *Volver*—reaches out to fill the emotional void left by the crimes or failings of the patriarch.[137] This resonates with the notion of the ethics of care, born of the efforts of philosophers to provide women's perspectives to questions of morality and normative values (see Gilligan 1993a). Manuela and Raimunda each create spaces that invite others in—sometimes even despite their protestations. These mothers tell us that Almodóvar's alternative families must be founded on an other-orientedness consistent with the ethics of care. It is not simply that they take over from the patriarch, but that their authority extends from and over care, rather than being tied to institutional frames.

b. The (br)other mothers

If Almodóvar's reimagining of the family appears to require the death (literal or figurative) of the patriarch, it equally demands new figures to claim authority. As I have proposed, his maternal figures certainly step up to fill this void. Just as his families are bound by links other than biological, his maternal figures are not always determined by anatomy. By broadening the maternal role, Almodóvar refuses essentialist notions of gender, and extends his communities and the ethics of care. In an interview, the Manchegan once asserted: "There's this erroneous belief that the desire for motherhood is something feminine" (Altares 2004, 131). Indeed, *Todo*

[136] See section D.ii of this chapter.

[137] This includes not only the abuse perpetrated by Paco, but also the violence of neglect committed by characters such as Antonio or even Lola.

sobre mi madre is dedicated to "todos *los* que quieren ser madre"—using the masculine relative pronoun.[138] Almodóvar opens motherhood to "(br)other mothers" without regard to anatomy or kinship, and treats such figures with the same fondness as his mothers. This, I argue, is a progressive extension of the maternal ideal discussed above.

Given the importance of the family in Almodóvar's engagement with Spain's past, this reimagining of the role of mother must be read as part of a broader political project of the democratic era. This exercise is buttressed by the ethics of care, which puts into relief the interpersonal (see Ramos Pozón 2011). When it comes to Almodóvar's male mothers, this dovetails with the director's subversion of rigid norms, and his consistent efforts to underscore the fluidity not only of markers of identity, but of human relationships.[139] The privileging of an ethics of care—as opposed to the rigid requirements of justice—as the highest moral order similarly undermines rigid social strictures.

This is evident in two key examples: drag queen Letal (*Tacones lejanos*) and transvestite Tina (*La ley del deseo*). There is a chain of similarities between Tina and Letal, from active subversion of gender identity, to their adoption of maternal roles, and their positions within alternative families. I discuss these characters in detail below, so to avoid duplication, here I will simply I only set out key characteristics as relevant to their maternal status. Certainly, each of these characters embodies Almodóvar's maternal ideal, whilst extending the performative links outlined regarding Manuela and Raimunda.

It is also significant, I propose, that these narratives both undermine the heterosexual family of origin. In *La ley del deseo*, for instance, Smith notes how the "unselfconscious … everyday domesticity of gay ménages" contrasts with the abuse suffered by Tina at the hands of her father (1992, 191). Accordingly, he continues, "it

[138] Although the masculine pronoun is the "neutral" choice in Spanish, its use here suggests that motherhood is not an exclusively female domain.

[139] This is achieved in part through foregrounding the performativity of identity, no less the case with mothers.

is the heterosexual family that is revealed as the locus of perversion" (1992, 192).[140] If Almodóvar states in the film's pressbook that whilst his previous film (*¿Qué he hecho yo!*) focused attention on the mother, "Ahora lo hago sobre… los Hermanos" (cited in Vidal 1988, 178), Tina nevertheless embodies the ideal mother. Moreover, she illustrates the extension of motherhood beyond biological limits. Pablo and Tina are only parents by virtue of a figurative immaculate conception—foreshadowed by the name of their child, Ada, as Brígida Pastor observes (2006, 13).[141] They are nevertheless, for Almodóvar: "un padre y una madre ideales" (Vidal 1988, 172). The director continues (Vidal 1988, 172):

> No hay imagen que represente mejor la idea de la familia unida en el dolor, el cansancio, el calor, la desesperación, que la imagen de ellos tres andando por aquella calle llena de lonas, cuando la niña se quita los zapatos y se sube a la espalda de Pablo y los tres andan en silencio.[142]

This film highlights "the support and the affection that are traditionally provided by the family" (Arroyo 1992, 43). Meanwhile, in *Tacones lejanos*, again the patriarch is dispensed with in order for Rebeca to overcome the pain caused by her family of origin. Although a heterosexual family is established at film's end, it challenges the heteronormative model through the figure of Letal, a cross-dressing judge whose imitations of her mother are what initially attracted Rebeca to him.[143]

In *Gender Trouble*, Butler outlines an understanding of gender as having no essential foundation, instead being the product of performance. In part, Butler is concerned with deconstructing the sex/gender binary, arguing that the sexual body

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140 For Arroyo, these storylines offer contradictory representations of the family, at once oppressive and a valued source of support, evident in Tina and Pablo's relationship (1992). Such contradictions are common in this corpus and are consistent with my reading of the family as both heavily critiqued and an object of nostalgia and affection.

141 This alternative family again references the biblical story of Jesus. Despite being siblings, Pablo and Tina fit this category due to the challenge they pose to heteronormativity, and the unusual configuration with Ada. Tina's transsexuality and their complex family history further highlight the fluidity of identities and roles in this community.

142 This hot summer evening scene also includes a much-commented sequence in which Tina encounters a municipal worker and asks him to "water her". Wearing a tight-fitting dress with a suggestive zip down the front, she runs her hands over her hips and through her hair as she is soaked; her physicality a significant marker of her gender.

143 The character problematises not only gender, but broader cultural norms, given that the Sevillian backdrop to the stage arguably has "el propósito de revelar el rostro feo que se esconde detrás de estas convenciones idealizadas" (Jerez Farrán 2011, 206).

is only intelligible through constructions of gender, an illusion maintained by hegemonic heteronormativity (1999, 191). Tina and Letal each highlight this understanding of gender as performative through both the emphasis on their gender fluidity,[144] and their occupations: Tina as actress (see Pastor 2006; Vilchez 2009), Letal as drag queen, police informer and judge.[145] Tina literally embodies Butler's articulation of gender—both in her post-operative form and given her adoption of hyperfeminine attire and mannerisms.[146] If Tina illustrates the mutability of gender positions and their capacity to change over times, Letal similarly moves between identities, adopting both masculine and feminine roles and using a range of costumes to effect these changes. Performing as Becky del Páramó, Letal dons a wig, figure-hugging dress and bold hoop earrings; whilst as Juez Domínguez this figure wears a false beard. Even as Butler denies gender as a locus of agency, these characters assert their identities through conscious adoption of various gender positions. As Pastor notes, through this emphasis on performativity, "the categories of gender and sexuality… are represented as discursive categories" (2006, 13). Once revealed as discursive, the linguistic and cultural construction of these categories can possibly be dismantled.

Moreover, Tina and Letal both embody a maternal figure missing from their own lives, suggesting the maternal as a route to overcome trauma. As D'Lugo argues, Tina's actions throughout the film belie a desire to "reconstitute both family and religion in terms that will construct for her a Utopian world" (1991, 60; see also Vilchez 2009). He goes on to say that this character exemplifies "Almodóvar's thesis of the contemporary Spaniard being dissatisfied with the past and therefore constructing a new one". Yet again, the maternal is central to the formation of community, highlighting the centrality of the mother to Almodóvar's vision for a new

144 Gender performance is nevertheless informed by broader social and political frameworks.

145 The way this character moves between these roles is discussed below at page 223ff.

146 Various critics have considered how Butler's writings on gender illuminate Almodóvar's characters: Ballesteros (2009); Martínez-Expósito (2013); Pelayo García (2011); Morgado (2014); Blanco Cano (2006). Whilst not of great significance for present analysis, the extent of Tina's physical change is never made clear. Jennifer Vilchez suggests she has kept her penis (2009, 115), but there is no mention of this. Her conclusion stems from descriptions of Tina as a "*travesti*", a term that overlaps with "transvestite," but which Vilchez states denotes a physical transformation that does not include removing the penis.

Spain. If Tina is the fulcrum around which Pablo and Ada turn, Letal similarly fulfils a maternal role, although this time for his lover, Rebeca.[147] As with Tina—whose mother is never mentioned[148]—Letal lacks a strong mother figure; his mother is depicted as a house-bound hypochondriac, whom he humours but does not hold great affection for. Here, the "alternative family" formed with Rebeca and their child is biologically connected, yet I argue that this configuration reinforces key ideas of the alternative family, including the importance of tolerance, choice and care, as well as the fluid nature of meaningful community.

In both examples, these gender-fluid characters are central to alternative communities, promoting a non-essentialist understanding of family that reinscribes the values of support and acceptance as more important than biological connection.[149] In sum, if Tina and Letal embody Almodóvar's problematisation of traditional notions of gender and sexuality, they more importantly for present purposes foreground the centrality of the maternal to his alternative communities.[150] In this way, they point us to the same ethics of care as Manuela and Raimunda.

One "(br)other mother" who challenges the model established by Tina and Letal is Lola (*Todo sobre mi madre*).[151] Whilst Silvia Colmenero Salgado views this character as embodying an alternative maternity which accommodates both feminine and masculine qualities (2001, 92),[152] the character is nevertheless not quite welcomed into the alternative family. For Martin-Márquez, Lola's designation as "mujer-padre" invites further reflection, as it suggests that the "father" cannot

147 I discuss from page 228 the positioning of Letal as a substitute for Rebeca's mother.

148 This is despite Tina's "affair" with her father, which led them to run off and abandon Pablo and the sibling's mother.

149 Having said that, the bond between Pablo and Tina is clearly strong. Pablo has a structuring function in Tina's sense of self, whilst she helps him recover his memory after his accident.

150 Another example, but one who less readily fits the description of "mother" is Agrado, who shares with Manuela the "selfless way in which they care for others" (Rivera-Cordero 2012, 320).

151 If Almodóvar was criticised for introducing this character only towards the end of the film (Altares 2004, 150), this is counterbalanced, in my view, by the framing of the film in terms of Lola's absence and Lola's presence in Manuela's motivations.

152 In contrast, Zavales Eggert notes that the latter "never fully embraces the joyful possibilities of this alternative reality with a mutable concept of gender" (2014, 393). Corbalán expresses concern with the film's "need" to kill off the transsexual father to establish the preferred matriarchal order (2008, 163).

survive alone, but "is in desperate need of supplementation, implantation or even transplantation" (2004, 507). Lola could be seen as offering a "bridge to later meditations over 'male maternity'" (Martin-Márquez 2004, 508), but has herself not yet come into her own as a mother. Indeed, she dies whilst her second son is an infant, having never met her first. In a similar vein to Irene, this character seems to have foregone the opportunity to enjoy motherhood fully due to her past failures of care. Manuela's description of Lola as a younger person (then a man) highlights qualities of selfishness and a lack of empathy that perhaps linger. *Todo sobre mi madre* hence contrasts the ideal mother (Manuela) with a mujer-padre who neither emotionally nor practically fulfils the role—even if she is a biological parent. Lola is nevertheless offered a certain level of redemption in her final encounter with Manuela. This poignant scene, in which the father is finally introduced to his son, suggests that Lola *is* capable of care, but perhaps simply realised this too late. The red cardigan she wears recalls the red worn by Letal as he performs "Piensa en mí," drawing a visual link that invites Lola into the pantheon of (br)other mothers.

Ultimately, these male characters suggest that the distribution of roles and identities according to patriarchal norms is limiting not only for women, but also for men—especially those who struggle to fit within hegemonic masculinity. This reinforces, I argue, the importance of the homosocial dynamic and potential political alliances between women and queer men. Equally significant is that male mothers are treated more in line with the mother. Where they fail their children (eg Lola), they are offered greater forgiveness and sympathy than that extended the father. Examples such as Tina, Letal and Lola underscore yet again the centrality of care—and the maternal—to Almodóvar's alternative families.

iii. Alternative families and care

As I contend throughout this section, Almodóvar's maternal ideal embodies the ethics of care. Here I engage more directly with this moral philosophy to elaborate key principles of his communities. The ethics of care is oriented towards grounding normative morality in a "feminine" instinct, one that arises out of the

maternal (Noddings 2010).[153] If this appears to offer an essentialist approach to morality, the ethics of care does not, I contend, rely on "mother" or "woman" as fixed categories, but rather on the qualities and activities which have been prescribed to women.[154] Further, I do not suggest that the ethics of care is only manifest by mothers (or women generally) in Almodóvar's films; nor do scholars propose that the ethics of care is only practised by or amongst women (Noddings 2010, 248). If the ethics of care draws on "feminine" qualities, Almodóvar's films reorient such qualities to dismantle any rigid gender-based associations and this is demonstrated by various male characters in these films, as just discussed.

If an ethics of care "starts from a theory of the self as relational" (Robinson 2011, 40), Almodóvar's "good mothers" (including the (br)other mothers) are, I have demonstrated, defined by their relationships to others. Where some have critiqued the pioneering work of Gilligan by asserting her work concerned relationships rather than ethics more broadly (Noddings 2010, 22), these examples illustrate in vivid terms the ways in which interpersonal relations underpin ethical decision-making. The moral strength of Manuela and Tina, for instance, is clearly illustrated by—and directly draws upon—their relationships to the people around them.[155] A review of this corpus reveals that the ethics of care is fundamental to the types of communities Almodóvar favours.

In addition to its emphasis on relationships, the ethics of care is, Gilligan asserts, "grounded less in moral precepts than in psychological wisdom" (2014, 103). She goes on to explain that this morality underscores "the costs of not paying attention, not listening, being absent rather than present, not responding with integrity and respect." Such costs are clear from the above discussion of abusive fathers and repressive mothers. Conversely, ideal mothers aptly demonstrate such

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153 Although Noddings' articulation of morality is based on the "maternal instinct", she does not claim this as the only source of morality (2010, 234), nor does she exclude non-mothers from this ethics

154 For an insightful discussion of the way maternal ethics can be conceived in non-essentialist terms, see Jeremiah (2006).

155 Conversely, it is without interpersonal connections that the world of *La piel que habito* becomes devoid of ethical concerns. This film illustrates, I argue, the closely imbricated nature of community, ethics and healthy individual identity.

"psychological wisdom", offering care and support in ways that meet the individual needs of their loved ones.

D. Coda: How progressive are Almodóvar's alternative families?

i. Reimagining the father

What remains to be figured in Almodóvar's alternative family is the father. In response to criticisms of the ethics of care that it supports the subordination of women, Held proposes that by challenging patriarchal understandings of community and ethics, and challenging people to reconsider the way they live, this moral framework is in fact highly revolutionary (2014, 107-108). Given the overwhelmingly negative portrayal of the father, it is unclear whether he can be included in this community. If the disposal of brutes such as Antonio and Paco seems necessary for community to emerge, it is significant that few "good fathers" are depicted to diversify Almodóvar's paternal figures.[156] Even where they are shown to develop emotionally and learn to care, such as Lola, they are not readily welcomed. As mentioned above, the exclusion of Lola from the final tableau of *Todo sobre mi madre*, for instance, complicates the director's apparent celebration of the fluidity of gender and subversion of gender norms.

Some see greater hope for the father's rehabilitation in later films, most significantly *Los abrazos rotos* (2009). Whilst principally a tragic love story between a filmmaker, Harry Caine, and actress Lena, the supporting characters—his friend and former colleague Judit and her son, Diego—are revealed in the film's finale to be closer to Harry than originally thought. In a characteristically labyrinthine fashion, the plot unfolds in two parallel time periods: The first a "present" in which Harry and Diego grow closer due to Judit's absence; the second the story of Harry's ill-fated love affair, told to Diego through flashbacks. It is not until the film's climax—a birthday dinner—that Judit reveals the biological relationship between the two: Harry is Diego's father. According to Samuel Amago, this marks a "radical departure" in Almodóvar's representation of "this most honoured of Spanish cultural

[156] As outlined above, I include figures such as Tina and Letal in my taxonomy of mothers given their emphasis on care.

institutions" (2011, 94; see also Matz and Salmon 2012b). Whereas earlier films end with the disintegration of traditional families, this narrative sees the heteronormative, biological family for once reconfigured, the only "deviant" element "is the fact that its existence and functionality are perhaps purely *ad hoc*" (Amago 2011, 100). Yet I argue that this impromptu—or coincidental—nature is central and undermines any characterisation of this family as "traditional".[157] More significant, in my view, is the fact that Harry is unaware he is a father for much of the narrative. Whilst he demonstrates real concern for Diego—his recounting of his love affair echoes the bedtime storytelling ritual—this is not framed as paternal care (by Harry himself, which distinguishes him from Almodóvar's reluctant mothers) until the final revelation redefines the relationship. If anything, this film demonstrates that the father does not automatically gain entry to his child's life, but must prove himself capable of the ethics of care.[158]

Any notion that Almodóvar progressively—or conclusively—rehabilitates the father is undermined by his next film, *La piel que habito*. Its protagonist is a return to the more common (and negative) patriarchs of earlier Almodóvar films, bridging the gap between the "abusive" and the "absent". As Zurián Hernández proposes, Ledgard (2013a, fn6):

> [r]eminds us, in one way or another, of all the husbands and fathers in the Almodóvar filmography. Marginal to the main story in most films, they are literally or effectively absent, self-involved, ineffectual, the shadowy projection of patriarchal power...

Whilst in a later paper co-written with Caballero Gálvez, Zurián Hernández declines to describe Ledgard as an example of *machista* violence because his violence is directed at another man, he nevertheless acknowledges that he "reúne las características del hombre patriarcal que cree que su voluntad es ley y todo lo demás es despreciable" (2016, 866; see also Martín 2014). This character embodies both an extreme, misdirected paternal instinct, as well as a propensity for maniacal violence.

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157 I discuss the importance of coincidence to Almodóvar's films in the conclusion to this thesis.

158 As with characters such as Enrique (*La mala educación*) and Pablo (*La ley del deseo*), it is through his creative work that Harry Caine meets his love interest, but they are only together briefly. The character then channels his art into a tribute to his lost love, but ultimately creative passion and romantic life are again incompatible.

Alongside its disturbing portrait of narcissistic revenge, this film confronts the viewer with a barren social landscape that stands in stark contrast to much of this corpus. The protagonist lives alone but for his servants and a young woman called Vera. We learn she was only recently Vicente—abducted and transformed in revenge for allegedly raping Ledgard's daughter, Norma. Whilst the truth of this accusation is never confirmed,[159] the transformation of Vicente's body against his will highlights not the madness of a grieving parent, but an avaricious vengefulness motivated by professional ambition and erotic desire. This is reinforced by the fact that Vicente's female form resembles Ledgard's deceased wife—victim to his jealousy.[160]

The protagonist's lack of self-awareness is confirmed in brief scenes with his daughter, at the institution where she is confined after the alleged assault. When she retreats into a closet rather than engage with him, he is unable to recognise himself as the cause of her abject fear, demanding that the psychiatrists "do something". His incapacity to see his failure as a father stems, I argue, in part from what has been described as his "unrestrained narcissistic rage" (Harrang 2012, 1307) and his "sadistic" needs (Lemma 2012, 1296). If this character's violence is meted out not against his daughter, but ostensibly to avenge her assault, it is no less drawn from the well of authoritarian patriarchy. He is, accordingly, yet another of Almodóvar's abusive fathers.

It is significant that this brutal and violent paternal figure follows the mellower Harry Caine. Above all, I contend, it suggests that there is more work for the traditional father to do before being accepted into Almodóvar reimagined family. Until Almodóvar's fathers adopt the ethics of care, they are not welcome in such arrangements.

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159 Although certain scholars see the rape as incontrovertible (eg Marcantonio 2015), the crime is not shown on screen (but events immediately before and after are), Vicente never admits to it, there are no witnesses, and despite Norma's trauma, she never articulates the cause—in fact, it appears that it is Ledgard.

160 His wife suicides after she is "rescued" by Ledgard from a car crash (the crash occurred as she was trying to leave him with Zeca). Ledgard replaces her burnt skin in the same operation he performs on Vicente. Whilst it could be read as caring, Ledgard's attitude is one of domination. As Martín argues, he embodies the most violent excesses of normative masculinity (2014).

ii. Return to traditional femininity

I have foreshadowed already that Almodóvar's alternative families have been criticised for idealising a traditional femininity. In this coda to my exploration of Almodóvar's families, I engage with and respond to such critiques, arguing that the revalorising of the maternal is a radical move that invites us to embrace care and community. When his ideal maternal figures are contrasted with their cinematic counterparts, there is no doubt that they experience greater love, compassion and fulfilment. With due respect to the arguments made by the scholars mentioned here, I do not agree that the maternal in these films undermines Almodóvar's progressive politics. As I demonstrate, he first deconstructs the traditional family, then turns to the task of imagining alternatives premised on care. If such communities rest mainly on the shoulders of women, this is, in my view, an indication of the limitations of hegemonic masculinity. If anything, it is in this regard that the director lacks imagination, especially when compared to the filmmaker's broad range of mothers, who extend well beyond the self-abnegating "ángel del hogar".

Notwithstanding his reputation as a leading director of women and the sexually marginal, a significant body of scholarship challenges the extent to the representation of the maternal undermines his apparently progressive approach (eg Zecchi 2005; Corbalán 2008; Camino 2010; Martin-Márquez 1999). If Almodóvar avoids the trap of Hollywood cinema—which pushes the mother "to the periphery of a narrative focused on a husband, son, or daughter" (Kaplan 1990, 127)—his alternative families are often premised on an exaltation of traditional motherhood (see Corbalán 2008, 149). Women are thereby praised for self-sacrifice and limited to a nurturing role, often denied sexuality. Another line of critique suggests that Almodóvar's idealising of the mother undermines his subversion of gender norms. Camino, for instance, suggests that whilst Almodóvar's women are stronger than their on-screen male companions—whom she describes as one-dimensional "cartoon-like images"—the grounding of their identity in maternity reinforces a "split duality of masculine and feminine values and universes" (2010, 641). Similarly, for Barbara Zecchi, the portrayal of motherhood reveals a latent conservatism,

where the *status quo* in these films generally involves a recuperation of patriarchal icons such as marriage, the birth of a child, or the return to the *pueblo* (2005, 155).[161] In this way, this corpus is seen to hark back to classic Hollywood narratives, even though in so many other respects it consciously, and often successfully, subverts oppressive patriarchal structures.

Returning to *¿Qué he hecho yo!*, the alternative family set up at its conclusion unpacks some of these issues. Gloria's liberation from the patriarchal family is visibilised at the end of the film when she finds herself alone in the claustrophobic apartment.[162] Her "freedom" is not, however, all that she imagined and is problematised by the film's closing scene, in which her younger son returns. This culminates in the living room where Gloria and Miguel's reunion is staged. Gloria and Miguel's bodies frame an idyllic pastoral scene that recalls the departure of Toni and the *abuela*. Miguel asserts that he has returned because "esta casa necesita un hombre". If this statement recalls the tyrannical wielded by patriarchs such as Antonio, the irony of his claim is accentuated by his flat delivery, the composition—the medium shot accentuating his short stature compared to his mother—and the camerawork. This potentially undermines any "straight" reading of his reference to a man of the house.

The scene exemplifies the film's "push-and-pull between several contradictory moments in its posture toward traditional family life" (Goss 2009, 86). Miguel's return can be read in two, conflicting ways: either his declaration that the house "needs a man" parodies the notion of masculine authority (given his age, sexuality and ambiguous relationship with dominant order) and gestures towards an alternative domestic configuration, or his reappearance reinscribes Gloria in the patriarchal order. There is perhaps a third, more "neutral" reading. The articulation of the need for a male head of the house can be read as simply reflecting broader social conditions, without either critiquing or endorsing these. Gloria is, Camino

[161] Conversely, as noted above, the "return" to the village in *¿Qué he hecho yo!* documents the dissolution of patriarchal authority and allows Gloria the possibility of self-determination and fulfilment at the film's close.

[162] Melodrama often symbolises the repressive attributes of community through mise-en-scène (Bainbridge 2007, 105), here reflected in the close framing and abundance of internal shots.

observes, "hindered by ignorance, poverty and, perhaps more importantly, by the constraints of being a woman in a sexist society" (2005, 339). Miguel's comment, she suggests, simply indicates his understanding of such circumstances. Yet this middle ground ignores, I contend, the strength of the film's social critique.

Readings of this scene as reinstating the traditional family often focus primarily on Miguel's gender, positing that according to the film's logic, Gloria needs to be "rescued" by a man in order to successfully navigate the world.[163] This in turn reinforces masculine authority over women's lives, even if the rescuer is her young, homosexual son. The film thus reestablishes the traditional family—now headed by Miguel—and undoes any progressive narrative. Such interpretations, whilst they acknowledge the complexity of the film's message, go against the weight of the film's gender and socioeconomic critique outlined above.

The alternative readings foreground Miguel's sexuality,[164] as well as the fact that it is the son earlier "sold off" to the dentist who joins Gloria in the new family. This gestures towards the significance of heterosocial bonds, as underscored by Maddison (2000b).[165] The heterosocial dynamic resonates with Gutiérrez-Albilla's description of the community that forms in *Volver*—although made up exclusively of women—as offering "an alternative ethical model of a relationship based on the solidarity between a heterogeneous and transgenerational group of women who can act out and/or work through their personal and collective traumas and incompatible memories" (2011, 334). With both marked throughout the film as limited by the traditional family institution and their socio-economic circumstances (see Jerez-

[163] Indeed, although the film cemented Almodóvar's reputation as a women's director (Goss 2009, 95) and even a "feminist" (Ballesteros 2001, 73), its initial reception, in Spain at least, was somewhat ambivalent (see Ibañez 2013).

[164] If Venkatesh aims to insert the film into "a genealogy of 'Queer' Spanish cinema" (2014, 353), it is inaccurate to suggest that this aspect of the film has previously gone uncommented, see: Vernon (1993); Jerez-Farrán (2011).

[165] As Gayle Rubin asserts: "the oppression of homosexuals, is… a product of the same system whose rules and relations oppress women" (1975, 180). For D'Lugo, the film's conclusion "underscores the persistent bonding of female and gay characters throughout Almodóvar's cinema as they recognize the city as the place of their liberation from the tyrannical sexual and social codes of the patriarchy" (1991, 55-56).

Farrán 20011),[166] this "alternative family" reunites them in order for them to vault these barriers. This is the reading that I prefer. This alternative family gestures towards new modes of community, foreshadowing unconventional communities of later films.[167] I contend that Gloria and Miguel form an early example of Almodóvar's alternative family, subverting orthodox gender roles and offering new possibilities of care.

Much of the discussion of *¿Qué he hecho yo!* focuses on "its stylistic evolution and stark social commentary" (Venkatesh 2014, 353). The film thereby offers a postmodern vehicle for communicating Almodóvar's critique of the social and economic pressures under which Gloria and her son both suffer. Rather than undermining his social commentary, the postmodern aesthetics reinforce it. As Ballesteros highlights, whilst Miguel potentially figures within the patriarchal structures, his arrival parodies them, given that the "figura de autoridad es reemplazada por una caricatura del patriarca: es un niño de 14 años, homosexual y prostituto" (2001, 73). Vernon also sees the film as ultimately progressive, suggesting that the reunion is positioned within the "realm of the maternal." The "playful asymmetry" of Gloria/Miguel pairing (Vernon 1993, 38):

> denies the restrictive logic of the patriarchal family, both on and off the film screen. In the absence of the paternal Law… mother and son are free to explore—and create—forms of sexuality and sexual identity impossible under traditional societal and familial structures.

If Almodóvar's alternative families offer fluidity and choice to their members, it is perhaps true that this is not an unequivocally progressive representation of the mother. The echoes of the *ángel del hogar* favoured by Francoist Spain undermine any such claim. Moreover, the privileging of the maternal *per se* suggests a limited vision for the possibilities of being a woman in modern Spain. Almodóvar's women protagonists almost inevitably find their way to being a mother, albeit sometimes circuitously.

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166 This solidarity has been highlighted throughout the film, I argue, by the framing of both Gloria and Miguel as objects of inanimate object point-of-view shots.

167 It can also be read as a continuation of the alternative families established in earlier films such as *Pepi, Luci, Bom* and *Entre tinieblas*.

Much of the more general critiques of Almodóvar's mothers focus on the figure of Manuela. Certainly, she is one example who fits the mould of the "proverbial angel of the house, of the abnegated heroine of melodramas, or of the model woman of the Francoist *Sección Femenina*" (Zamora 2009, 369). Such a figure was queen of the domestic sphere, as well as herself a key proponent of Franco's reactionary ideology (Richmond 2003, 14). Major elements of this privileged domesticity included, of course, cooking, sewing, and, above all, motherhood. Manuela certainly fulfils all of these roles, even in her professional capacity. If, as Alberdi suggests, one of the key challenges for the changing Spanish family "es la conciliación del trabajo remunerado y el cuidado familiar" (2006, 35), Almodóvar's films prioritise family care, reinforced by the fact that mothers' paid work is generally an extension of their caring duties. This is true for Gloria (a cleaner), Raimunda (cleaner and cook), and Manuela (nurse, cook, carer), their occupations seeming to limit them to domestic spaces.[168]

Cruz, for instance, remarks that despite the intertextual links to *A Streetcar Named Desire*, a work that offers women a range of roles and desires, "el único deseo que aparece aquí es el de ser madre (o el de ser mujer para poder ser madre)" (2002, 158). Cruz suggests that women in this diegetic world are limited to three roles: mother, prostitute and nun. If Almodóvar's mothers are often required to professionally fulfil "maternal" responsibilities, Cruz's analysis is overly generalised and does consider *Todo sobre mi madre* in detail. She seems primarily concerned with what she identifies as a broader cultural return to traditional values—in part, she suggests, a reactionary response to low birth rates and high rates of immigration—and is concerned to fit the Almodóvar film into that broader argument.

Cruz is especially concerned at the lack of on-screen feminine sexuality: "ésta aparece, o sublimada en la maternidad o degradada en la prostitución y el lesbianismo" (2002, 158). Although Cruz clarifies that by "degradada" she means

[168] Tina is one exception, balancing maternal responsibilities with work as an actress, although she is required to sacrifice romantic fulfilment. Becky's career, conversely, is positioned as a direct impediment to her maternal role. Women who do enjoy meaningful, independent careers—Leo (writer), Huma Rojo (actress), Lidia (*torera*)—tend not to be mothers.

within the bounds of this film's representations of female sexuality—including the sites of prostitution at Barcelona's peripheries and Huma's unhealthy relationship with Nina—this nevertheless, I would contend, ignores the terms of Almodóvar's aesthetics in which "degradation" often leads to fulfilment and community. It is true that Almodóvar's mothers are rarely given sexual agency, although they are at times afforded sexual *appeal* (such as Raimunda). Manuela is depicted asexually, as are the majority of idealised maternal figures, from Tina, who basically swears off sex, to Raimunda, whose costuming and make-up suggest a screen siren, but her only sexual encounter, as discussed, is awkward and unfulfilling. Meanwhile, Becky has an affair with her daughter's husband; and Gloria has two unsatisfactory on-screen sexual experiences: one a pseudo-commercial transaction with her husband, the other a hurried and futile encounter with a stranger.

Cruz is not alone in her critique of *Todo sobre mi madre* for its apparently pronatalist approach. If Manuela is torn between her desire for love and her search for personal freedom (see Pozo Fajarnés 2012, 6), she is also torn between professional ambition and the demands of motherhood. In each case, however, her impulse towards connection wins. This is reflected in Zecchi's discussion of the intertextual references to *All About Eve*, which offers not a commentary on motherhood, but two other relevant female models: the self-sacrificing wife and the "threatening ambitious female who is capable of anything in order to succeed" (2005, 156).[169] Zecchi identifies Manuela with the second type, although "success" is defined in relation to her son, but the counterbalancing of her self-denial and her talent make her ambition not threatening, but altruistic. Nevertheless, for Zecchi, Almodóvar's "rescue" of feminine ambition is problematic as it is only through her transformation into "a self-abnegating mother" (2005, 157). If we read Manuela's story as not only pivoting around her position as mother, but as gesturing towards an overarching ethics of Almodóvar's films, a more transformative interpretation comes to light. For Ryan Prout, analysing *Entre tinieblas*, framing Almodóvar's work within redemptive feminist theology reveals the film as engaging not only "with the

[169] These two female types, despite their lack of children, fit into Kaplan's taxonomy of Hollywood mothers (1992), suggesting that cinema's constraining of women is not limited to mothers.

question of Spain's transitional political periods but with changing attitudes to the role, and identity, of carers in a more generalized social transition" (1999, 64). If Almodóvar's model mothers are similarly seen to be reclaiming caring as a fundamental characteristic of humanity, perhaps we can yet understand them as radical.

Corbalán provides a more critical appraisal of the figure of Manuela. For Corbalán (2008), the alternative family offered in *Todo sobre mi madre*—founded on bonds of female friendship—ultimately fails. This is in part, it would seem, due to the idealisation of the maternal as fundamental structuring principle for the new family model. Corbalán intimates that this is due to certain old-fashioned moral values held by the director himself in relation to the family. She quotes an interview in which Almodóvar states (2008, 152; citing Montano in Willoquet-Maricondi 2004):

> Family is essential, and if you don't have it, you look for it, you begin to form it throughout your life. … The family fulfils a role, but that's no reason for me to stop recognizing that it's a primary instrument of repression.

Instead, Corbalán suggests that *Todo sobre mi madre* moves between "un descentramiento posmoderno y una crítica humanista más tradicional." (2008, 153) Despite the film's critique of the phallocentric family, and destabilisation of gender norms, for Corbalán the idealisation of traditional motherhood—embodied by Manuela—offers a restrictive vision of the family.

In her article "'Vivir sin ti': Motherhood, Melodrama and *españolada* in Pedro Almodóvar's *Todo sobre mi madre* (1999) and *Volver* (2006)", Camino locates these two later films within the tradition of the Spanish genre of the *españolada* (2010; see also Kinder 1993, 260).[170] Whilst Camino acknowledges that Almodóvar films are protagonised by strong women, she suggests that figures such as Manuela and Raimunda "converge with women from Francoism's españoladas" (2010, 641). Despite the clear traces of parody in Almodóvar's films, and his disavowal of "Fascist" or "Catholic" connotations, such female characters remain, according to Camino, bound to traditional values of self-denial (2010, 641). If such values are present, in my view this doesn't undermine the progressive project behind other

[170] See the Introduction to this thesis, page 17.

elements of his films—such conflicting readings are inherent in Almodóvar's aesthetics and ethics.

On another note, above I explore not only the maternal ideal, but also repressive and neglectful mothers. The various ways in which mothers fail their children in these films problematises, I propose, any claim that Almodóvar slavishly idolises the maternal. This is not to deny the limitations imposed on mothers—most notably in terms of fulfilment beyond motherhood—and I do not want to understate the significance of this. The mother is often revered primarily for her support and unconditional love. There are, however, also mothers who fail to provide such nurture. These mothers tend to be associated with the rigid patriarchal order, still caught up within its structures, and this has consequences for their relationships with others, even as their fixed notions of self exclude them from the alternative family. That motherhood in this corpus is presented with such complexity and diversity is in itself subversive. Ultimately, I view these narratives as engaging in a process of dismantling heteronormative structures in order to develop progressive alternatives to the traditional family. In her 1980 article "Maternal thinking" (precursor to her book of the same name), Ruddick stated: "It is enormously difficult to come by an image of maternal power that is even coherent, let alone benign: it is easy to come by images of powerlessness and malign power." (1980, 345) Almodóvar's mothers address this lack of visible maternal power; they are, for the most part, strong and resilient, able to overcome significant obstacles in the pursuit of the well-being of their children and other loved ones. They offer a powerful—and, importantly, positive—vision of motherhood.[171]

The tension between the various approaches to Almodóvar's films also resides in numerous feminist projects, which work to undermine social constructs of gender and sexuality, even as they must grapple with the very real manifestations of these constructs. This can be seen, for instance, in the way Ruddick explicitly refuses to engage with notions of "ineradicable difference between female and male parents," arguing that men can engage in maternal thinking, yet at the same time suggests

[171] In this way, the power of Almodóvar's mothers are distinguishable from the authoritarian iteration of Franco-era cinema.

that they "necessarily" acquire such thinking differently to women (1980, 346). Ruddick is careful not to exclude men from maternal thinking, but she does acknowledge the real differences in parenting expectations and experiences that existed at the time of her writing (and, by and large, continue in certain respects).

Almodóvar's films offer us characters who adopt "maternal" thinking, or the ethics of care, regardless of gender and this, I argue, is radical. It is not that these limitations of his films are not significant. Certainly, there is a clear tension here that refuses easy resolution. But this, I argue, is the case for much of this corpus, and does not undermine the radical revaluing of care. For the maternal is at the heart of Almodóvar's alternative communities, which, in this filmography, are the best places to be.[172] Without denying that female characters are valorised for their maternal instincts, I propose that this reinforces Almodóvar's radical ethical project, rather than reflecting a revised patriarchal politics. By this, I mean that his films promote meaningful (and often feminine) bonds and solidary as a route to fulfilment and security over more conventional mechanisms based on individualistic pursuits. By foregrounding care, these films reconfigure social organisation to value the interpersonal alongside the individual. That such community-oriented qualities are privileged (whether in men or in women) can be understood from the perspective of the ethics of care. These films thereby give rise to an alternative ethical framework.

In Almodóvar's films, the mother is the archetype for a more community-focused understanding of self. If Almodóvar's women are stronger than their on-screen male companions, the grounding of women's identity in maternity underscores the power of Almodóvar's alternative families, and the new ways of understanding identity and community that frame them. Ways that are perhaps conventionally understood as more "feminine", but which in Almodóvar's universe are available to anyone who cares.

[172] As Camino identifies, there is a "sense of humanity and community informed by an ethical stance towards altruism, friendship, trust and solidarity" (2010, 641).

Chapter Two: The Church's dark habits

A. Overview of chapter two

This chapter focuses on the representation of religion in Almodóvar's films, focusing on two examples: *Entre tinieblas* and *La mala educación*. Each unfolds—at least in part—within a Catholic institution: the first in the convent of the *Redentoras Humilladas*, and the second in a Catholic boarding school. I also consider, by way of conclusion, the film *La ley del deseo*, as an exploration of new forms of spirituality, distanced from formal religion. The Church—here, always the Catholic Church, which dominates any discussion of religion in Spain (Donapetry 1999, 70)—can be conceptualised as a community in its broadest sense. The convent and the boarding school, however, offer more distinct examples of religious community, apposite for our exploration of the director's deconstruction, and occasional reimagining, of the institutions of traditional Spain. As set out above, I argue that Almodóvar both interrogates the limits these communities impose, and imagines new modes of interaction between community members that allow for deeper and more meaningful relationships.

In this chapter, I consider how Almodóvar critiques (albeit implicitly) the historic relationship between the Church and the Franco regime—highlighting abuses of individual power—and how the director attends to the repressive forces at play within the Church itself, and their impact on its members. I outline how these institutional structures are visible in the finale of *Entre tinieblas*, and also in the ongoing struggle between the priest and his desires in *La mala educación*. This representation of the destructive power of religion on the lives of so many of Almodóvar's characters offers a warning to avoid rigid dogma. This focus on the Church's institutional failings accords with Elizabeth Scarlett's (2014) broader analysis of religion in post-Franco cinema.[1] Whilst she tactfully avoids generalisations about filmmaking during the Transition and in more times, Scarlett's analysis of specific films reveals an ongoing engagement with the sacred and religious devotion.

[1] For a discussion of religion in film of the immediate pre-Transition period, see Pérez (2017).

Interestingly, however, she concludes that during the post-Franco period, cinema itself became the object of worship (2014, 171). This leads to a second interpretation of the director's engagement with religion.

Beyond this critical function, this chapter explores whether the representations of religion in this corpus might also serve as a call of arms for a more inclusive spirituality. Below I consider whether the moral concerns that emerge in these narratives are in fact answered by something else: the ethic of care. Whilst the films focused on here offer very different perspectives on religion, I propose that each reflects the director's search for an alternative moral framework. Through a palimpsestuous approach, I suggest the films retrace similar terrain in order to explore how and whether religion can be redeemed for the new Spain. These repetitions demand that we hold competing and sometimes contradictory ideas in balance, as the reappearance of motifs and issues—always in different guises—denies any conclusive resolution. If formal religion is resoundingly rejected in *La mala educación*, which offers a strident critique of institutionalised repression and violence, *Entre tinieblas* offers more hope for the reimagining of the Church. This is reflected partly in the different genres each film draws on; the first offering elements of thriller and *noir*, whilst the second plays with the line between comedy and melodrama. Nevertheless, even here the "alternative" convent is ultimately disbanded and formal religion fails to ground a genuine alternative community. Instead, this is only achieved in *La ley del deseo*, where such community is depicted alongside spirituality more broadly—drawn from, but not restricted by, the iconography and values of the Catholic Church.

We turn first to the ways in which Almodóvar critiques organised religion, with a focus on *La mala educación*, before considering—through a close reading of *Entre tinieblas*—whether there is any hope for the Church. [2] These religious representations are consistent, I argue, with Almodóvar's search for a new form of ethics; one rooted in caring, individual relationships, rather than the structures of

[2] This achronological reading of the films allows us to see more clearly the parallels (and differences) between Almodóvar's approach to the Church and to the other communities discussed in the thesis.

the Church. As mentioned in the previous chapter, I have articulated this in terms of the "ethics of care". This moral framework is premised on the need for a tailored response to any given situation (see Gilligan 2014; Noddings 1995).[3] A highly relational approach to morality, the ethics of care is tied to the specific circumstances of a situation, requiring an understanding of the other's position, and a response that addresses their needs. I argue that such personalised responses are impossible within Almodóvar's depiction of the Church's formal institutions and structures. Before we examine these films in depth, I first contextualise Almodóvar's focus on religion within Spanish history and culture. I will then offer a brief overview of the representation of religion in his work, complemented by a discussion of key turns in the academic literature.

In a 1988 interview, Almodóvar remarked that religion "belongs to Spanish culture" (Rouyer and Vié 1988, 24). Along with the family, religion was a key motif of the Francoist imaginary (Sánchez-Alarcón 2008, 339), the dictator "entrusting education and cultural policy from the beginning to a succession of right-wing Catholic interest groups" (Boyd 1999, 93). After the Civil War, the Church experienced a revival strongly grounded in the State's support of its efforts to "re-Catholicise" the population (Pellistrandi 2000, 54). As described by historian Stanley Payne, this "resacralization" of public life was: "One of the most remarkable features of post-Civil War Spain" (1984, 183). Whereas the brief Second Republic saw violent confrontations between Church and State, Franco officially declared Catholicism the national religion (Pellistrandi 2000, 54), and many of his regime's policies stemmed from traditionalist Catholic values (Payne 2011, 218). Indeed, although Vincent Cervantes cautions against "essentialising" the role of Catholicism in Spanish identity, he acknowledges that "the Catholic Church became heavily politicized during Franco's regime" (2014, 435). Such influence extended into the socio-political imaginary, as Franco himself adopted the role of the "good shepherd" (Yarza 1997, 110), the implication being that his role was to lead the Spanish people through troubling times. Moreover, with the ideological and symbolic "fusion of fascism and

[3] Noddings specifically denies that this framework stems from Christian ethics, although she does acknowledge that there are overlapping values and concerns (2003, 29).

Catholicism", Kinder suggests, "when the Spanish son rebelled against his father, he was also rebelling against Franco and against God" (1991, 82). Whilst the regime purported to offer protection, it also promoted a logic of sacrifice—both physical and political—on the part of Franco's "sheep".

Just as the Transition coincided with fundamental changes in the Spanish family, as discussed in the previous chapter (see Alberdi 1999, 2004, and 2006), this period also saw a shift in the role of the Church. Whilst this commenced prior to Franco's death, the move to democracy is generally seen as an important factor in the increased secularisation of public life (see Scarlett 2014, 111-112; Pérez-Agote 2010; Rossi and Scappini 2016). Despite these significant changes, Bertrand Pellistrandi argues that the Church has maintained a strong "sociological" presence (2000, 60; see also Muñoz 2009), reflected not only in religious practice, but also in its visibility in social and political affairs. Although this research is almost two decades old, the Church's ongoing presence in Almodóvar's films is testament to the institution's historical and cultural legacy.

With Catholicism so enmeshed in Spanish social and political life, it is no surprise that it figures heavily in the cinema of the Franco era. The "religious film", for instance,[4] became a key genre of Spanish film during the immediate post-Civil War period, reflecting the regime's appropriation of cinema for propagandistic purposes (Jordan and Morgan-Tamosunas 1998, 17), together with the Catholic Church's own use of cinema for such ends (see Pérez 2017; Recalde Iglesias 2014; Colmenero Martínez 2014).[5] This early Francoist cinema overtly celebrated the nationalist cause, emphasising "[p]ersonal values such as piety and obedience as well as loyalty to God" (Jordan and Morgan-Tamosunas 1998, 18). Given the regime's fusing of religion and nation, cinematic encouragement of religious attributes could equally be characterised in terms of patriotism.[6] More generally,

[4] Noting that the definition of the genre is disputed (see Pérez 2017), I adopt Scarlett's definition of the term "religious picture" which suggests that it is a broad genre that requires audience foreknowledge of the various religious motifs referenced in an individual film (2014, 2).

[5] See Pelaz López (2005) for a history of the Church's involvement with cinema, which was both on-screen and regarding censorship (see also Cerdán et al 2012; Colmenero Martínez 2014).

[6] Labanyi (1997) insightfully analyses missionary films of the 1950s, highlighting their "patriarchal orientation," which depicted the other in gendered and racialised terms.

Kinder has traced the influence of religion on Spanish cinema, including the way its national melodrama was "inflected with a specifically Catholic sadomasochistic discourse" (1993, 73), and on-screen indicators of the relationship between Catholicism and Franco's brand of fascism. In a more recent volume, Scarlett traces Spanish screen representations of religion—particularly Catholicism—from Luis Buñuel to the contemporary period. Her analysis suggests, following the work of Pierre Bourdieu, that in the Spanish habitus, religion "functions as symbolic or cultural capital" from which "[n]o director thus far can be found to be immune" (2014, 20). This is evident in Almodóvar's films.

i. Religion across the filmography and in the scholarship: a review

Given "la veta religiosa es una conocida característica del cine español" (García de León and Maldonado 1989, 42), it is unsurprising that this thread is also woven throughout Almodóvar's films. Before we turn to the specific examples of this chapter, I briefly explore the extent to which these films reflect Almodóvar's engagement with religion more broadly. The director himself suggests that religion—which he has described as "un lenguaje que el ser humano inventado ha inventado para relacionarse con algo superior"—"está en todas mis películas" (Vidal 1990, 68). For Daniela Aronica (2005, 28), religion is:

> una de las claves más productivas para entender la actitud ambivalente de Almodóvar frente a la tradición y las modalidades mediante las que el cineasta se adueña de los códigos del pasado para construir una nueva identidad, propia y nacional.

The approach here takes up this key, hoping to unpack Almodóvar's communities here through the lens of religion. Engaging critically with such traditions, Almodóvar's films visibilise the shift away from the Church. We must also acknowledge points of continuity. His narratives implicitly recognise the continuing centrality of religion in people's lives and its status in Spain. That the Church continues to figure so heavily in these films points to a tension that emerges from Spanish history. As Scarlett suggests, from a contemporary perspective, "[t]he persistence of Catholicism as a theme of Spanish cinema is surprising given its association with the authoritarian side of the Civil War and of Francoism" (2014, 171). This sheds light on Almodóvar's portrayal of religion generally as a source of

pain and suffering (Edwards 1995, 169), yet still important in day-to-day life. From another perspective, the Church's ongoing presence reflects contemporary debates around historical memory in Spain (see Labanyi 2008), which foreground "[t]he tension between the public and the private, the personal and the collective" (Cervantes 2014, 419). As with depictions of the family, representations of the Church offer opportunities to work through trauma.

The question arises how—or even whether—such disparate religious allusions can be read together. Within the critical literature, there is considerable debate about Almodóvar's attitude towards religion. As I outline below, this aspect of his work has been read, amongst other things: autobiographically, through the lens of genre, in aesthetic terms, as highlighting ethical concerns, or as emblematic of the director's scepticism of authority. Almodóvar has explicitly articulated the need for a religion as a means by which humans can relate themselves to "algo superior"—although one not inspired by God (Vidal 1990, 68-69). Indeed, Smith proposes: "Perhaps the boldest of Almodóvar's innovations is to secularize Catholic iconography and ideology." (2000, 193)[7] In an interview with Kinder, the director asserted that despite the Spanish reputation of being highly religious: "What we do is adapt religion for our own needs" (1987, 42). In the following discussion, I illustrate how Almodóvar undeniably adapts religion to his needs as a filmmaker (it makes a compelling antagonist), and shows how his characters similarly adapt it to serve theirs. Perhaps thanks to this self-serving deployment, his depiction of religion is characterised by a singular fusion of the sacred and the profane (see Aronica 2005; Sánchez-Alarcón 2008, 340).

Although *La mala educación* and *Entre tinieblas* are the two narratives which most squarely focus on the Church, Almodóvar's filmography is peppered with religious themes and allusions. There are references to Catholic schooling (*La ley del deseo* and *La mala educación*) and missionary work (*Todo sobre mi madre* and *Hable con ella*), whilst the Church is often embodied by priests and, to a lesser extent,

[7] Both of these analyses resonate with Prout's claims that Almodóvar's narratives are "alive with a sense of the sacred, the magical, the uncanny and the numinous, all of which point towards what could perhaps best be described as a religious temperament" (1999, 58).

nuns. Such examples sit alongside more mundane allusions such as character names with religious connotations, often ironic (María and Diego in *Matador*,[8] Gloria in *¿Qué he hecho yo!*, Ángel in *La ley del deseo*). This is not to mention Catholic-inspired décor and the inclusion of religious iconography. María Donapetry (1999, 69-70) highlights the religious holy-water fonts decorating the wall of the family mansion in *Kika* (1993). To these compendious accounts, I would add the sacred heart that looks down over Ricki and Marina in *¡Átame!* (1990), and the icons that populate the walls of Ángel's home in *Matador* (1986), to mention only a few. Other films draw out religious themes through the depiction of "comportamiento ritualizado que define a algunos de los personajes" (Sánchez-Alarcón 2008, 340). Examples include *La ley del deseo*'s depiction of Tina's altar,[9] alongside the highly ritualised relationship between Pablo and his lovers. Meanwhile, *Matador* "hinges around an eclipse defined in dialogue seemingly inspired by Revelation and the train of events unfolds from Ángel's compulsion to confess, which takes him directly from his spiritual adviser in church to the door of the local police station" (Prout 1999, 58). Biblical motifs permeate many of these movies (see Donapetry 1999; Prout 1999, varying from the subtle to the more obvious. For instance, Françoise Mirguet reads *Volver* as echoing the story of Joseph, through not only a character's "return from the dead," but also its major themes: intergenerational trauma, the significance of brotherhood (or sisterhood, in Almodóvar's reimagining), and extreme violence within the family (2011, 30-32). In *Hable con ella*'s "motif of sexual intercourse with a sleeping partner," meanwhile, Mirguet sees traces of Lot and his daughters (2011, 32).

Numerous scholars identify parallels between Almodóvar's life and religious elements of his films. Sánchez-Alarcón suggests that the director's Catholic education is referenced in the characters of two teachers: padre Constantino (*La ley del deseo*) and padre Manolo (*La mala educación*) (2008, 340).[10] Yet in relation to *La*

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8 For Donapetry, these names "would become rather meaningless in a non-Catholic context" (1999, 72), eg María's serial killing would be less shocking if the character was named differently. See also Evans 1993.

9 This is discussed in section D of this chapter.

10 Almodóvar acknowledged that *La mala educación* (together with *Volver*) marked a return to his childhood (Ciment and Rouyer 2006, 17), whilst Alan Stone considers every main character to be an alter ego of Almodóvar (2004). I would suggest autobiographical traces are also evident through the film's references to cinema.

mala educación—the film most often described as autobiographical (see D'Lugo 2006; Fuentes 2009; Mira 2013; Pingree 2004)—Almodóvar has stated: "I'm not telling *my* story, but I'm telling *the* story that most matters to me" (G. Smith 2004, 25; original emphasis). This suggests that, for Almodóvar, the line between his own story and that of his fictions is fluid. Conversely, it cautions us against reading too much into the more specific correspondences between his life and any given plotline. Without undermining the approach taken elsewhere, my analysis in this thesis is not grounded in such autobiographical resonances, although I would agree that these narratives cannot be made sense of without an appreciation of Almodóvar's Catholic heritage (see Sánchez-Alarcón 2008, 340).[11]

The variety of such references is matched only by the diverse tone with which they are presented. Although Camino suggests that Almodóvar portrays representatives of the Church "comically, obliquely or in an overtly critical fashion" (2010, 632), there are also shades of reverence; not for religion *per se*, but for its rituals and spiritual possibilities. Beyond engaging directly with the "religious film" genre (see Scarlett 2014), such allusions can be considered through a variety of generic lenses. Early religious representations tend to draw on comedy, such humour associated with women. This is evident in the almost exclusively female *Entre tinieblas*, discussed below, which is variously comedic and surreal. In *Tacones lejanos*, meanwhile, a deathbed confession offers relief in an otherwise sombre finale. As Becky lies ailing in hospital, after having confessed to the judge that she killed Manuel, she implores: "Y ahora que he cumplido con la justicia de los hombres, permítame cumplir con la de Dios." The film thereby reinforces yet again the parallels between these two sources of "law." The clergyman's ensuing meditation on the merits of lying and confession, as Edwards observes, is "not only incongruous in the context of Becky's hold on life itself, but… becomes in its pomposity a genuine self-parody" (1995, 211).[12] This cameo also highlights the inconsistency between doctrine and practice, undermining the authority of the

[11] Nor, I would add, the social, cultural, political and historical context in which they emerge.

[12] Conversely, Acevedo-Muñoz argues that this offers a final possibility of redemption after years of maternal neglect (2007, 150). It is not unusual for such potentially contradictory readings of Almodóvar's films to arise. I consider both interpretations equally insightful, given the depiction of maternal angst alongside carnivalesque elements such as the jail yard merengue.

Church, most clearly as connected to masculine figure of the priest. The film's press kit notes: "Rebeca and her mother act behind the back of the law of man and that of God (a Catholic God as we understand it in Spain)" (Kinder 1992, 42).

The feminine reworking of patriarchal doctrine is foreshadowed in *Mujeres al borde*, which begins with Pepa's voiceover equating her experience to that of Noah in the flood.[13] A narrative that carefully balances drama with comedy, this film chronicles burgeoning feminine empowerment, with its opening suggesting "the narrative of a new social and moral order authored by the female" (D'Lugo 1991, 61). Other humorous religious allusions include a cameo by Chus Lampreave as Pepa's Jehovah's Witness neighbour. Asked to lie about Iván having visited the apartment building, she responds that she would lie if she could, but her religion strictly forbids it. This dogmatic edict is rendered comedic through straight delivery, while also underscoring Iván's duplicity. Finally, Pepa's appearance in an advertisement for Ecce Omo washing powder reinforces Almodóvar's humorous critique of religious doctrine. The phrase "Ecce Homo"—Latin for "behold, this is man"—appears in John's Gospel as Pilate presents Jesus to the people (A. Wilson 2016). Putting aside debates about the meaning of the phrase,[14] this commercial again explores religious fictions. After a string of references to lying, Pepa—playing a killer's mother concerned with washing away evidence of his crimes—describes the detergent as so good, "parece mentira". This sly joke has been read as symptomatic of Almodóvar's tense relationship with Catholicism (Gómez Gómez 2012, 70), although Donapetry suggests that the advertisement reflects "the power of women to save or protect themselves from others" (1999, 69), given the narrative context of the scene—Pepa having worked throughout the film to "cleanse" herself and others of the effects of men. As in *Entre tinieblas*, female community is galvanised through religion. The oblique connections made between lies, violence and religion in this

[13] This film also contains an isolated reference to Islam: Candela's Shiite lover, who belongs to a vaguely defined terrorist group plotting to bomb a flight to Stockholm. The terrorists' alleged motives and religion are never discussed in depth, and the plotline operates primarily to get Candela to Pepa's apartment, rather offering any real commentary.

[14] The possible allusion to Friedrick Nietzsche's *Ecce Homo* further complicates how we might interpret this brand name.

advertisement also evoke the relationship between religion and the Franco regime, suggesting, I argue, a deeper critique of authority and dogma.

Connected to such moments of comedy are depictions in which the director consciously emphasises the "kitsch" aesthetic of religion (Rouyer and Vié 1988, 24; see also Strauss 2006, 35). This is striking in the Cruz de Mayo altar that takes pride of place in the living room in *La ley del deseo*, discussed in detail below. This shrine brings together high and low culture, including figurines of actresses and a Barbie doll. In a similar vein, it has been suggested that what interests Almodóvar most about religion is its performative aspect (Tabuenca Bengoa 2011, 92). As discussed below, performance and kitsch are combined in *Entre tinieblas*, in which an Abbess becomes enamoured with a nightclub singer. In Prout's (1999) estimation, the film depicts religious sensibility as a primarily visual experience.[15] This film also offers a carnivalesque take on religion, with its parade of convent transgressions: acid-tripping, a pet tiger, and a seamstress whose costumes for the Virgin Mary would not look out of place on pop icon Madonna. Such tropes are defined in early readings of Almodóvar's religious imagery as "pura iconografía" (Holguín 1994, 94) or "pura parafernalia" (García de León and Maldonado 1989, 42), with the director co-opting religious imagery for secular purposes. Allinson similarly sees Almodóvar's religious references as primarily aesthetic, suggesting that "[a]t best, the rituals of the Church are shown to be empty," although he acknowledges that the director focuses attention at other points on the "more sinister, superstitious form of religion" (2001, 33-34). While I agree that the director is sceptical of the Church, in our discussion of *La ley del deseo*, we challenge this reading of ritual as empty. Indeed, this film clearly foregrounds its power.

Other scholars view Almodóvar's representation of religion as overtly critical—especially in *La mala educación*. Piganiol, for instance, suggests that the Church is "a central target" for Almodóvar due to its links to patriarchy and traditional masculinity (2009, 92). Whilst consistent with one of the central premises of this thesis—that Almodóvar's project involves critically dismantling key institutions of

[15] Alongside visual elements, Prout (1999, 57) notes the use of "religious music" in *Pepi, Luci, Bom*.

traditional Spain—Piganiol's reading is perhaps too dualistic, overlooking the complexity of these representations. As I outline below, even paedophile padre Manolo is offered some sympathy. Yet, the nexus between religion and sexuality (see Cervantes 2014, 421) certainly takes a darker turn in the representation of institutional sexual abuse. Alluded to only in passing in *La ley del deseo*, as we see below, in *La mala educación* this critique becomes "totalmente explicita" (Pozo Fajarnés 2012, 6). Even a brief mention of the Church in *Hable con ella* serves to remind of religious wrongdoing. One of *torera* Lydia's entourage makes passing mention of a news item about the rape of a number of nuns by priests in an unidentified country. Whilst this abuse of power mirrors Benigno's rape of Alicia, the dialogue draws attention to sexual misdeeds committed under the auspices of the Catholic Church. In a less direct way, *Matador* equally hints at religion's oppressive potential, linking as it does Berta's religious fervour with her son's sexual immaturity. Moreover, Berta's affiliation with the Opus Dei undermines her relationship with her son, and her dogma marks her as a "castrating" mother (see Donapetry 1999, 71).[16] Indeed, Ángel adopts responsibility for the murders of his mentor to purge himself of religious guilt (see D'Lugo 1991, 57).[17] These links between sexuality and religion exemplify Scarlett's observation that Spanish cinema is inflected with a "common religious sense with certain markings, particularly pertaining to the body and gender" (2014, 164). Although Church doctrine represses sexuality generally—and importantly, homosexuality—the nuns and priests of *Entre tinieblas* and *La mala educación* nevertheless explore their desires in a range of ways, foregrounding the threats represented by moral tyranny. This echoes Guy Hocquenghem's analysis of

[16] The association with the Opus Dei inscribes Berta in a gendered hierarchy whereby women's roles were viewed as clearly subordinate and/or complementary to those of men (see Moreno 2012). Women were instructed to let their actions be guided by "la entrega, la delicadeza o la tenacidad" (Moreno 2012, 190), qualities which again conflict with Berta's comportment.

[17] Nevertheless, this film also offers a more hopeful portrayal of spirituality, reflecting the mutability of Almodóvar's engagement with these themes. Even as Ángel attempts to "save" his mentor by offering to take responsibility for their sins (see Donapetry 1999, 71), his unexplained visions lead the police to the killers. Institutionalised religion fails Ángel, but Almodóvar does not refuse him mystical experience. This suggests that whilst religious institutions are broadly repressive, spirituality is essential to the human experience.

law as a "homosexual libidinal site", in which the condemnation of homosexuality stimulates sexual desire even as it seeks to repress it (1993, 61, 66).[18]

Donapetry argues that in Catholic rituals and imagery Almodóvar finds "an avenue of expression for the substance of his stories and not mere items of folkloric decoration" (1999, 68). This is most evident in the film we turn to in the final section of this chapter: *La ley del deseo*, in which Tina's Cruz de Mayo altar is treated as a sincere (and effective) form of worship (despite its kitschness). These films indicate that certain human experiences—desire, love, suffering—ought to be honoured and that this may at times require self-sacrifice. Donapetry, focusing on the "Christ-like" nexus between passion and death in *Matador* and *La ley del deseo*, offers an insightful conclusion: "God may very well be dead or may not 'be' at all for Almodóvar personally, but the ethics and emotions, particularly the pathos of his characters, come through loud and clear." The cinematic language used to articulate such ideas has "visible roots in the Catholic religion" (1999, 74-75). This indicates that religion might be redeemable, in Almodóvar's view. If Almodóvar reimagines the family, as discussed in the previous chapter, there is a question around the extent to which he allows the Church such flexibility. The films discussed in this chapter reflect on the role of religion in the new, democratic Spain, persistently hinting at, if not foregrounding, the Church's dark side. I refuse any reading of this corpus as offering a "linear" narrative that moves from optimism about the possibilities of religion, possibly offered by *Entre tinieblas*, to a more fatalistic stance about its "inevitable" violence. Instead, whilst this early film attempts to reimagine the Church, organised religion is ultimately irredeemable. Although I posit that Almodóvar is sceptical of religion—and does not rehabilitate this institution in the same way that he does the family—my approach is not totalising. In this way, I follow queer and feminist theories that destabilise boundaries between the centre and the marginal, challenging positivist claims to offer comprehensive and neutral accounts of the world (see England 1994).

[18] This dovetails with Michel Foucault's thesis that the restrictive discursive economy regarding sex is linked to the proliferation of discourses on the topic (1990, 18f).

B. The Church: Una "mala" institución

i. *La mala educación*: A lesson in religious misdeeds

While earlier Almodóvar films suggest the possibility offered by spirituality even as they critique organised religion, no such spirituality is on offer in *La mala educación*, arguably one of the bleakest films in this corpus. Offering an "honest treatment" of child sexual abuse in the Catholic Church (Acevedo-Muñoz 2007, 263), this film has a classic Almodovarian structure, with multiple intertwined narratives and competing timelines (see Carcaud-Macaire 2000, 172).[19] If *Matador* highlights certain repressive aspects of the Church and their individual consequences, *La mala educación* drills further into the impossibility of community within the institution's confines. Here, "religion serves an antagonistic role" (Cervantes 2014, 430) and there is no trace of meaningful interpersonal connection; these characters seem destined to remain isolated. Although the representation of religion across this filmography is invariably critical, this film reverses any perceived "softening" in Almodóvar's stance towards this institution (Allinson 2001, 35).[20] This suggests there is no single way of reading his attitude towards religion.

In *La mala educación*, Almodóvar illustrates how religious repression interferes with the development of healthy identity and, accordingly, prevents meaningful relationships. Here, as Smith proposes, "Almodóvar seems more willing than he once was to denounce ethical crimes, such as rape" (Smith 2006a, 161). Donapetry highlights how the underlying religious motifs in films such as *Matador* and *La ley del deseo* echo the Christ narrative, giving (romantic) passion an inherently tragic timbre (1999, 74). Here, the tragedy is not the subjugation of desire, but its abusive misdirection. This is not to suggest that the strict regulation of sexuality by the Church (or any other institution) mitigates individual accountability for the sexual abuse of children. Indeed, what this narrative suggests is that the institution is

[19] Various insightful analyses have been offered of this film from different perspectives. Pastor (2013) approaches it through the lens of genre. A number of scholars consider the film's historicity and reworking of the past (D'Lugo 2009; Gutiérrez-Albilla 2013b; Cervantes 2014), while Pérez (2011) focuses on the film's foregrounding of childhood sexuality.

[20] Allinson refers to the sympathetic priest who hears the deathbed confession (*Tacones lejanos*), Victor's bible lessons (*Carne trémula*), and compassionate nun Rosa (*Todo sobre mi madre*).

deeply implicated in the abuse. *La mala educación* reveals how the religious institution causes longstanding harm to the child victim and the paedophile priest, whilst also having flow-on effects on those around them.

ii. Critiquing the Church

No Almodóvar film is as scathing of the Church as *La mala educación*. As José Luis Pozo Fajarnés puts it, such criticism "vertebra toda la trama" (2012, 6). Apparently written to denounce Almodóvar's own Catholic education, Geoff Pingree suggests this film be read as a "collective biography of Spain, and in particular an account of the increased engagement with the country's recent past" (2004, 5-8). It may therefore be understood, at least in part, as a denouncement of the abuses of power that occurred under the Franco Regime, including those perpetrated by the Church. The narrative framing device—which offers insight into a director's career, from the search for a story to the filming and finally alluding to future success—is also meaningful. This is a story which "envisions a director who has finally acknowledged the importance of confronting his past while recognizing its importance to his own movement into the future." (Amago 2011, 106) The centrality of this history is pertinent not only to Enrique Goded, the protagonist, but the Spanish national narrative. In fact, this film has been read by numerous critics as meditating on the weight of the past on the present (see Pingree 2004; Blake 2005; Acevedo-Muñoz 2007; Gutiérrez-Albilla 2013b). The narrative suggests that the resolution of historical trauma is required for a healthy "present". This is achieved through the film's confrontations with Ignacio's past, whilst Juan's trauma is framed as unknowable, and hence less resolvable. Ultimately, this reinforces the impossibility of a single reading of the narrative's engagement with the past. What is clear throughout the film is the ways in which the abuses committed within the confines of the Church impact on the characters' identities and communities.

a. Confronting the past

The film's dual narratives underscore this nexus between past and present, with its two storylines sharing characters and a mutual past. This structure is utilised to develop narrative intrigue and to highlight the psychic disturbance of the

protagonist(s). In the "framing narrative", a young actor, Juan (who goes by the "artistic name" Ángel), has assumed the identity of his brother, Ignacio. Initially at least, he successfully dupes both the audience and Ignacio's childhood friend—and first love—Enrique Goded, a filmmaker. Enrique and Ignacio were schoolmates at a Catholic boarding school where the latter was abused by priest and teacher padre Manolo. Enrique, suffering writers' block, is approached one day by Ángel with a story, "La visita," written by Ignacio, which he offers for Enrique to adapt, with himself in the lead role.[21] This becomes the film-within-the-film. The actor's deception is ultimately revealed to Enrique and the audience during the film's production in the same breath-taking moment when we discover that Ignacio died of a drug overdose, well before Ángel arrived at Enrique's office. In a flashback (offering in effect a third story arc), we are shown Ignacio's descent into addiction and blackmailing of padre Manolo, now known as señor Berenguer, who develops a perverse relationship with Juan/Ángel. In the film-within-the-film, *La visita*, Ángel again portrays his brother, although the film's protagonist is in fact Zahara, Ignacio's cross-dressing alter ego. *La visita* depicts Ignacio's abuse at the hands of padre Manolo during the boy's schooldays, together with Ignacio's later confrontation with his abuser—the central visit of this secondary plotline. Its title indicates the significance of various visits depicted throughout the narratives: Ángel's initial visit to Enrique, the priest's to Enrique to reveal Ignacio's death, and Enrique's to the brothers' home village.[22]

If Catholicism demands "self-sacrifice" (Scarlett 2014, 166), in this film this is depicted in its most negative light. This stems partly from the religion's strong association with the maintenance of the heteronormative patriarchal order, which

[21] While one narrative strand concerns Ángel's efforts to be cast as Ignacio/Zahara, the film's serpentine structure reveals his success early on. In a smalltown bar, the "auténtica, e inimitable" (as introduced by her friend, Paquito) Zahara impersonates Sara Montiel and encounters the fictionalised Enrique, only realising his identity when she rifles through his wallet. She leaves him money, a handwritten note, and a copy of "La visita: Relato de Ignacio Rodríguez." This *mise-en-abyme* illustrates how the references to Ignacio's story confirm the impossibility of a reunion with his childhood love; the two are doomed to meet only through the written word. This results, as Asibong puts it, in "a nightmarish sense of limitless isolation, compounded by the oppressive hall of mirrors into which the film's multiple fantasies, fictions, films within films and narratives within narratives force us" (2009, 190).

[22] For a detailed analysis of these three visits, see D'Lugo 2006.

"requires" the repression of certain desires.[23] We see this play out in this film, where not only does Ignacio suffer at the hands of padre Manolo, but his consequent separation from childhood friend has a profound impact on both of their lives and the development of their identities. Ultimately, the film seems to deny the possibility of love: Ignacio and Enrique are separated before their affection can blossom into adult love; Berenguer develops unrequited feelings for Ángel, who uses the older man to get rid of his embarrassing older brother; Ignacio's murder reflects a lack of brotherly love; Enrique uses Ángel as a cipher for his lost love, with no regard to Ángel's own desires. Each character of the film is denied the opportunity to explore or fulfil his desires. Love is denied any chance to grow and the root cause of this are those structures within the Church that are seen to enable sexual abuse.

Although Ignacio's trauma is visible in the consequences of drug-addiction on his body and mind, Enrique is also shown to have suffered for the loss of this first love. In the tradition of many Almodóvar characters, Enrique experiences intense romantic disappointments. Besides the forced separation from Ignacio, there is his equally fraught relationship with Ignacio's brother. Initially premised on an assumed identity, this encounter hints at an inability to develop a meaningful adult relationship. When Enrique has finished reading "La visita"—presented as a flashback that we later learn is the film Enrique and Juan make together—Almodóvar uses fades to show the blurring of distinctions between young/old and "real"/fictional, as the young Ignacio becomes the adult Juan. This also reinforces the emotional charge of the relationship for Enrique, who is shown crying as he leaves the boarding school, seeing his friend for what turns out to be the last time. Of course, at this point in the narrative Juan's cover is still in place; Enrique's happiness at seeing the man he believes to be his long-lost friend is clearly conveyed through his expression and the warm embrace with which he greets him. Tensions emerge almost immediately, however, when "Ignacio" insists on being called Ángel, creating a rupture between the past and their renewed friendship. Whilst both men are keen to adapt the short story, Enrique is also motivated to reignite their childhood

[23] As mentioned in the Introduction, Althusser views religious institutions as one of the ideological state apparatuses responsible for maintaining dominant ideology (1977, 143-146).

connection, frustrating Ángel by getting high during their night out together, rather than focusing on the project. As they drive back to Enrique's house, the past interrupts the silence between them, as Little Tony's "Cuore Matto" plays on the radio. Ángel's inability to recognise that this is "their song" is an early sign that all is not as it seems.[24]

The complex power dynamics at play are of course in part established by Ángel's preparedness to manipulate the desire he inspires in others. He does so to benefit professionally (in the case of Enrique) and financially (as with Berenguer). However, this is not to undermine Enrique's contribution to the situation. Pastor notes that although Ángel initially uses his sexuality to manipulate Enrique, it is in the end the latter who—upon learning Juan's true identity—"takes sadistic pleasure into (sic) recreating Juan into Ignacio's image by transforming him into Zahara." (2013, 4) As is the case with similarly "creative" characters such as singer Becky of *Tacones lejanos*, Enrique's artistic energies seem to be tied to a lack of consideration for the emotions of others.[25] Whilst Enrique can possibly be characterised as the "victim" of Ángel/Juan's ruse, he also fails to live up to the ethical framework I argue is outlined in Almodóvar's films: the ethics of care. As noted, this framework offers a relational approach to morality, requiring us to seek out the other "and put on our shoes and go to learn from them about their place" (Gilligan 2014, 104). In line with this mandate, Juan and Ignacio's mother cautions Enrique not to judge her son too harshly, and it is this mother-son relationship that reveals Juan's own ability to care. The only time he shows concern for anyone outside himself is when he learns from Ignacio that their mother has suffered a heart attack. Juan immediately calls her, his

[24] While the melody and rhythm reflect the scene's tension, this Italian pop song also offers lyrical comment. Its title translates to "crazy heart", raising the spectre of unrequited love, romantic secrets, and suspicion. Soon after, Enrique reveals his mistrust of Ángel: "Por mucho que te miro no reconozco el Ignacio que conocía en el colegio. A quien le encantaba 'Cuore Matto'…." See Vernon (2009) for a more wide-ranging analysis of Almodóvar's use of music.

[25] Becky is discussed further in section E.ii of chapter three (see especially from page 227). The apparent exclusion of "creative" characters from Almodóvar's privileged communities is an issue that this thesis does not resolve, but these films present a tension between creative endeavours and care for the other, or community. It is perhaps only Becky and another character also played by Marisa Paredes, Leo (*La flor de mi secreto*) who escape this double bind, although Becky only reconciles with her daughter on her deathbed. Meanwhile, Leo's creative ambitions cause her distress when her desire to write thrillers puts her in breach of her publishing contract. Here, however, this sparks connection, as the film ends with smitten Ángel taking on her romance-writing obligations.

worry for her wellbeing evident in his tone of voice and body language. Enrique, conversely, is unable to empathise with Juan.

It is from the brothers' mother that Enrique learns about Ángel's deception, although not the exact circumstances of Ignacio's death. Yet he decides to maintain the pretence. When the two men finally confront each other, Ángel argues that he did not lie, given Enrique learnt his identity before his audition. The implication is that the director is equally guilty of duplicity and certainly Enrique's ability to ignore the younger man's conduct runs counter to the call of the ethics of care to allow understanding, trust and mutuality to guide behaviour (Held 2014, 111; Noddings 1984). D'Lugo proposes that an explanation for this is offered by a story mentioned earlier in the film as Enrique trawls the news for inspiration. This item tells of a woman who committed suicide by crocodile in a Taiwanese zoo, jumping into the enclosure. D'Lugo describes Enrique's conduct as "an almost suicidal desire to know the source of Juan's enigmatic being and the true circumstances of Ignacio's death," offering an allegory for the "need of contemporary Spaniards to break through the deceptive surface of the democratic Transition" (2009, 381). Enrique himself—referring to Ángel's prolonged "audition"—likens embarking on the filming of *La visita* to the woman who threw herself to crocodiles, embracing them as they ate her.[26] Whilst D'Lugo's analysis is persuasive, his characterisation perhaps overstates Enrique's "pursuit of the truth behind the mask" (2009, 381), suggesting a dogged investigation of historical misdeeds at odds with his passive characterisation. Whilst Enrique does seek out Ignacio's mother—who counsels him not to judge her younger son, deeply affected by finding his brother's dead body—Enrique otherwise appears content to allow matters to unfold before him. He throws himself into his fictionalised "homage" to Ignacio rather than into pursuing the "truth".

[26] This connects with a broader trend in this filmography, whereby creativity comes at a high cost. For filmmakers such as Enrique, Pablo (*La ley del deseo*) and Mateo (*Los abrazos rotos*), artistic passion precludes enduring romantic love and even community. These examples suggest that creative focus limits the possibilities of responding to the other as required by the ethics of care (see Gilligan 2014). This is equally the case for Becky (*Tacones lejanos*) whose successful singing career comes at the cost of her relationship with her daughter, although they are ultimately reconciled. See Marcantonio (2007) for a discussion of how this might be seen to play out for the director himself. She views the incorporation of Pina Bausch's choreography in *Hable con ella* as revealing the limits of Almodóvar's authorship. It is beyond the scope of this thesis to go into further detail on this, but this certainly suggests interesting further lines of inquiry.

The encounter with the boys' mother takes Enrique to their childhood home in the Galician town Ortigueira. Greeting him with news that she has an undelivered letter for him, Ignacio and Juan's mother reveals that her older son is dead. Although Enrique responds calmly to this news, he is visibly stunned when, as he passes through the hallway, he views photos of Ángel and Ignacio side-by-side and learns that Ángel is in fact Juan, Ignacio's younger brother. For a moment, Enrique is dumbstruck. Shown to the attic where Ignacio liked to spend time, there is sadly nothing of his childhood friend to be recovered: Juan burnt everything. In contrast to Berta's house in *Matador*, this space is homely and inviting. The walls are adorned not with religious imagery, but with family photos and a painted portrait of a couple that hangs over the boys' mother's bed. In a long shot showing Enrique waiting as she collects the undelivered letter, a fixed camera offers a view down the hallway, revealing over a dozen photos on the kitchen wall. All black and white, these appear to be family portraits. Whilst entirely congruent in this domestic setting, the multitude of faces points to the significance of identity, and of the past. For even if Ángel has attempted to transcend the confines of his rural origins, his ambitions are grounded in his family history: namely, in adopting the identity of his brother. The personalised mementos here also contrast starkly with the décor in Enrique's house—a stunning, angular modernist space filled with *objets d'art* and stylised paintings. The warm final embrace between Enrique and the mother further highlights the familiarity of the village setting, alluding to his affection for her older son, whilst also foregrounding the lack of affection in other relationships in this film.

b. Desiring Juan and failures of care

This lack of affection is evident even in the sexual relationships depicted: Juan and Berenguer, and Juan and Enrique. The latter's "sexual use" of Juan's body is, for Nancy Blake, an abuse of power equal to that perpetrated by padre Manolo (2005, 616).[27] Yet, as Blake acknowledges, Enrique never appears satisfied by these sexual interactions. In contrast to the priest—who is clearly and strongly drawn to his young student, and, in the alternate narrative, to his brother—the director's desire is less evident, despite the film's play on the nexus between the visual and the erotic. As

[27] Pastor also suggests that Enrique "forces" Juan into a sexual relationship (2013, 4).

Jorge Pérez proposes, the sight of children (classmates of Enrique and Ignacio) playing in the water is put to the spectator as a potential, and highly uncomfortable, erotic spectacle, "emphasizing the sensual contact of those bodies in motion with the water" (2011, 150; see also Acevedo-Muñoz 2007, 270). This is evoked in the later poolside seduction of Enrique by Juan/Ángel; the camera's focus on Ángel's body in the water recalls the younger bodies. As Pérez suggests, this implicates the spectator into the complex erotic dynamics of the film. If metacinematic moments in Almodóvar's films, as Sánchez-Alarcón proposes, emphasise the importance and relevance of the inner workings of cinematography (2008, 334), they also foreground the cinematic mediation of desire. The burgeoning relationship between the young Ignacio and Enrique also directly connects desire and the medium of film. As they sit watching *Esa mujer* (1969),[28] the soft light of the screen reveals the boys engaging in mutual masturbation. The cinema, Pérez observes, is here presented as "a private place to share fantasies activated by the mesmerizing image of a (heterosexual) diva" (2011, 152), contributing to the growing number of queer readings of cultural spaces.

The boys' solidarity is quickly destroyed by padre Manolo, who expels Enrique, upon discovering the pair together after curfew. In the filmed version of *La visita*, this forced separation seems to fuel Zahara's anger, although she equally censures the priest for the abuse. During their confrontation, when the clergyman protests that he loved Ignacio, Zahara responds tersely: "a un niño de diez años no se le quiere, se le acosa, se abusa de él"—the clearest denunciation of sexual violence across Almodóvar's oeuvre. Yet even here, this condemnation is tempered by the sympathetic portrayal of Berenguer as a victim of Juan's manipulations. For D'Lugo (2009, 381):

> Berenguer is, from a moral position, a despicable character. Yet… he evokes a certain pathos by virtue of being doomed by his own uncontrollable desires… the old

[28] This intertextual reference has received significant attention. D'Lugo (2009) highlights how both films dramatise moral ambiguity, whilst Montiel's embodiment of the fluidity of history and identity echoes Almodóvar's engagement with the past. Kinder (2009a) also suggests intriguing parallels between the films, including the use of flashback and Montiel and Gael García Bernal's transnational mobility. Pavlović, Perriam and Triana-Toribio, meanwhile, argue that *La mala educación* contributes to the "recuperation" of Montiel, seen as challenging the narrow view of women under Franco (2012, 328).

> Manichean structure of good and evil that seemed to rule Francoist morality has been replaced by a more compassionate understanding of what Almodóvar has famously called "the law of desire."

This perhaps explains why Berenguer is Almodóvar's favourite character of the film, due also to his willingness to "burn in hell" for his passion (Hirschberg 2004, 27). Conversely, the narrative of the innocent and abused child is perhaps not so simple. Not only does Ignacio deny padre Manolo's assertion that it was Enrique who led him into the bathrooms, claiming responsibility himself, he later attempts to exploit the priest's desire. Clearly jealous, the priest threatens to expel Enrique as Ignacio is undressing him in the sacristy, and the boy responds: "Si no le echa, haré lo que usted quiera". As Pérez observes, this scene "sketches a post-Foucauldian understanding of power relations", in which such dynamics are unstable and shift over time (2011, 151). Whilst his friend is nevertheless banished from the school, Ignacio is not as powerless as he might appear.[29]

When, in *La visita*, Zahara confronts padre Manolo, s/he initially professes to be Ignacio's sister, telling the priest that Ignacio died in an accident. Whilst the priest does not believe that s/he is Ignacio's sister, nor that s/he is a woman at all, this lie further complicates the already highly layered identities of Juan/Ángel/Ignacio—the performance of Gael García Bernal one of the few things to link each character. For Pingree, this complex plotting "underscores the existential murkiness that descends on the characters as they confront their complex and contradictory selves and attempt to realize their genuine desire" (2004, 5). Beyond underscoring her voracious ambition, Zahara's encounter with padre Manolo intimates Juan's fraud in the film's principal narrative, and the fate of the "real" Ignacio. Such narrative deception accords with the film's characterisation as a thriller or *noir*, although *La mala educación* also integrates some limited comedy—embodied by Paquito, Zahara's camp best friend, whom Almodóvar has described as an "oasis for the whole crew" (D'Lugo 2006, 147). In contrast with other works in this filmography, which have at times been criticised for representing sexual assault in kitsch or even

[29] It is interesting that his brother's exploitation of Berenguer's attraction mirrors this scene.

humorous ways,[30] "the violation in *Bad Education* is wrenching in part for the stylistic command marshalled in staging it" (Goss 2009, 85).

This violence goes beyond the molestation of young Ignacio, and extends to the uncomfortable sex scene between Ángel and Enrique. Kinder, for instance, notes the "pained expression" on García Bernal's face throughout the scene (2009a, 286). The apex, of course, being the fratricide committed by Ángel/Juan. This character is one of the most complex and troubling across Almodóvar's body of work. A simulacrum of his brother, he is a highly unstable personality, with unclear motivations. Through his callous claim to Ignacio's identity, Ángel represents perhaps the older, but far less likeable, brother of Tina or Femme Letal. When Enrique questions his identity, Ángel contests angrily: "¿Y tú quién coño te crees para decidir quién soy o quién no soy?" For Ballesteros (2009, 6):[31]

> [the] playful, parodic and subversive potential of non-normative desire, transvestism, and transsexualism that characterized Almodóvar's early films appears to have assumed… a more disturbing tenor, almost as if performativity had become a curse and sheer punishment, a painful burden to others, a tragic irony.

The light-hearted tone with which such themes are explored in earlier films—the humorous sadomasochism of *Pepi, Luci, Bom* or the light-hearted incestuous relationships in *Laberinto de pasiones*—is here replaced with a far more ominous mood. Yet the root of Juan's trauma is never identified. The only hint is his allusions to the difficulties of growing up with an unabashedly gay, drug-addicted brother. If the abuse is implicitly the cause of Ignacio's addiction, not to mention his decision to undergo gender reassignment,[32] it could also be indirectly responsible for Juan's trauma.

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30 For an extended discussion of these critiques see: Saenz (2013); Zanzana (2010); Edwards (2001); Hart (1997).

31 Kinder similarly observes that this film offers "a darker reading of sexual mobility and authorial power" (2009a, 272).

32 Ballesteros argues that linking Ignacio's sex change to his drug addiction and, subsequently, to his death, "appears to punish Ignacio for his/her transgression even as he denounces the repressive climate in which s/he had to live" (2009, 94).

iii. Queer temporalities and trauma in *La mala educación*

Beyond sharing characters, *La mala educación*'s multiple narratives intersect at various points in space and time, which work together to reinforce the impossibility of community. This impossibility must be understood, I argue, as stemming directly from the sexual violence that occurred under the auspices of the Church. The following discussion of sexual relations in this film highlights the significant consequences of the priest's abuse, which ultimately preclude all of the film's characters from engaging in any meaningful community. The narrative's temporal structure reinforces the interpersonal limitations of its characters. I contend that the temporal dimensions of this film can be usefully read through the notion of "queer" time. As mentioned previously, queer temporalities foreground non-heteronormative life narratives through an attentiveness to the back-and-forth of lived experience (see Halberstam 2005; Jagose 2009, 158). As with women's time, this privileges "non-linear narrative based on repetition and reversion" (Smith 1992, 170). Without denying the past's impact on the present, *La mala educación* suggests a web of connections that defies linear logic in a similar way.[33] This is thanks not only to the multiple overlapping narratives, but also to the blurring of the line between truth and fiction. As discussed, this is highlighted by the narrative's structure, together with the visual allusions to fractured or multiple identities.

For Halberstam, queer time offers a "useful framework for assessing political and cultural change in the late twentieth and early twenty-first centuries" (2005, 4). Kinder's "retroserial" reading of *La mala educación*, *La ley del deseo* and *¿Qué he hecho yo!* affirms this. Whilst Kinder does not explicitly refer to queer conceptualisations of time, her approach suggests that this "fraternal trilogy" can best be understood when read together: Almodóvar's "films remind us that new works influence old works just as old works influence new ones" (2009a, 269; see also Smith 2006a). Focusing on brotherly rivalry in the three films, Kinder draws on René Girard's account of the Oedipus myth and proposes that it is the desire to imitate the father (or brother) that motivates the primary violence, rather than the

[33] As Vicente Rodríguez Ortega puts it, the narrative "subjects the investigative mode to an increasing reflexivity, to the point of becoming 'meta-Almodovarian'" (2012, 271).

desire for the mother (2009a, 289). She argues: "Mimetic doubling is thus the source of the murderous impulse, and doubling relies on splitting, the way Ignacio felt 'split into two' (male and female, victim and killer) after he was molested" (2009a, 289).[34] For Kinder, the historical conflict between the "two Spains" imbues brotherhood with rivalry, giving rise to "both an incestuous desire for fusion and a fear of interchangeability" that erupts in violence (2009a, 291).

This paradox, Kinder argues, offers a possible explanation for Juan's fratricide: "to deny his brother's superiority or difference by becoming him" (2009a, 291). This narrative urges a "palimpsestuous" approach, not only within its own confines, but beyond them. The mystery of Juan's motivations must be sought, she proposes, in the earlier films of the "fraternal trilogy". Kinder notes various parallels between Ignacio and Juan/Ángel and the brothers of *¿Qué he hecho yo!* These include: their sexuality, Ignacio and Miguel are openly gay, while Juan and Toni are more sexually ambiguous;[35] the molestation of Ignacio and of Miguel (by the dentist, and a friend's father); and Toni's drug dealing, which connects him to addict Ignacio. If in the earlier film, Gloria and the *abuela* separate the brothers geographically, in *La mala educación* fraternal "jealousy erupts into violence" (2009a, 277). Reading the narrative through these complex, overlapping characters and motifs, we observe that alongside the emphasis on brotherly love and rivalry, the film's queering of post-Transition Spain through the Ignacio/Enrique love story also suggests both continuities and significant ruptures with the past. Almodóvar does not shy away from representing the boys' burgeoning desire. As Pérez says, the emphasis on their sexual awakening offers "the gutsiest rewriting of that foundational narrative of the innocent child" (2011, 149). Of note is the boys' mutual masturbation in the cinema—an institution that Prout argues has "usurp[ed] the space previously

[34] For Kinder, loving mother Gloria and sensitive gay son Miguel are combined in the character of Tina (*La ley del deseo*), whilst they reappear separately in *La mala educación* (2009a, 279). Nevertheless, she argues that the relationship between mother and son is represented in the later film with less emotional intensity, due in part to its *noir* atmosphere.

[35] Kinder suggest that Ángel "turns sexual mobility, previously a progressive political force in Almodóvar movies, into a venal form of opportunism, stripping away its political edge and glamour" (2009a, 286). Asibong, meanwhile, describes him as "vampiric", his sole purpose "to suck the lifeblood from Ignacio's writing, memory and – crucially – suffering, all for the sake of his own obsessive quest for stardom, and certainly not in the interests of a radically ethical 'incorporation' of Ignacio's various wounds" (2009, 189; original emphasis).

accorded religious spectacle" (1999, 56).[36] This flagrant, but not graphic, representation of young sexuality depicts a blossoming romance that is never given the opportunity to become an adult relationship. Yet the boys' farewell when Enrique is expelled is not truly final. The ongoing impact of the separation on the boys' development imbues their lives with a melancholic memento of each other. Conversely, the possibility of a reunion is offered years later, when Ángel appears at Enrique's studio. Whilst Ángel is of course not what he seems, he does bring about a reunion of sorts, through *La visita* and Ignacio's letter to Enrique, arguably only obtained because of Ángel's emergence. Through these splintered narratives, the boys' farewell is refracted and repeated.

The consequences of this separation are also alluded to in *La visita* when Zahara returns to confront, and blackmail, the priest. Whilst Zahara's assertion that in 1977, things have changed and "esta sociedad valora más mi libertad que su hipocresía" has a certain truth, it is not simply a matter of the "end of the past," as Acevedo-Muñoz puts it (2007, 272). If this reflects, as he proposes, Almodóvar's "assessment of the Spanish political process since democratisation" (2007, 271), this is complicated by the film's dénouement. The past features heavily in the lives of this film's characters, whether in the melancholy of a lost romance (Enrique), the pain of childhood bullying (Ángel), or atonement for past sins (Berenguer). The impact of these memories and events continues beyond the narrative. A written epilogue states that Berenguer never left Ángel's life, begging him for money before turning to blackmail, before finally being killed in a car accident. His story ends with the line: "El vehículo lo conducía Ángel Andrade." The blackmail "victim" becomes the blackmailer, and suffers the same fate as Ignacio, his own would-be blackmailer. Both are fatalities of the opaquely ambitious Ángel. This postscript suggests a cycle of violence and deception that offers a darker imprint of the temporal structure

[36] Kinder (2009a, 282) offers a similar reading of another cultural realm, suggesting that as a publisher, Berenguer "performs a more secular version of the same censorship and exploitation that he exercised as principal of Ignacio's religious school: for the tyrannical publisher quite literally fucks the author, whose story undergoes a chain of appropriations and accommodations."

referred to above.[37] Yet Berenguer's finale cannot be viewed as a simple reproduction of Ignacio's story, whether we accept that of the metafilm or the version offered in *La visita*.

Adopting Sarah Dillon's palimpsestuous approach as one that reveals the competing and interlocking narratives within a given text (2005), I argue that this narrative's multiple accounts of suffering and deception acknowledge the difficulties of recovering from the related trauma. As Noelia Saenz suggests, the film's narrative structure—in which the sexual abuse is only ever disclosed through the film-within-the-film—offers "a safe space in which Ignacio can address his victimisation. Through Almodóvar's framing, it is also a space that refuses to further victimize through the re-enactment of this form of violence" (2013, 251) Even within *La visita*, the abuse is implied, but never represented on screen. If the film's complex narrative reproduces the splintering effect of trauma on the individual psyche, alongside the ripple effect of the abuse, it does not exploit the abuse visually. Without denying the impact of the assault, the framing foregrounds instead the relationship between the two boys, allowing for readings that highlight on-screen celebration of young queer love (see Pérez 2011). Whether the trauma is seen to be the abuse itself or the forced separation, the film's interlocking narratives highlight competing identities and experiences, offering a "queer" temporality that refuses a single interpretation. Yet whilst I argued in the previous chapter that such strategies are implicated in the reimagining of the family, here the Church is clearly relegated to the past.

Time in this film ultimately reinforces the impossibility of community, tracing the fractured identities of Juan/Ángel/Ignacio back to the sexual abuse that occurred under the auspices of the Church. Religion is thereby premised as the root of the lack of meaningful relationships in this film. When we turn to *Entre tinieblas* below, we will see that religion is not rejected wholesale, but even where this film offers the possibility of community in a religious space, the two are shown to be ultimately irreconcilable due to the very structures of the Church.

[37] This is not to suggest a direct line between these queer temporalities and these negative consequences. If Juan's description of growing up in the shadow of his transsexual brother recalls the difficulties of being openly gay in rural Spain during the Franco regime, it also implies an internalisation of heteronormative values, grounding his violence in such norms.

iv. The incompatibility of religion and the ethics of care

The communicative failures in *La mala educación* shed light on the incompatibility of religion with one of the key concepts for our understanding of community in Almodóvar's films: the ethics of care. What is striking is the almost total lack of community and ethical concern. This contrasts with the way in which the films discussed in chapter one foreground the ethics of care in their presentation of the community's constructive possibilities. If, as Almodóvar has suggested, *La mala educación* appropriates the "language" of Catholic rituals (G. Smith 2004, 25), the film's conclusion about the failure of care and the (im)possibilities of community must be read in light of this language: such failures are due, in part, to the institutional context. Whilst sexual assault in other Almodóvar films takes place in private (with the exception of *Hable con ella*, where it occurs in a hospital), in *La mala educación* the abuse is facilitated by the institutional setting, as embodied by padre Manolo's fellow priest, padre José. This priest, for instance, instructs the young Ignacio to sing for his colleague, clearly aware of his attraction to the boy. The Church provides a front behind which the priests feel emboldened to act on their darkest desires without consequences. In fact, the Church is shown as culpable through padre Manolo in a scene within *La visita*. When Zahara returns to the school to confront, and blackmail, her former teacher, she happens upon the priest officiating a service and reciting "Yo Confieso", a prayer of confession. As padre Manolo recites the line "por mi culpa, por mi culpa, por mi grandísima culpa," he not only evokes his own sins, but also the shared history of these characters. There is no hint, however, of irony in the priest's demeanour and he in fact has a new altar boy. Whilst there is no indication that this student is also victim to padre Manolo's abuse, his presence reinforces the lack of repercussions. The connection between the prayer and his actions is reinforced by Zahara's repetition of "por *tu* culpa" rather than the standard phrase.[38] Yet responsibility does not have consequences for the priest, and the narrative denies catharsis. Perhaps this is because—as I argue

[38] Although Zahara holds the priest responsible for the sexual abuse, she seems more aggrieved by the separation from Enrique. This reinforces Almodóvar's emphasis on relationships; the loss of a lover is a more significant wrong than the individual trauma.

above—this narrative does not simply critique the actions of this individual, but of the institution that protected him. As Cervantes contends (2014, 430):

> The redirection of "Por tu culpa" functions not only to keep Father Manolo accountable for his sins but also to keep the Church accountable for its own enforcement of sexual repression.

The priest's unchecked desires—which the metafilm suggests remain uncontrolled until his death—are deployed against him. The response is not shame or contrition; there is no interpersonal concern in this encounter. Padre Manolo seems shaken, but ultimately accedes to padre José's proposed solution; the latter cements his role in the abuse, breaking the neck of Ignacio/Zahara. These scenes occur in the film-within-the-film, and the complex narrative structures suggest that this is only one version of the events, that there are other ways the abuse may have played out. On any reading, the institution shows a startling lack of care for its young charges.

The consequences are felt, I argue, not just by Ignacio, but ripple out to all who come into contact with him. Ignacio is rendered unknowable, beyond connection. Andrew Asibong describes the character as fragmented "beyond repair" (2009, 189), immune to interpersonal connection. Any possibility of connection is denied elsewhere as well. Although the abuse of Ignacio is at the heart of the plot, it is not the only misdemeanour depicted. Perhaps most shocking is the scheme devised by Ángel (with Berenguer) to kill his brother via an overdose of pure heroin. Consistent through these crimes—and the film more generally—is the prevalence of self-interest. If the ethics of care highlights the relationship between autonomy and relationality (Farley 1993), in *La mala educación*, autonomy—or its more negative sister, self-interest—is never moderated by concern for the other. Even where self-interest is perhaps "positively" invested, such as Enrique's commitment to his films, this comes at the cost of interpersonal relationships: the film's epilogue revealing that after learning Juan's identity and the circumstances of Ignacio's death, Enrique continued making films "con la misma pasión," but alone.

This reading is reinforced by the film's interwoven plotlines, which highlight both the fragmentation of Ignacio's identity, and the impossibility of connection between and across time and the boundaries of fiction/reality. Characters are unable

to connect in part because they are separated by the film's very structure. Yet no character is entirely autonomous—the narrative highlights how each character is both victim and victimizer, bound to others through shared traumas: padre Manolo abuses Ignacio, then becomes his target; Berenguer later turns to blackmail when abandoned by his lover, Juan/Ángel; Enrique is fooled initially by the duplicitous Juan, but takes control of the relationship in the final scene of the film, cutting him off completely. The power of narrative—wielded to great effect by a filmmaker such as Enrique—is a further theme, and one shared with *La ley del deseo*. In each film, this is highlighted through the narrative control of the protagonist over their environment and the trajectories of the characters around them. For Blake, this leads to the conclusion that Enrique is at some level responsible for Zahara's murder at the hands of padre Manolo's colleague and accomplice, padre José (2005, 2). Responsibility and culpability are diffused throughout the narratives, highlighting the significance of storytelling itself. If in *La ley del deseo*, the motif of the typewriter offers Pablo the power to dictate his own story (fictional and romantic) in *La mala educación* the object is associated not with the filmmaker, but with Ignacio's attempted bribery and the moment of his death—suggesting that his story was interrupted before its time. The final shot of Ignacio—a high-angle shot framing his dead body slumped next to the typewriter—emphasises the power of words, whether as a means of blackmail, a conduit for relationship, or a vocation.

This absolute failure of community is linked, I argue, to the absence of care throughout this narrative. Returning to the theme of memory with which I opened this section, it is clear that this narrative revisits the past in order to highlight its lasting impact on the present. As with the other films discussed in this thesis, *La mala educación* gestures towards a broader critique of the apparatus of the Franco regime, including the Catholic Church. In a departure from the playful approach of earlier films, here Almodóvar is pessimistic about the rehabilitation of the Church, let alone the possibility of recovering from the traumas it has made possible. Indeed, the film refuses to reimagine a Church that allows for the development of meaningful community. Although Almodóvar's films return time and again to the Church and religion more broadly, it is difficult to identify a clear "evolution" in his

attitude. This is coherent, I argue, with the palimpsestuous approach adopted in this reading.

Nevertheless, it would appear that Almodóvar's critique has both narrowed—focusing as it does in *La mala educación* on the impact of institutional sexual abuse on an individual—and also broadened—with the depiction of the Church here also offering a reflection on the Transition. Ballesteros argues that *La mala educación* depicts the Transition with complexity, refusing simple nostalgia. The film, she proposes (2009, 94-95):

> strips it of its glamorous aura and reveals that it was not as liberated as the expressions of the elite, but reduced, group of night birds might suggest. Depictions of the *Movida* in … *Bad Education* resist, in short, the one-sided codification and institutionalization of a phenomenon whose most definable features are arguably its break with the past and its provisionality.

If, as Ballesteros suggests, this film refuses nostalgia, it can be viewed as an example of what D'Lugo describes as "postnostalgia", drawing on the work of Fredric Jameson. For D'Lugo, this allows "a movement beyond readers' and spectators' sentimental ensnarement in memories" (2009, 357), offering greater critical possibilities with regards the meanings allocated to historical events. In the same way that the palimpsestuous approach suggests "not a linear retrieval of the past but a disguised sample of circular logic" (de Groote 2014, 119), Almodóvar's films refuse a simple historical reading. The Church in *La mala educación* is a real institution, one that is drawn in part from the shared Spanish history and also Almodóvar's own childhood (see D'Lugo 2006; Vernon 2009). Yet this narrative is a fiction, doubly inscribed as such through the representation of the assault in the film-within-the film.

Nevertheless, *La mala educación* offers a blazing critique of the abuses committed under the auspices of the Catholic Church, suggesting that the institution fails to provide an effective ethical framework, whether for its clergy or congregation. The criticism is, however, complicated in various ways, as mentioned. First, Almodóvar refuses a simplistically evil portrait of the abusive priest. Whilst the "fictional" representation in *La visita* comes close, in the metanarrative, Berenguer is a sympathetic character, verging on victimhood himself, both to his desires and to

Juan/Ángel. Secondly, the "victim" himself—Ignacio—turns blackmailer, and is generally represented in an unflattering light (literally, and figuratively). Little is done to establish viewer empathy for the adult Ignacio. He is represented as lacking empathy for his brother and his mother (with numerous mentions of the difficulties he has put her and his aunt through) and his physical form feels monstrous rather than enticing. Further, although Juan is perhaps the least sympathetic character in this film—and even across Almodóvar's oeuvre—his relationship with Enrique again complicates this character, hinting at a man who is uncomfortable with his sexuality even as he is prepared to exploit others' desire for him.

As with most Almodóvar films, *La mala educación* focuses on interpersonal relationships, here highlighting the ways that love and affection are destroyed by the Church. For Alan Stone, this is "Almodóvar's most important work", in part due to its complexity but also because of its political and emotional resonances (2004, 57). These include direct engagement with institutional child abuse within the Catholic Church but also, I argue, a broader denouncement of the damage that arises from the failure of community. The film's narrative structures—the complex temporal, spatial and fictional webs explored above—reinforce the significance of care and the savage consequences of its absence. The trauma of institutional child sex abuse is not felt simply by the individual, but has ramifications that extend well beyond Ignacio, seeming to deny all characters in his circle the possibility of community.

C. In the shadows of religious freedom

i. Can the convent be saved?

If *La mala educación* suggests that religion denies the possibility of community, *Entre tinieblas*—at least initially—offers a very different picture.[39] Despite Almodóvar's scepticism of organised religion, the convent of the *Redentoras Humilladas*, the film's primary setting, seems to allow a level of freedom unheard of even outside its impressive walls. I want to leave unanswered for now the question of the extent to which this is a truly progressive community. Described by Smith as

[39] For a detailed overview, see Smith (1995). DiFrancesco (2009) also offers an insightful analysis, focusing on the film's "lesbian family," while Prout (1999) focuses on the ethics of care, as discussed below.

both a "convent comedy" (2000, 37) and a "lesbian tragedy" (1995, 38), this 1983 movie focuses on sexual peccadillos, exploring new modes of subversive storytelling and offering a glimpse into a countercultural microcosm: the convent is a refuge for young women fleeing the law. As the Mother Superior (Sister Julia) hopes wistfully: "Dentro de poco este pabellón estará lleno de asesinas, drogadictas, prostitutas como en otra época." Evidently, the *Redentoras Humilladas* is far from a traditional cloister, "historically associated with male Church authority, oppressive rules and limits placed on personal experience" (DiFrancesco 2009, 54); as D'Lugo suggests, the nuns' work liberates them as much as the women they work with (1991, 53). The narrative focuses on the arrival of nightclub singer Yolanda, fleeing the drug-dealers who killed her boyfriend with tainted heroin.[40] When she arrives during mass one evening, her figure silhouetted by the bright outside light, Yolanda appears to answer the nuns' prayers, giving reason to their mission at a difficult period. On the face of it, as Smith notes, this appears to be "an opportunity for comedy of incongruity in which the perceived opposites of sensual pleasure [Yolanda] and spiritual asceticism [the nuns] are contrasted with and transformed by one another" (2000, 38). Of course, this is not entirely how the narrative unfolds—the nuns are deeply subversive, and each has her unique carnal indulgence. The religious principles espoused by these women "are both egalitarian and sexually liberating" (D'Lugo 1991, 54), with judgment similarly suspended with respect to the nuns' own proclivities. Here, asserts Goss, "[t]he nuns are also free of pious moralizing and (for the most part) cynical exploitation of their authority—in contrast with the unredeemable, predatory men of the cloth in *Bad Education*" (2009, 84). If the later film highlights the Church's repressive tendencies and forecloses the possibility of community, *Entre tinieblas* imagines the convent as a permissive space, hosting a progressive community of eccentrics. The nuns here share a specific space and time, but they are presented as unique and heterogeneous.

Despite denying any provocative intentions, Almodóvar has acknowledged that *Entre tinieblas* was likely to be "scandalous" to its primarily Catholic Spanish audience, given that "the nuns do forbidden things" (Strauss 2006, 33). Indeed, the

[40] A murder weapon also employed in *La mala educación*, as mentioned above.

convent's founding values—self-mortification and humiliation—evoke how certain values may manifest in fetishised ways.[41] Yet, as Prout suggests, the film's "unconventional use of loaded symbols such as the Sacred Heart cannot be read simply as an indication of anticlerical intent" (1999, 57-58). For rather than suppress the desires of its residents, this institution offers a space in which each nun's cravings may be explored. For Almodóvar, religion in this film is not inspired by God, but rather these nuns "se han ido alejando de Dios, acercándose cada vez más a su propia naturaleza" (Vidal 1988, 69). Personal expression here seems to know no boundaries and the forbidden activities pursued in this "freakish convent" (Camino 2010, 632) include Sor Rata de Callejón's erotic writing, Sor Víbora's haute couture designs—worn by various religious icons around the convent—Sor Perdida's pet tiger and cleaning fetish, and various instances of drug-taking, from reformed murderess Sor Estiércol acid trips, to the Mother Superior's cocaine (and heroin) habit.[42] Given the female space within which the action occurs, the nuns offer a gynocentric reimagining of religion, not only reorienting Catholic doctrine towards the feminine, but arguably attempting a broader rehabilitation of religion.

Whether this is successful is a question we will return to below, for whilst the film clearly allows for the constructive potential of religion (or perhaps more accurately, spirituality), it seems to again negate the possibility of this within the confines of the Catholic Church. Whilst it is difficult to read this narrative as a resolute critique of the Church, this haven (at least for some) is ultimately disbanded in the film's dénouement, which sees the *Redentoras Humilladas* shut down when the new Mother General arrives from Albacete. This suggests, perhaps, that the community was never entirely stable. For Fernando Huerta, the film's conclusion marks the end of the convent's feminine world, which "queda latente, entre tinieblas, esperando una mejor ocasión." (2010, 52) Moreover, the communities that replace it—most evidently that formed by Yolanda, Sor Rata and the convent's aristocratic benefactor—seem to offer more radical possibilities in terms of self-

41 This fine line is explored again—albeit briefly and subtly—in *Matador*, where Ángel's mother's religious rituals are linked to her zealous interest in his behaviour.

42 Alongside their unusual hobbies, the nuns are all, apart from the Mother Superior, given "obscene" names.

expression and authenticity. Accordingly, religion takes on a complex web of meanings, with the narrative hinting both at the importance of spirituality, as well as the dangers of rigid religious prescriptions, especially those attempting to control desire.

ii. Lesbian love and Catholic ritual

Alongside the playful cast of sinning nuns, *Entre tinieblas* offers one of the few depictions of lesbian love across this opus, with the Mother Superior falling quickly—and hard—for Yolanda. Despite Cristina Sánchez Pascual's wooden performance as the young singer,[43] the romance is believable because of the forceful longing of the Mother Superior (played by Julieta Serrano). It was during the filming of this film, for instance, that Almodóvar "realized the power of the close-up" (Strauss 2006, 34). This technique reflects a greater emphasis on the subjectivity of his characters—a finer level of psychological development and a deeper interest in their innermost desires. The one-sided romance between the Mother Superior and Yolanda is marked by performance, premised in part on Yolanda's connection to the female actresses the abbess worships. These two themes combine to suggest both renewed possibilities for religious experience, but also their limitations. Desire here verges on a spiritual experience for the abbess, whose emotions are laid bare. As Smith states, "Lesbian desire is here aestheticized and distanced, but not ironized or belittled" (1992, 188). It is in part through this doomed romance that the film reorients Catholic imagery and narrative towards the feminine, and the transgressive. Religion becomes the "catalyst for each woman's self-realization" (D'Lugo 1991, 53). Yet ultimately, the Mother Superior's feelings are unrequited and she is left alone, having lost not only her would-be lover, but also the convent.

a. The altar of transgressive women

The Mother Superior's love for Yolanda is foreshadowed by her adoration of "fallen" women. Actresses such as Ava Gardner, Marilyn Monroe, and Brigitte Bardot

[43] As Arroyo points out, *Entre tinieblas* "demonstrates that Almodóvar is not infallible with actors; that the great performances in his films are collaborations for which actors need to be given their due; the proof is in Cristina S. Pascual's performance as Yolanda, unarguably the worst in Almodóvar's oeuvre and deadly in a film that is essentially a vehicle for that actress." (2011, 10)

(see Holguín 1994, 370) are displayed on her walls in a makeshift altar that displaces the traditional icons of Catholicism. As Prout (1999) notes, the film foregrounds the visual nature of religious experience. The nexus between performance, desire and the feminisation of religion is reinforced in an early encounter with Yolanda. As Yolanda enters the Mother Superior's room, the Mother Superior initiates a lip-synched duet the bolero "Encadenados."[44] The shot/reverse shots highlight the décor of the cell, with religious iconography—including a cross and a picture of the pope—on the wall behind Yolanda, whilst the abbess is sitting in front of her altar of "glamour shots." The abbess explains to Yolanda that the "grandes pecadoras" are present because it is "en las criaturas imperfectas es donde Dios encuentra toda su grandeza." She continues that when she looks at her altar of "sinner" women, she feels "una enorme gratitud, porque gracias a ellas, Dios sigue muriendo y resucitando cada día." Together with the explicit linking of these sinning women with the redemptive project of Catholicism, for Smith this scene "suggests a lesbian appropriation of readymade (heterosexual) images found in popular culture" (1995, 35).[45]

This sequence also foregrounds the power of the gaze, which in turn reflects the power relations between the women. As suggested by Acevedo-Muñoz, Yolanda is "put in the position of object of desire, possessed by the nun's gaze, while the nun is put in the typically masculine position of being the active looker and seducer" (2007, 42). Feminist film theory has offered considerable insights into the construction of desire through the gaze (Mulvey 1975; Halberstam 2005; L. Williams 1989), which is explored in this encounter. Mulvey's extremely influential article "Visual Pleasure and Narrative Cinema" raised questions about "pleasure, spectatorship and gender identity in mainstream cinema" (Hollinger, 1998, 17), considering the ways that the spatiotemporal qualities of film privilege masculine visual pleasure, coding women as "*to-be-looked-at-ness*" (Mulvey 1975, 11). Vernon offers a useful summary of Mulvey's argument (1993, 31):

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[44] As in numerous Almodóvar' films, the song's lyrics hint at the unhappy ending of the Mother Superior's desire.

[45] Smith draws on the work of Richard Dyer (1990) on gay and lesbian "confrontational cinema" to contend that whilst the film foregrounds lesbian desire, it refuses to take a clear political stance, instead allowing the audience to arrive at their own judgments about the relationship.

> narrative cinema is complicit with a scopophilic regime of pleasure whereby the male spectator 'possesses' (with its dual connotations of sexual and physical control or power) the female through the look—or rather the relay of looks—created by the camera, the male actor's gaze, and the male spectator who identifies with both.

Whereas Mulvey's analysis highlights the association between masculinity and active spectatorship positions, Almodóvar parodies the male gaze,[46] or removes it entirely. In *Entre tinieblas*, this absence of men does not result in the lack of scopophilic pleasure.[47] Such issues are reworked through the allocation of "masculine" active gaze to the nuns; here, it is women who "possess" other women through the gaze. This is typified in a later scene where Sor Estiércol spies on Yolanda through a hidden peephole. The exclusion of men makes all positions available to women, although Mulvey's arguments about the gendered economy of looking remain pertinent, and it is clear that this framework has influenced the reception of Almodóvar's films. As Vernon suggests in relation to *¿Qué he hecho yo!*, the privileging of feminine desire constitutes "an implicit challenge to the patriarchal structures of both power and pleasure inherent in the dominant cinema as theorized by Laura Mulvey and subsequent feminist critics" (1993, 31). This applies equally, I argue, to the equation of the gaze and desire in the Mother Superior's office. That the women never exchange more than a light touch reinforces the scopophilic nature of this relationship.[48]

Religious iconography and the lesbian gaze are again combined when the film's episodic narrative culminates in a party thrown in honour of the Mother Superior's saint's day. The celebration's highlight is Yolanda's performance, dedicated by Sor Rata de Callejón to the Madre Superior "que se ha entregado cuerpo y alma a nuestra obra redentora". Sor Rata pays homage to her superior's commitment to the convent, articulating their project in specifically female terms, emphasising that women of all types have come to the convent, finding "refugio, consuelo y

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46 Smith, for instance, suggests that the wheelchair-confined horror director in *¡Átame!* is presented as "the image of male impotence before female mastery" (2000, 109). See also Epps (2009) on the gaze in *Matador* and *Laberinto de pasiones*.

47 Of course, the actual positions that might be taken by any given viewer are in fact varied and complex: see L. Williams (1989).

48 See Ballesteros (2009) for an analysis of performance as a strategy of identification in these films, which further illuminates this relationship. See also L. Williams (2000) and Smith (2000) for a discussion of the fetishisation of Yolanda through costume and mise-en-scène.

diversión." If the convent represented refuge for Yolanda after her boyfriend's death, the Mother Superior finds comfort in the song itself, seeing the possibility of a new closeness to her love object. Despite such deep emotional resonances, the performance is a light-hearted salsa, "Salí porque salí." This foreshadows Yolanda's imminent departure. Yolanda's outfit is a vision of gold, layered Lurex skirts with a sheer top and Lurex cape, complemented by oversized earrings and hair and exaggerated make-up (thanks to the Marquesa). The lip-synced recital is a celebration of exaggeration: not only her over-the-top dress, but also her flamboyant gestures, which primarily involve her flinging her arms in the air in a camp approximation of the crucifixion pose. The overall staging is incongruous to the convent environment,[49] but resonates with this filmography's celebration of drag performances, notably by Letal and Zahara. Indeed, for Bruce Williams, Yolanda's mannerisms "suggest a woman playing a drag queen" (2000, 31). The audience is—with the sole exception of the Mother General—captivated, their diversion evident on their faces. Yolanda is once again the object of their scopophilic pleasure. That this camp highlight occurs during a significant celebration of the Mother Superior confirms the nun's embrace of alternative ritual, just as it undermines her in the eyes of the central authority.

The marginalisation of male figures of Christianity in this film gestures towards an alternative order dominated by women—whether the nuns, or the women they are hoping to redeem (see Acevedo-Muñoz 2007, 43). Yolanda's arrival at the convent is one example of this feminisation of Catholic iconography and narratives. As Smith suggests, this moment "is presented as an Annunciation, eloquently exploiting the expressive potential of light: as the nuns prepare for mass in an extreme long shot of the darkened chapel, the doors behind them are flung open to reveal Yolanda, framed by a halo of brilliant light" (1992, 182).[50] Taking a bolder approach, DiFrancesco reads the scene as reflecting the Mother Superior's rejection of Christ: as she turns away from the altar towards Yolanda, she replaces Christ with

[49] This is reinforced by the presence of three of the *Redentoras Humilladas* on stage, who accompany her as she sings.

[50] D'Lugo (1991) offers a similar analysis of the scene.

the younger woman (2009, 55).[51] But there is a significant difference, I argue, between the nun's worship of Christ (or the Virgin)—to whose service she has committed her life, albeit in a unique and at times transgressive way—and her worship of Yolanda, whom she seems more interested in controlling.

The substitution of Catholic iconography is confirmed after Yolanda's final song. The Mother Superior arrives to thank Yolanda, gleefully describing the performance as "obscene." Clutching a glove discarded by Yolanda into the audience, the abbess offers to help her remove Yolanda remove her make-up. Holding up a handkerchief to Yolanda's face, when it comes away with an image of Yolanda's faces she declares: "Que Dios me perdone si me siento una nueva Verónica." Saint Veronica gave Jesus her veil to wipe his face whilst he was carrying his cross, and it came back to her with an imprint on his face. The film again draws an explicit parallel between Yolanda and Christ, although here this moment is driven by the Mother Superior's desire, rather than pity. This "queer Veronica" is the beginning, as Acevedo-Muñoz points out, of Almodóvar's subversion of Catholic symbolism (2007, 47), which reaches its apotheosis in *La mala educación*. In *Entre tinieblas*, Anna Forgione suggests that religious symbolism in this film is demystified in the name of an alternative "credo", that of individual and sexual liberty (2005, 221). It is not only the physical space of the convent that is gendered feminine, as discussed below, but also its reimagining of the religious narrative and ritual.

b. The Mother Superior's inability to care

Yet there is a contradiction in the representation of lesbianism here. In contrast to even padre Manolo in *La mala educación*, the Mother Superior evokes little audience sympathy. As with Smith, Prout (1999) views the abbess as psychically damaged, reducing her agency and risking the pathologisation of lesbian attraction.[52] The film underscores her lack of emotional and psychic integrity through various strategies that highlight parallels between her and her love object, such as their

[51] Scarlett, conversely, suggests a parallel between Yolanda and the Virgin Mary, established by framing in which she shares the Virgin's halo as she stands in front of a painting (2014, 127).

[52] I am not suggesting that Prout does pathologise the Mother Superior's attraction to Yolanda, but I do want to highlight the fine line between a critical analysis of the unrequited attraction and the association of her sexuality with psychiatric symptoms.

shared drug habit and shared experiences of withdrawal. Yolanda's vulnerability binds the two women together when she tells the nun that she plans to give up heroin, saying she wants to work in the orchard, as she is a specialist in hybrids.[53] Yolanda's decision is linked to a desire to reestablish control of her life.[54] Once Yolanda's intentions are clear, the camera angle switches to an external shot, each woman framed by a different window—at once together and separate. The static shot emphasises their distance, suggesting that it was the drug that united them in the first place (and indeed, it was Jorge's overdose that brought Yolanda to the convent). At the same time, the mirrored framing is, according to Smith, "a fitting image of the intermittent identification with and withdrawal from the lesbian woman which (as critics testify) must problematize audience response to the film." (1992, 187) Smith later notes that through moments such as this, *Entre tinieblas* suggests "a blurring of desire and identification" (2000, 39). Yolanda's feverish withdrawal is laid over images of the convent: Sor Perdida's tiger, a statue of the Virgin being lowered into the chapel, the Chaplain and Sor Víbora arranging a costume. The Mother Superior, meanwhile, enters a deep despair, suggesting that for so much having admired the "fallen" women, she has turned into one of them. Her response to this distress is quasi-religious: she retreats to the chapel, where she clutches her rosary and refuses food, in a simulation of religious self-mortification that is of course inspired by her carnal lust. Whilst this could be read as seeking penance for her sins, such a reading is undermined by the impetus for her "recovery": a plan to bribe the Marquesa, which we return to below.[55]

The complex nexus between identification and desire, performance and fandom, religious ritual and fetish ultimately seems to undermine the liberating

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[53] Smith suggests that this "extraordinary and unmotivated dimension" of Yolanda points "to the virtuality of the character (in cinema, in life) who is subject to constant change and direction. As a 'specialist in hybrids' himself, Almodóvar does not allow us the reassurance of a single genre and a unified sense of self." (1992, 202)

[54] This contrasts with a comment Yolanda makes during the film's initial sequence. Returning home with heroin for her boyfriend, Yolanda recounts a discussion with a friend who advised her that she wouldn't get anywhere singing. She responds: "Yo no quiero llegar a ningún sitio. Lo que yo soy es una aventurera." By this point, Yolanda appears to have given up her desire for adventure and "arrived" at a renewed sense of vocation. A more stable community soon follows.

[55] At one point, the Mother Superior declares to Yolanda: "Mi único pecado es quererte demasiado." This suggests that she does not perceive any issue with her behaviour.

potential of the convent of the *Redentoras Humilladas*. This is embodied by the Mother Superior, at once the most transgressive figure of the convent, but at heart an authoritarian. Perhaps as the abbess is the most associated with religious authority, she is the most constrained by its institutional structures. The other nuns appear largely content with their odd lives—although Sor Rata declares at one point that she is in crisis, and has decided not to write again[56]—but the Mother Superior pines for Yolanda. Her romantic disappointment is reinforced when a former "refugee" returns, fleeing the police. The Mother Superior reacts like a scorned lover telling the pleading Merche: "Te dije que si te ibas, no volvieras por aquí." The nun is uncompromising, but her tone is undermined in part when she ends up sleeping with the young woman in the small cell bed.[57]

Her approach to courting Yolanda perhaps indicates why the nun is unable to sustain such relationships, revealing a disdainful attitude that belies her purported affection. The Mother Superior approaches Yolanda as she sits on a bench in the internal garden, reading. When Yolanda finally notices the nun gazing at her, she impatiently yells for her to stop staring. When the nun states she is glad they are alone, Yolanda responds that she knows about the nun's "game" and challenges her to go to the police with the information about her boyfriend's death. The Mother Superior responds disparagingly: "Te crees muy valiente, pero sólo eres una drogadicta que estás desesperada y tienes miedo." The nun leaves Yolanda with a gift, again clothing, and tells Yolanda to seek her out if she needs help. Yolanda responds emphatically: "No la necesito. Entérese bien… usted sólo es un instrumento que yo estoy utilizando." This attempt to shift the power imbalance is undermined—at least for the audience—by the fact that Yolanda's words are borrowed from her boyfriend Jorge's diary.[58] As highlighted by Scarlett, the power

[56] As Acevedo-Muñoz points out, Sor Rata is the only figure to admit her crisis of identity (2007, 44), despite the fact that almost all of these women are at a point of transition.

[57] The Mother Superior's inability to maintain meaningful relationships is again highlighted in a confrontation with Sor Rata. The writer refers to a long shared history, noting that the two entered the convent at the same time, but that they are no longer close. She proposes this is because the abbess is jealous of her close friendships with the girls who pass through the convent. The Mother Superior brushes this off, but is clearly perturbed by the accusation.

[58] This follows immediately after Yolanda has "saved" Sor Rata's books from the fire, a minor disagreement where Yolanda implicitly challenges the Mother Superior's authority.

dynamics within the convent undermine the potential relationships, with the Mother Superior, for instance, abusing her authority to "coerce sexual favours from those who need her protection" (2014, 125). Scarlett thereby draws a line from the Mother Superior to the abusive clergy in *La mala educación*.[59] The encounter with Yolanda in the garden reinforces a certain attachment to power, as does her refusal to comply with the Mother General's orders disbanding the convent. The abbess longs for control, a position from which she can manipulate the vulnerable women she surrounds herself with. Ultimately, although the film launches with the promise of religious and personal freedom, this is foreclosed through the Mother Superior's controlling nature, which denies the possibility of meaningful relationships, even as it hints at a feminine reimagining of Catholic ritual and narrative.

iii. Alternative geographies and feminine space

Entre tinieblas takes place almost entirely in a convent, a space by definition feminine, or at least female-dominated. If we accept that Almodóvar adopts an anti-essentialist view of identity, this has consequences for the director's engagement with space and time. Accepting that "the construction of identity [is] always already spatial leads to a critique of the notion that identities are… mapped in some natural sense onto particular spaces" (Cresswell and Dixon 2002, 6). The spatial dimensions of identity and power can be conceptualised in terms of "queer space," which, as already mentioned, describes "the place-making practices within postmodernism in which queer people engage" (Halberstam 2005, 6). In *Entre tinieblas*, Smith associates this postmodern approach to knowledge and identity with the lack of a clear protagonist, and also the "collage effect" (1992, 202), by which Almodóvar calls into question the idea of a single authoritative narrative. The enclosed setting of the film here is inflected with both the markers of domesticity and those of religion. Below, we focus first on the feminine spaces represented in this film, which in part challenge the idea of home as a site of oppression (see G. Rose 1993). This is reinforced, as we shall see, through the other settings of the films, which are predominantly domestic. We will then turn back to the convent itself.

[59] Scarlett otherwise focuses primarily on *Entre tinieblas*' intertextual connections to other films within the "religious" genre.

The narrative of *Entre tinieblas* slowly moves from the urban landscape into the closed environment of the convent. The film opens with a time-lapse aerial shot of Madrid, with heavy traffic racing through the buildings as the credits appear over the sunset. The next shot takes us to street level, where a young woman—who we later learn is nightclub singer Yolanda—is walking across a bridge. The bridge reappears moments later, when she leaves the nightclub, fleeing two men in trench coats, presumably policemen. She finds herself in a café, where she pulls a business card of the Comunidad Redentoras Humilladas from her bag (their motto: "Venid a mí, yo soy vuestro refugio"). A brief flashback follows, showing her first meeting with the Mother Superior and Sor Estiércol, who come to her dressing room wanting an autograph. The action moves from here into the convent, from which it barely escapes, until the film's dénouement. A few scenes take place outside of the convent, including for instance a brief sequence in *El Rastro* market, where the nuns are selling produce. Incongruous in the "modern" streetscape, the nuns are largely ignored by the passing crowd. The women are static behind their stand, contrasting with the swarming hordes and further highlighting their incongruity. Nevertheless, as Acevedo-Muñoz points out, Sor Estiércol is perhaps not so out of place; a nearby fire-eater is "outdone" by her inserting a skewer into her cheek (2007, 41).

El Rastro is one of the few exterior spaces shown in this film. If characters escape the confines of the convent, it is generally into domestic spaces. Whilst the home has at times had problematic associations with the feminine, its association with the maternal and feminine also positions it "as a powerful spatial setting to critique women's assigned roles in heteropatriarchal societies" (Baydar 2012, 703). By presenting diverse homes and occupations within them, Almodóvar speaks perhaps to the feminist project of challenging universal and unproblematised representations of the domestic engaged in by certain schools of geography, for instance (see G. Rose 1993, 55-57). The association of home with the feminine is at once challenged and accepted, as Almodóvar undermines any fixed notion of what the home is, and thereby what the feminine must be in relation to that home. These various homes start with that shared by Yolanda and her boyfriend, Jorge, which she flees in the initial sequence. Other domestic settings include the Marquesa's

ostentatious mansion, which the Mother Superior visits to bribe the wealthy woman with information about Virginia. She catches the Marquesa just as she is about to head to an exhibition of "oleographs". From here, she calls on her drug dealer, looking for a loan to keep the convent running. In exchange, the nun agrees to traffic drugs from Thailand, a plotline that Acevedo-Muñoz suggests feels forced (2007, 45)—unsurprising in what is an at-times carnivalesque comedy.[60]

In the next scene, whilst the other nuns head off to *El rastro* to raise funds, Yolanda and Sor Rata head instead to the house of Sor Rata's sister, Antonia. As they arrive, Antonia is being interviewed about "her" writing, but she is unable to answer simple questions such as when she writes, and what she reads. Her responses are confirmed when Sor Rata discovers that the "books" on her shelves by Cervantes and Luis de Góngora are in fact empty boxes. This film depicts, to borrow Acevedo-Muñoz's words, a post-Franco Spain where "religious institutions are corrupt, where culture is a sham and where identity and authorship itself are under question" (2007, 46). Yet, as Acevedo-Muñoz goes on to contend, this focus on deception "is not so much a dismissal of the Spanish classics as it is an indictment of the arbitrary inclusion and exclusion of regional practices by the cultural establishment under Franco" (2007, 46).[61] This fits with Almodóvar's counter-cultural aesthetics and politics, which were evident in his earliest films (see Triana-Toribio 2000; Smith 2000, 9-36; Aguado 2009; Oliva 2009; Epps and Kakoudaki 2009).

In such scenes, close framing exposes little of the internal spaces. It is, however, evident that although vastly different in terms of luxury and size, these residences share a chaotic décor. The multiple pictures on the Marquesa's walls reflect perhaps her interest in oil paintings, whilst the drug dealer's shelves are cluttered. For Antonia, the house is her key occupation and reflects her growing wealth, earned by skimming her sister's royalties. She tells the journalist that she believes the house is the mirror of the soul, and quickly reveals that a decorative

[60] It almost goes without saying that the genres engaged by *Entre tinieblas* and *La mala educación* are almost diametrically opposed. If the earlier film is a free-wheeling tragi-comedy, the later one explores trauma through the conventions of thriller and *film noir*.

[61] This is reminiscent of a later scene in *¿Qué he hecho yo!* involving the *abuela*, unable to distinguish between romantic and realistic authors. Taken together, these suggest that the classification of art, whether by genre or the high/low culture binary, is increasingly meaningless.

fountain cost 100,000 pesetas. Unable to talk about literature, Antonia is clearly much more interested in talking about her domestic space, reflecting the traditional association of the home and family with the feminine (G. Rose 1993, 54), and further reinforced by the presence of Antonia's daughter, the only child in the film. Ultimately, these three domestic spaces undermine any universal characterisation of the home, or its nexus to the feminine. Not only the décor, but also the women's occupations—the Marquesa engaged in a life of luxury, the drug dealer negotiating business deals, Antonia preoccupied with keeping house—reveal diverse relationships with domestic space.

Just as the domestic is coded feminine, it goes almost without saying that the convent is a female-dominated space. This is fortified by the lack of male characters (the chaplain aside), and by the convent's mission to offer refuge to "fallen" women. Even where the mass is led by the priest, the voices and faces of the nuns dominate. For Smith, the narrative not only has "separatist echoes", but also evokes certain elements of cultural feminism, especially: "the investigation of traditional material (such as the religious) historically gendered as feminine" (1995, 36). Feminist positions on separatism vary, with essentialist radical feminism positing that women-only spaces allow for identity formation, reflection and political mobilisation—all but the latter palpably present in the convent—whilst other strands of feminism, such as poststructuralist feminism, see separatism as "invert[ing] the dominant value system without challenging its fundamental categories" (G. Rose 1993, 153). In this space, the inclusion of the chaplain complicates the separatist narrative. Smith notes his "unexpected knowledge and interest in" the costuming in *My Fair Lady* without further comment (1992, 186), although the implication seems to be that the chaplain is a somewhat feminine subject himself. Whilst he is characterised in gender-ambiguous terms, with the softly spoken man primarily occupied with sewing, the conclusion of the film sees him establish a heterosexual family with Sor Víbora, together with Sor Perdida's pet tiger, *el niño*, a substitute son.

Massey reminds us that "gender relations vary over space" (1994, 178) and in this space, it is clear that women are in charge. Whilst the convent was previously dependant on the Marques, the confrontation between these two women sets up

the convent as a space that is now controlled and maintained by women. As Smith suggests, *Entre tinieblas* "is a separatist narrative in which men have no place" (1995, 36). With the Marques's death, the only significant male figure is the chaplain. Whilst the chaplain thereby perhaps escapes the rigid confines of his role and institution, the Marques is overtly connected to the former political order. Although the Mother Superior describes him as a good servant of God, his wife responds: "Da igual. Como marido y como padre, era un monstruo…" When the Mother Superior tries to defend him, the Marquesa notes emphatically "¡era un fascista!" This needs to be read in light of recent history. Acevedo-Muñoz points out: "Spain is one of the few places in the world where the noun 'Fascist' has a literal and historically specific meaning" (2007, 38), and the Marquesa's description reinforces the nexus between church and state under the Franco dictatorship. Her refusal to continue his support also inscribes the convent "in the harsh economic realities of the real world," D'Lugo observes (1991, 53). The Mother Superior is horrified at losing the Marques' contributions, leading to a debate about the convent's role. When the Mother Superior suggests that "la juventud nos necesita",[62] the Marquesa responds: "¿Qué juventud? La juventud quiere que les dejemos en paz." The Marquesa sees no role for the convent in the lives of the community, but her motivations are revealed to be selfish as well. Although the Marquesa is a millionaire, she does not simply want to survive, she wants "to live", now that no one controls her.

The convent's boundaries—themselves only ever shown in two brief external shots—are challenged in two ways: first, through the incoherent floorplan which is never fully revealed to the viewer; and secondly, through the wide variety of women and activities that are on display throughout the space. As a result, the convent never feels claustrophobic. Of course, its dimensions are expansive; as the Marquesa points out, the property would be worth a fortune. Yet its spaciousness also emerges through the myriad spaces on display, from the chapel to the tiled patio, the nuns' various cells—including a shared bedroom that seems to serve no purpose—to the

[62] This comment is evoked when Merche arrives one evening, bloodied and looking for shelter. When she declares her love, the Mother Superior responds "No. Me necesitas." This seems to be enough for the nun, who, despite her reluctance to accommodate the young woman, ends up sleeping next to her in the small metal-framed bed.

room given to Yolanda. The relationship between these spaces is never shown, giving rise to an incoherence that seems to expand the dimensions of the building. Even the internal patio, for instance, is never shown in a wide shot, so *el niño*'s cage is never located in relation to Sor Víbora's sewing room. Moreover, individual rooms are at times arranged or filmed to enhance the space. In the convent's dining room, for instance, the tables are organised along the walls, in a U-shape, leaving a large gap in the centre of the room, contributing a sense of spaciousness. Whilst the dark paintings close in the space, the image of the last supper behind the head table—on which the Mother Superior sits alongside Yolanda, who is again wearing her sequined red dress—seems to extend the dining space beyond the wall.

Reflecting the diverse spaces offered by the convent, the nuns' self-expression is never limited by their confinement. As mentioned above, the nuns engage in a range of unexpected activities, each free to pursue her own interests. These are revealed in a sporadic way, deepening the incoherence of this space. Nevertheless, the convent is ultimately revealed to be a liminal site, one that is unable to withstand the pressures that emerge from both within and outside its walls. Ultimately, the nuns are somehow "outside" of time and space—they neither belong to the "modern" Madrid that has emerged in the post-Franco period, nor do they fit within the traditional model imposed by the institutional hierarchy. The convent, offering only a small entry located within enormous walls that seem to extend for an entire block, similarly seems like a building that sets itself apart from the city. Yet, for D'Lugo, the narrative offers an "explicit connection between the urban milieu and moral categories," with the nuns' contact with urban life "inevitably lead[ing] each of the women to realize her own inner desires" (1991, 54). These possibilities are foreclosed by the film's ending, which offers both a conclusive end to the convent, but also suggests new possibilities of community: the unconventional family of the chaplain, Sor Víbora and their "son", tiger *el niño* on the one hand; and on the other the "same-sex 'pretend' family" (Smith 1992, 188) of the Marquesa, Yolanda and Sor Rata. Positioned in opposition to the convent—at least in the sense that she withdraws financial support and refuses to comply with her husband's purported gift—the Marquesa establishes a rival community with Yolanda, who provides the

information about her daughter, Virginia, that the Mother Superior was withholding. This new, more "vigorous and healthy" community suggests, according to DiFrancesco, "the formation of a new female-centred family, one that casts off the essential nature of the convent as a socially acceptable haven for women within what has been a historically Roman Catholic country" (2009, 56).[63] Yolanda here replaces the Marquesa's daughter, Virginia, a former nun at the convent who left for Africa and subsequently died.

There are numerous parallels between the two women, underscoring certain circular narrative patterns. Beyond the shared cell and Yolanda's completion of a painting Virginia left unfinished, both women entered the convent because of a boy. The Marques had forbidden Virginia's marriage and Virginia's lover killed himself, something the Marquesa suggests would no longer happen.[64] The irony here is of course the death of Yolanda's boyfriend, Jorge, with which the film commences. His diary refers to a desire to revenge himself upon Yolanda in anticipation of her leaving him. When she reads these words, she writes "Yolanda me ha suicidado," adopting a role in his suicide by heroin overdose, albeit after the fact. Such links between the two women are cemented by the veneration of the abbess. Never made explicit, the nun's protectiveness of Virginia and Yolanda when it comes to Sor Rata's novels—inspired by the women who have sought refuge in the convent—suggests equally fierce feelings for both women. In both instances, this puts her at odds with the Marquesa. These overlapping narratives therefore offer alternative visions of the "divine mother"—a relationship DiFrancesco notes was previously excluded from Catholic tradition, where the idealised mother relies on the son for her genesis (2009). This divine mother is at first represented by the Mother Superior, who searches desperately for an emotionally fulfilling relationship with Yolanda, but it is the Marquesa-Yolanda relationship established at the film's end that takes up the mantle of this dynamic.[65] In *Entre tinieblas*, the feminine is privileged and defined

63 The alternative family is considered in more detail in chapter one.

64 This is contradicted by Antonia, who assures her sister that everything outside the convent is precisely as it was when she entered. Her motives are, however, selfish, as she is enjoying the proceeds of her sister's writing.

65 Sor Rata who also joins this new family, is another proxy for Virginia, given her initial plan to work on a mission in Africa.

without reference to the masculine, not only within the convent itself, but also in the primary community that forms in its wake. The spatial dimensions of the film reinforce the fluidity of these women's lives and their freedom from heteronormative frames.

iv. Identification and the ethics of care

Although *Entre tinieblas* is perhaps a more modest version of the original concept—due to the producer's requirement that his girlfriend, Pascual, was to play the protagonist[66]—it nevertheless celebrates community in a way that contrasts sharply with *La mala educación*. Yet although the convent offers a space free from certain restraints, where the nuns may pursue their unique—and at times transgressive—interests, the question remains whether it suggests that an ethic of care might be able to find space within the Church. Ultimately, this inclusive and libertarian convent cannot be taken as reflecting on the Church as a whole, with the film's conclusion highlighting the difference between the *Redentoras Humilladas* and the central authorities: the convent is closed down not only for the Mother Superior's refusal to follow orders, but also a marked lack of funds. The previous Mother General dies and her replacement arrives a just in time for the Mother Superior's saint day, when an extravagant party seals the convent's fate. While the Mother General attempts to assert her authority, asserting that the abbess must obey her as her superior, this "humiliated redeemer" refuses to be humbled. She announces that she has an alternative strategy: she plans to found her own order, presumably funded through drug trafficking. This reinforces the abbess's opposition to the Catholic institution, even whilst she remains its key representative within the convent. Moreover, whilst the nuns enjoy singular freedom within the convent's walls, its closure is blithely accepted by all, bar Sor Perdida, who weeps inconsolably, surrounded by the debris from the party, before deciding to return to Albacete (where the Mother General is based).[67]

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66 Almodóvar has said that the actress "wasn't capable of turning [his original] dream into reality" (Strauss 2006, 31).

67 As she goes to leave, Sor Perdida asks Sor Víbora and the chaplain to adopt her tiger, given that they are going to form a family.

The ethics of care is, I argue, key to Almodóvar's alternative communities. In bringing together the above discussion of lesbian desire, space and time in *Entre tinieblas*, I want to consider whether—and if so, to what extent—this film offers a truly progressive community. DiFrancesco suggests that the convent's "family-like community supports the expression of the individual" (2009, 54). Yet although it is certainly more progressive and tolerant than the Church of *La mala educación*, the convent's limitations are clear, both institutionally (the convent's final closure) and personally (the Mother Superior's authoritarian approach to the "sinners" who seek refuge). The convent ultimately fails, and is broken up into smaller units. During its existence, however, the convent offers not simply a parody of religion, but also an exploration of female-centred space and ethics. For Prout, the narrative raises questions that have also been asked in feminist theology, such as the ability of a male saviour to "save" women (1999, 63). Indeed, the parallels established between Yolanda and Christ suggest that he is perhaps not necessary to the redemption narrative. Just as the film excludes men from the dynamics of visual pleasure, they are equally excluded from the nuns' project.

According to D'Lugo, this film recuperates Catholicism's "tradition of ministering to the humble and the weak" (1991, 54), whilst Prout concludes that "*Entre tinieblas* seems to come down on the side of an ethics of care which finds its most persistent expression in feminist theology, rather than on the side of an ethics of justice more readily identifiable with patriarchal social structures." (1999, 63) The possibility of a care orientation is brought forward by the nuns' redemptive project. Through their work, the nuns break down barriers between saint/sinner, religious/secular, welcoming into the convent women who may otherwise find themselves without refuge. The Mother Superior, of course, goes so far as to identify herself with her charges; and this theme, as discussed, is not uniquely tied to the lesbian love affair. For Almodóvar, identification is part of the nuns' role more generally; they must experience the weaknesses of those that they are trying to save (Strauss 2006, 32). This is consistent with the reading of the film as offering a new ethics of care. The ethics of care is oriented towards "an empathetic sense of connectedness to others, of being in relation with them" (Puka 1993, 216). Based on

such principles of relationality, this moral orientation requires identification with the other in order to respond to the other's specific needs (see Larrabee 1993, 14). Whilst this ethics could be read as tied to the religious context, I agree with Martin-Márquez when she rejects any suggestion that Almodóvar's ethics has a Christian foundation, arguing against this that the ethics of care put forward in this filmography is "broadly humanist" (2004, 508; footnote 7).

The convent's alternative moral order is highlighted through its open hostility towards the police, foreshadowed by Sor Estiércol's comment that the police are the natural enemies of nuns (although she does not explain why). That she refers to the nuns rather than to the Church generally draws attention to gender, especially given—as discussed in the next chapter—that Almodóvar's police are almost exclusively men. This perhaps typifies a broader association of care with the feminine and justice with the masculine, although Gilligan does not argue that care is necessarily the sole domain of women, nor justice the exclusive moral orientation of men (1993).[68] Similarly, D'Lugo argues that the tension arises not with the institution more broadly, but due to the nature of this given convent: "the progressive, liberating activities of the Humbled Redeemers are in direct opposition to the repressive tactics of the law" (1991, 63). Indeed, the mission of the convent is to harbour women who are fleeing "justice" (in its official sense), and all the guests of the convent are criminals. Fernando Huerta proposes that in *Entre tinieblas*, women "huyen de sus hombres, que encarnan la moral tradicional, el pasado y el machismo" (2010, 44). This raises the question as to whether "justice" is a masculine attribute. The opposition between the church and the police is highlighted in an early scene, when two policemen attend the convent to arrest a prostitute who had sought refuge. As Conrod notes, the "perfectly symmetrical angle and… deep perspective" that direct the eye towards the statue of Christ also focus attention on the Mother Superior attending to the prostitute, as she places shoes on the woman's feet (2012, 109). Conrod suggests that this recasts the relationship between church and police. Rather than working together as they did during the Franco regime, here the Church

[68] Gilligan acknowledges that whilst care and justice are alternative moral perspectives, they need not be dichotomised (1993b, 212). Nevertheless, I argue in the next chapter that Almodóvar's films persistently put a care orientation in direct contrast with a justice orientation.

(at least this convent) has redeemed itself, whilst the police are yet to be reimagined as a socially useful institution. As we see in the next chapter, this is confirmed throughout the filmography, as police ineptitude is often foregrounded. In *Entre tinieblas*, the police effectively pursue one wanted woman—Merche—but are entirely incompetent when it comes to locating Yolanda.

Yet if the care orientation requires an openness of spirit and other-orientedness—that one be present, listen, and respond with integrity and respect (Gilligan 2014, 103)—the nuns, especially the Mother Superior, fall short. This is highlighted in a number of ways. The first is the Mother Superior's response to Merche's desperate plea for shelter, discussed above. Despite their shared history and, more importantly, the young woman's evident need for assistance—besides her distressed demeanour, she is bloodied around the face—the abbess is initially inclined to turn her away, until Merche explicitly reminds her of the convent's calling. Moreover, the relationship between the Mother Superior and Yolanda demonstrates a lack of other-orientedness; the nun is concerned not with maintaining a genuine relationship with the singer, but with controlling her. The Mother Superior's motivations, as discussed above, are never selfless[69] and her desire for Yolanda itself imposes demands on the singer that limit her freedom. The Mother Superior's disregard for the interests of her charges—whether the nuns, or the women they shelter—points to the abuses of individual power that were explored in depth in our discussion of *La mala educación*. This is reinforced by the nun's dramatic reaction to Yolanda's departure. When she realises Yolanda has left, the abbess lets out an intense and near-animalistic howl that summons the only remaining member of the convent: Sor Estiércol. The camera slowly pans out, to the exterior of the convent, as the nun comforts her superior and "Encadenados" plays over the credits. The final shot of the abbess collapsed in the arms of her only remaining friend reimagines the *pieta*, suggests Acevedo-Muñoz (2007, 48). He goes on to suggest that "Almodóvar secularises religious iconography throughout the film to suggest the humanity and imperfection of his characters, while at the same time

[69] Although this is not what the ethics of care necessarily requires (see Larrabee 1993), the Mother Superior is driven by her own desires in a way that eclipses any consideration of the other's needs, for instance the abbess never asks whether Yolanda reciprocates her feelings.

heretically equating pious love and homosexual desire" (2007, 48). Once again, Catholic ritual is reimagined within a feminine—and queer—frame, which here reinforces the fluid relationship between saviour and saved. It does not, however, equate to the ethics of care articulated by Gilligan and others. The community of the *Redentoras Humilladas* fails to provide a meaningful, other-oriented space and does not live up to its promise.

D. *La ley del deseo* and the alternative altar

In this chapter, we have seen that Almodóvar's depiction of religious institutions allows very little possibility for them to be reimagined ways that allow for meaningful community. This seems to stem primarily from a fundamental incompatibility between religious dogma and the responsiveness required by ethics of care. Rigid doctrine or rules do not allow for this flexibility. By way of concluding this discussion of religion, I want to suggest that Almodóvar does allow religion to play a constructive role, but only if we understand it in its broadest terms. Despite Allinson's assertion that Almodóvar rarely depicts "personal spirituality" (2001, 31),[70] through the example of *La ley del deseo*, I suggest that spiritual practice and/or devotion can coexist with the ethics of care and Almodóvar's communities of circumstance. I have mentioned this 1987 film numerous times already in this chapter, highlighting various ways in which the film raises religious themes. On the one hand, the film can be read as critical of religion—primarily through its reference to the sexual abuse Tina experienced as a child at the hands of padre Constantino—but there are also various ways in which the film posits a more positive role for religion (or spirituality). We will endeavour to determine whether this is enough to redeem religion, through an exploration of two key religious threads in the film. The first, and most significant, is Tina's personalised spiritual practice, visible in her Cruz de Mayo altar, and foregrounded in her (and Ada's) faith in prayer. I concur with Donapetry's conclusion that, whilst peripheral to the film's central plot, Tina and Ada's "version of the Catholic rituals and faith… is undeniably relevant to an understanding of the film as a whole" (Donapetry 1999, 73). The second emerges in

[70] Almodóvar has also discussed spiritual elements in *La mala educación* and *Hable con ella* (see Strauss 2006, 207).

the film's conclusion, in which a visual parallel is established between Antonio's body and that of Christ.

Tina and Ada establish a highly unique religious practice early in the film, which is presented in almost exclusively positive, albeit somewhat humorous, terms. Their worship is a direct response to the rejection of Tina's former teacher (and abuser), padre Constantino. This occurs in an early scene, during which Tina (walking along the street with Ada) passes her old school. The mother-daughter duo squeeze through a gap in the fence and enter the church as piano music plays "¡Oh, Virgen más pura," a hymn to the Virgin Mary which foreshadows the worship of Ada and Tina. Ada's "bemused fascination" in the church is subsequently converted into religious fervour, albeit practised outside the church, "allow[ing] Almodóvar the chance to propose new forms of spirituality that are not mediated by the repressive policies of the institutionalized Roman Catholic Church" (Quiroga 2009, 67). Wandering over to the priest at the piano, Tina discloses that, although Ada is her daughter, she is not married; she has been "condenada a la soledad." The priest instructs her glibly to return to God, but when Tina responds enthusiastically that she would love to sing again in the church choir, he becomes uncomfortable, telling her to find God elsewhere. Tina comments that the church holds her memories, which are all she has left, and notes that there have only been two men in her life: padre Constantino, and her father.[71] Yet if Tina's attachment to her memories highlights the priest's significance to her, his response is the opposite: "Huye de ellos, como yo he huido." Tina turns and leaves the church, the shot shifting suddenly to a long shot that transfers our attention from the characters to the building itself. As Tina and Ada exit the church to the left, the wider frame reveals a large, circular stained-glass window showing a supplicant before Jesus, who appears in the sky atop a pillar of fire and smoke. As we shall see, this image prefigures the film's finale.

Whilst the confrontation with the priest seems negative, Tina remains optimistic about the possibilities of religion. As José Quiroga suggests, the scene

[71] This conversation makes more sense when we learn later that Tina and her father engaged in a sexual relationship.

"clarifies that [Almodóvar's] critique is against the hypocrisy of organized religion" rather than against religious feeling *per se* (2009, 70). It is important, I argue, that whilst Tina is able to reconcile (or at least accept) both the priest's rebuff and religion's promise of comfort and hope, padre Constantino is less able to balance competing concerns, rejecting outright Tina's attempt to re-join the congregation. Instead, Tina develops her own form of religion. The next scene reveals a Cruz de Mayo altar of "kitsch artefacts" in a central position in Tina's apartment. Tina's shrine "mix[es] popular religion with the adoration of movie stars" (D'Lugo 1991, 49), a "claro símbolo de la mezcla de lo sagrado y lo profano que caracteriza el fenómeno religioso en el cine de Almodóvar" (Sánchez-Alarcón 2008, 340).[72] The camera pans across a cowgirl barbie and a porcelain Marilyn Monroe (depicted with her flying white dress), alongside icons of Jesus and Mary, and a plastic dinosaur.[73] In this early scene—the altar's recent arrival marked by a gesture from Pablo and a simple: "¿y eso?"—the three sit down for dinner, an intimate party in the "shadow" of the altar, positioned within view of the table.

This is not the only time the film depicts the three in a domestic setting. Almodóvar's careful attention to private spaces here subtly undermines any correlation of the home with dominant discourses of heteronormativity. Whilst visibilising the family home is not in and of itself subversive (see Johnston and Longhurst 2010), Almodóvar's focus on this unconventional family in moments of domestic "bliss" reveals subversive possibilities for the family. This space contrasts significantly with the domestic space in *Matador*, where Berta and Ángel's "conformist household, with its symbolic mirrors, religious and other traditional icons, heavy furniture, has all the excess of its Hollywood counterpart" (Evans 1993, 328). Such excess reveals the hollowness of Berta's religious code, her living

[72] Similarly, Quiroga suggests that the altar "becomes a homemade construction that bypasses official religion" (2009, 70), whilst Vidal describes it as a symbol of "una religion pagana… lleno de tesoros, donde toda la iconografía kitsch del cine de Almodóvar se reúne…" (1990, 308-309) Through its mixing of popular and religious iconography, the altar recalls the Mother Superior's altar to fallen stars.

[73] The different eras referenced by this paraphernalia hints at the film's playing with time, illustrating Rita Felski's reflections on the complex relationship between three temporal levels: everyday time, life time, and large-scale time (2000, 17). This is also illustrated in the way Tina and her charge engage with the altar.

conditions inconsistent with the Opus Dei value of poverty (Moreno 2012, 188).[74] In *La ley del deseo*, domestic spaces reveal different possibilities for spirituality. As with *Matador*, the home—especially Tina's apartment—is a space of religious observance. Yet her shrine reimagines religion through the lens of popular culture, suggesting a more democratic form of worship. Besides pointing to various time periods and destabilising the high/low culture divide—emblematic of much of Almodóvar's aesthetic—the altar reflects Tina's "very specific devotion to objects which have personal significance," including a shell from Morocco, where "she spent the time of her love affair with her father" (Donapetry 1999, 73). Tina's worship does not follow strict dogma, but instead reinterprets the rites and symbolism of Catholicism. This is key to the difference between the religion of *La ley del deseo* and that depicted in other films. Even *Entre tinieblas*, with the Mother Superior's substitution of saints for famous actresses and sex icons,[75] ultimately subjugates the nuns' unconventional form of worship to the rules of the central authority. Conversely, Tina and Ada—whilst clearly influenced by Catholic imagery—practise religion in a highly personalised way, in line with the ethics of care. If religion can be reimagined, according to this logic, it is only outside the confines of its institutions. This is underscored by the Cruz de Mayo's location in Tina's apartment, its centrality reinforced time and again by the camera's attraction to it, not to mention the numerous shots of worship at its base (by Ada and Tina, and at one point including Antonio).

The women reconfigure religion for their own purposes, adopting a highly pragmatic approach to worship.[76] Their prayers to the Virgin are primarily focused on asking for favours, which are generally granted. At the altar's first appearance, Ada has taken a vow of silence. This is first interpreted by Pablo as reflecting annoyance at him, but Tina clarifies: "No, es que se ha enrollada con el altar y ha hecho voto de obediencia, de castidad y de silencio." Over dinner, Pablo offers his

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74 There is also a tension between her décor and her warning to Ángel that she is not "dispuesta a subvencionar una vida de lujo y de disipación."

75 The Mother Superior's altar and Tina's Cruz de Mayo share not only their pop culture references, but also their hybridity.

76 This echoes the "religión muy práctica" of the *abuela* (*¿Qué he hecho yo!*), which offers a survival mechanism (Almodóvar in Vidal 1990, 68; see also Sánchez-Alarcón 2008, 339-340).

sister the main role in "La voz humana," his next production, and Ada breaks her silence, declaring: "¡Funciona! ¡Funciona!"[77] It is revealed that her oath was made to support a request for work. Ada promptly asks for a role for herself, and Pablo obliges.[78] This suggests that it is not only through prayer that wishes can be granted, but also by asking directly. Perhaps to some degree self-serving, their religious worship is nevertheless "effective," although not necessarily a substitute for other forms of appeal or aid. Moreover, I would argue that it is important that Ada's subsequent prayers are for Pablo not to abandon her and Tina, and, later, for him to be protected from the police. This suggests that her intentions are not purely egoistic, but rather reflect the interpersonal concerns at the heart of Almodóvar's communities.

The casual insertion of religion into domestic moments of this film also, I argue, destabilises the association of "everyday" life (and the feminine) with the natural or humdrum. For even as religion is depicted here as a part of everyday life, its power is alluded to, both in the way prayer brings Ada and Tina together,[79] and also the fact that such prayers are invariably answered. Whilst never encouraging

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77 Ada immediately wants to ask for something else, but Tina cautions her: "No abuses, niña, bonita, cariño." The altar is also a lesson in restraint, albeit one Ada struggles to learn. In a later scene, Ada wants to ask for something as she is settling down to sleep. Tina describes her as a nuisance, yet they nevertheless go to the altar, where Ada asks that Pablo not leave them. Again, their prayers are answered—the door rings Pablo arrives to reconcile with Tina following an argument; the film's editing reinforces the altar's power.

78 Pablo also gifts Ada a white dress "digno de una santa" for her first communion, which she wears on stage in *La voz humana*. It is whilst wearing this gown she sees her mother, who responds to the news of Ada's new found faith: "Te dije que no la hicieras, Ada. Tú y yo somos ateas." Her daughter responds: "Tú seras atea. Tina y yo somos creyentes y mucho." Religion provides a way to establish independence (although it also reinforces Ada's relationship with Tina). The articulation of Ada's religiosity in terms of *believing*, rather than religious doctrine, foregrounds her agency. This is reinforced when Ada's mother, responding to news of the Cruz de Mayo, queries "Pero si estamos en junio." This highlights again Tina and Ada's adaptation of religion to their own purposes. Whilst Ada's mother voices a sceptic's view of religious belief as foolishness, this is not necessarily, I argue, Almodóvar's own conclusion, given its depiction throughout as a source of comfort.

79 Although Donapetry suggests that Tina "educates Ada as a regular Catholic" (1999, 73), it is never clear whether it is Tina or Ada who drives this process. While Tina sometimes leads their prayers, at other times Ada is clearly most keen to pray (although often to ask for something). Instead, religion seems a way to cement their relationship, their closeness consistently reinforced through framing (the two captured in profile near the altar, or kneeling before it); and costuming (both often wear red; in one scene they each have a paintbrush slipped into their up-dos; they each wear a Betty Boop shirt as a nightdress, as they enjoy milk in bed and discuss their bodies).

the viewer to believe in the absolute power of prayer, the film nevertheless foregrounds its potential to offer comfort and hope. As Sánchez-Alarcón puts it, such elements allow these characters an opportunity to "invocar el favor de las fuerzas divinas que rigen el mundo" (2008, 340). Whilst such divine forces are interpreted by Ada in terms of the Virgin's power, their mystery is not, I argue, undermined by the fact that these "miracles" are granted not by the Virgin Mary, but by the logic of Almodóvar's communities (eg Pablo giving his actress sister a role in his new play; Pablo arriving to reconcile with his sister after an argument). It is the nature of such groups to provide opportunities and share resources, and never to give up on each other.[80] Such miracles occur throughout these films, understandable as reflecting the power of interpersonal connection.[81]

The quotidian elements of Ada and Tina's life are thereby inflected with a mystery and power more readily associated with the heroic masculine than the domestic feminine (see Felski 2000, 77-98). The focus on the domestic also recalls the elements of women's time.[82] This weaving together of mundane detail of meals and discussions of cleaning with the esoteric—represented by the ostensible power of prayer—reflects the expansion of women's time as outlined by Emily Apter in her discussion of Kristeva's work (2009). It is not by chance that their prayers are offered

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80 Consider, for instance, the way Agrado assists Manuela in her search for work in *Todo sobre mi madre* (albeit unsuccessfully), and conversely the way Manuela—despite her reluctance—is unable to distance herself from the needs of her community, eg Agrado and Rosa. Such communities are often built around neighbours: Raimunda in *Volver* depends on her neighbours to dispose of Paco's body, as well as to stock her restaurant; whilst Gloria, perhaps less willingly, provides prostitute Cristal with both a stick to beat a sadomasochistic client and as spectator for an exhibitionist (*¿Qué he hecho yo!*). In *Mujeres al borde*, although Pepa tries to extricate herself from her friend Candela's troubles, she nevertheless provides refuge and sympathy.

81 For instance, the "rebirth" of Esteban (*Todo sobre mi madre*) might be interpreted as a religious motif, but it is also a testament to Manuela's care and the bonds of community. Smith, for instance, proposes that Manuela is "Mary in a new Holy Family" (2000, 193). Similarly, the Irene's resurrection in *Volver* is due not to divine intervention, but her realisation of her daughter's need to resolve their traumatic shared past.

82 See section C.i of the Introduction. It would also be possible to read *La ley del deseo* through the lens of queer time given the focus on non-heteronormative lives and romances (see Halberstam 2005; Jagose, 2009). Even the depiction of Pablo and Tina' drug-taking (as with that of the nuns) and club-going fits within these ideas, as it highlights a failure to adhere to the "pacing and schedules that inhere to family life and reproduction," undermining dominant understandings of time (Halberstam 2005, 174). This reading is not to deny that Tina is a caring and attentive mother; she regularly mentions the importance of Ada's needs. Nevertheless, Tina and Pablo seem to exist in a sort of perpetual adolescence, emblematic perhaps of the *movida*, but which also positions them outside the rhythms of the dominant heterosexual life narrative.

to the Virgin Mary, or that the Cruz de Mayo altar is populated with female icons. Women are therefore shown to have significant agency over their circumstances, albeit exercised through prayer. Moreover, their requests are directed exclusively at relational (and/or domestic) concerns. The question is whether the power of religion harnessed by Ada and Tina is open exclusively to them *as women*. We shall see when we consider the final scene of the film that this is not the case.

The concern for Pablo comes to a head in the film's dénouement. Whilst Pablo is recovering in hospital, Antonio has insinuated himself into Tina's life (and heart) in order to get closer to his former lover. The altar reappears in this final sequence, where it plays an important visual role in connecting Antonio's narrative to Catholic imagery. After over three weeks in hospital, the revelation that Tina has been sleeping with Antonio "wakes" Pablo from his amnesia. He urgently calls her and the shot cuts to the apartment, where Tina and Ada are kneeling in front of the altar (to which Pablo's rejected typewriter has now been added), with Antonio standing to Tina's side. This pseudo-family portrait suggests that Antonio has manipulated his way into all aspects of Tina's life, including the spiritual—not to mention her relationship with Ada. Whilst clearly stunned by the revelation that her lover is not what he seems, Tina quickly realises the danger she and Ada are in and tries unsuccessfully to convince Antonio that Pablo has died, so that she and Ada can leave, inciting an anguished prayer from Ada to bring Pablo back to life. Whilst Ada makes it out of the apartment, Tina is held hostage—alongside a hapless policeman—until Antonio negotiates for one last hour with the object of his affection.

In this sequence, Antonio's words draw implicitly on religious terminology, suggesting sexual shame and perhaps even internalised homophobia. He tells Pablo: "Quererte de este modo es un delito. Y estoy dispuesto a pagar por ello. … Pero no me arrepiento." This notion of sin seems to be lifted from a religious dogma that Antonio does not otherwise refer to, or obey (given his murderous intentions). The two men share a final encounter, and after their last embrace, Antonio covers Pablo with the white sheet, expressing concern that he not get cold. He proceeds into the living area, where he shoots himself, falling in front of the altar. Pablo rushes out and

upon seeing his lover's dead body, hurls the typewriter out of the window, from which it falls in slow-motion, before bursting into flames in a dumpster below.[83] As the spectators all run across the square to the building, Pablo goes back and picks Antonio up in his arms. The candles of the altar burn brighter, the sense of burning enhanced by a superimposed image of flames, perhaps from the typewriter. The all-consuming passion experienced by Antonio is given visual form, whilst it also evokes the Jesus of the burning pillar from Tina's childhood church.

Beyond this visual parallel to the image of Jesus in the church, Pablo's cradling of Antonio in his arms evokes the Christian iconography of the Virgin Mary with her son's lifeless body, otherwise known as the Pietà.[84] With the men seated in front of the Cruz de Mayo, both Tina's shrine and the image of the Pietà are appropriated by the film's central homosexual romance (see Kinder 1991, 85; D'Lugo 1991, 49). Religion is democratised once more, its symbols made available to characters who at other times have been excluded from its care. Moreover, the composition of this scene seems to offer Antonio some form of redemption. As Pastor suggests, the visual parallel drawn between Antonio and Christ offers "a way of redeeming Antonio for his imposed cultural 'sin', and conferring on him an aura of sanctity and martyrdom" (2006, 19). If religious dogma has been the source of shame or "sin", it can nevertheless offer a means of absolution.[85] I would add here that it is not any religion that can offer this possibility, however. It is important for this reading that it is Tina's postmodern altar that provides the background to Antonio's redemption,

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[83] Whilst Pablo identifies the typewriter as the cause of his woes, I argue that the narrative does not allow the viewer such a simple conclusion. Vidal, in line with Pablo, describes the typewriter as a "vehículo del mal," ie having autonomy. Yet she also suggests this item is harnessed by "el destino para involucrar a todos los personajes en una historia ficticia que acaba teniendo más entidad que la realidad misma" (1990, 309): namely, the story of Laura P. Pablo's pseudonym becomes a key suspect, but accepting this fiction as the cause of Juan's death both undermines Antonio's culpability and raises questions about the function and power of fiction. This sequence also demonstrates that Pablo sees his personal and creative lives as in conflict. He chooses care, indicating that he is willing to abandon filmmaking by throwing his typewriter from the window, therefore maintaining the possibility of remaining in the alternative family with Tina and Ada.

[84] Numerous other scenes evoke the Pietà across this filmography: Ricky and Marina when she tends to his wounds (see Yarza 1999, 128; Kinder 1991, 77); the Mother Superior's final collapse in Sor Estiércol's arms, as mentioned above (see Scarlett 2014, 134; Acevedo-Muñoz 2007); Manuela holding her dying son, Esteban in *Todo sobre mi madre* (others who have commented on religious undertones in this film include Zavales Eggert 2014; Navarro-Daniels 2002).

[85] In contrast, D'Lugo reads this scene not in terms of absolution, but as reflecting the "valorising" of homosexuality through the religious symbolism that under Franco suppressed it (1991).

for it is through her (and Ada) that religion is in this film reimagined as a more inclusive, tolerant and accepting space.

Another factor in Antonio's redemption is the fact that his death is the ultimate "self-sacrifice." According to Vidal, Antonio's suicide is motivated by love: "se mata para salvar a Pablo, es decir, para librar a Pablo y a sí mismo de una presencia y un desprecio respectivamente." (1990, 308) If this murderer is offered "forgiveness" in the film's conclusion, it is primarily due to his ability to finally put his own needs to one side and care for those of another. Whilst his jealousy and possessiveness have driven the plot to this point, by putting these aside and giving up what he loved most—Pablo—Antonio allows room for new possibilities of community. Whilst he exemplifies that which is anathema to Almodóvar's privileged forms of community, Antonio is nevertheless offered the possibility of redemption; Almodóvar reveals himself yet again to be a merciful deity.

If religion takes on a meaningful role in *La ley del deseo*, it is clearly only on the director's terms. This form of worship brings together high and low culture, is gendered feminine, and whilst closely integrated into daily life, nevertheless remains mystical and miraculous. Most significantly, religion can only be remediated if it pays close attention to the needs of the other and serves to build the bonds of community. If the disparate religious motifs and themes discussed throughout this chapter are difficult to read in a single, cohesive manner, this is not so different to other recurring elements of this filmography, which often demands that we hold competing and sometimes contradictory ideas in balance. Nevertheless, the representation of religious institutions is clear in its critique of rigid dogma. From the stark indictment of sexual abuse in *La mala educación*, to the subtler criticism of the religious hierarchy in *Entre tinieblas*, there is no room for institutional religion. Whether Almodóvar denies a place for spiritual practice is less clear. In line with his earliest comments on the need for an "atheist" religion, I argue that spirituality is compatible with Almodóvar's communities, although on the condition that it is practised in accordance with the ethics of care. Tina and Ada's form of worship is oriented towards maintaining relationships and caring for the other; to the extent that it suggests a self-serving pragmatism, I argue that this reflects Ada's immaturity

and foregrounds Tina's role in attending her moral growth. Antonio, meanwhile, is offered redemption only once he has put aside his selfishness and considered the needs of another. It is an understatement to describe his sacrifice as significant, but the final scene suggests that it allows the miracle of forgiveness.

Chapter Three: Policing the new Spain

A. Overview of chapter three

This chapter considers the third community of this thesis: the police. Taking a broader focus than the previous chapter, this chapter considers the representation of this institution throughout the filmography. Previous chapters have argued that the family and, to a lesser extent, the Church, are reimagined in Almodóvar's work. The question remains whether this filmography allows for formal legal institutions to adapt to the new social order depicted in these films, one that underpins communities founded on tolerance, mutual support and the ethics of care. Conversely, those institutions that limit the individual to strictly defined identity categories are shown to be destructive and unable to survive. The police force is one such institution.[1] From his earliest films, Almodóvar's derision of the police reflects his deep-seated suspicion of conservative ideology, and also his rejection of the repressive mechanisms of the Franco regime. As with the family and the Church, I argue that this reflects the director's ongoing engagement with questions of moral order, and his attempt to liberate Spain from the constraints of the previous socio-political paradigm. The law, as with other patriarchal institutions, is excluded from Almodóvar's privileged forms of community; the logic of his narratives sets up an irresolvable tension between official, rigid social order and domestic, care-based community.

If the director is known for his "refusal to judge his characters" (Fuentes 2009, 430), this is less apparent in his depiction of the law. It is widely acknowledged that Almodóvar's police are the most reviled and satirised of all the institutions he engages with (see Allinson 2001, 60; Conrod 2012). In fact, these films continually undermine the law's moral authority. In this chapter, I address questions of moral order, together with the relationship between the ethic of justice—generally

[1] This is not to deny that even within the law there are elements that will pull in different directions, potentially offering pockets of resistance to hegemonic norms.

privileged by formal public institutions and legal mechanisms[2]—and the ethics of care. I argue that the persistent engagement with themes of deviance, justice, and ethics suggests a deep concern with social regulation on the filmmaker's part. Through the deconstruction of social norms and the rejection of conventional forms of community, these films offer an alternative ethical framework that leaves little room for the formal mechanisms of law. Its officers remain stuck, unable to move past the Francoist order in which their role was clear: to enforce the social and legal prescriptions on which the dictatorship rested.[3]

This chapter offers a comprehensive overview of the law in this filmography. In the first section, I offer a taxonomy of the police officer: either abusive or incompetent, and occasionally both.[4] I argue that the representation of policemen (for they are invariably male characters[5]) in these films is the manifestation of a suspicion of conservative ideology, and a rejection of the repressive elements of the dictatorship. Revealing an attitude that is egoistic in its lack of attention to the other, not to mention dogmatic,[6] Almodóvar's police cannot fit within his alternative social order.

I also consider how Almodóvar's manipulation of time highlights police ineffectiveness, challenging the underlying linear logic of conventional police work. Detectives often lag behind non-official investigators. The second section explores alternative powers that emerge to confront and replace the police, primarily through the lens of space. Various narratives foreground "feminine spaces," such as the kitchen, in which conflict between the police and women hints at a transition to a post-patriarchal order. Whilst the progressiveness of Almodóvar's privileging of the

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2 The ethic of justice is premised on formal principles such as hierarchy and an assumption of equal opportunity: Stopler (2005); Okin (1989); Prout (1999, 63).

3 Almodóvar's earliest films, mainly, suggest that the law's legacy of complicity in the regime is yet to be shaken off.

4 It is not coincidence that there are parallels to the taxonomy of fathers offered in chapter one, given that both are patriarchal archetypes.

5 A single exception is the policewoman at the police station reception desk in *Matador*.

6 That is, when they take notice of the war. As discussed below, the police often perceive themselves as above it.

domestic can be challenged (and has been convincingly[7]), I argue that it is a source of power equal to, and sometimes greater than, that of the police, offering an alternative to the current legal order. This foregrounding of feminine space highlights the importance of gender to my analysis. Almodóvar's films pose a challenge: to find new forms of masculinity that can be included in the alternative communities he privileges. I argue that these films contest the rigid masculine ideal privileged during the Franco years, potentially offering a space for reimagining Spanishness and Spanish masculinity. Building on the discussion of gender in chapter one, I interrogate the police's relation to a particular, perhaps doomed, ideal of Spanish masculinity in post-Transition Spain.

The third section of this chapter considers the way the police are increasingly pushed to the margins. This institution is strikingly absent in later films, even when crime is central to the plot. I explore whether the police absence in more recent films, chiefly *Hable con ella*, hints at a potential failure of the post-Transition socio-political order: in the space left by the departure of formal authority, alternative communities do not always emerge.

Finally, I ask—as with the family and the Church—whether the law can be redeemed, given that any connection with the law (professionally at least) seems harmful to the individual personally and in terms of their ability to experience meaningful community.[8] While this discussion focuses on masculine embodiments of the law, I first consider briefly the possibilities suggested by two female lawyers: Paulina (*Mujeres al borde*), described as a "feminist" lawyer, and María (*Matador*), both a criminal lawyer and a serial killer. María and Paulina, the two sole female figures of the law, are prevented from forming social connections and are excluded from the forms of community generally available to women in Almodóvar's films. The section then turns to the cross-dressing Juez Domingo, aka Femme Letal. A judge, rather than a police officer, this character nevertheless offers a more

[7] As discussed in chapter one, Almodóvar's idealisation of the self-abnegating mother is problematic in the way it limits women to motherhood, refusing them other forms of expression and fulfilment: Cruz (2002); Camino (2010); Zecchi (2005).

[8] This accords with the conclusions of chapter one about "patriarchal" mothers. Even for women, association with a patriarchal institution is a barrier to community.

progressive vision of the law, one which might be compatible with a new, more tolerant Spain. This does not necessarily reflect greater faith on the director's part in the institutions of authority *per se*. Any such claim would be undermined—I contend—by the absence or failure of police in narratives where crime or violence is central.[9] Rather, the development in the representation of the law mirrors a more nuanced morality that emerges in the Manchegan's work. If earlier films adopt a wholly amoral attitude, where all behaviour is acceptable, from about 2000 the director's work adopts a darker, less optimistic tone.[10] Whilst the ethics of care emerges as a key organising principle of Almodóvar's communities, the director seems to become less optimistic about its possibilities in later films. I argue that in the end, the decreasing presence of the law in these films confirms its irrelevance for Almodóvar's ethical framework.[11]

Before providing an overview of the relevant scholarship, I want to contextualise this discussion of the police given that "the police" vary according to social, political and historical context. The Spanish term "*policía*" may refer to both the institution and its members, but the distinction is not significant for present purposes given my contention that the representation of the individual officers is a commentary on the institution itself and on the law, more broadly. An additional complication is the existence of multiple agencies of law enforcement in Spain, including the *Guardia Civil* and the National Police.[12] A military order which considered itself part of the army (Macdonald 1987), the *Guardia Civil* makes only one appearance in Almodóvar's films, *La ley del deseo*, where one of its officers is represented as kind hearted and tolerant.[13] Therefore, references to the police in

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9 Plots focusing on crime are numerous. As with other aspects of his work such as the recurring trope of the church and the police, the director's focus on deviancy has been read as a means to explore Spain's authoritarian legacy (see Sánchez Conejero 2007, 79).

10 This coincides with the beginning of what I have described as his "black" period: see the Introduction, page 3.

11 In relation to *¡Átame!*, Almodóvar has said "transgression isn't my aim, for it implies the kind of respect and acceptance of the law I'm incapable of" (Strauss 2006, 18).

12 Additionally, every municipality is empowered to create its own police force, giving rise to a third level, the municipal police.

13 There are various possible reasons for this. First, the *Guardia Civil* is more visible in rural areas and most of these narratives take place in cities; there is an enduring perception that it is better integrated into rural daily life (Jaime-Jiménez 1996). Secondly, the *Guardia Civil* is viewed more favourably than the other forces, as its mandate emphasises social service (reflected in the

this chapter are to the National Police, unless otherwise stated. Charged with investigating the most serious crimes in cities such as Madrid, it is this body that appears most frequently in these films and is subjected to Almodóvar's peculiar blend of socio-political critique and parody. This is best understood in light of police involvement in the Franco regime.

At a more general level, the agency is defined by its mandate to fight crime and maintain order, although ideas about crime and order are contingent and subject to moral as well as political manipulations. This is apparent in Almodóvar's problematisation of the nexus between crime and official sanctions. Whilst the Church, as outlined in the previous chapter, operates as an ideological state apparatus—supporting and reinforcing dominant ideology through processes of socialisation and interpellation—Althusser classifies the police as a repressive state apparatus. Such mechanisms maintain and regulate the ideology of the State through more active means, having been granted power to discipline breaches of society's rules (Althusser 2014, 153). As with the ideological state apparatuses, a repressive state apparatus influences individual consciousness, as mentioned above. Law is implicated in maintaining hegemonic social structures, and is consequently resistant to social and political change. Meanwhile, Jacques Derrida ascribes the police a metonymic status as "exemplary figures of the violence of the law" (1990, 1009). He continues that the police have the power to exercise a ghostly violence, as they "are present, sometimes invisible but always effective, wherever there is preservation of the social order" (1990, 1009). This effectiveness is premised on violence, or at least the threat of such, evident in Almodóvar's representation of these figures. Nevertheless, as with the representation of other institutions associated with the Franco regime, foregrounding—and often ridiculing—institutions such as the law offers a "manera de cuestionar su funcionamiento y sobre todo la escasa ética que presentan" (Gómez Gómez 2012, 68).

alternative name: *La Benemérita*) (Jar Couselo 1994, 184; 192; Silva 2010); this was confirmed by a 1995 survey in which the *Guardia Civil* scored more favourably than the other forces on measures such as respecting citizens' rights and professionalism (Raldúa Martín 1996, 334). Finally, although I do not suggest this is a significant factor, Almodóvar's own brother-in-law was a member of the agency (Zurián 2013b, 40).

Whilst the police of this corpus are post-Transition public servants, their representation can be analysed against the backdrop of this history. The police role as social and moral watchdog is heightened in the context of a regime, such as the Francoist dictatorship, whose power was "based almost exclusively on military prowess and repression" (Ellwood 1990, 212). One legacy of the violence of the Civil War—during which all security agencies participated in punitive expeditions to towns that had resisted the ultimately victorious nationalists (Dunnage 2006, 101)—was a close association between each police agency and the Franco regime.[14] The police forces as a whole were adopted by the regime as an instrument "en la lucha contra la disidencia política," with the unintended consequence of "detrayendo en gran medida su atención de la vigilancia y persecución de la delincuencia común" (Jaime-Jiménez 1996, 145). This was reinforced by policies that emphasised their loyalty to the State over service to the Spanish people (Palacios Cerezales 2010, 430),[15] although, as Julius Ruiz reminds us, the structures of repression evolved over the period of dictatorship (2005, 227). The police in Spain (as elsewhere) have always been "un instrumento de represión y de control al servicio de los grupos sociales, económicos y políticos dominantes" (Raldúa Martín 1996, 327), recalling Althusser's categorisation of the agency as part of the repressive state apparatus. Whilst this is not confined to the Francoist period,[16] it is important to acknowledge the role played by the police in the country's recent past. Certainly, Almodóvar's representation of this institution—at least initially—draws on this authoritarian legacy.

[14] Although the *Guardia Civil* was associated with the nationalist right during and after the Civil War (Ellwood 1990; Paxton 2013), and a majority of its members supported the *Falangist* uprising (Dunnage 2006, 101; Blaney 2003; Blaney 2005), it is not necessarily perceived as more implicated in Francoist violence.

[15] The association was further strengthened by the lack of significant reforms after the Civil War (Dunnage 2006, 106), whilst the "disappearance" of police and other records has impeded legal redress for wartime violence (Ruiz 2005, 12; Boyd 2008, 136).

[16] The use of force and an "authoritarian professional culture" are of course police mechanisms even in democratic contexts (Palacios Cerezales 2010, 430). Nevertheless, during the Transition moderately successful reforms were introduced to reduce the police's military characteristics and to recalibrate their relationship with Spanish citizens (Jaime-Jiménez 1996; Macdonald 1987), accompanied by a broader transformation in their objectives and attitudes (Palacios Cerezales 2010).

i. The law in Almodóvar's films and the scholarship: A review

Although numerous academics have discussed the law and the police in Almodóvar's work, no recent scholarship has provided a comprehensive review of these figures as the basis for discussion. Moreover, this contribution explicitly considers the notable absence of the police in narratives with a focus on violence and/or crime. This has not been considered elsewhere in any depth. While the police are mentioned in dozens of articles, chapters and books, only a few focus specifically on this theme. Indeed, when contrasted with the wealth of material on the family, and to a lesser extent religion, material analysing the role of the police is sparse (see Conrod 2012, 104). This is perhaps explained by the chronological organisation of a number of the key monographs, which does not allow for consideration of character types. What is missing from this literature is a comprehensive analysis of the symbolic significance of the police across Almodóvar's works, which is provided here.

As early as 1988, Vidal identified the police officer as a key Almodóvar figure, noting that despite the director's disdain for the institution, policemen appeared in all his early films (1990, 335). She offers a brief summary of such characters, but with little analysis. In a similar vein, Sánchez-Alarcón comments on the "unidimensional" portrayal of these figures (2008, 338) and Jorge González del Pozo observes the prevalence in these films of "policías de todo tipo pero generalmente corruptos" (2012a, 27). In his monograph, Allinson includes a short section on "Police, Crime and Drugs" (2001, 58-62) in which he notes the habitually "critical or derisory tone" with which the officers of the law are represented (2001, 58). Whilst Allinson provides a good overview, the discussion is brief and without detailed analysis. Moreover, although he observes that crime becomes less of a focus in later films (2001, 60), releases since publication of this monograph have turned back towards the theme. Since 2000, many of Almodóvar's films feature sexual violence, in particular.[17]

One of the earliest and most significant discussions of the police is in D'Lugo's "Almodóvar's City of Desire" (1991), which explores the director's use of urban space

[17] I argue that the absence of the police is striking in light of the prevalence of such violence, especially when it is contrasted with their ubiquity in earlier works.

to critique Spanish moral institutions and their impact on individual identity and desire. Focusing primarily on the depiction of Madrid, D'Lugo's argument is premised on a distinctive interpretation of the presence and function of the police, whom he sees as authorising the shift to a new social order in which the police serve a passive role. The transformation traced by D'Lugo raises an unresolved dilemma. It is due to the police being present, but helpless, that D'Lugo claims these films suggest a Spain in which the law valorises a new social order. Yet if the police have lost their authority, by what power can they valorise this shift? Their presence may be required to reflect the shifting social order; however, I argue, these films present the police as unable to either prevent or authorise the alternative morality. This fits with the director's general challenge to patriarchal order, which decentres men but does not entirely banish them. Where D'Lugo's analysis focuses primarily on the police as witness, I take this further by considering their relationship to space, especially those spaces from which they are excluded.

If D'Lugo established the significance of the police in the post-Transition order of Almodóvar's works, Frédéric Conrod's 2012 article is the only piece of scholarship to focus exclusively on their depiction. This important piece identifies a series of early Almodóvar films (1980 to 1997) with significant police characters. Conrod's approach is twofold. First, he explores the ways the main Francoist institutions—including the police and the Church—were defined by the limitations they imposed on desire (2012, 104). Secondly, he traces the way that "the growing impotence of the *policía*" reflects not only the "extinction" of traditional Spain, but also a shift to a different model of masculinity (2012, 105). He notes an evolution from the caricature of Luci's husband (*Pepi, Luci, Bom*), to the more fully realised characters of David and Sancho (*Carne trémula*). While I agree that these later characters offer a more complex and varied vision of masculinity, in my analysis below I foreground the way that they are nevertheless excluded from Almodóvar's communities. Their rehabilitation is not, it would seem, complete.

The theme of gender also features in the discussion of the police by numerous other scholars. Vernon (1995), for instance, views *¿Qué he hecho yo!* as outlining a post-patriarchal vision of the world, where the police are outsmarted by Gloria's

(feminine) domestic know-how. This, she argues, challenges "the hold of [Francoist] history over future stories" (1995, 38). In her analysis, the police play a role not in validating an alternative order, as D'Lugo argues, but in highlighting the complete failure of the previous social structure.[18] Meanwhile, Pavlović's (2007) analysis of masculinity in *Carne trémula* contends that the film offers a utopic tale of post-Transition social integration together with a fatalistic revenge story, where masculinity serves as a "metaphor for the evolution of democratic change" (2007, 165). The two police protagonists reinforce her reading of this film as a commentary on Spain's democratic social order and the new masculinities available.[19]

The work of Vernon and Pavlović exemplifies a broader tendency to focus on the nexus between Spain's Francoist inheritance and the police, as monitor and regulator of deviance. Almodóvar's representation of the police is thereby often read as part of a broader critique of the key institutions of the Franco regime (eg García de León and Maldonado 1989; D'Lugo 1991; Sánchez-Alarcón 2008, 338). This emerges, according to many of these readings, through Almodóvar's irreverent attitude. Whilst generally not sympathetically portrayed, these policemen—and the State they represent—are no longer to be feared, gesturing towards a "new" Spain that has moved beyond the burden of dictatorship (García de León and Maldonado 1989, 159). The representation of the police is therefore connected by these scholars to a broader interpretation of Almodóvar's work as addressing Spain's social, cultural and political liberation.

More generally, the literature has only paid scant attention to the representation of the law. Carlos Javier García (2009) provides an insightful analysis of the way judicial perspectives frame Almodóvar's films, based on the premise that the law "crea cauces por los que se desarrolla la busca de la individualidad y la

[18] Nevertheless, Vernon seems to concur with D'Lugo's observations about the police as on-screen spectators, charged with approving the new socio-political framework.

[19] Blanco Cano (2006) also frames the film's representation of masculinity in terms of the democratisation of Spain and the attendant shifts in norms of masculinity, although she focuses less on David and Sancho being police officers. Various others consider *Carne trémula*—and Víctor in particular—as a commentary on the dictatorship and the Transition, although without focusing on the presence of the police: Schaefer (2003, 132-134); D'Lugo (2006, 96-99); Acevedo-Muñoz (2009, 99-101); and Correa Ulloa (2005, 111-114). It is, of course, one of the director's only films to directly reference the dictatorship.

organización de comunidades y grupos sociales" (2009, 45). Tracing the law's structuring function through a number of Almodóvar's narratives, García concludes that it retains an organising function in the new social order, although its limitations are revealed by focusing on legal infractions.[20] Similarly, Agustín Gómez Goméz proposes that ridiculing institutions such as the police offers Almodóvar a "manera de cuestionar su funcionamiento y sobre todo la escasa ética que presentan" (2012, 68). From a feminist legal perspective, meanwhile, Orit Kamir (2000; 2006) and Mónica López-Lerma (2010) both focus on *Tacones lejanos*, but reach different conclusions as to its possibilities for offering a new moral framework.[21]

A more bountiful area of relevant scholarship focuses on Almodóvar's portrayal of violence. This literature draws attention to the director's regular engagement with themes of crime and violence, starkly highlighting the failure of the police to effectively regulate such matters. These discussions are often framed in terms of gender (Zecchi 2001; Blanco Cano 2006; Acevedo-Muñoz 2007, 10; Le Pallec Marand 2007; Zanzana 2010; Martín 2014; Caballero Gálvez and Zurián Hernández 2016).[22] Alternatively, they address the relationship between violence and sex or desire (Wu 2004; Evans 2009; Morris 2012), notably as suggested in the recurrent theme of voyeurism (Nandorfy 1993; Acevedo-Muñoz 2007, 204-219; Ohi 2009). Caballero Gálvez and Zurián Hernández (2016) offer an original approach, classifying Almodóvar's gender-based violence according to the abuser type.[23] Some argue that violence against women is "dangerously trivialised" in this corpus (Cruz and Zecchi 2004, 153; Aguilar Carrasco 2006), or at the least minimised (including Kakoudaki 2008; Mirguet 2011). Conversely, others view the representation of sexual violence

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20 García (2012) returns to Almodóvar's representation of the law in a later chapter, focusing more broadly on Almodóvar's engagement with political and ideological ideas. Here, García considers not only Almodóvar's oeuvre, but also politico-biographical factors to argue that although the director himself operates within the law, his films continue to illustrate the need for individuals to resolve their problems outside of the law.

21 López-Lerma's analysis is largely reproduced in a 2011 article published in the *Southern California Interdisciplinary Law Journal*, reflecting the jurisprudential focus of her analysis. I engage with this in more detail below, from page 226.

22 Whilst these scholars largely avoid passing judgment on these representations, Zanzana (2010), coming from a more sociological perspective, mentions *Pepi, Luci, Bom* in an analysis of the representation of domestic violence in Spanish cinema, and concludes that the film shows a "blatant disregard for the victim" (2010, 396).

23 These classifications are outlined in footnote 24 of chapter one.

as acknowledging the complexity of such crimes and their impact (Smith 2000; Kinder 2004; Eaton 2009b; Lev 2013; Saenz 2013; Marcantonio 2015). At times, scholars avoid either position and maintain a more ambiguous stance, focusing on how representations of violence illuminate cultural questions (Corbin 2006; Naughten 2007). My approach avoids an absolutist conclusion, suggesting that the representation of violence in these films may at times undermine its seriousness, while at other times foregrounding the significant trauma that follows.

These various lines of analysis offer diverse and complex approaches to Almodóvar's depictions of the law and related themes. They also tell us something of the broader implications of these portrayals of the police and the law, which not only speak to us of the institution and its limitations, but also of broader issues such as justice, social order and ethics. The next sections work through these themes in relation to various examples, developing a more comprehensive analysis of the law in these films than any discussion to date.

B. The mad, the bad and the ugly

i. Changing the clocks: Challenging police authority over social order

Across Almodóvar's films, the police are unsympathetic, even if their primary fault is only general ineffectiveness. I propose that Almodóvar's films offer two types of policeman: the violent, and the incompetent. The former category is most prevalent in his earliest works, in which representations of the police highlight abuses of power and tie them explicitly to authoritarian forms of regulation. These earliest police characters can be understood, I argue, in light of a critical feminist tradition that is not only concerned with the limitations and stereotypes that affect women, but also those that impact on men. For example, in her book on the maternal instinct in the ethics of care, Noddings identifies the way that "male-proud traditions" deny boys and men the opportunity to develop their nurturing side (2010, 248; see also Connell 2005).

The police remain generally unsympathetic across the remainder of the corpus, but brutality becomes less prevalent; police are increasingly portrayed as hapless, inefficient and a target of ridicule. But to what extent is this connected to ruptures in

linear causality throughout the corpus? If later representations are more sympathetic (such as the arguably progressive David in *Carne trémula*), I argue that it is only in the context of incompetence that such characters are "forgiven". They remain, however, excluded from Almodóvar's communities. Furthermore, what will become clear in this discussion of the police is that they seem unable to fit within the ethics of care. This is mainly due to their egoism, and for some police characters, their dogmatism.

From the caricaturish yet violent policeman in *Pepi, Luci, Bom*, the policeman is an almost constant presence in the early films of this corpus. If *Laberinto de pasiones* ignores the police and *Entre tinieblas* mentions them only briefly, the next films generally depict scenarios in which the police attempt, unsuccessfully, to solve or prevent crime, from the impotent Polo in *¿Qué he hecho yo!* to the buffoonish officers in *Kika*.[24] These figures reveal the emergence of a new order, as the law's authority—crucially aligned with the patriarchal order of the dictatorship—gives way to a new moral authority vested in a burgeoning matriarchy (see D'Lugo 1991; Vernon 1993). This new framework can be understood, I argue, by reference to the ethics of care. In each of these narratives, the police are thwarted in their efforts to regulate behaviour. They are also, significantly, excluded from community. Indeed, the hopelessness of the police is revealed partly through their inability to establish meaningful and effective relationships, even with their professional partners, with whom they are often in conflict.[25]

Police incompetence also challenges notions of linear causality, as explored in chapter one. For Vernon, the lack of real consequences of crime reveals the possibilities of the post-patriarchal society, and "affirms its power not, as one might have thought, to forget history, the past of Francoism, but to challenge the hold of that history over future stories" (1993, 38). This is in keeping with my contention that women's time offers a politically potent way of recasting events, from individual

[24] I discuss in section D of this chapter those examples where the police are entirely absent, despite the fact that crime and violence remain key themes.

[25] Such conflicts are discussed in section B.ii b below.

moments of daily life to broader socio-political narratives.[26] The police are incapable of maintaining social order and regulating violence. In *Pepi, Luci, Bom*, of course, police intervention is never an option given that Pepi's rapist is an officer, whilst in *Laberinto de pasiones* incest is revealed without any reference to the law. This is equally true of *Volver*, with its multi-generational stories of sexual abuse and incest. The failure of the police to regulate such "private" instances of violence speaks to the private/public binary feminists have identified at the heart of patriarchal law (see M. Davies 1994, 190-193). Police are also excluded from the communities these films privilege. This is in part due to their lack of morality, evidenced time and again through indifference and/or brutality. I investigate here the various ways in which the law—and its claim to impose consequences for breaching the social order—is challenged.[27] Yet in these films, such failings also gesture towards new possibilities of law and moral order spearheaded by women. I argue that this reflects the transition to a post-patriarchal, or perhaps matriarchal, world governed by the ethics of care.

ii. From violence to incompetence

a. A violent force

Across Almodóvar's works, officers routinely overstep their authority. This is evident from his first feature film: *Pepi, Luci, Bom y otras chicas del montón*.[28] The film's carnivalesque plot takes place in a gritty Madrid that is the "opposite of a 'postcard' depiction" (Rodríguez Ortega 2014, n.p.), following three women: Pepi, a young virgin heiress; Luci, a mousy housewife with a hidden thirst for masochism; and Bom, a teenage punk singer.[29] The film's main male character is Luci's husband, credited simply as "the policeman". That he is unnamed emphasises the significance of his occupation for comic effect, whilst also implying that brutality, intellectual

[26] Almodóvar deploys this potential to reimagine the Spanish family in ways requiring the patriarch's departure, thereby undermining his authority. As we saw in chapter one, this provides space for new forms of family to emerge. It is not clear that the same conclusion can be reached with regards the police.

[27] My characterisation of certain police characters means that the discussion is ordered thematically rather than chronologically, although each section is chronological.

[28] See D'Lugo 2006 16-26 for a detailed discussed of the plot and the unusual filming process.

[29] For insightful general analysis of the film, see Smith (2000, 9-21) and D'Lugo (2006, 16-26). See also DiFrancesco (2009) for a discussion of the film in terms of lesbian families.

simplicity and retrograde values are inherent to the legal institution. The character embodies the fascistic State (see D'Lugo 2006, 23; Ceia 2016, 254), and reinforces the disconnect between official law and morality. This is revealed primarily through his interactions with the liberated female protagonists. As Acevedo-Muñoz observes, the policeman provides a perfect contrast to the (2007, 14):[30]

> exaggerated portrait of what 'freedom' and 'so much democracy' meant for [Almodóvar's] generation, whose members grew up traumatically repressed yet were to attain all sorts of personal and public freedoms.

Besides the two sexual assaults, this character "continually voices the tenets of the old guard Francoist ideology: law and order, misogyny and homophobia" (D'Lugo 1991, 51).[31] This reinforces the link between sexual violence and sexism, additionally connecting these social ills to the Francoist legacy. For these reasons, perhaps, Allinson views Luci's husband as the "most objectionable incarnation of the profession" in this corpus (2001, 59). He is therefore a useful place to commence my analysis of Almodóvar's deconstruction of the law's authority.

The policeman's depravity is apparent from his first appearance in the film's opening minutes, when he rapes Pepi "in exchange" for overlooking her illegally grown marijuana plants. He leverages his official authority when he visits her apartment, having noticed her marijuana plants from his home across the courtyard. His tone is curt from the first, a stark contrast to Pepi's playfulness. This quality positions her as representative of the *movida*, in the sense that the movement's "frivolity is a political stance that both rejected Francoism's propriety and separated the movement from the direct involvement and sobriety of the political progressives" (Pavlović et al 2009, 164). The policeman has no time to enforce the letter of the law before Pepi proposes an alternative. She lifts her skirt and asks: "¿Qué te parece este conejito en salsa?"[32] With gestures that suggest cunnilingus

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30 Nevertheless, whilst it is possible to read the film as situated in democratic Spain (see Arroyo's introduction to the DVD), García cautions against overstating the significance of the new political order, as this fictional world does not accord precisely with historical fact (2009, 47-48). I take a medium position: this world would clearly not be possible absent the Transition, but Almodóvar's films at times ignore (or even reject) history.

31 Smith similarly suggests he is a "caricature Fascist, as brutal as he is corrupt" (2000, 10).

32 Apparently Maura and Almodóvar disagreed over this line, with Maura of the opinion "que las mujeres no dicen ese tipo de cosas" (Arroyo 2011, 274, endnote x).

rather than intercourse, she continues: "Saúl vendió su primogenitura por un plato de lentejas. ¿No harías tú la vista gorda por un platito como éste?"[33] When the policeman indicates his interest, she asks him to try "por detrás" because she is "más acostumbrada." He calls her a pervert and proceeds to penetrate her forcefully.[34] Without this excusing the sexual assault, Pepi's proposition complicates any reading of the assault as it grants her some agency. A further complicating factor is her revelation that she had been saving her virginity to auction it off. Yet even if Pepi's complaint is framed primarily in economic terms, and the emotional harm downplayed, the ferocity of Pepi's thirst for revenge, as García highlights, "parece sobrepasar la dimensión económica mediante la que ella define lo ocurrido" (2009, 46). Pepi is unmistakably positioned as an alternative authority, her quest for revenge establishing "a battle between the old order of the dictatorship, epitomised by the policeman, and the new subjectivity of a sexually and socially-progressive woman who asserts her unalienable freedom" (Rodríguez Ortega 2014, n.p.; see also Pavlović et al 2009, 164). The film's various plotlines therefore position freedom and dictatorship in direct opposition.

These two social orders overlap in their response to violence. If the sexual assaults confirm "that sexual assault is the only type of sexual activity that the policeman desires" (Acevedo Muñoz 2007, 20),[35] Pepi too is sexually aroused by violence. She rubs herself against the corner of a building as Bom and a group of friends beat her assailant, although they are in fact attacking his twin.[36] It is

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33 This is a characteristic religious reference, blending humour and parody of authority.

34 Even if in this scene Almodóvar "successfully portrays a humorous edge to rape", as Allinson remarks (2001, 77), the seriousness of sexual assault is referenced later. As Luci is in hospital recovering from the beating by her husband, a friend remarks that at least she wasn't raped, implying that would be a far worse outcome.

35 The policeman commits a second sexual assault when he takes advantage of a neighbour's affection for his twin, Juan, forcing himself on the young woman in a scene whose culmination we do not witness. The policeman's sexual identity is therefore inflected with authoritarianism. As Caballero Gálvez and Zurián Hernández observe, the hypermasculine stereotype is reflected in the officer's sexual voracity, competitiveness and violence (2016, 858). Through this character, official legal institutions are framed in Francoist and patriarchal terms, even if their effectiveness in addressing crime is undermined.

36 The group members are dressed in the traditional madrileleño costume of "chulapo/as" as they walk down the street singing a *zarzuela*. The policeman's twin seems to find them charming: he greets them enthusiastically and kisses Bom's hand in a gesture of apparent chivalry. This festive air parodies violence, as the gravity of vengeance gives way to a celebratory parade.

significant that while the sexual assault occurs in Pepi's home—highlighting the ways in which home has not always been a "domain of 'safety'," in line with recent work in geographies of sexuality (Wright 2010, 59)[37]—her revenge takes place in the street. This suggests that the law has lost control of public space. As the law's authority is diminished, that of Pepi and her group of young, progressive friends grows, reflected in both their violence and Pepi's arousal. Excited by her revenge, Pepi's desire is directed to the buildings themselves, further suggesting her connection with public space. Although, as noted by Vanessa Ceia, the *movida* was, in its early days, "very much a private affair, restricted to private homes, indoor establishments and underground cultural and social circles" (2016, 251-252), these protagonists adopt the streets as an extension of their living spaces.

Whilst later films give more time to domestic spaces, *Pepi, Luci, Bom* refuses the distinction between private and public space in subtle ways, undermining the police through the displacement of their authority. If, as Ceia notes, Almodóvar's depiction of space in this film "equalizes and democratizes his representation of different characters" and thereby highlights the fluid nature of identities (2016, 260), I argue this holds also for the power relations between them. While Pepi experiences violence in her home, an unfortunately common occurrence, she subsequently claims public space as her own.

This is equally evident in the relationship between the policeman and Luci. Described by Gwynne Edwards as "the embodiment of traditional male attitudes, especially towards women" (2001, 21), we learn that it is these very qualities that attracted his wife. Luci's masochism is first revealed in her relationship with Bom. Having married the policeman because she believed he would treat her "como una perra," Luci was instead disappointed when he respected her "como si fuera su madre." Her brief affair with Bom has unexpected consequences: Luci is "reunited"

[37] If the home is transgressed through this sexual assault, Pepi's homelife is equally presented in intricate detail, distancing male pleasure. As Smith notes, the triangular relationship between the three women "raises particular problems for the heterosexual male spectator, whose quest for pleasure in the pornographic scene is continually disrupted by the banal, material detail (knitting needles and polite conversation)" (1995, 26). Whilst in other films considered in this thesis the domestic foregrounds women's time, here it is turned on its head through the juxtaposing of knitting with sex acts such as the *meada* (where Bom pisses on a fully clothed Luci).

with her husband after he beats her to within an inch of her life. Yet when Pepi and Bom try to "rescue" her, Luci tells them that she "deserves" much worse than Bom delivers. Pepi's last-ditch effort is to warn Luci that the policeman will return to treating her like his mother, but the latter responds (happily) that she is confident he will never forgive her. The policeman stands at the side of Luci's bed throughout this exchange, which could indicate his power over her. However, the camera cuts him out, reducing him to a hand, which Luci clutches in a defiant gesture as she reassures Pepi that this is what she wants. In a film in which the depiction of sexual assault is shocking for its understatement and comedy, this moment highlights Luci's agency, rather than her husband's; it is she who determines the dynamics of this marriage, insisting on her own punishment. As Smith argues, the film's conclusion "does not dissolve ethical dilemmas [but] requires the viewer to mediate on the power structures inherent in all sexual relations" (1995, 31). Luci's adoption of a "submissive" role illustrates Almodóvar's complex attitude towards identity, and his reflection that "every couple has their own rules" (Strauss 2006, 16).[38]

The policeman is both derided and celebrated for his violence; even if he initially treated Luci like a "mother," she seems thrilled as she lies in the hospital bed bandaged like a "mummy". In keeping with the foregrounding of Pepi's agency during her sexual assault and in its aftermath, the film depicts Luci reconciling with her husband on her own terms. The housewife is also reimagined through Luci's declared masochism, which grants her sexual agency, even as her circumstances might seem shocking to Pepi and Bom (not to mention the spectator).

It is possible that Luci's insistence that she "deserves" to be mistreated is an internalisation of the misogyny of Francoist society. Allinson, for instance, proposes that her "masochistic tendencies are a grotesque inflation of her social position as the submissive wife of an unreconstructed and bigoted patriarch" (2001, 75). While this reading potentially conflates the social with the individual in a way that is rejected throughout these films, it also aligns with my argument that alignment with

[38] Although romantic couples are not the focus of this thesis, there is much to be said about the way many of these relationships seem to lack "care" as defined by the ethics of care. This is true not only for this early pairing, but throughout the corpus.

official law limits the possibilities for interpersonal connection. Pavlović et al comment that Luci's narrative arc illustrates the democratisation of pleasure and unrestrained fantasy (2009, 165),[39] which is reinforced by the de-centring of the law, embodied by the policeman.

The policeman shows little insight into the relationship between his behaviour and this reunion, nor into the changing social order. In stark contrast to the film's other locus of authority, the highly reflexive Pepi,[40] the policeman lacks self-awareness and is unable to understand that his loss of status stems from broader social shifts. When his wife leaves him, he searches for a law that will force her to return, nostalgic for the days when a wife was the property of her husband.[41] Although he finds no such regulation, the policeman holds fast to the law, albeit only when it suits him. When he confronts Luci after months of separation, he attempts to arrest her based on a recently enacted regulation requiring all citizens to keep their national identity cards on their person. This selfishly utilitarian approach to the law shows a lack of consideration of justice or ethics. As Smith observes, his legalistic discourse is revealed to be "an empty repetition of propositions that have lost any truth-value that they may have once had" (1995, 27). That the policeman's legal authority has been diminished by socio-political shifts reveals the externally derived nature of this power. This is reinforced by Luci's taunting: "Cobarde. Un verdadero marido no necesita decretos para tratar a su mujer como se merece." Of course, the policeman's hard-line rhetoric on law and order is undermined by his actions: he

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39 Pavlović et al also suggest, referring to Luci's role in the *Errecciones generales*, that Almodóvar "resignifies the character of the housewife, liberating her from the traditional role of woman and sacrificial mother so typical of the Franco period, and turning her into a protagonist of postmodernity" (2009, 168). As they mention, and as discussed in chapter one and again in section C.i.a of this chapter, the director turns to the same theme more earnestly in *¿Qué he hecho yo!* and *Volver*.

40 This is evident when Pepi briefs Luci and Bom on the filming of her screenplay, advising them that as well as playing themselves, they will be acting. She states: "la representación es siempre artificial."

41 Whilst this was never officially enshrined in law as such, legally women were dependent on their husband (or father), needing permission to apply for a job, open a bank account or obtain a passport (Radcliff 2001; Roca i Girona 2005; and Gómez Nicolau 2013 discuss further issues around workforce participation). Franco also reversed the Republican legalisation of divorce (Graham 2005, 134). Whilst many of these laws remained until Franco's death, the dismantling of certain restrictions began in the 1960s (Davidson 2011). Alberdi (1999, 55-79; and 2004) outlines changes to laws relating to the family.

does not consider himself bound by the law; rather, it is a tool for the fulfilment of his personal desires.[42]

Nevertheless, while this policeman's actions are brutal and violent, he is still an easy comic target. His powerlessness against his own caricature-like depiction is ironically highlighted by his assertion following a thwarted "drug raid" on Pepi's apartment that "es prohibido burlarse de la policía." Unable to police the way others respond to him, the officer's ability to impose order on society more generally is seriously undermined. He is denied any active part even in the reconciliation with his wife, who returns to him to fulfil her masochistic desires. The emphasis on feminine sexual agency throughout this film visibilises women's desire, whilst also revealing the self-centredness and violence of the policeman's sexual activities. The cruel (albeit ineffective) policeman of *Pepi, Luci, Bom* is Almodóvar's most violent depiction of the office, but there are others with similar tendencies—chiefly, Sancho (*Carne trémula*), discussed in more detail below.

b. Partners in crime or fools in time

Across Almodóvar's films, policemen generally appear in pairs, a "homosocial archetype" (Maddison 2000a, 273).[43] I argue—in line with Conrod (2012, 105)—that the motif of contrasting police partners not only reveals Almodóvar's familiarity with cinematic history,[44] but also serves as a means of exploring notions of post-Transition Spanish masculinity. Police partners across the filmography are juxtaposed in age and style; attitude and manners. Whilst reflecting a reality of real-life policing, this trope also provides the director a means of contrasting different qualities and approaches, often with comic effect. Interestingly, one of the policemen in *La ley del deseo* asserts that to be a successful policeman, the officer also needs a sense of

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42 The relationship between the Franco regime itself and the rule of law is subject to debate, as the dictatorship's efforts to "normalise" Spain's foreign relations saw increasingly "democratic" language enter public discourse, even if the regime's legal and political frameworks did not always align with such principles (see Sesma Landrin 2006; International Commission of Jurists 1962, 82-88; Payne and Palacios 2014).

43 They also reflect, in the case of David and Sancho above all, Eve Sedgwick's analysis of homosociality (1985): same-sex relationships that do not involve sexual or romantic interest, although they may mediate desire.

44 As Edwards observes, implicit references to films of Hollywood's "Golden Age" further reinforce that these Spanish police fail to live up to the movie-star ideal (2001, 143)

humour, as well as to be unscrupulous. Such humour, for D'Lugo, "prescribes a distance for the spectator, a way of seeing without the authoritarian impulse to judge and condemn that for so long ordered Francoist society" (1991, 63). This perhaps glosses over the fact that these policemen still function according to this logic, but nevertheless it is clear that this humour is part of a series of strategies to undermine police authority. To draw on the work of Linda Hutcheon, Almodóvar's approach "foreground[s] the politics of representation" (2002, 90), and thereby raises questions about authorship, interpretation, and history.[45]

The comedy achieved through these duplications is, as Quiroga observes regarding *La ley del deseo*, "totally constructed" (2009, 114), and I would add that they reveal not only the constructed nature of the figure of the police—offering a metacinematic commentary on the "police procedural"—but also the ways in which the law operates to circumscribe meaningful community. As a representative of the law, the policeman embodies the way the individual is both a subject of law, in theory autonomous, and also subject to the law.[46] These figures highlight the ways in which formal legal institutions inscribe individuals within specific frames of gender and sexuality and notions of heteronormative masculinity. For example, whilst *Pepi, Luci, Bom* only offers partners in the sense of the policeman having a twin, from *La ley del deseo* police appear in pairs and police ineffectiveness becomes bound up in the director's exploration of masculinities through contrast, as I explore below.

La ley del deseo includes two sets of partners: a pair of *Guardia Civil*, and a pair of national police. Unlike the caricature of Luci's husband, here Almodóvar eschews a "simple opposition between good characters and bad," with each police officer characterised distinctly (Smith 1992, 194). For instance, one of the *Guardia Civil* shows a softer side; when Pablo arrives at the village where his lover, Juan, has been murdered, the officer tells him that Juan really loved him. For D'Lugo (1991, 63): "This gentle characterization of what has been traditionally one of the most

[45] For an in depth discussion of parody in *La ley del deseo*, see Omaña Andueza, (2001), although this analysis focuses on gender rather than the representation of the police.

[46] Further inquiry could consider these complexities in the representation of the police through a more legalistic lens, ie to what extent the police figures in these ways reflect the relationship of the Franco regime to the principles of the rule of law.

repressive and feared of Spanish institutions of authority suggest the changing spirit of the time." The other pair of detectives, meanwhile, is a father-son duo.[47] The younger man adheres to rules and procedures, driven by professional ambition, whereas for his father the primary aspects of the job are "corruption, vice, drugs, and sex" (Conrod 2012, 114). Of these competing approaches—which could perhaps be seen as a commentary on the generation that Almodóvar sees as most capable of seeing Spain through the Transition—neither offers a viable social order. They are, moreover, unable to agree on an approach to solving Juan's murder. The bickering between these officers implicitly undermines their authority, and they are further ridiculed, as García notes, "tanto en sus reacciones desmedidas como en la caracterización verbal" (2009, 53).

Although there are notable differences, each policeman illustrates the law's repressiveness. This is most apparent in their interactions with Tina, who discovers them in Pablo's study. The use of parody challenges a fixed reading of the police as simply malicious, pushing police brutality to the background and foregrounding Tina's agency. The policemen respond differently to Tina's arrival: the father is inappropriately flirtatious, whilst the son is unable to accept her identity, accusing Tina of not being a real woman, after she chides him for slapping her. She rewards this with a punch that knocks him to the ground. This move ironically underscores her gender fluidity, the unexpected comedy undermining the "genuine question of police maltreatment" (Smith 1992, 194-195).[48] In this scene, if the older officer cannot respond to Tina *except* as a woman, ie as an object of desire, then his son cannot accept her *as* a woman, troubled by her failure to adhere to gender norms. And even if these partners do eventually solve Juan's murder, they are unable to arrest their suspect without incident. Instead, they are subject to his demands.[49]

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47 They are portrayed by real-life father-son duo Fernando Guillén and Fernando Guillén Cuervo. The older detective also appears in *Mujeres al borde* as Iván, Pepa's ex-lover.

48 In contrast, Pastor proposes that the policeman's derogatory comment is an attempt to excuse his violence according to culturally acceptable discrimination, which ultimately subverts police authority (2006, 19-20). See also Guijarro-Ojea and Ruiz-Cecilia (2011), who highlight the implicit homophobia in these comments.

49 See page 211ff below for further detail.

The tension between the police and the community they are attempting to regulate therefore remains a live issue. In contrast to D'Lugo, Pastor (2007) views the police presence as reflecting the fact that Pablo and Antonio's sexual otherness constitutes a threat to the dominant symbolic order. Antonio—having internalised these socio-cultural values—is required to pay the highest price (Pastor 2007, 233). As García suggests, *La ley del deseo* highlights the struggle between desire and the law, according to which each character's search puts them in conflict with the legal and social order (2009, 52-54). Even Pablo's decision to write under the pseudonym "Laura P" reflects the "fuerte legado represor de la tradición" (Pastor 2007, 232), whilst the heteronormative framework ultimately pressures Antonio to commit suicide. As Pastor notes, the young man "no puede conciliar su verdadera identidad con la represión cultural que le espera fuera del limitado espacio del apartamento, en la esfera pública" (2007, 233).[50] The law here is either a catalyst or foil for this new social order, but never truly a part of it, its authority thereby challenged. As both Pastor and García highlight, the law's function as an interpretative framework gives rise to an irresolvable tension making it incompatible with the communities of the new Spain.

This is shown again in another contrasting pair of officers, who make a brief appearance in one of *Kika*'s most polemic scenes: the rape of Kika by Pablo, brother of Kika's maid.[51] The policemen are again contrasted, this time in appearance: the older officer (Santiago) is clean-shaven, dressed in a smart suit and tie; whilst his partner is unshaven and dishevelled, wearing a casual denim vest over a t-shirt.[52] The older officer sees himself as the embodiment of Kirk Douglas—noting that he and the actor each have a dimple in the chin, although his is the product of plastic surgery. Conrod notes that the comparison highlights his underwhelming masculinity

[50] Whilst García disagrees with Pastor's characterisation of the final encounter between the lovers, focusing instead on Antonio's refusal to accept legal consequences for the murder (2009, 56), in my view the characterisation of his mother supports Pastor's analysis.

[51] Whilst the scene has been criticised for depicting sexual violence comically (see Lev 2013; Pavolvić et al 2009, 179; Hart 1997), Caballero Gálvez and Zurián Hernández argue that the ridiculing of the police and the trivialisation of the sexual assault taken together denounce the impunity of masculine violence (2016, 863).

[52] For Conrod, this officer's attire and demeanour align him with the ETA members depicted in the wanted poster on the wall of their office (2012, 116).

when compared to the exemplary 1950s Hollywood male (2012, 117). Conversely, the young man's informal attire and attitude indicates a lack of dedication, whilst his willingness to shoot at Kika's front door when there is no immediate answer speaks to a lack of self-control. Alerted to the sexual assault, the police take their time, debating whether to attend the crime scene given they do not really "feel like it".[53] While this casual disregard for the assault adds a layer of humour, it also reinforces the critique of police effectiveness. Indeed, Conrod argues that it suggests "that Spanish police have become so used to being the object of ridicule that they can no longer believe in the urgency of the calls they receive" (2012, 117). If contemporary crime drama has shifted from "a site of heroic assurance to one of hazardous anxiety" (Feasey 2008, 83), in Almodóvar's films the police have gone from malevolent caricature to slapstick clumsiness. When they finally arrive at Kika's flat, the officers' conduct is, as Allinson describes it, "grotesquely unsympathetic" (2001, 61), compounded by their gross incompetence. The officers arrive during the sexual assault, to find Kika screaming at her assailant, but take a confused moment determining how best to intervene. As the policemen bumble around Kika's bed, at one point an officer sits on top of Pablo, briefly forming—in terms of composition—a *ménage à trois*. Visually, the policeman becomes, if only briefly, party to the assault. The two eventually drag Pablo off Kika, but the overwhelming impression is of ineptitude.

The law itself is arguably an inherently voyeuristic institution, given its interest in seeing into the personal lives (and minds) of its subjects.[54] The policemen's arrival is framed through the peephole in the door, significant in a film that emphasises the pleasures of watching other people's miseries. This theme is further reinforced by the anonymous tip-off from a self-described "voyeur", later revealed to be Kika's fiancé, Ramón, whose profession as a photographer makes him the ultimate voyeur.[55] Yet these films consistently challenge this logic, at times suggesting that

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[53] Caracortada is clearly keener to arrive at the crime scene than these supposed defenders of law and order. Moreover, when she arrives and asks what happened, the officer's response is: "Nada, violar a una chica."

[54] For Guy Hocquenghem, this is partly what implicates the law as a system of desire (1993).

[55] This is also reinforced by the film's credits, which feature close-ups of women's bodies through peepholes and a camera shutter (see Smith 2000, 167).

the police are almost uninterested in seeing into the lives of private citizens. Just as these officers only reluctantly responded to Ramón's tip-off, other police routinely ignore confessions (for instance of Gloria's admitting to Antonio's murder, or Ángel's confession of rape in *Matador*). As D'Lugo has argued, the police at times serve an important role as spectators of the changing social and political climate, but they are no longer its arbiters. The police have lost all authority over social order.

The end of Almodóvar's "cycle of castrating representations of idealized masculinity," according to Conrod (2012, 120), *Carne trémula* continues his scrutiny of patriarchal order through the police. Whilst Víctor is the film's protagonist, partners Sancho and David are integral to its narrative motor. They attend one evening at an apartment, where Víctor has shown up for a date the resident, Elena, no longer wishes to keep. Their dispute escalates and Elena threatens her would-be suitor with a gun, which is fired, as Chekhov decreed it must be (Burt 2009, 139).[56] The policemen take control of the situation and, in David's case, step into the romantic role Víctor had sought. David's immediate desire for Elena—whom he goes on to marry—is signalled in a slow-motion shot that occurs after the younger man releases her; the unusual (for Almodóvar) technique drawing out this moment to alert the audience to the emotional charge felt by the characters. In the next moment, Sancho dives for Víctor, and David is shot and paralysed during their scuffle, ostensibly by Víctor, who is consequently jailed. The police are again ineffective when it comes to preventing and solving crime: the shooting was committed not by the man convicted for it, but by David's partner. The policeman is both incompetent, and outside the law. The balance of the film explores the various turns in the relationships between these three central male characters, exploring various modes of Spanish masculinity.[57] The director himself acknowledges that the

[56] If Chekhov in fact wrote "If a gun is hanging on the wall in the first act, it must be fired in the last", this is equally true here, given that Clara and Sancho shoot each other in the film's dénouement.

[57] This is partly due to the casting. Five years before he played David, Javier Bardem was described in the pressbook for *Jamón, jamón* as a "young macho… the expressive force of his virility so representative of deepest Spain" (Torres 1992, 28, cited in Fouz-Hernández 2005, 190). In *Carne trémula* this hyper-masculinity is contested by the role of sensitive, wheelchair-bound David (see Marsh 2004, 64). Fouz-Hernández suggests this was instrumental to establishing a new phase of Bardem's career (2005, 198). Meanwhile, the young, handsome and relatively unknown Liberto

men in this movie "have a capacity for action, a moral autonomy, that was more characteristic of my women characters before" (Strauss 2006, 174).

The first film to focus on male relationships, *Carne trémula* is also the first to refer explicitly to Spain's history. As Rosana Blanco Cano (2006) argues, the film's exploration of masculinities is a comment on the ongoing democratisation of Spain (see also A. Davies 2007, 74-77). This narrative posits a nexus between ideas of masculinity, Spanish nationhood, and the law. As Pavlović notes, the reference to the formal institutions of law here fit with the emphasis on the Transition, as *Carne trémula* "centres on the intersection of personal and collective protagonism, cinematographic history and memory" (2007, 164). Similarly, Blanco Cano argues that the film reflects on "las contradicciones de la modernidad así como la ineficacia de los procesos de democratización presentes todavía en los comportamientos genéricos cotidianos" (2006, 55; see also Evans 2009). According to Blanco Cano, the officers' characterisation as representatives of the law "les hace poner en el control de sus comportamientos una masculinidad ideal que, sin embargo, se encuentra asimismo en conflicto" (2006, 64).

This contrasts with the easier attitude of Víctor, unencumbered by the expectations of traditional masculine norms. Whilst he in some respects embodies a hyper-masculine ideal, there is a significant quirk: the young man relies on a woman, Clara, to teach him to be "the best fucker in the world". Víctor's masculine power is not innate, it is learned—from a woman no less. This reflects an important difference between Víctor and his older rivals. Whilst Víctor is prepared to brazenly ask for what he desires, the two police officers demand.[58] Through the somewhat tongue-in-cheek plotline of Víctor's lessons in lovemaking, Almodóvar reinforces the constructed nature of gender: masculine virility is something that can be learned. Moreover, he reveals how Víctor's masculinity is determined by a key interpersonal relationship—his rivalry with the policeman—and mediated through the prism of their respective relationships with Clara and Elena.

Rabal plays the role that might previously have belonged to Bardem, whilst José Sancho, well known at the time for television and film roles, plays Sancho.

58 This is not to overlook the fact that all three at times impose their will on their lovers.

c. The homosocial partnership

David and Sancho (and to a lesser extent, Víctor) also offer an example of homosociality, their platonic relationship a fulcrum through which their sexual encounters can be understood, principally David's affair with Sancho's wife Clara and subsequent marriage to Elena. If the term "homosocial" both echoes and negates the "homosexual" (Sedgwick 1985, 1), the boundaries are further blurred by the fact that David is cuckolding his partner. We later learn that Sancho—a "remnant of the repressive past" (Acevedo Muñoz 2007, 171)—deliberately fired the gun in revenge for the affair.[59] The tension between the policemen introduces the threat of serious violence into the initial situation, subverting the conventional narrative of crime and punishment. The presence of a woman (Elena) during the otherwise archetypal male fight for domination diffuses the homoerotic potential of this scene, reflected in the close embrace of Sancho and Víctor wrestling on the floor. Nevertheless, the "threat" of homosexuality hangs over the film in the entanglement of relationships. As Hocquenghem puts it, homosexuality "haunts" the "normal world" (1993, 50).

Nevertheless, Hocquenghem argues that any distinction between homosexual and heterosexual desire is "meaningless" (1993, 49), and moreover that modern capitalist society itself produces homosexuality through attempts to classify and quantify the norms and margins of sexuality (1993, 50-51). This echoes Foucault's conclusions that it is the attempts to restrict and repress sexuality that resulted (somewhat ironically) in the proliferation of discourses on sexuality (1990, 17-18). Whilst Hocquenghem views desire as inherently polyvocal and fluid, he also argues that homosexuality expresses a unique aspect of desire that "appears nowhere else" (1993, 50). This is reflected in Almodóvar's narratives, which reveal the particularity of different desires, even as they challenge any totalising narrative of homosexuality.

[59] As Evans highlights, this reflects Sancho's view of Clara as a possession; his inability to accept Clara's autonomy indicating "the conformist's failure in post-Francoist Spain to come to terms with changing attitudes to the relations between the sexes" (2009, 106-107). Conversely, Blanco Cano sees Clara's affairs as revenge against her abusive husband (2006, 69). The association of Sancho's masculinity with his wife's sexuality (and his presumed sexual potency) may well feed into traditional understandings of heterosexual relationships, but it undermines, I contend, the importance of Clara's own desires.

The archetype of heterosexual masculinity depends on the (male) individual navigating a fine line between being a "man's man" and being "interested in men" (Sedgwick 1985, 89). This is, according to Hocquenghem, heightened in the context of the law, with an "inverted relation of desire" existing between the law and police on the one hand, and homosexuality on the other (1993, 61). For Eve Sedgwick, the triangle is a key schema for conceptualising erotic dynamics, where the female object of desire—such as Elena or Sancho's wife, Clara—may well be the most revealing element of the relationship between two men (1985, 21). Indeed, in this narrative, as Alfredo Martínez-Expósito and Santiago Fouz-Hernández suggest, each of the erotic triangles invites "a comparison between the two men involved" (2007, 104), much like the pairing of police officers. In the case of the romantic rivals, comparisons are made based on the virility and sexual success of the amorous adversaries; comparisons of policemen focus on authority and professional capability.

Each of the three male leads offers a distinct vision of Spanish masculinity, framed in part by his relation to the institution of the law. Even though, as Conrod contends, Sancho and David offer more realistic representations of law officers than earlier police, their flaws depicted as the norm rather than the object of mockery (2012, 118), they are ultimately as unsympathetic as Luci's husband. The partners are shown to not only lack integrity, but also to be ineffectual in their professional capacity; failings embodied in Víctor's incarceration for Sancho's crime. Whilst Sancho is a violent drunkard, his partner is an adulterous hypocrite, whose jealous vigilance over his wife reflects his insecurity and deep-rooted conservatism. David initially appears to offer new possibilities for a reimagined masculinity, and policeman. Marsh suggests that he is "the sensitive hashish-smoking *new man*… who believes in dialogue with criminals and comes to understand when his wife leaves him for Víctor" (2004, 58).[60] Yet the "reformed" David is ultimately sacrificed to the winds of change, losing his wife to the younger suitor. The film suggests that

[60] Fouz-Hernández and Martínez-Expósito note that the sex scene between David and Elena "transcends the obsession with penetration… by focusing on oral sex instead," although this is undermined by the focus on Víctor's legs in the film's poster (2007, 209). Other discussions to focus on the character's disability include Marr (2013) and Minich (2010).

policemen are inherently limited by the institution to which they belong, unable to develop in ways that fit with Almodóvar's preferred forms of community.[61]

In *Carne trémula*, various erotic triangles are formed and disentangled, each ultimately revealing the emotional and sexual failings of the two policemen. This reinforces the portrait of their professional incompetence. Whilst her affair with David is only alluded to, Clara is the initial fulcrum around which masculine rivalry turns. When Víctor is released, he initiates an affair with Clara (her tryst with David long over), who agrees to teach him how to be the world's best lover.[62] Whilst for Clara the relationship begins as a distraction from her unhappy marriage, she soon declares that she is falling in love. David, meanwhile, uncovers the affair, as he seeks his own revenge on Víctor for his paralysis, the true culprit not yet revealed. As a private citizen, David's approach relies on the tools of his prior profession, his role as an officer of the law has given way to a looser understanding of law as social regulation as he seeks to regulate Víctor's actions and prevent the breach of social norms around marriage and infidelity.[63] Yet his former policeman partnership is pivotal: David relies on Sancho to complete his revenge, as he anticipates a violent response to the photographs he takes of their affair.[64] As David spies on the couple through his telephoto lens, the camera highlights the voyeuristic, almost fetishising quality of his gaze.[65] Whilst Clara here mediates the rivalry between the two men, the direction of his gaze reveals that David no longer has any interest in Clara; his attention is focused on Víctor. Pavlović suggests more generally of the female characters that they merely "play secondary roles as loci of competitive exchange"

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61 These are defined in more detail in the Conclusion to this thesis.

62 Víctor's plan is not designed to maximise his—and his lovers'—pleasure; he is motivated by revenge, "a further indication of how a healthy body is seen as the ideal weapon to take revenge on disabled David" (Martínez-Expósito 2000, 101). He achieves this, excelling at Clara's lessons and using his prowess to "win" Elena, although his initial plan is to leave her "addicted" to his body and begging for more. Yet ultimately, the pair "decide to build a relationship around a life-altering sexual experience" (Acevedo-Muñoz 2007, 179).

63 Despite the fact that he previously had an extramarital affair with the same woman, David takes on the role of arbiter of traditional morality.

64 David's efforts to control his relationship with Elena are also based on blackmail. For Urios-Aparisi, this need to hold onto social prestige and David's means of doing so stem from his paralysis (2010b, 188), reflecting a traditional masculinity tied to physical prowess.

65 As Martínez-Expósito and Fouz-Hernández note, this pairs with an earlier scene where Víctor watches from prison as the policeman plays Olympic wheelchair basketball (2007, 104).

between the three men (2007, 159). Women here are markedly passive, especially when contrasted with Almodóvar's earlier protagonists.

Even if this film focuses on male desires,[66] there are key moments that highlight the agency of the female characters. In Clara's case, agency ultimately leads to her death, as she refuses to be caught up in a world where she is controlled and used by men.[67] Unfortunately, she sees no possibility of life, or community, outside of this framework. I contend that this is partly due to the lack of care here; this is a narrative in which the key players show little concern or empathy for each other, driven primarily by revenge and other selfish impulses. Clara's death (together with Sancho's) is foreshadowed by those of María and Diego in *Matador*. In each film, the female lover sets the terms of the final confrontation. Although this is framed positively in the mutual murders of María and Diego—although she must take control of her own death as well as his—this is not so clear in the case of Clara and Sancho. The couple confront each other with drawn weapons in Víctor's ramshackle house and Clara falls first, but the camera cuts away as shots are fired, hence whether her death is by suicide or murder is never clear. That said, Clara's farewell note states that she will either be dead or leaving Madrid when Víctor reads it, hinting that Clara has chosen death. When Víctor enters the house, he finds Clara dead on the floor, and Sancho wounded. As I suggest elsewhere (M. Rose 2016), although Sancho appears briefly to threaten Víctor, he ends his own life whilst embracing his wife's dead body. Clara ultimately wrests some control from her abusive husband and their deaths hint at an end to rigid and unreflexive gendered behaviour (see Blanco Cano 2006, 70).[68]

Given its emphasis on relationships between men and the nexus between these male characters and broader ideas of Spanishness, *Carne trémula* may well represent, as Smith suggests, Almodóvar's "rediscovery of masculinity" (2000, 183). I

[66] There is a direct causal link between David's desire for Clara (his partner's wife) and the loss he suffers of his own spouse, who leaves him for Víctor. At the same time, it is Sancho's desire for revenge that results in David's paralysis.

[67] I explore below the ways in which Sancho is represented as a stereotypically controlling and macho figure.

[68] As discussed at section C.i.b, there is nevertheless one aspect of this matrimonial relationship that subverts traditional gender roles: Sancho's foray into the kitchen.

would take this further and suggest that every representation of the police in this corpus touches on such questions, whether through violence and insistence on traditional gender roles—tying them to the repressive elements of Franco's regime—or through inefficiency—undermining their authority and pointing to the need for alternative moral authorities. The police officer illustrates in a unique way the intersection of identity, symbols of nationhood, and social order. Accordingly, such figures in Almodóvar's films offer a means of working through Spain's recent history, and also points more broadly to the requirements for meaningful community. In this way, the dynamics between the male protagonists of *Carne trémula* reflect Spain's national narrative, most specifically the "transformations borne by its institutions, rituals and corrective mechanisms during the period of transition" (Pavlović 2007, 159). More generally, the ineptitude of Almodóvar's policemen suggests the limits and possibilities of the Transition, and the need for a new, post-patriarchal, social order.

iii. Consequences outside the law

As is clear from the above discussion, the police are unable to ensure that breaking the law has any meaningful consequences. Through comparisons not only to each other, but also other fictional counterparts, these limitations are revealed and reinforced. Certainly, ordinary citizens are shown to be more effective at addressing crime. As Goss notes, police ineptitude contrasts with the narratives of non-state agents, who "set out to investigate crimes… with far greater efficacy" (2009, 82). The variety of these examples speaks to the responsiveness of the ethics of care as a moral framework, even if such consequences are not clearly framed in such terms. This is true for Caracortada in *Kika*, the "wicked dominatrix" (Smith 2000, 166) presenter of a "real-life" crime show "El peor del día." The reporter arrives shortly after the officers, and soon takes over the crime scene. The older officer's failure to fulfil traditional norms of masculinity is reinforced by his ready compliance with Caracortada's orders; she barks at him to localise Pablo's escape vehicle, and then banishes him so she can have a more "private" conversation with the unwilling Kika. The irony of this is that Kika has just threatened to report

Caracortada for breaching her right to privacy.[69] The reporter downplays these concerns, implying that the police "saved" Kika's life as she attempts to extract an interview. Voyeurism is therefore seen as having potential benefits beyond the voyeur's pleasure, whilst the relationship between spectatorship and pleasure is further foregrounded by Caracortada's pioneering television show.[70] The nosy reporter is far more efficient than the police, not only in her assertiveness with Kika, but also through her solving an unrelated murder.[71] In a less direct way, Ángel (*Matador*) is also shown to be more effective than the police, his visions leading them to the murderous duo.[72]

Yet it is not quite true that "crimes have no consequences" in these films (Vernon 1993, 38). As already outlined, certain actions are duly punished, although not through official channels.[73] Pepi, as mentioned above, organises the beating of the policeman who raped her. Antonio and Paco, discussed in chapter one, are each punished with death for their domestic and sexual violence.[74] There are, therefore, consequences, but only in the right circumstances, namely where the victim can take matters into her own hands. This does not exactly accord with vigilante justice, however, as such consequences are generally in line with the ethics of care. Punishment is tailored to the individual, rather than following the vengeful principle of an "eye for an eye."

I concur, furthermore, with Vernon's claim that Almodóvar challenges "the foundations of linear causality" (1993, 38). As this thesis claims, progressive time is

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69 This reinforces the nexus between Caracortada, the police and the intruding gaze.

70 See Gómez Gómez (2012, 77-79) and Rascaroli and Mazierska (2002, 39-40) for an interesting analysis of the critique of television in this film, which are consistent with concerns Almodóvar has raised elsewhere regarding the intrusion of the television camera into personal space in an interview promoting *Kika* (Troyano 1994, 60). This sequence presents voyeurism as incompatible with the ethic of care. This is a film where care is generally lacking, except perhaps between Kika and her maid, Juana; undermined somewhat by the economic nature of their relation.

71 The power differential is reinforced when Caracortada refers to one of the policeman condescendingly as "bonita". The media star also mentions an apparent agreement by which the police alert her to crimes.

72 I discuss this sequence further at page 210ff below.

73 A notable exception is Benigno's rape conviction in *Hable con ella*. Yet the police investigation and trial are never shown; the focus is instead on Marco's travels and emotional recovery from Lidia's death. Moreover, by the film's end Benigno has committed suicide, undermining the law's power to hold and punish him on its own terms.

74 Raimunda's father in *Volver* is similarly punished, although Irene kills him in a house fire for having an affair before she realises that he had abused their daughter.

destabilised throughout these films. This is not to say that events occur wholly without consequences, given the high value placed on community and interpersonal relationships, but to posit that their consequences might not follow in a straightforward manner. Numerous examples speak to the significance of relationships: for instance, the resilience of Vicente's mother in *La piel que habito*, who refuses to believe the police that her son has simply run away. She is proved correct, of course, when her son (now appearing as Vera) escapes Ledgard's mansion and returns to her in the film's final moments;[75] Her maternal instincts are more accurate and powerful than the efforts of the State, and are able to challenge the official narrative of his disappearance. If, as Alejandro Yarza proposes, Almodóvar's treatment of the police reflects the "final extinction" of Francoist, traditional Spain (1999, 188), the question arises as to what authority, if any, emerges when they are gone. In the next section, I propose it is a feminine power drawn from the domestic.

C. Banishing the law

i. Law and domestic space

Police failure to address violence against women (in which they are at times complicit) gestures not only towards their loss of authority, but also towards an alternative source of authority. As Eva Navarro Martínez and Alejandro Buitrago Alonso note, the expulsion of men from the narratives discussed here suggests "that men should not enter women's spaces" (2016, 301), and that there are significant consequences when they attempt to do so. The alternative feminine moral order that emerges in their absence is congruent with the ethics of care, embodied chiefly by Almodóvar's mothers.[76]

Various scholars have noted the move to a post-patriarchal society in these films (see Vernon 1993; D'Lugo 1991). Here I trace this shift through the lens of space. I first consider the law's banishment from the kitchen through confrontations

[75] For Harrang (2012) and Lemma (2012), Vicente's emotional resilience is born of this maternal bond, epitomised by her refusal to accept the police account. Despite this woman's incredible fortitude and manifest maternal love, this film suggests that the possibilities of constructive and tolerant social structures offered in earlier films have come to nothing; community itself has failed to live up to the early hopes Almodóvar seemed to hold.

[76] As discussed in chapter one, section C.

with police officers that occur in such spaces, before turning to the one example where the law tries to enter the kitchen on its own terms: Sancho's attempted reconciliation with Clara in *Carne trémula*.

a. The kitchen bites back

As mentioned in chapter one, *¿Qué he hecho yo!* is a key example which juxtaposes police authority and domestic space. This is the first of the "mariticide trilogy" identified by Le Pallec Marand (2016, n.p).[77] Here, emotional violence is unregulated by the formal institutions of law and a murder goes unsolved despite the police engaging directly with the weapon and culprit. The policemen's efforts are thwarted both by Gloria's domesticity and by their own rigid take on the crime—they are unable to see her as a suspect, even given a confession. For D'Lugo, this marks a turn in the representation of the police from repressive to incompetent, embodied by the sexual and professional impotence of inspector Polo, who attempts both to be Gloria's lover and to find her husband's killer—failing at both (1991, 63). This is foreshadowed by his naked body, exposed in one of the film's first sequences. Although his shower pose has been described as reminiscent of Michelangelo's David (see Venkatesh 2014, 359), Conrod describes the detective's penis as "so small that it is barely noticeable, so all signs of powerful masculinity are absent from the neo-realist shot" (2012, 100; see also Lehman 2007, 10).[78] This is confirmed when Polo is unable to maintain his erection with Gloria; this scene indicative of his lack of "professional discretion" (Allinson 2001, 59) and the first indication that he will be incapable of solving Antonio's murder.[79] Through his association with patriarchal

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[77] Mariticide refers to the killing of one's husband. Whilst the wife is not always the murderer in these films, in each case it is the protagonist's husband who dies. The other two films are *Tacones lejanos*, and *Volver*.

[78] Vernon similarly suggests that Polo's various impotencies reflect "a world where the Law has lost its potency and the power to enforce its strictures" (1993, 38).

[79] Polo's sexual failings are reinforced when he hires Cristal to play his girlfriend during therapy. In contrast to the policeman, the female characters of *¿Qué he hecho yo!* enjoy greater sexual autonomy, although this is hard won. Gloria engages in casual (albeit unfulfilling) sex without consequence. Cristal, meanwhile, is shown to have significant agency and power, even if the power dynamics of the prostitute relationship are not straightforward. Meanwhile, *Matador* includes a policeman for whom desire is expressed in purely passive terms. *Comisario* del Valle falls "secretly in love with Ángel" (cited in D'Lugo 1991, 58), but this is limited to looking.

authority, the policeman is aligned with Antonio, rendered incapable of regulating this man's violence or solving his murder.

This is reinforced through the film's engagement with domestic space. As Zurián Hernández has observed, Almodóvar's films offer an unusual glimpse into spaces such as the kitchen and the bathroom, "places of privilege where it is impossible to lie" (2013b, 46). He continues: "Almodóvar savors the authenticity of having his characters eat and behave like anyone would in private." Not only offering a revealing glimpse into interpersonal relationships, such scenes reveal something of Almodóvar's engagement with the division of space into "feminised" and "masculinised" realms. Navarro Martínez and Buitrago Alonso in their analysis of food in Spanish film propose that "the kitchen is a recurrent stage on which the female characters in Almodóvar's work carry out some sort of extreme action" (2016, 302), by which they mean an action that is life-changing. Through such scenarios, these narratives stage encounters between two gender-coded realms: the kitchen and the law.

Francoist ideology—communicated by and to women principally through the *Sección Femenina*, the women's branch of the *Falange* party—inscribed women within the domestic sphere through the model of the "ángel del hogar," which privileged their capacity for suffering, self-denial and service to others (see Rabazas Romero and Ramos Zamora 2006; Brooksbank Jones 1997; Morcillo 2000; Anderson 2016). The kitchen, in particular, became the "proper place for Spanish women," with the *Sección Femenina* advocating women spend a significant portion of their day preparing meals (Dunai 2012, 7-8). Accordingly, certain feminist analyses of power relations "have understood homes and communities as sites of oppression – by the state, by capitalism and by patriarchy" (G. Rose 1993, 56).

Yet even as domesticity became a means of both controlling women and engaging them in the Francoist nationalist project, the kitchen also became a site of potential resistance (see Dunai 2012). The contributions of feminist geographers are also useful here. Beyond highlighting the substantial unpaid labour undertaken within the home (see McDowell 1999, 71-95), such scholarship challenges the discursive construction of the public/private divide that works to constrain women

to the domestic arena (see G. Rose 1993, 17-26). As McDowell argues (1999, 12), "gender relations are also of central concern for geographers because of the way in which a spatial division – that between the public and the private, between inside and outside – plays such a central role in the social construction of gender divisions." This can be seen in the way Almodóvar engages images of the "domesticised feminine," at times uncritically—for instance, as noted in chapter one, characters such as Manuela and Raimunda resonate with the Francoist maternal ideal (see Zamora 2009; Zecchi 2005; Cruz 2002). Yet there are instances where the nexus between femininity and domesticity offers the potential for a more radical reading of his works.

Whilst Almodóvar's women have escaped the kitchen to some extent—they are often engaged in paid employment[80]—they are nevertheless clearly the rulers of this domain; with few exceptions, men cannot enter the kitchen. Here the kitchen is a source of power. This is apparent in encounters between police and women located in domestic territory, where officers are clearly uncomfortable. At various times, official investigations are thwarted by "peasant" foodstuffs such as *jamón* (*¿Qué he hecho yo!*) and gazpacho (*Mujeres al borde*), revealing the subversive potential of the domestic. Certainly, that such typical Spanish fare may be more effective than the law or the police seems to be in part due to their association with the feminine.[81] In the earlier film, whilst the *jamón* is an extension of the phallic *shinai* (bamboo stick) used in kendo (Venkatesh 2014, 362),[82] in the kitchen it becomes imbued with feminine authority and used to kill Antonio. His death, even as it recalls the masculinised field of martial arts, takes place in a feminised space, while the murder weapon evokes the "feminine" virtue of nourishing. By bringing these together in a moment that ultimately begets Gloria's liberation, the film imbues the feminine with power.

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80 Although this is often work that can be seen as an extension of "maternal" duties.

81 See Sánchez-Alarcón (2008) for an analysis of how Almodóvar's incorporation of traditional Andalusian culture into his reimagined Spain compares with Francoist attempts to establish a unified nation. Navarro Martínez and Buitrago Alonso also comment that food references in these films are generally to "typical" Spanish dishes (2016, 305).

82 The opening scene also establishes the martial arts studio as an exclusively male space: the only woman present is Gloria, performing the traditionally "feminine" role of cleaner.

It is, I argue, also significant that the crime itself takes place in the kitchen. As mentioned in chapter one, Antonio intrudes into this feminised space and slaps Gloria for refusing to perform her domestic duties: here, ironing a shirt. She has finally had enough of his *machista* ways and—after a brief struggle—strikes him on the head with a hambone, killing him instantly. Previously a prison of sorts, Gloria's domesticity becomes, as Pavlović articulates it, her saviour (2009, 172). Although the tight space of the kitchen enhances the tension, Antonio's death is also outlandish. As Núria Morgado contends, this moment "derriba… cualquier alardeo pasado de superioridad machista" (2014, 159). The use of the hambone as the murder weapon—whilst grotesquely comic—suggests a triumph of the traditionally coded "feminine" realm of the kitchen (see Floyd 2004) over the patriarch. This fits with a broader trend in Spanish cinema, in which "the mother not only nurtures with her food but… also knows how to kill with that food those who curtail her agency or try to enforce their authoritarianism on her" (Zamora 2016, 151). Gloria deploys the "maternal" tools at her disposal to assert her agency.

This film suggests that individual freedom relies on the deconstruction of rigid gender boundaries.[83] The demolition of the patriarchal edifice is reflected not only in Antonio's death, but also the apathetic—and incompetent—response to the crime. In a departure from the realism of the portrait of Gloria (see Ballesteros 2001), the police here are parodied.[84] They bump into each other as they move around the apartment looking for clues, and seem more interested in the *abuela*'s stash of *agua de Vichy* (her branded mineral water) and the apartment's quirky décor than in solving the crime. D'Lugo argues that the law has a "valorising" role here, enabling Gloria "to free herself from the tyranny of the old patriarchy and reconstitute the Spanish family anew with her homosexual son" (1991, 55). According to his analysis,

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[83] Whilst not all fathers are dealt with so brutally, this early example of patricide foreshadows how Almodóvar deals with abusive fathers throughout the corpus, as detailed in chapter one.

[84] There is one point where the sadistic cop of earlier films re-emerges. Dinero, the family's pet lizard, is killed by a police officer and thrown from a window. A brief shot from the reptile's point of view highlights the brutality of his death. This surprising burst of violent energy underscores the police's failure to deal with real crimes. If the police at least show an interest, albeit ineffective, in Antonio's death, they are entirely absent in relation to other criminal acts: Antonio's forgeries, the paedophilic dentist, Toni's drug deals and the family violence that is hinted at, if not directly shown. Their professional incompetence parallels the impotence of the inspector, Polo, in the early shower scene.

this valorisation comes from the policeman's rejection of her confession, which is thought to originate from her shock. Rather than take her seriously, the inspector dismissively responds that she ought not shout it from the rooftop. Yet this puts a positive spin on the policeman's inefficiency that is incongruous with his characterisation more generally. Whilst D'Lugo's argument for the role of the police as witness is compelling, in this instance I suggest it gives too much credit to the impotent Polo. It would also reinforce a reading of the film's conclusion that leaves open charges that it confirms patriarchal authority, not only through younger son Miguel's return, but also Gloria's reliance on patriarchal authority for her liberation. Instead, I argue that the circumstances surrounding Antonio's death position feminine domesticity as a route to agency and power. The police prove unable to locate the killer and remain oblivious to the murder weapon, which Gloria has cooked in the evening's *caldo*. She cheekily offers the police a bowl when they arrive to search the apartment for clues. This masculine authority has lost all power, both inside and outside the domestic space.

In a similar vein, Pepa in *Mujeres al borde* uses her cooking to incapacitate two policemen that arrive at her apartment, attempting to foil a terrorist plot.[85] The police are following up a lead about a potential attack on a flight to Stockholm, phoned in by Carlos in a moment of surprising verbal lucidity.[86] These bumbling officers fit the motif of opposing partners, divided by age and ideology: the older partner is dressed in a suit;[87] whilst his junior casually wears a camouflage jacket.[88] The professionalism of the suited officer is challenged, however, by Pepa's competence, indicated by her discovery that Iván's new lover is the lawyer, Paulina.

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85 The police arrive following an absurd encounter between Pepa and her answering machine, where Iván has left a long-awaited message. The machine is punished for his lies by Pepa throwing it through the window, where it lands on the car of his lover, Paulina. Pepa also inadvertently hits Paulina in the head with a record. The danger of flying objects is foreshadowed in an earlier scene where Pepa encounters Chus with a shoe thrown from the balcony: Chus warns her to be more careful, as the item almost hit a neighbour.

86 As mentioned in chapter two, one of the alleged gang is the boyfriend of Pepa's anxious friend, Candela, who greets the police with hysterical crying.

87 This officer is played by Ángel de Andrés López, who played Antonio in *¿Qué he hecho!*.

88 When the telephone repairman arrives, he asks this officer to provide identification, as his attire undermines his profession.

These police represent an ineffectual institution with no ability to offer justice or protection. Their lack of authority is underlined, as Conrod highlights, by the officer's outburst; when his gentle questioning fails to elicit any meaningful response, he threatens to imprison everyone in the apartment, a menace that "underlines the lost authority of the policeman who belongs to a generation of 'castrated cops'" (2012, 115). This growing frustration contrasts with Pepa's emerging sense of emotional stability and order, which surfaces as the farcical elements of this scene recede (see Edwards 1995, 195). Pepa finally establishes control over her situation (and self) as the police are neutralised by the sedative-laced gazpacho. It is possibly the intrusion of legal authority into the intimate space of her home that initiates this transformation. The soup is, for Almodóvar, a kind of magic potion that can transform the person who drinks it (Strauss 2006, 89; Navarro Martínez and Buitrago Alonso 2016, 304),[89] although it is never clear how the police are changed. Their role goes little further than facilitating exposition of Pepa's backstory: under interrogation, she reveals further details about her affair with Iván.

Even before the officers drink the soup, they provoke no real concern in any of the characters, with the exception of the highly-strung Candela whose every reaction verges on hysterical. Although they are no longer the menacing figures of Almodóvar's earliest films, these police pose an indirect danger to the group, who are fearful of the consequences that might flow from Candela's relationship with the alleged terrorist. Moreover, the police presence remains dangerous even after they have fallen unconscious.[90] Lucía picks up their weapons and threatens Pepa, demanding to know what she wants with her ex-husband. This is a more convincing threat than that of the police officer, even if Lucia's bouffant hair and clownish make-up add a comical edge. Whilst the police are rendered ineffective in the domestic space, Lucía resists the soup. Nevertheless, she receives no real response, as the younger woman seems to realise in this moment that she no longer needs Iván, not even if she is pregnant with his child.

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89 This is evident in Marisa's reaction: upon waking up from her gazpacho-induced sleep she states that she feels as though she has lost her virginity.

90 While the gazpacho was originally spiked for Iván—to make him stay, rather than hurt him—Carlos and Candela offer the police the drugged gazpacho to help their friend.

From the intimate space of Pepa's apartment, the showdown between Iván's exes concludes at Madrid's Barajas airport. If this sequence showcases "Almodóvar's ability to interweave such disparate elements as irony, farce and melodrama" (Edwards 1995, 194), it also emphasises again police ineptitude. The law is entirely absent from the scene, despite the policeman's claim that there are more police than passengers at the airport. If we accept that the law is masculinised, this accords with the film's underlying critique of masculinity. Men such as the police are not only ineffective, but also the cause of women's despair. As Peter Evans suggests, the film seems to condemn "the patriarchal order as a whole for leading women to the brink of mental collapse" (1997, 40). In this final scene, Pepa reclaims her sanity, facing off against the mad Lucía in this most public and impersonal of spaces (Augé 2008, 63). Moreover, Pepa saves Iván's life as Lucía attempts to kill him, making her powers of crime-prevention greater than those of the police. In the film's dénouement, Pepa asserts control over her destiny and that of others, laying claim to authority beyond her domestic space.

Feminine authority over the kitchen is also foregrounded in *Volver*, but here this contrasts with an absence of official law. The absence of the police is discussed in more detail below, but the centrality of cooking and the kitchen to the dénouement of *Volver* makes it appropriate to discuss here.[91] Raimunda's maternal instincts are reflected by her primary motivation: to protect and care for her daughter, Paula. Although arguably "logic would dictate" Raimunda simply call the police, Walsh suggests that in this film, "logic is not enough… to prevent a mother from protecting her daughter from any danger" (2011, 100; see also Le Pallec Marand 2016). However, this reading overlooks the violence and ineffectiveness of Almodovarian police. It also ignores the fact that Raimunda was abused by her father, a crime that went unpunished by the law. In this narrative universe, it is entirely logical to seek protection and redress outside the institutions of the law.

As Navarro Martínez and Buitrago Alonso point out, the kitchen becomes "the main scenario" for *Volver*'s protagonist (2016, 301). Whilst the film has already

[91] See also the discussion of Raimunda as ideal mother above, in chapter one, from page 81.

foregrounded Raimunda's centrality in the kitchen through mise-en-scène and camera angles, this is also where Paco sexually assaults his stepdaughter, and where Paula in turn threatens him with a knife and is forced to follow through on her threat when he continues the assault. At the same time, the restaurant kitchen becomes Raimunda's liberation twice over.[92] It is, first, a convenient place to stash Paco's dead body. Then, when a film crew arrive seeking catering, it becomes an opportunity for financial independence. Meanwhile, the disappearance of the only possible patriarchal figure in this film seems to evoke no concern and certainly no legal response. Almodóvar has again displaced the patriarchal figure through a feminised space, the kitchen becoming a threshold beyond which female authority rules.

Whilst D'Lugo suggests that Antonio's death in *¿Qué he hecho yo!* frees Gloria from "the tyranny of the old patriarchy" and facilitates a new form of family (1991, 55), I am less convinced that *Volver* releases Raimunda from her traditional role. As Camino (2010) argues, this character is confined to her maternal role, regardless of her apparent newfound freedom. Nevertheless, while there are no legal consequences for the crimes committed in this film, Raimunda's cooking highlights the construction of an alternative authority premised on care rather than justice. It is no surprise then that this restaurant not only foregrounds her "maternal" skills, but also offers a women-centred community.[93] The police literally have no place in this framework.

Ultimately, these confrontations between the domestic and the law suggest a privileging of the material experiences of Almodóvar's characters grounded in "feminised" spaces. This offers a means of resisting top-down attempts by the law to impose social order. If the law enters the kitchen, it is neutralised, whether literally—as in *Mujeres al borde*—or through the removal of evidence, such as in *¿Qué he hecho yo!* or *Volver*. If, as discussed in chapter one, this at times undermines progressive readings of Almodóvar's gender politics, these narratives nevertheless

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92 As mentioned in chapter one, this is made available when a neighbour drops in the keys because he wants her to show around any potential buyers whilst he is away.

93 See the discussion of Raimunda in chapter one, from page 81.

resist conventional notions of the home as idealised, "sacred" space (see McDowell 1999, 75-80). At the same time, while the kitchen is a source of power, these films also reveal the day-to-day drudgery of domestic chores, as well as the violence embedded in some intimate relationships. This is explicitly tied to the patriarchal order through characters such as Antonio and Paco, who are consequently banished from feminine spaces. The law, equally represented by men in these films, is similarly unwelcome in Almodóvar's favoured communities. There exists an irresolvable tension between official social order and the ethics of care.

b. Sancho steps into the kitchen

Carne trémula explores a different point of contact between the law and the kitchen. The relationship between Clara and Sancho is framed in terms of his adherence to traditional gender values, but there is one way in which they subvert such rigid norms. This occurs on their 12th anniversary, when Sancho cooks for his wife in the hope of winning her back.[94] This is significant given, as Marsh has noted, an anniversary evokes a kind of "monumentality" in that such occasions are "commemorations in the shared and private imaginary" (2004, 63).[95] The dish he cooks to celebrate this anniversary, *rabo de toro al brandy*, is a simple stew, but the time it takes to prepare highlights Sancho's efforts, his domestic commitment reinforced by an apron. Whilst Sancho works to salvage their relationship, Clara has forgotten the significance of the date and retires to watch television. Even as he moves into the "feminised" space of the kitchen, Sancho feels the need to impose his will on his wife. When Clara announces that she wants to go back to dancing because she needs to be occupied, Sancho responds: "Ocúpate de nosotros." This command triggers Clara to suggest a separation. Sancho slaps her, stating: "Mientras yo te siga queriendo, tú no te separas de mí." Clara's response—that one day she

[94] A more successful use of food to forge a connection is shown in ¡Átame!, where Marina's cooking for Ricki reflects their deepening connection, even if this scene can be viewed as a parody of the traditional married couple. As with *Volver*, food imposes its own social order to the exclusion of the law. Acknowledging that this "matrimony" is forced by Ricki kidnapping Marina, Nisch proposes that the power imbalance "satirically parallelizes heterosexual marriage in patriarchic Spain to keeping a woman prisoner" (2012, 98; see also Wu 2004, 265). Nevertheless, here is another point of contact between the kitchen and questions of criminality, in which domestic logic prevails over official morality.

[95] This fits with Kristeva's notion of monumental time, a time marked by important moments rather than linear progress (1981, 17).

will stop being afraid of him—indicates a history of domestic violence, reinforced by her demand that he never hit her again.[96] Accordingly, the abusive Sancho is an "unreconstructed holdover from the epoch when *machista* ran rampant" (Goss 2009, 100).[97] His retort that it hurts him more than her can be read as an assertion of ownership over his wife's body, as he claims to be privy to her physical suffering. When he apologies and kisses her before going to set the table, Clara's anguished expression reflects her struggle to establish her autonomy.[98] The dynamics between this couple are incongruous with the policeman's apparent adoption of a nurturing role. Although he flirts with care, he is unresponsive to his wife's needs and cannot conceive of a relationship except on his terms.[99]

Where a policeman crosses the threshold of the kitchen, his failures of care seem inevitable. The outcome here suggests that whilst traditional forms of nurture might be a way to develop interpersonal connection, they must be accompanied by an understanding of the other person's situation. Representatives of the law are limited in their capacity to develop such connections. In contrast, Almodóvar's kitchens offer women a way of taking control of their fates and responding constructively to the abuse they suffer at the hands of men, and the law more generally.

ii. Keeping the law outside

The police are increasingly excluded from Almodóvar's films, and not just via the authority exercised by women in domestic spaces. Rigid rule-based justice gives way to a more responsive care-based approach and as part of this process the police

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96 This is reminiscent of Gloria's response when Antonio hits her shortly before his death.

97 Pavlović similarly suggests a connection between Sancho and the Franco regime through his duplicity and self-appointment as "guardian of a sick flock" (2007, 159). This explicitly identifies him with the "shepherd" role adopted by Franco, mentioned in chapter two.

98 It is possible that Clara's difficulties with Sancho are reinforced by his co-opting of the kitchen, leaving her no space from which to assert her power.

99 This dinner is mirrored in a later scene in which Víctor arrives home to unexpectedly find Clara preparing dinner, wearing an apron. Sancho appears to be making a concerted effort to reconcile, having taken her on a holiday where he gave up alcohol, while she is drinking more than ever. Like the earlier scene, while Clara's cooking reflects her commitment, Víctor announces they should break up. While Clara's distress contrasts dramatically with Sancho's imposition of conditions on his marriage, she is no more understanding of her lover. As she is imploring Víctor (in the shower) not to leave her, the frying pan left on the stove sets the kitchen on fire. Clara's emotional turmoil is given literal form by the flames.

are not only excluded from the domestic, but become increasingly ineffective in public. If, in the director's early films, the city (always Madrid) "tend[s] to emphasize the concept of physical movement and social mobility underscored in the very word, *Movida*" (D'Lugo 1991, 51), this does not play out for officers of the law. As Almodóvar's films mediate the portrayal of gender and politics through the city of Madrid, it becomes for Almodóvar a palimpsest through which the director explores cultural and historical dynamics.[100] Considering Madrid through this lens reveals that representatives of the law are as ineffective in public spaces as they are in the domestic sphere.

Although it is perhaps only Luci's husband who is physically incapacitated in the public streetscape, the city is no more welcoming of the law than the kitchen. This is consistent, I would argue, with D'Lugo's characterisation of the significance of the police as witness to "the new moral order of post-Francoist Spain" (D'Lugo 1991, 64). However, I focus here more on the exclusion of the police from the alternative forms of community that subsequently emerge. If, as Marsh argues, Madrid is a palimpsest over which Almodóvar has made story after story (2004, 66), mining the city for new meanings and images, then the stories that have been overwritten are not only the director's own, but also those belonging to history.[101] Beyond foregrounding violence in the home, Almodóvar's narratives often include public crimes. A key example is *Matador*, where a series of crimes takes place in public space: Ángel's attempted rape of his neighbour, Eva—interrupted by his premature ejaculation between her legs,[102] and serial killer María's prowling for victims. Eva's assault is investigated by the conventional pair of police, yet again ineffective. When they approach her to discuss the alleged assault following Ángel's ineffective

[100] See Introduction, page 24 for further discussion of this term.

[101] Consistent with this, in relation to *Carne trémula*, D'Lugo has identified a "spatial and temporal circularity" of the film, designed to encourage reflection on "the concept of national political history" (2006, 97).

[102] Without diminishing the seriousness of the sexual assault—and putting to one side its problematic trivialisation—Eva's reaction primarily suggests inconvenience.

confession,[103] Eva and her mother greet them with equal measure disdain and annoyance.

This moment perhaps most clearly reflects Almodóvar's attitude towards the law. Both Eva and Pilar threaten the officers with castration, each in a way that reveals something of her personality. Pilar warns the police directly, whilst Eva declares that if Ángel ever attacks her again, she will castrate him, maintaining eye contact with the policeman throughout, directing her menace not only at her would-be assailant, but also at the police (see Conrod 2012, 113). Given the nexus between the police and masculinity, it comes as little surprise that the first point of attack is the phallus. The penis represents both a threat and a vulnerability. Although Eva at times plays "dead" for her lover, she takes a strong stand against the possibility of sexual violence—including the potential violence of the policemen's gaze. These representatives of the law are explicitly refused entry into the house, and seen as a potential source of harm, rather than protection.

María's crimes also occur partly outside.[104] She is first shown in a plaza, seducing a man whom she later kills with a hairpin.[105] In this sequence, María dominates both traditionally masculine public space and the masculine body. Her confident movement across the plaza suggesting she views it a place in which she belongs, which is congruent with the film's more general subversion of the "very puritanical version of Spanish orthodoxy of the Franco years" (Corbin 2006, 315). The serial killer wrests control of public space from the police, who are in turn excluded from the alternative communities privileged here, even if amongst them is the most sympathetic and intriguing of Almodóvar's police: *comisario* del Valle. As the director describes him, del Valle (cited in D'Lugo 1991, 58):

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[103] At the police station, Ángel is viewed as an object of desire, rather than a potential criminal. This ambivalence towards his crime is embodied by del Valle, whose (repressed) sexual desire makes him "more eager to prove Ángel innocent than solve the murders" (A. Davies 2004, 41). Similarly, the woman at the station reception, upon learning why he is there, quips that some people have all the luck. This emphasises, in Conrod's terms, "that no one escapes the labyrinths of desire, not even the police" (2012, 112).

[104] There are parallels to Antonio's crime in *La ley del deseo*, a murder that takes place in the cliffs above a public beach.

[105] As Corbin (2006, 319) points out, María's killing style is reflective of the *tercio de muerte*, the third sequence of a *corrida* in which the *torero* is charged with finally killing the bull with a hidden *estoque*, or rapier.

> is a surprising kind of police detective, subtle, sensitive, ingenious, and well-dressed, qualities which one doesn't usually attribute to a Spanish police officer. But Spain has changed a lot, and I want to believe that so have its police officials.[106]

When it comes to del Valle, Almodóvar eschews the binary of brutality/impotence. The character "outwardly embodies the forms of continuity with the past, but inwardly disavows its stern judgmental posturings" (D'Lugo 1991, 58). Nevertheless, the *comisario* is no more effective than previous officers. This narrative again suggests that investigations are better left to mystics, rather than to the efforts of a state institution: Ángel "solves" the crime by leading the police to the murderous lovers via his unexplained visions. The group arrive just after María and Diego reach their ultimate climax, dying in each other's arms in the fulfilment of their death pact—the culmination of Almodóvar's exploration of the relationship between death and sexuality.[107] Poe (2010) notes that the spectators (as in the next film, *La ley del deseo*) include police, ex-lovers, and psychologists. Here, however, the police appear to sanction the killers' relationship. Upon viewing the bodies, the *comisario* declares: "Es mejor así. Nunca he visto a nadie tan feliz." The inspector forgives the couple's crimes, struck by the power of their mutual desire. Ultimately, despite the film offering more hope for a reformed police officer, even this detective is—as with other Almodóvar police—restricted to the role of witness, unable to enter this serial killers' space without invitation from Ángel, a non-state actor.

Similarly, the police in *La ley del deseo* are undermined in public space during their car chase with Pablo. Whilst this scene suggests an attempt to impose control over another prototypical public space—the highway—they are ultimately thwarted. This occurs in two ways. First, the police cause a car crash in which Pablo loses his memory, undermining any usefulness he might have for their investigation.[108] Secondly, as a result of his injury Pablo is admitted to hospital and in this pseudo-

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106 Other representations of the police are incongruent with the optimism expressed here.

107 Almodóvar has said his central concern in *Matador* was to explore the nexus between death and sexuality: Alabadejo, Arias and Hergueta (1988, 80).

108 This is of course not the only car chase in these films. In *Los abrazos rotos*, a car chase leads to the death of the protagonist's lover, Lena. There, the police are entirely absent where in the earlier *La ley del deseo*, they are not only present at the scene of the crash, but contribute directly to it. Similarly, in *Todo sobre mi madre*, the question of potential criminal responsibility for Esteban's death, again in a car accident, is never raised.

public space, the law's authority cedes to that of medical professionals. Almodóvar pits the doctors against the law, as they actively subvert the investigation, ostensibly in order to protect their patient. Again, the law is shown to have limited reach.

Meanwhile, as the film moves towards its conclusion, an officer becomes vulnerable upon entering the domestic space of Pablo's apartment, and Antonio takes him hostage. Although the law has solved the crime, they are outwitted when their suspect—holding Tina, Ada and a policeman hostage—releases them only in exchange for a final hour with Pablo.[109] Again, the law is located outside and the police become an on-screen audience to a passionate dénouement (see Poe 2010, 193). As the two men share their last embrace, the police are banished to the street. The police become no more than spectators of the lovers' final encounter and, according to D'Lugo, "the apparatus of Francoist social and sexual repression is reinscribed into the scene to affirm the very values that historically it has blocked and supressed" (1991, 49).[110] In other words, the police are only able to implicitly support the very behaviour they were previously charged with repressing. Yet even their approbation is undermined, I argue, by Antonio's position of power in the negotiations. The police remain frozen in the square until Antonio and Pablo's intimate moment is over, when Antonio wrests any residual power from the law by taking his own life to avoid official sanction. It is only after his death that the police

[109] Pablo is played by Eusebio Poncela, who appeared as the *comisario* in *Matador*. If this character's desire is repressed, in the later film Pablo's desire and desirability drive the narrative, highlighting the mutability of Almodóvar's performers.

[110] D'Lugo is referring to not only the police, but also the Church, represented by Tina's altar. Whilst the Franco regime co-opted both institutions, the tension between them is highlighted by Tina and Ada's prayer that Pablo be protected *from* the police. The law is also in conflict with the medical profession, when Pablo's doctors attempt to protect him from the criminal investigation. Warned that "el encubrimiento es un delito," the doctor responds: "¿Y torturer a un enfermo qué es, un acto de caridad?" Each frames the other's actions through their own professional lens, the policeman concerned with the letter of the law, the doctor with his patient's wellbeing. Other examples of this tension include: the psychologist who aligns herself with suspect Ángel rather than the police (*Matador*); the director of the psychiatric institution who disagrees with the judicial decision to release Ricky (*¡Átame!*); and the "outlaw" nurse found guilty of sexual assault (*Hable con ella*).

are released from their frozen state, and rush to climb the building's façade. At this point, the police are literally frozen by the frame as the final credits roll.[111]

For Almodóvar, such "spectatorial moments" are key to understanding *La ley del deseo*. As the police imagine Pablo and Antonio's final encounter, the director has said (Kinder 1987, 40), "their faces are full of awe and envy. Even the police are softened and eroticized by the passion that they imagine is going on in the room." Bearing witness (even indirectly) transforms the officers, even whilst—as D'Lugo posits—their presence is required to "validate" the new social order. The significance of witnessing is emphasised by the mise-en-scène—it is clear as the police and other bystanders climb up the façade that this is a set, with little effort to make it seem real. The spectator is directed to identify with law enforcement as onlooker, even whilst she is encouraged to critique their misogyny and small-mindedness, by the camera's alternation between the scene inside Pablo's home and the officers standing on the ground. The law is physically excluded from the expression of (non-heteronormative) sexuality, suggesting that the police cannot participate in this new, more tolerant Spanish society.

There is a tension in these films as the police are both changed and the agents of change. Nevertheless, it is clear where the power lies. Ultimately, across these films, the law's authority is diminished until it seems that there is nothing the police can do but watch; they are pushed to the very fringes of the narrative and society. Their historical moment is clearly over.[112]

D. Police off the beat

i. Early examples of police absence

From the 2000s, the absence of the police becomes as notable—and significant—as their presence was previously. Where earlier representations undermining the police point to an alternative social order prioritising desire and,

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111 If Arroyo sees the film's "quasi-classical narrative structure" (1992, 41) culminating in the bolero that plays over the final credits, I argue that it nevertheless avoids a traditional resolution. The authority of the law is again undermined, here through Antonio's actions.

112 Another relevant film is *Carne trémula*, where Víctor is "adopted" by the city of Madrid and ultimately seems to take over from the policemen, not least in their relationships.

increasingly, care, later films offer less optimism. Although sexual violence, crime and revenge are present from the director's earliest films, a bleaker tone emerges from *Hable con ella*.[113] Each film in this black period addresses a new crime: rape, paedophilia, incest, murder, vehicular manslaughter, kidnapping, and identity "theft" (albeit not in its usual guise).[114] Despite this catalogue of wrongdoing, the police barely make an appearance. Each of the "black films" coincides with my contention that Almodóvar's disposal of the law: (1) confirms its failure to offer meaningful rules for governing community; and (2) reveals that, to be meaningful, community must be governed by an appropriate ethics. More broadly, given that the police embody the State, their absence might hint at the failure of the post-Transition socio-political order. This section focuses on *Hable con ella*, for reasons of concision, and also because it has received significant attention from scholars concerned precisely with questions of ethics.

Before turning to the primary example, I want to acknowledge two early narratives that serve as precursors: *Laberinto de pasiones*, which includes the director's first depiction of incest; and *¡Átame!*, which focuses on a kidnapping. These were made in the wake of Spain's post-dictatorship Constitution, adopted in 1978.[115] As Epps (2010) eloquently posits, Spain's foundational legal document, while progressive in many ways, remains a site of conflict and has failed to create a cohesive nation.[116] Like the police, the Constitution's legal authority does not

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113 This is highlighted by contrast with *Los amantes pasajeros*, viewed as an attempt to return to the lighter mood of the director's 1980s works (Smith 2013; Marí 2015; Delgado 2016), even if the director has characterised it as a move of resistance to the financial crisis of the late 2000s (de la Fuente 2017, 185; see also Goss 2014). With the more earnest *Julieta* (2017), it is not possible to say whether the director has moved into a new phase.

114 As mentioned in the Introduction, page 3, the "black period" encompasses the first five films of the 2000s: *Hable con ella*, *La mala educación*, *Volver*, *Los abrazos rotos* and *La piel que habito*. While not all are entirely pessimistic, each gestures towards the limits of the communities foregrounded in earlier films.

115 The democratic system is expressly parodied in Almodóvar's first film, which features the "Errecciones Generales". Whilst the Constitution was an important milestone, García (2009) cautions against reading too much into such reference points, as Almodóvar's characters live "al margen de la ley," inhabiting spaces outside the law's reach.

116 Most recently, this has manifested in the tensions over Catalan independence, which culminated in a referendum (declared illegal by Spain's Constitutional Court) on 1 October 2017, followed by regional elections in December the same year. The issue of independence remains alive at the time of writing. The Constitution also fails to engage meaningfully with aspects of Spain's past, for instance by keeping the tricolor flag and the *Marcha Real*, both used under Franco (see

guarantee its effectiveness. Debates around the Constitution mirror an issue at the heart of Almodóvar's representation of the law: how can such complex issues as identity (national, regional, personal), desire and belonging be regulated by fixed and stable rules? One of Epps' primary conclusions is that despite sincere efforts to codify Spanish history and territory through the 1978 Constitution, these boundaries remain in flux (2010, 564). Whilst this corpus eschews explicit political commentary, its social order reflects this instability. Identity, morals and even basic ideas of cause and effect are persistently interrogated. There is no guarantee that the law can be a stabilising force, given that it too is subject to at times contradictory demands of identity and community.

In *Laberinto de pasiones*, Queti lives alone with her father, seeming to accept his unwelcome sexual advances as a "natural" consequence of her mother's abandonment. If this compliance accords with the ideal feminine prescribed under Francoism (see Caballero Gálvez and Zurián Hernández 2016), the law's failings also indicate its alliance with the same patriarchal social structures and complicity in the on-screen sexual violence. This offers a complementary reading to that of Allinson, for whom the invisibility of the law is "in direct proportion to the severity of police repression under Franco" (2001, 59). Whilst he foregrounds the permissiveness of this "new Spain", I want to hold onto its continuities with the traditional order, given that patriarchal violence endures. Although the protagonists escape from their families, others—such as Queti—are left behind in situations that echo the gender roles of Francoism,[117] subject to sexual violence that is beyond the purview of the law.[118]

The law's impotence in the face of desire is reinforced in *¡Átame!*, which takes the permissiveness of post-Transition Spain to its apotheosis. In this extreme "post-

López-Lerma 2011b). On the other hand, the Constitution decriminalised homosexuality, paving the way for the growing on-screen visibility of same-sex desire (see Richmond Ellis 2010).

[117] As mentioned in footnote 25 of chapter one, Queti remains in a submissive and apparently incestuous ménage with Sexilia's father, who believes her to be his daughter.

[118] The law has no place in this new social order where desire rules. From its first scene—protagonists Riza and Sexilia roam Madrid's streets, eagerly gazing at male crotches and buttocks—this narrative positions the spectator as voyeur of this "erotic spectacle" (D'Lugo 1991, 52). In this world, diverse and subversive manifestations of desire are celebrated and even paternal incestuous lust has a place.

crime" democratic Spain, Ricky evidences an unbounded willingness to transgress social and legal norms to achieve "normality." This is defined ironically primarily as having a family. Whilst his expectations about "meaningful life" are "not particularly transgressive" (Strauss 2006, 18), Ricky's manner of achieving them is. Upon his discharge from a psychiatric institution, Ricky kidnaps actress Marina, intending to marry her. Whilst initially resistant, Marina falls in love with Ricky and he appears to achieve his dream. Despite this crime-driven context, the law warrants only a brief mention by the director of the psychiatric institution where Ricky has been held. She seems unhappy with the judicial decision to release him, and notes that she can no longer protect him: "Como cualquier ciudadano, tendrás que responder de tus actos ante la ley." The director positions the (medical) institution as a refuge from the law.[119] Despite this warning, the police do not figure here at all. If as García (2009) and Navajas (1991) have suggested, this film explores the need for a new social order, it equally highlights the importance of this occurring outside the law.

Whilst in some respects problematic given it is premised on an act of masculine violence, the relationship between Marina and Ricky is literally established outside the conventional social order. A further complexity with *¡Átame!* is that even if it contains certain elements of Almodóvar's critique of the traditional family, it concludes with the return to the *hogar*. For Navajas, this reveals a tension at the heart of the (post)modern project, which has proven unable to entirely avoid reaffirming the fixed categories it critiques (1991, 79); this is much in line with Almodóvar's reluctance to entirely abandon the family. Conversely, though, García reads the narrative as successfully deconstructing identity binaries. He highlights: "lejos de ser fijas, las posiciones de los personajes son cambiantes, dinámicas, fluidas, señalándose que los sujetos no son unitarios o completos, sino que se presentan fragmentados y divididos por una carencia de sustancia que les dé plenitud." (2009, 52) I propose that more significant than the film's challenging of fixed identity markers is that it is ultimately Marina who chooses to continue the relationship. Moreover, she does so in the face of her sister's comment that she

[119] The institution is also presented as an antidote to solitude. The director states that the cost of freedom is loneliness, speaking to Almodóvar's emphasis on community.

cannot be so "kinky" as to have fallen in love with the man who kidnapped her. That the police do not figure in this family—whether understood as successfully reimagined or not—despite the kidnapping, highlights, I argue, the need for a space outside the law in which to explore the boundaries of new social organisation, one premised on the ethic of care. As with *Laberinto de pasiones*, *¡Átame!* privileges desire without judgment, but it goes further, I propose, in foregrounding an ethic of care, for Ricky and Marina only establish themselves as a couple once their relationship finds mutuality.[120]

ii. *Hable con ella*: The law's absence and the failure of communication

Moving into Almodóvar's black period, reimagining social order in constructive terms becomes less possible; the law's absence does not provide space for meaningful community to emerge. The first of these films, *Hable con ella* nevertheless offers a lone example of effective justice: nurse Benigno is convicted and incarcerated for his rape of his patient, Alicia. Yet the film shows neither the crime, nor the police investigation. The film has been a "touchstone of recent film-philosophy" (Shaw 2017, 247).[121] Below I explore the extent to which the law's absence here suggests a resignation on Almodóvar's part to the impossibility of justice. The peripheral positioning of the police—their presence inferred only from Benigno's incarceration—invites us to consider whether the "new Spain" of Almodóvar's works has cemented an effective alternative moral framework.

Almodóvar undermines the law's disapprobation by portraying Benigno sympathetically. Whilst found guilty of a crime, the narrative is ambivalent when it comes to characterising the nurse's (mis)deeds. Some scholars have gone so far as to describe this film as "ethically defective" in its insistence on establishing our empathy for him (Eaton 2009b, 18-19).[122] This is achieved in part through his

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120 It is beyond the scope of this thesis to explore in any greater detail the ways in which Almodóvar's couples challenge or expand upon the notions of care and community outlined here. This is an intriguing topic for further investigation.

121 See from page 13 of the Introduction.

122 See also Novoa (2005). Conversely, Shpall (2013) views the film as clearly condemning the rape. Various other scholars have taken a more moderate position, highlighting the film's nuanced representation of the crime and its perpetrator: Pippin (2009); G. Wilson (2009); Bacchini (2014), Conlon (2016).

relationship with Marco, a journalist whom he meets in hospital, as each man tends to a different comatose woman: Marco as lover, Benigno as nurse. The audience is encouraged to identify with Marco, and to experience with him Benigno's suicide as tragedy. Absent when the crime is discovered and prosecuted, the reticent Marco is positioned at a distance from the law, confirmed in the final sequence wherein he takes up Benigno's position. Via its weaving together of backstories and the mundaneness of hospital life, the film foregrounds the struggle to communicate meaningfully, which I posit is never fully achieved.

The film is broken into three acts, each focusing on a pair of characters named by written intertitles. None of these pairs is "Benigno and Marco," yet they are the narrative's focus.[123] The two first encounter each other during a performance of Pina Bausch's "Café Müller," the piece "foreshadow[ing] the film's suffering and sadness—in particular that of women, but also the desperate attempts of men to save them" (Freeland 2009, 72).[124] The performance moves Marco to tears, because—he later tells Benigno—he could not share the beauty with his former lover. This is due not only to their friendship, but also Benigno's mandate that Marco "hable con ella" (being his comatose lover, Lydia), vocalising the film's title and inspiring a fundamental change in the protagonist's communicative possibilities.

Benigno seems much more at ease expressing himself than Marco—after the performance, he shares with Alicia in detail the movement of the dancers, as well as Marco's emotive response—but the fact that his love object is in a coma reveals the limitations of his communicative abilities. As Marco emphatically puts it when Benigno declares his desire to marry Alicia: "Lo tuyo con Alicia es un monólogo y una locura." It is unclear whether Benigno is guiding Marco towards monologue or dialogue and it is in this tension that a key ethical dimension of the film emerges. Is it enough to simply speak, or does Almodóvar urge us to find someone who can and will talk back, giving rise to meaningful discussion? Ballesteros argues that "[t]he

123 The three pairs are: "Lydia y Marco", "Alicia y Benigno" and "Marco y Alicia."

124 In this, two women move like sleepwalkers through the stage with their eyes closed, as a man tries desperately to remove the multiple obstacles from their paths. Numerous other scholars have commented on the way the dance sequences in this film gesture towards the importance of community and offer a means of establishing connection: Scott (2002); Palao Errando (2003); Gutiérrez Albilla (2005a; 2005b); Marcantonio (2007); Kakoudaki (2008); Freeland (2009).

conviction, or at least the desire, that women and men can—even should—perform their personal dramas before each other resides at the core of *Talk to Her*" (2009, 83). Similarly, Andrea Sabbadini, considering the film through the prism of the psychoanalytic "talking cure," notes that the film's Spanish title tells us to talk *with* her. The English translation, he contends, misses the "dimension of mutuality" in the original (2007, 67).[125] Meanwhile, adopting a feminist lens, Cynthia Freeland highlights the ways in which the film foregrounds the need to "subjectify" (rather than objectify) a person, in order to understand them fully *as they are* (2009, 71), an approach reminiscent of the ethics of care. The communicative possibilities foregrounded by these readings are undermined, in my view, by the lack of participation by the two comatose women, as they never achieve "subjectification".[126]

As noted by Ballesteros (2009), *Hable con ella* reflects a shift in emphasis in Almodóvar's oeuvre: from female solidarity to male bonding. Yet this does not mean that he has nothing to say about women here. Almodóvar's purportedly progressive gender politics—undermined in part through his representation of the mother[127]—are further challenged by the largely passive role played by Alicia and Lydia.

Moreover, the narrative's logic precludes mutuality, exemplified by the mute, black and white interstice that interrupts the rape. The spectator is denied the opportunity to judge the crime for herself and instead is shown *El amante menguante*, which focuses on all-absorbing love. In this sequence, scientist Amparo develops a weight loss potion, which is tested by her lover, Alfredo—trying to prove his devotion and unselfishness—with unforeseen consequences. After a brief separation, the lovers are reunited and the now finger-sized Alfredo ventures inside the sleeping Amparo's vagina, where he stays forever.[128] The significance of this narrative is reinforced by Benigno's recounting it to Alicia as he bathes her. For James Conlon, rather than "hiding" the sexual violence, the comparison with

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125 Sabbadini's comment overlooks the fact that "talk *to*" is more idiomatic in English.

126 For Goss (2009), the portrayal of these female characters is non-empowered and "creepy".

127 This is discussed in more detail in chapter one, section D.ii.

128 This occurs at the Hotel Youkali, which was, as Acevedo-Muñoz observes, the "name of the much-desired maternal estate in *Kika*" (2007, 254).

Alfredo's actions reveals the complexity of Benigno's conduct, as "he enters Alicia in that same self-sacrificing way" (2016, 44; also Shpall 2013, 107-108). In a film that is otherwise bereft of romantic intimacy, I contend that this sequence reinforces the general pessimism of the film. Whether it is Benigno's assault of Alicia, or Alfredo's disappearance, mutually supportive and beneficial relations seem impossible here.

Tensions around the limitations of narrative and communication permeate this film.[129] Whilst I agree that the film eschews simple moral judgments, this sequence privileges Benigno's feelings over Alicia's bodily autonomy, undermining the severity of the crime and distancing the audience from the legal characterisation of the act as rape. The law's authority—and its judgment of Benigno's actions—is further negated as Marco steps into the shoes of his friend. Nevertheless, Benigno's instruction to Marco later generates the possibility of a relationship: he not only moves into Benigno's flat but also becomes a potential suitor for Alicia. This is reinforced when Marco and Alicia meet at the same theatre where the film began—a new possibility of connection foregrounded in the film's final intertitle: "Marco y Alicia." In some respects, this returns to the tension between legal authority (according to which Benigno is a criminal whose death could be read as an extension of his punishment) and religious lore. Without wanting to overstate the parallel between Benigno's "re-birth" and the Resurrection, this Christian-infused reading exemplifies the director's approach to religion more generally.[130] Furthermore, this Christian symbolism hints that Benigno is absolved of his sins, offered a second, vicarious, opportunity at love with Alicia. This is reinforced by the problematic narrative logic that the rape wakes Alicia from her coma.[131]

The power of this narrative is that rather than *telling* the audience what to think—as the law does—the film allows us to judge for ourselves, at the same time

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129 Marcantonio, drawing on Butler's work, argues that the film offers "a compressed statement of Almodóvar's ideas about narrative and its role in constructing meaning" (2007, 21).

130 See chapter two for further discussion of the various ways in which the filmmaker refers to the Church, particularly section A.i.

131 In the published script, Almodóvar shares his inspiration for the story: a morgue night watchman who sexually assaulted a "dead" young woman, apparently bringing her back to life (Almodóvar 2002, 9). Even if the narrative never unreservedly condemns Benigno, it is possible to read as a sort of punishment in the fact that he never learns of Alicia's recovery, which seems to contribute to his suicide.

gesturing towards the possibility that diametrically opposed judgments might each be rationally and morally justified (see Bacchini 2014). By giving Benigno a second chance, the film confirms the law's irrelevance. What emerges in the law's absence, however, is tainted by the communicative failures throughout the narrative. This undermines the emphasis on relationality in the film's title. Ultimately, the lack of mutuality or solidarity in *Hable con ella* emphasises acutely the importance of human connection across Almodóvar's work.[132] This remains a live issue, notwithstanding the absence of the law. It is clearly not enough to simply sideline the law; an alternative moral framework must be constructed in its place.

This is explored again in the subsequent films of the black period. Each of these narratives reveals how moving outside the law does not solve the ethical problems that arise, although it *may* allow greater space for meaningful community to emerge.[133] Rather than use police figures as a source of humour, or dwell on their incompetence, by focusing on the ways civilians muddle through significant moral dilemmas without reference to law, these films reveal the complexity of Almodóvar's communities. If the (non-)representation of the law reflects the permissiveness of post-Transition Spain, it also hints at the need to move beyond traditional notions of justice towards the moral possibilities offered by the ethics of care. Almodóvar's films suggest that the (sometimes criminal) conflicts that emerge can best be resolved at the interpersonal level, rather than through the imposition of a "higher" authority. Community is intricately connected to such ethics. It is partly due to their inability to establish meaningful community—alongside the adherence to rigid, outmoded understandings of masculinity—that the police are unable to be reimagined. This excludes them from domestic space, and pushes them outside of

[132] If we accept that the dance sequences offer a complementary narrative to the story of Benigno and Marco, the piece at the film's conclusion offers more hope of mutuality. After intermission, a later piece from *Masurca Fogo* shows men and women dancing together: a line of male/female couples move across the stage, working in partnership and suggesting more mutual communication.

[133] *Volver* and *La mala educación*, for instance, portray incest, paedophilia and murder without police intervention, whilst in *Los abrazos rotos* a woman is killed in a car accident whilst pursued by her ex-lover's son, again without reference to legal sanction. Where the police do appear, in *La piel que habito*, it is only briefly and they are superseded by Vicente's mother. The police are virtually absent, but so too is any alternative community; this film notably offers nothing of the ethics of care present in other narratives.

Almodóvar's communities altogether. Rather than reflecting a phantom-like power, as argued by Derrida (1990), I suggest that the police are undermined—through both ridicule and their own misdeeds—until they lose all authority and eventually vanish.

iii. The disappointment of the new moral order

Returning to D'Lugo's analysis of the role of the police, their absence in these later films could suggest that there is no longer any need for the police to serve as witnesses, as the new order has effectively taken hold. Scenes such as the finale of *La ley del deseo* illustrate the incompetence of law enforcement, alongside the emergence of new forms of social order. The police are spectators to—and thereby participants in—a changing of the moral guard. Yet D'Lugo's insistence on the need for the police to witness the transition does not hold for later films. Here, the law has lost all operative force, even spectatorial. It may at times be invoked, even invited in,[134] but it is increasingly ignored. This does not necessarily reflect the success of the new social order. Instead, I propose that what marks Almodóvar's films of the first decade of the 21st century—but for *Volver*, which offers an alternative, feminine order—is a lack of clear moral order. If, as in earlier films, individuals pursue their desires freely, here this does not lead to new relationships. Rather, the dogged pursuit of individual fulfilment comes at the expense of interpersonal connection. Almodóvar has long rejected formal justice as a structuring principle and embraced care as its substitute. Yet the films of the black period move away from this alternative moral order. Accordingly, the absence of the police in these films hints perhaps that there is no need for a witness to a new moral order, as no such order exists.

E. Feminine law: The ethics of justice vs the ethics of care

i. Are women lawyers welcome in the new moral order?

Before turning to the primary feminine figure of law, Juez Domínguez/Femme Letal, I want to briefly outline how the two female lawyers of this corpus suffer similar fates to the police discussed above. Each of these characters is isolated from

[134] Across numerous narratives, crimes *are* reported to the police. Examples include the sexual assault in *Kika* and the "home invasion" in *Carne trémula*.

other women, her association with the law correlating with a lack of community. Paulina, for instance, is positioned as Pepa's romantic rival for the affections of Iván, alongside his ex-wife, Lucia. The fact that she represented Lucia in her divorce with Iván, raises questions about Paulina's ethics, and this lack of "sisterly" solidarity is compounded by her refusal to provide legal advice to Candela in relation to her terrorist lover. This behaviour positions Paulina outside any form of community, and this is literally hammered home when Paulina is struck (albeit accidentally) by a record Pepa flings out of her apartment. In this moment, Paulina seems to be divinely punished for choosing her lover over potential community.

María, meanwhile, is similarly without female companionship, again in part precluded by her romantic plotline.[135] She is set up as Diego's sexual and murderous twin: the imagery of the film, as well as narrative parallels, establish the pair "as kindred spirits whose destiny will become inextricably interwoven as the film unfolds" (Edwards 1995, 167).[136] Although she acts as Ángel's lawyer—as he takes responsibility for her and her lover's crimes—María lacks care for her client, not to mention for her victims.[137] Her communicative difficulties are foregrounded in an encounter with her client's hostile mother, Berta. The sequence explicitly contrasts criminal and religious law; when María asserts disdainfully that it is not god who will try her son, Berta immediately retorts: "¿Es usted atea, por casualidad?" The women are unable to develop rapport. Berta is aligned with the Church (rather than María) through her attitude towards the lawyer, and in the camerawork: she and the cleric are kept in the same shot for most of this scene.

It is now clear that the law—whether embodied by the police or by lawyers—is excluded from Almodóvar's privileged communities. As with the Church, this exclusion springs from an incompatibility between the rigidity of the law and the highly specific and personalised ethical approach privileged in these films. This is true

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135 It is beyond the scope of this project to consider this in depth, but it seems that romantic relationships preclude meaningful communities across this corpus. Women (and men) must choose either community, or romance.

136 Jordan and Morgan-Tamosunas similarly claim that the lovers belong to the "same species, beyond gender difference," distinct from the other characters (1998, 152).

137 María also seems to see herself as above the law, as with the police officers discussed above. If her violence is foregrounded more than that of Diego, Nandorfy posits that this is because violence against women is so common that it cannot be represented metaphorically (1995, 85).

even for those who see themselves as above the law. Whilst this is perhaps true again for the mercurial figure of Juez Domínguez, from *Tacones lejanos*, he offers arguably greater hope for the law to be reconfigured.

ii. Femme Letal and the ethics of care

a. Subverting the law's masculinity

A film that defies easy classification,[138] *Tacones lejanos* focuses again on an investigation by an officer of the law, here a judge rather than a policeman. The two female lawyers aside, this is the first time the law itself is embodied by a character who can be described as feminine. A cross-dressing drag performer, Juez Domínguez imbues the law with feminine authority, whilst also alluding to the notion that gender is a performance (see Butler 1990; 1999). Kinder writes that Almodóvar's characterisation of the law (1993, 254):[139]

> reaches a new stage of inversion in *Tacones lejanos* where the glamorous androgynous hero is a cop and where virtually all policeman are tenderhearted souls who identify with those marginalized under patriarchy.

There is no doubt that, as Edwards puts it, this character is "much softer, more caring, far removed from the brutal and macho policeman of *Pepi, Luci, Bom*" (2001, 132). But if the judge offers the possibility of a more nurturing and individualised law, it is, I argue, because his approach is governed by the ethics of care rather than an ethics of justice. He embodies Almodóvar's rejection of formal legal institutions. Beyond his fluid gender identity, the judge also subverts the law's masculinised authority through his substitution for the central maternal role. Whilst this latter element raises concerns for Fischer (1996), who views the judge as co-opting the maternal to the exclusion (and detriment) of the film's female characters, I offer an alternative reading below focused in part on the film's redemption of the (biological) mother. This section explores how the judge problematises any totalising interpretation of Almodóvar's representation of law, briefly touching also on the

[138] Saz (1992) notes that critics in Spain in particular struggled to readily categorise *Tacones lejanos* into an established genre (see also Smith 2000, 127-128).

[139] Whilst Kinder's analysis implies multiple policemen, Juez Domínguez is the only police figure given any prominence.

alternative family with which this narrative ends. The key question for this section is whether this judge can redeem the institution of the law.

This film opens in Barajas airport,[140] as news anchor Rebeca awaits her mother after a long separation. Both the film's narrative structure and Rebeca herself orbit around Marisa Paredes' Becky, who left her daughter as a child to pursue her dreams of stardom. While Becky is in Madrid for a series of performances, she sleeps with Manuel, a former lover who is now her daughter's husband. This maternal betrayal compounds the already difficult relationship. Allinson, in a rather blunt (but not unfair) assessment, states that "the gulf which separates the two women is Becky's inability to see beyond herself" (2001, 65). As his analysis of the film indicates, the focus is on how mother and daughter address and eventually overcome this "gulf." This reflects the difficulties of moving beyond past traumas, their reconciliation achieved through the mother's self-sacrifice.[141] This is facilitated by the efforts of the law as embodied by Juez Domínguez. The judge's desire to see the women resolve their differences is driven primarily, I argue, by his *care* for Rebeca.[142] Also known as Femme Letal, [143] this character mediates their relationship through his drag imitations of Becky, a famous singer. Missing her mother, Rebeca turns to these shows as a substitute and develops a friendship with the performer.

Their relationship turns professional, however, when the judge is brought in to investigate Manuel's murder. We soon learn that Manuel was not only having an affair with Becky, but also another newswoman. All three of Manuel's lovers become suspects, but Rebeca soon confesses on live television, during the evening's

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140 This is the same location where *Mujeres al borde* concludes.

141 In this way, the film adheres more strictly to the script of the maternal melodrama fdiscussed in chapter one, page 62ff. Described as a "transgressive 'negative Oedipal' passion" tale (L. Williams 2004, 276; Kinder 1992, 40), in which the daughter must kill the stepfather, this film foregrounds the negative impact of maternal rejection.

142 This is complicated by an earlier scene, in which Letal pursues Rebeca despite her protestations, leading to a sex scene that is ambivalent in terms of consent. This encounter leads to pregnancy and is key to the film's dénouement.

143 A third identity is Hugo, drug addict and police informant. Whilst in scenes with his mother, he goes by "Eduardo". It is never clear which identity is "real." Even at home the character wears a false beard, suggesting a riddle of identities that is never resolved.

newscast.[144] She is promptly arrested, but the judge is determined to help her.[145] Juez Domínguez ultimately recuses himself from the case because he has become too "involved", as though this were not always already the case. He helps Rebeca to escape legal consequences for her misdeeds, although she is left bereft when Becky dies at the film's conclusion. If this film represents a "triumph of matriarchy" as suggested by Victor Fuentes (1995, 163), the police officer has come full circle in this film. The lack of legal sanction for Manuel's murder is not a sign of the law's failure, but of its reimagining in less repressive, more fluid, and "just" terms, at least according to Almodóvar.

The alternative justice proposed here is tied to the subversion of patriarchal order. Certainly, in myriad ways, the judge challenges the notion of the law as masculine. Around this film's release, Almodóvar offered the following reflections (cited in Morgan 1992, 29):

> for me there is ambiguity in justice – and that's why I have given it to the character of the judge. I don't know what the face of justice is – sometimes it's masculine, sometimes it's feminine – that's where ambiguity resides: in questions of morality.

Whilst we might question whether Almodóvar's films are compatible with such a binary approach to morality, this is the first time the law itself embraces this ambiguity. The judge represents the highpoint of the law in these films, in part due to his embrace of this fluidity. His multiple identity positions reinforce the notion that there is no single point of authority. Through his various roles—including that of a legal officer—this character explores the performance of both femininity and masculinity, challenging any notion of stable or fixed identity, embodying Hutcheon's claim that postmodernity is marked by a "commitment to doubleness or duplicity" (2002, 1).[146]

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144 In a comic twist, Rebeca's rival, Isabel, is by her side during the confession, signing the bulletin for deaf viewers: see Smith (2000) for an insightful visual analysis of this scene.

145 He organises a meeting between mother and daughter during which Rebeca admits that as a child she killed her step-father by switching his pills so that he fell asleep whilst driving.

146 This is not unique to Letal. Mirrors figure throughout this film, with various shots of the central characters—Becky, Rebeca and Letal—making themselves up reminding the viewer that no one is what they seem. The question as to who lies beneath such masks "reverberates throughout the film" (Edwards 1995, 210).

Numerous scholars have linked this character's fluid gender and sexual identities to Almodóvar's subversion of formal justice (Morgan 1992; Shaw 2000; Smith 2000), whilst the various identity positions taken by the judge undermine more generally any binary approach to gender. *Tacones lejanos* celebrates disguise, suggesting a reconfigured Spain based on plural and shifting identities as embodied by the judge. Moreover, by developing and then portraying his cast of informants, the judge inserts himself into multiple points of the investigative hierarchy, undermining the notion of an objective, omnipotent arbiter. This chimes with the more diffuse understanding of power posited by Foucault, who conceptualises it as "the multiplicity of force relations immanent in the sphere in which they operate and which constitute their own organisation" (1990, 92).

Letal adopts a highly situational investigatory technique, evident both in his adoption of given personae, but also his caring treatment of Rebeca and her mother. Accordingly, Kamir notes: "Care is thus portrayed as neither biologically female nor appropriated by men" (2000, 928). Kamir explores alternative feminist understandings of law, judgment and justice, arguing that the film is both postmodern and feminist. This coheres with Shaw's proposal that the film's resolution is achieved (2000, 61-62):

> through the execution of justice, within the terms of reference of the film: the death of the womanising misogynist, the reconciliation between mother and daughter, and Rebeca's freedom from her mother once she knows she is loved.

The film refigures justice into a new shape. Whilst Shaw categorises this in terms of some new ethical order, Kamir advocates that the film proposes a "justice of care," refusing to frame this within the ethics of care. This distinction stems primarily from a characterisation of the ethics of care as essentialist, which is not in line with my readings of the scholarship.[147] Her emphasis on the film's feminist undermining of patriarchal order is, however, not inconsistent with the way I have articulated the ethic of care throughout this thesis. In a thesis chapter that engages in detail with

[147] See section C.iii of the Introduction.

Kamir's analysis, López-Lerma extends this conceptual framework,[148] contextualising her analysis against the backdrop of the Francoist repression of homosexuality. Kamir posits that *Tacones lejanos* replaces the ethics of justice with the "justice of care" (2006, 267), rejecting patriarchal oppression and offering instead "a human search for compassion" in which the law plays a central role (2006, 282).[149] Adopting a slightly different perspective, López-Lerma proposes that the film reimagines justice through an "ethics of otherness," an approach that resists "a moral philosophy reductive of difference into sameness" (2010, 141). For López-Lerma, it is significant that the film highlights the judge's fluidity and performativity, elements that give rise to the possibility of a judgment "that takes seriously the call of those marginal subjects… that have been traditionally excluded from the law." She concludes that the film: "transforms the law into a queer performance that recognizes and includes new subjectivities that disrupt the hierarchy that privileges masculinity, heterosexuality, and patriarchy." (2010, 183) What these two scholars agree on, significantly, is the film's progressive possibilities—achieved at least in part through its subversion of the patriarchal order.

b. The law of the mother

If this film illustrates the "triumph of matriarchy", as suggested by Fuentes (1995, 163), the matriarch is as much Letal/Juez Domínguez as anyone else. This is achieved partly through Letal's imitations of Becky, via which he inserts himself into their family dynamic, and reminds us of the performative nature of gender.[150] As Butler says of Divine's role in *Hairspray*, such performance "destabilises the very

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148 López-Lerma draws on postmodern jurisprudence, performativity, and queer aesthetics. See also Pelayo García (2011) for a queer reading of the film, drawing heavily on Butler's work.

149 Kamir explicitly distances her reading of the film's notion of justice from the ethics of care, suggesting that because the film's ethical framework does not precisely correspond to the feminist ethics of care, it offers a universal vision for the operation of law and justice (2006, 282-283). López-Lerma's reading of Kamir's chapter nevertheless seems to conflate the term "justice of care" with "ethics of care". It is beyond the scope of this chapter to entirely resolve the tension between these terms.

150 In terms of literal performance, there is some inconsistency in the representation of the possibilities it offers. Whilst theatre offers "ideal mother" Manuela a means to connect with others, and performance offers Letal similar opportunities, Becky's stage ambitions separate her literally and metaphorically from her daughter. Moreover, despite the film's dual focus on performance and on the mother-daughter relationship, Rebeca never sees her mother sing live. As Linda Williams notes, Rebeca's fragmentary listening experiences suggest "pieces of the mother that never quite add up to the whole envisioned in the daughter's fantasy" (2004, 278).

distinctions between the natural and the artificial, depth and surface, inner and outer through which discourse about genders always operates" (1999, xxxi). This is reinforced in an exchange of tokens—Becky giving an earring, Letal a fake breast—wherein these characters seal the bond premised on their shared stage identities, and explicitly confirm Letal as Rebeca's substitute mother.[151] For Deborah Shaw, meanwhile, Letal is indeed lethal to traditional notions of masculinity and femininity (2000, 59). If his drag name is a pun on the term *femme fatale*—another recurring character type in Almodóvar's films—Letal's body becomes, similarly, a vessel for a series of circulating desires between mother and daughter.[152] For Conrod, Letal's layering of identities places the police at the "very epicenter of all desires" (2012, 116). It is not, however, the judge that is the focus of these desires, but Femme Letal. The performer is both the object of Becky's narcissistic pleasure at seeing herself (re)presented on stage, as well as substituting for Becky in Rebeca's desire for maternal approbation and love. Incapable of giving her daughter the love and affection she desperately desires, Becky fits with Almodóvar's "bad mothers." Conversely, the judge's caring nature fits the maternal ideal. Here is an officer of the law who can represents both formal authority and Almodóvar's ethic of care.

Whilst I argue for a progressive reading of the judge's fluid identity, for Fischer, this is problematic because this same quality is denied to the female protagonists (1996, 171).[153] Yet not all men participate in this fluid gender economy—Rebeca's husband certainly does not. The hollowness of Manuel's masculinity is highlighted in an early interaction with his romantic rival, Femme Letal. When Manuel queries the performer about his/her gender, gesturing towards his gun as he demands a "straight" answer, Letal responds: "depende, para ti soy un hombre". This response denies the assumption at the heart of the question—that we must be one or the other, thereby encapsulating the director's destabilisation of gender. Manuel's

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151 A number of scholars have commented on the significance of this scene: Kamir (2000); Shaw (2000, 57); Fischer (1996, 169). This is often to offer a psychoanalytic reading of the focus on fetish and sexual difference: Kinder (1993); Zorach (2000); L Williams (2004).

152 As Doane (1991, 1) suggests, the femme fatale is unsettling because "she never really is what she seems to be," defying classification or legibility.

153 Coming from a slightly different perspective, Smith suggests the film devalues the freedom and achievements of the film's female protagonists, due to the law's destabilisation "by presenting the judge quite literally as a travesty of justice" (2000, 133).

question underscores a belief in a rigid gender binary, for which he is duly punished.[154] He is quickly replaced by Letal.

When Becky becomes pregnant—to her mother's look-alike no less—"the reproduction of mothering' goes berserk" (Fischer 1998, 209).[155] Examples include the protagonist's name ("Re-Becky"), her choice of husband—Manuel is a former lover of her mother (see Shaw 2000), and the sexual encounter between Rebeca and Femme Letal. The ultimate maternal reproduction is Rebeca's pregnancy; as her mother dies, she herself becomes a mother. A dysfunctional family is replaced by an equally non-traditional, triad: Rebeca, Letal, and their unborn child. The audience can only hope that unlike Juani in *¿Qué he hecho yo!*, Rebeca will not revisit on her daughter the traumas of her own childhood. Optimism is offered, suggests Hardcastle, by this new family's fluid nature, which "reflects Almodóvar's ideal for a new Spanish society that respects individuality, interdependence and change—characteristics at once crucial to a functional family and to democracy" (2007a, 84). It is not only individual identity, but also community (whether the family or otherwise), that is dynamic and subject to complex negotiation. In this alternative family, however, it is Letal who offers the most likely maternal figure, as Rebeca remains almost childlike in her demeanour and attachments.

Whilst his performance as Femme Letal highlights the performativity of gender, and its function as "masquerade" (see Doane, 1991), Fischer suggests that even more remarkable is the way Letal's imitation of Becky "places him within the *maternal* position" (1998, 207). This "male mothering," she argues, emerges "at the *expense* of woman" (1998, 213; original emphasis). Contrasting her reading to that of Kinder (1992), Fischer does not view the narrative as empowering the maternal.

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[154] Most immediately, Rebeca kills Manuel for his lack of compassion when she arrives home distraught upon discovering his infidelity. His response is in line with hegemonic masculinity, according to which the emotional sphere is not his responsibility (see Connell 2005 for an insightful and detailed account of Western masculinities). It is therefore—even if only indirectly—his rigid understanding of gender that leads to his death. He joins an extensive list of patriarchs punished for such misdeeds, including Antonio, Paco and Raimunda's father.

[155] Fischer reads the film as a postmodern remake of Douglas Sirk's *Imitation of Life* (1959). Various other scholars have considered this intertextual reference: L. Williams (2004); Kamir (2000, 924); and B. Williams (2004), who also views the film as reimagining the real-life murder of Johnny Stompanato by the daughter of actress Lana Turner, who played the mother in *Imitation of Life*.

Instead, Becky's fate reflects for Fischer a postmaternal world in which femininity is associated with surface, whilst masculinity is associated with depth and men like Letal "make the best Moms" (1998, 213).[156]

In my view, Fischer's reading understates Becky's emotional growth. Becky's decision to withhold information about her illness, because it would have manipulated Rebeca into forgiving her, reveals hidden emotional depths. So too does her confession to Manuel's murder—a final maternal act to protect her child. On her deathbed, Becky can finally engage in a heart-to-heart with her insecure and dispirited child. This scene offers "a remarkable opportunity for melodramatic expressions of 'mother-daughter passion and rapture.' … making up, just-in-the-nick-of-time, for years of maternal neglect" (L. Williams 2004, 276).[157] Becky sacrifices herself through the false confession,[158] leaving Rebeca free to establish a new family with Letal. The importance of this is foregrounded in the film's closing frame, where a red cloth linked to the murder weapon and Rebeca's red jacket form the apex of an inverted triangle, as Rebeca lies prostrate over the lifeless body of her mother.[159] That this final embrace closes the film reinforces the centrality of Becky in her daughter's life. The judge's willingness to believe the lie is instrumental and exemplifies his subversion of norm-based law. It is partly for this reason that although Juez Domínguez is associated with the patriarchal judiciary, he embodies "Almodóvar's law" (Shaw 2000, 60), which is regulated by the individualised moral principles of the ethics of care. Rebeca, mother of his yet to be born child, is a murderess twice over, having killed her stepfather as a child and later her husband (each her mother's lover). Although Juez Domínguez ultimately recuses himself from

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156 Fischer links her discussion to broader debates about the extent to which postmodernism is inherently progressive; or whether its destabilisation of categories that perhaps require interrogation sidesteps political debates that have real consequences (1998, 209; see also Creed 1987; Kaplan 1988; Hutcheon 2002, 38). It is beyond the scope of this thesis to resolve such debates about the nature of the postmodern aesthetic and ethic. Nevertheless, my analysis of Letal seeks to highlight the ways in which Letal's care for Rebeca challenges any view of the character as empty.

157 Kamir similarly notes that in this final moment, Becky "has finally taken on the loving role of a 'good mother.'" (2000, 922)

158 For the religious connotations of this moment, see page 112ff, chapter two.

159 The other two vertices are the red curtains to the top right of shot and a red-dominated abstract painting above the bed to the left. See Rennett (2012) on Almodóvar's use of red generally.

the case, by this point he has aided Rebeca to escape legal consequences for her misdeeds.

Even if Rebeca's fairytale ending seems to require her mother's death, I contend that the plot's "matricide" can be read as directed not at the mother in general, but at the "bad mother" who privileges her career over her daughter.[160] Whilst critically foregrounding the damage of maternal neglect, the film ultimately takes a compassionate approach, allowing the viewer to understand each character's vulnerabilities and flaws. If this narrative perhaps leaves little space for the (feminine) maternal, it concludes with a new family, and new maternal possibilities, premised on the ethic of care whereby individuality and community must be finely balanced. Becky's refusal of the maternal role is contrasted with Letal's more conscious ethical positions, and Rebeca is ultimately partnered with the latter, her mother removed.[161] The film thereby gestures towards the constructive potential of this reimagined family.[162] This unconventional family accords with my contention about the primacy of the reimagined family in Almodóvar's communities.

c. Can we say the law is redeemed?

In contrast to Smith's claim that the film devalues the resourcefulness of its female protagonists, I argue that they are shown to overcome significant hurdles through self-reliance and creativity. The law does not offer them protection from the injustices they face, chiefly those caused by the men in their lives, and hence it is

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160 See section B.iii of chapter one for my definition of the "bad mother" and the different types. This illustrates, I would argue, Labanyi, Martín and Rodríguez Ortega's view that the resolution to Almodóvar's melodramas generally involves the consolidation of "an alternative space of care" (2012, 252).

161 Linda Williams considers that this heterosexual family is "both informed and upstaged by the much more central passion of incestuous mother love" (2004, 277), arguing that Rebeca's incestuous desire for her mother drives the plot. Whilst she offers a convincing analysis, it is deeply rooted in a psychoanalytic approach that I contend over-sexualises the mother-daughter relationship.

162 The gender fluidity of Letal is central to this alternative family; his ability to move between genders and spaces reflects the creative and empathic principles at the heart of Almodóvar's alternative communities. Significantly, Letal's disparate identities are used for the benefit of those around him, not for personal gain. If Rebeca seems reluctant to accept Letal's proposal given her discovery of his multiple identities, her mother's death at the film's conclusion leaves her little choice but to turn to the substitute. Moreover, their mutual incomprehension is explicitly described as "reciprocidad" by the judge, hinting at the need for mutuality and other-orientedness.

replaced. Yet law may be re-read into the film if we relinquish attachment to a rigid, legalistic approach so patently rejected by the ethics of care. That the alternative moral system proposed by the film is incongruous with the letter of the law is exemplified by the judge helping his lover—and the mother of his child—avoid conviction for murder. Certainly, as Allinson points out, he "betrays his profession because of his feelings" (2001, 61). Rather than moralising about this murderess twice over (Rebeca having killed her step-father as a child and then Manuel), the film's logic commends his actions, which are in keeping with the ethics of care. Any reconfiguration of the police is complicated by this maternal characterisation. Letal, I propose, does not redeem the police. Rather, he marks yet again the transition to a post-patriarchal order through his adoption of the maternal role. This is ultimately incompatible with his investigatory duties, as he lets Rebeca go with very little exculpatory evidence. In the dual role of (biological) father and (symbolic) mother, Letal is more effective than any "natural" parent of this narrative.[163]

Even as later depictions of the police offer new possibilities of rehabilitated masculinity and milder authority, such as David in *Carne trémula*, such figures remain nevertheless inscribed in the rigid framework of justice, which excludes them from Almodóvar's favoured ethical framework. Perhaps ultimately not much more likeable than his forebears, David is shown to have admirable qualities and the potential for social integration and success, as discussed above. But he is nevertheless sacrificed in favour of the more tolerant and progressive Víctor. Similarly, the gentle del Valle is supplanted in his investigative efforts by the amateur, but spiritually "blessed", Ángel. Del Valle's lack of interest in human motivations suggests a failure of emotional intelligence and an incompatibility with the ethics of care, given its reliance on empathic reasoning. Such representations of police demonstrate a clear distinction between the imposition of order and the possibilities of justice, and in turn, between an ethics of justice and an ethics of care.

[163] This includes his own mother—apparently housebound for many years, with only her celebrity scrapbooks and the judge for company—whom he describes as "crazy." For Edwards, his difficult home life explains this escape to "a world of make-believe and sexual fantasy" (1995, 209).

Meanwhile, when it comes to Femme Letal/Juez Domínguez, the law is largely an obstacle to relationships, something that is manipulated to restore the mother-daughter bond. Through this cross-dressing, gender-bending figure, *Tacones lejanos* offers the most hopeful reimagining of the law across Almodóvar's oeuvre. It comes as no surprise that the most progressive portrayal of a legal officer involves both the blurring of gender lines and the inclusion of the maternal into the legal sphere. Both aspects of the film highlight yet again how the ethics of care can be seen to drive Almodóvar's project. The contrasting of formal justice with the ethics of care shows how only the latter seems compatible with the new, reimagined, family. Accordingly, this narrative is congruent with the broader thread that runs through these films, highlighting a total divorce between the police (or any other representative of Spain's legal system) and ethics. Whether the crime is kidnapping, rape, or murder, the police are never a truly viable option. Women, more than anyone, must rely on their own wiles and methods to achieve acceptable outcomes. As I have explored through this analysis of the police across these films, Almodóvar seems to not envisage any possibility of reimagining this institution for the new Spain.

Conclusion: Deconstruction / reconstruction

A. Out with the old

This thesis contributes to the ongoing work on the films of Almodóvar, offering a new perspective on his communities and ethics. As I have argued, the ethics of care governs Almodóvar's alternative communities, offering a framework premised on openness to others and a mandate to respond with attention to their concrete needs. This has been a key frame for my articulation of Almodóvar's approach to community, but it is not an exhaustive framework for his reimagined social order. This conclusion offers some reflections on other concerns that merit further investigation, drawing on my discussion in the three substantive chapters of this thesis. Finally, I offer an answer to one of the questions posed in the introduction to this thesis: to what extent do these films suggest that a postmodern aesthetic can give rise to a meaningful ethic?

This thesis has traced the manifold ways in which Almodóvar deconstructs three institutions that were central to maintaining the ideological agenda of the Franco regime: the family, the Church, and the police. Drawing on a range of conceptual and analytical tools, each chapter has charted ruptures in the fabric of traditional Spain, highlighting the director's scepticism of rigid forms of community. His critique is premised in large part, I have argued, on his rejection of fixed identity markers. To reveal this, I have drawn on frames from feminist and queer understandings of space and time, to genre studies and feminist philosophy.

In chapter one, we saw how this was achieved with regards the family, one of Almodóvar's most consistent concerns. I first traced the dissolution of the family, primarily through his strident critique of the father, alongside that of the authoritarian mother. Where the former is largely depicted as absent or abusive—in which case he is summarily discharged—the latter is treated with more sympathy. This emerges primarily through Almodóvar's engagement with "women's" genres, and his foregrounding of domestic, quotidian life. Nevertheless, as I argued when I discussed his alternative families, those mothers who are aligned with patriarchal

authority are also excluded from Almodóvar's reconfigured communities. This trend was addressed in the second part of chapter one, where I explored the ways in which the family is reconfigured in these films and that Almodóvar's alternative families are framed in maternally-oriented terms that are congruent with the ethics of care. This was argued through engagement with Almodóvar's ideal mothers, which include transgender mothers. Finally, I considered criticisms of Almodóvar's idealisation of the maternal. I concluded that the concerns expressed by certain scholars about the way his mothers appear to be limited to traditional roles and qualities overlook the broader moral universe of these films. Characters such as Manuela and Tina are granted fulfilment and meaning through community in ways that are denied to their counterparts (mothers or not) who ignore the ethics of care.

In chapter two, I turned to the representation of religion in this filmography, focusing on the Church as embodied by two institutions: the boarding school of *La mala educación* and the convent of *Entre tinieblas*. As with chapter one, in this chapter I began by exploring the strident critique of the Church offered by *La mala educación*, which highlights the destructive power of religion and the moral failings that occur under its auspices. This is evident in the film's subversion of linear time, whereby the trauma caused by child sexual abuse becomes apparent through the film's intricate narrative structure. Focusing then on *Entre tinieblas*, which offers more hope for the reimagining of the Church, I concluded that institutionalised religion remains anathema to Almodóvar's conceptualisation of meaningful community. This is evidenced by the way that even the feminine space of the convent is ultimately incapable of sustaining solidarity amongst its members. In the final part of chapter two, the example *La ley del deseo* offered a different way of understanding religion, this time in more spiritual terms. Tina's altar and ritualised practice, premised not on any formal religious institution but instead on her care for adopted daughter, Ada, suggested that spirituality can find a place in Almodóvar's alternative communities, but only outside the institutional constraints of the Church.

Chapter three of this thesis turned to the representation of the law, starting with a comprehensive taxonomy of Almodóvar's police. The two primary categories overlapped considerably with the types of father unveiled in chapter one: abusive or

incompetent. The representation of the law in these films further reinforces Almodóvar's suspicion of conservative (particularly patriarchal) institutions. The limitations of the police are foregrounded through a wide range of techniques, including the director's challenges to linear causality and the presence of amateur investigators whose efforts often outmatch those of officers of the law. The second part of this chapter considered the banishment of the police, who become increasingly irrelevant to questions of crime and violence until they disappear entirely. This was particularly evident in my discussion of domestic spaces, especially when the police pit themselves unsuccessfully against women. A key question emerges from this trend. Given D'Lugo's early work on the role of the police in witnessing the shift in social and ethical order, does this absence mean that this transition is complete. Through a close analysis of *Hable con ella*, I concluded that this was not the case. Rather, this film suggests a growing pessimism on the director's part about the possibilities of establishing meaningful community. In the final section of this chapter, I explored feminine examples of the law, principally Juez Domínguez (*Tacones lejanos*). This figure suggests that Almodóvar may be able to reimagine the law, but only if it is guided by maternal principles, and grounded in the ethics of care.

My thesis demonstrates that Almodóvar does not abandon the family, the Church or the law altogether. My analysis has uncovered a constructive enterprise, although the discussion of each community gave rise to different conclusions about the (im-)possibilities of its reconfiguration. Rather than leave us with a void where traditional forms of community used to reside, I contend that these films offer us dynamic and fluid alternatives. Regarding the family, Almodóvar holds onto this community to the extent that it fits with his notion of the family as a source of care, albeit only once it is divested of the authoritarian patriarch (or his maternal substitute). Conversely, his attitude towards the Church and the police is less optimistic. These two institutions are, I contend, too steeped in historical trauma and violence to ground the types of community championed by these films. Moreover, the rigid formal structures that govern their operation do not provide space for the ethics of care's responsiveness and specificity.

B. The community of circumstance

Throughout this thesis I have drawn on notions of time and space. This coincides with an increasing emphasis on time and space in Almodóvar's films. My palimpsestous approach is an extension of Kinder's "retroserial" reading of Almodóvar's brothers (2009a), which encourages us to analyse these films without regard to chronology. This is most evident in chapter two above, where *Entre tinieblas* is considered after *La mala educación*, released over twenty years later. If D'Lugo first highlighted the significance of space—specifically Madrid—for Almodóvar's reimagining of community in Spain in 1991, this theme has continued to interest scholars in their discussion of Almodóvar's films. Whilst subsequent discussions of the city have conflicted as to whether it is a repressive or progressive space,[1] my discussion of space in these films somewhat elides such debates. This thesis has not sought to resolve whether Almodóvar's representation of space is inherently progressive, but to unveil its insights into the social configurations favoured throughout this corpus. Despite such differences of opinion in the literature, by drawing on the innovations of this scholarship, this thesis has brought together space and time in my exploration of Almodóvar's alternative communities. This has allowed me to define the limits and guidelines of these communities, and revealed the centrality of the ethics of care.

Space and time coalesce here as I consider the role played by randomness, and happenstance. Beyond the ethics of care, I propose circumstance as a further pivotal feature of Almodóvar's alternative communities. Having considered in detail the director's representation of three institutions and the limits and possibilities they pose for community, it seems to me that beyond rejecting inflexible notions of identity and moving beyond rigid, universalised ethics, the director's favoured communities emerge organically from the circumstances of his characters' lives. I therefore want to move beyond the terms "alternative community" or, most commonly, "alternative family," and suggest instead that we might categorise these alternative configurations under the notion of the "communities of circumstance."

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[1] See Triana-Toribio (1996); Richardson (2002, 147-157); Campbell (2005); C. Ruiz (2007); Macdougall (2014); Rodríguez Ortega (2014); Pérez Ríu (2017).

These communities of circumstance are, I contend, a natural corollary of Almodóvar's subversion of gender, sexuality and other identity markers. I have traced the dissolution and (re-)formation of numerous communities over the course of this thesis. What emerges, I argue, is the conclusion that central to the most meaningful communities is a certain randomness in their formation. To understand these configurations, we must abandon fixed social boundaries and conceptualise community as a dynamic network of relations that shifts as people make and lose connections. In this way, it is responsive to its members' needs as the ethics of care requires. This offers us not only an insight into Almodóvar's preferred communities, but also a way of understanding or researching communities. These films suggest we must move beyond our expectations about communities, whether on screen or in more concrete settings. The ruptures Almodóvar traces in the family, the Church and the police mean that we cannot rely on these institutions to bring us together meaningfully. Alternative bonds must be established. In what follows, I briefly outline some of the key characteristics of the community of circumstance, suggesting also a potential conceptual framework for further exploration.

First, a quick note on the relationship between "circumstance" and "care". By referring to Almodóvar's alternative communities as communities of circumstance, I do not mean to underplay the extent to which agency is involved in their formation, not to mention their ongoing existence. Indeed, even as Almodóvar's alternative communities deny fixed boundaries and refuse to remain stable, they are nevertheless premised on a specific commitment. The notion of circumstance is not intended to replace or undermine the requirements of the ethics of care as outlined above. Whilst there may seem to be a tension between the concept of randomness and that of care, members of such "circumstantial" communities must choose (consciously or not) to participate by attending to the needs of others and evidencing a "commitment to caring" (see Noddings 2003, 13). I contend that any tension between the concept of circumstance and that of care does not lead to their mutual incompatibility, but reminds us yet again of the ways in which Almodóvar's films encourage—indeed at times even demand—that we hold competing ideas in tension.

Many of the bonds formed and broken throughout Almodóvar's films can be conceived of as communities of circumstance. From the first feminine community of Pepi, Luci, Bom to the more recent *Todo sobre mi madre*,[2] the filmmaker's communities are premised not on biology or kinship, but on coincidence and happy accidents. Even where biological family does appear to form the basis of a community, this is undermined, I argue, by the extensive ways in which Almodóvar distances his "families" from their traditional counterparts. Kinship is no guarantee of meaningful community in these films. In *La ley del deseo*, for example, whilst Tina and Pablo are of course biologically related, their relationship is premised on Tina's decision to return to Madrid after she was left by their father and by their mutual care and support.[3] Their adopted daughter Ada, meanwhile, is shown to explicitly choose to stay with them, rather than move to Milan with her mother. Another community of circumstance, by way of example, is to be found in *Mujeres al borde*. Brought together by a combination of need and happenstance, the women who congregate in Pepa's apartment are even more clearly held together by a random confluence of events, from an alleged terrorist attack to the famed spiked gazpacho. This is reinforced by the "mambo taxi," a comedic element that nevertheless reinforces the ways in which a community might respond to a person's needs by chance.[4] If this film foregrounds the impossibility of communication between Pepa and Iván through the broken promise of the telephone motif, Pepa finds it instead in the unexpected forum of the community of circumstance.

Another quality of these communities is their transience, and perhaps even fragility; they are formed through the forging of certain connections and the rupturing of others. Communities of circumstance often shift over the course of a narrative, or Almodóvar's films end in ways which gesture towards such change. This is evident, for instance, in the finale of *Todo sobre mi madre*, with Manuela (and the youngest Esteban) leaving Barcelona and her newly established close network of friends, although she does return shortly. In *Volver*, meanwhile, Irene purportedly

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2 As we move into the black period, such communities become less and less visible.

3 See chapter two section D for further discussion of this relationship and the ethics of care.

4 The mambo taxi turns up a number of times to ferry Pepa around Madrid, taking her to the office of lawyer Paulina, and to the airport, whilst also offering other forms of practical assistance.

returns from the dead, but leaves her daughters again at the film's close, to care for the orphaned Agustina. Makeshift communities such as these suggest that community emerges through the unavoidably social nature of our existence. These films thereby also offer insight into human nature more generally.

One conceptual tool that could help to better understand these aspects of the community of circumstance is the work of Jean-Luc Nancy, who has articulated a unique vision of the "inoperative community". This work offers an intriguing direction for future investigation of Almodóvar's communities, drawing attention to the various ways in which they refuse to fit with conventional social configurations. The resonance of this philosopher's work also reinforces my overall approach to these films as offering a form of philosophical mediation on the subject of community.

I have mentioned already the poignant tribute to deceased scholar José Esteban Muñoz offered by Chambers-Letson (2014) in his rumination on *Todo sobre mi madre* and questions of loss.[5] What is notable for present purposes is the way Chambers-Letson brings the work of Nancy to bear on the representation of community. The only scholar to mention Nancy in relation to Almodóvar's communities, Chambers-Letson suggests that Esteban's death (and life) is the catalyst for the community that forms around Manuela.[6] Indeed, Nancy proposes that it is the finitude of death which reveals community (1991, 15):

> Community occurs in order to acknowledge this impossibility, or more exactly—for there is neither function nor finality here—the impossibility of making a work out of death is inscribed and acknowledged as 'community.'

It is significant, Chambers-Letson suggests, that Manuela "repeatedly refuses to communicate the nature of her son's loss", a failure to "communicate the incommunicable" that seems to highlight that in turn, according to Nancy's logic, founds community (2014, 21).

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5 See chapter one from page 80 above.

6 Allbritton (2015) similarly sees a constructive potential in Almodóvar's representation of death in *Volver*.

Turning to the work of the scholar to whom his article is dedicated, Chambers-Letson suggests that the queer forms of community theorised in Muñoz's work are similarly founded on a sense of the incommensurate, the sharing (out) of the incommunicable. This is, he proposes, a "revolutionary site because it is the space where we imagine, discover, and produce new ways of being in the world together" (2014, 22). Community in both Nancy's work and Almodóvar's films is therefore to be understood as a space to which we bring those parts of our experience that are beyond expression and/or comprehension; it harbours those aspects of our lives that we are unable to process alone. Certainly, death figures extensively in Almodóvar's films and, as I argue elsewhere (M. Rose 2016), is often pivotal to his communities.

I want to draw out another aspect of the philosopher's "inoperative community". Nancy's *The Inoperative Community* provides an intriguing account of our being-in-common, or of community. Nancy's endeavour is not to establish a definition for community, or to set out community's limits, but rather to rethink the term itself. Almodóvar's films have been read as revealing "a utopian desire for a sense of community that is political and emotional" (Kakoudaki 2009, 196). This fundamental need for communication points to Nancy's account of community as "given to us with being and as being, well in advance of all our projects, desires and undertakings" (1991, 35). For Nancy, the goal of community is not its own self-realisation, but an acknowledgement of its impossibility or "inoperative" nature; it is "inoperative" because it is given to us with our very existence, we cannot bring it into being through our own endeavours (1991, 31). If the ethics of care seems incongruent with the assertion that community cannot be achieved through work, I contend this can be resolved partially by putting these two frameworks on different levels. On the one hand, Nancy's work helps us conceptualise the *emergence* of Almodóvar's communities; on the other, the ethics of care governs how they might *operate*. It therefore provides exciting potential for deepening our understanding of the questions discussed in this thesis.

Community is, for Nancy, given to us with being; it comes not after individual human identity, but with it; being-with is an "essential condition" for our existence (Nancy 2008, 2). This evokes, I contend, Almodóvar's communities of circumstance,

which emerge organically from lived experience. If they similarly at times vanish just as quickly, the possibility of community nevertheless remains ever present in the coincidences and palimpsests that govern his narrative logic. This thesis has endeavoured to better unpack the governing principles of Almodóvar's communities. The inoperative community could provide further insight into their nature, and deepen our understanding of the primacy of community in this corpus. Beyond this, these films reveal something about how off-screen communities are formed and broken and how they might be sustained, ethically speaking. The insights offered by the above discussion therefore contribute not only to our understanding of Almodóvar's themes, but what it means to live within community in the "real world".

C. Final reflection

This thesis not only provides an account of the ethical principles of Almodóvar's communities, but also explores whether the transgressive, postmodern aesthetics for which Almodóvar is celebrated are necessarily antithetical to questions of ethics. His communities of circumstances arise out of his characters' lived realities and in turn shape those realities, offering a space for the deepening of interpersonal relations and for the exploration of self. They are a manifestation of a politics of inclusion, I suggest, and a call for a new form of social organising governed by the ethics of care. As Butler states in relation to queer theory generally—and I would say this applies here—Almodóvar is not interested in rejecting all identity claims, but rather opposes "the unwanted legislation of identity" (2004, 7). When it comes to community, he similarly calls for us to be accepting and to respond with care, rather than regulation.

Based on my analysis of his representation of the family, the Church, and the law, the conclusion must be that a postmodern aesthetics can coexist with a meaningful ethics. Although the moral framework put forward in these films refuses universalising norms and totalising guidelines, there is nonetheless an ethical mandate established here. If Almodóvar's films invite us to relish ambiguity and to celebrate transgression, they also, I have argued, implore us to *care*.

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