

REPRESENTATIONS OF MOTHERHOOD IN LATE FRANCOIST SPAIN: FROM CATHOLIC DISCOURSES TO EARLY FEMINIST CRITIQUES¹

REPRESENTACIONES DE LA MATERNIDAD EN EL TARDOFRANQUISMO: DE LOS DISCURSOS CATÓLICOS A LAS PRIMERAS CRÍTICAS FEMINISTAS

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Abstract

This article examines changes and continuities in the representations of motherhood at the end of Franco's regime (c 1960-1975). Influenced by the approaches of the history of emotions, this study looks at the emotional prescriptions and norms associated with Catholic representations of motherhood and family, but also at the emotional counter-narratives of second-wave feminism in Spain. It draws on various sources, including popular and religious magazines, films, medical

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discourses, advice literature, illustrated books and feminist writings. The first section focuses on the most conservative depictions of motherhood at the time, those linked to Opus Dei, which praised the joys of prolific motherhood and resisted any change in social attitudes towards birth control. Modern in appearance, but very reactionary at heart, these publications intended for a popular readership disseminated an ideal of the self-sacrificing mother who never lost her smile or optimism despite the hardships of everyday life. The second section deals with a new type of advice literature for mothers aimed at disseminating the so-called *painless childbirth* method, which contained a conservative message about the role and emotions women should perform during labour. Thirdly, the article assesses the evolution of the most progressive Catholic discourse on motherhood and family in the 1960s and early 1970s in the context of the Second Vatican Council (1962-1965). Finally, it studies some early feminist writings from the end of the dictatorship. In opposition to the patriarchal narratives, these critiques drew attention to the various types of violence associated with the experience and institution of motherhood.

Keywords: late Francoism; motherhood; childbirth; family; gender; emotions; feminism

Resumen

Este artículo explora algunos de los cambios y continuidades en las representaciones de la maternidad a finales del franquismo (c. 1960-1975). Influido por los acercamientos de la historia de género y de las emociones, este estudio examina las prescripciones y normas emocionales de las representaciones católicas de la maternidad, así como las contranarrativas emocionales del feminismo español de la segunda ola. Se sirve para ello de una diversidad de fuentes, entre las que se encuentran revistas populares y religiosas, películas, discursos médicos, literatura de consejos, libros ilustrados o ensayos feministas. El primer apartado se centra en la vertiente más conservadora, ligada al Opus Dei, que tendía a exaltar las alegrías de la maternidad prolífica y resistió cualquier cambio social en la concepción del control de la natalidad. Por medio de sus publicaciones dirigidas a un público popular, modernas en apariencia, pero muy reaccionarias en el fondo, difundió un ideal de madre sacrificada, pero que no perdía la sonrisa ni el optimismo ante nada, a pesar del sufrimiento y carencias cotidianas. Un segundo apartado se aproxima a un tipo de literatura de consejos para las madres, novedosa en la época, destinada a divulgar el llamado *parto sin dolor*. Esta contenía un mensaje conservador acerca del rol que debían jugar las mujeres en el momento de dar a luz. En tercer lugar, se analiza la evolución que experimentó el discurso católico sobre la maternidad y la familia en los años sesenta y principios de los setenta, en el contexto del Concilio Vaticano II (1962-1965). Por último, se presentan algunas ideas de un incipiente feminismo de la segunda ola en España que, frente al relato

patriarcal, ponía sobre la mesa la diversidad de violencias asociadas a la experiencia e institución maternal.

Palabras clave: tardofranquismo; maternidad; parto; familia; género; emociones; feminismo

1. INTRODUCTION

We are not saying anything new when we state that Francoism made motherhood the central feature of female identity, nor when we point out that the regime politicised the prolific, Christian family, making it an essential part of its political project. The dictatorship turned fruitful reproduction and the moral regeneration of the home into women's most sacred and transcendental duty. In a context of obsession with the demographic potential of the nation as a sign of its greatness and strength, the regime promoted a series of pronatalist discourses and practices that instrumentalised women in terms of their maternal capacity, becoming vital components of Franco's gender politics (Nash, 1996; Roca i Girona, 1996; Polo Blanco, 2006; García Fernández, 2014).

Less well known, however, is the evolution of normative narratives beyond the post-war years, which is still the most researched period. This article contributes to filling this gap and examines the changes and continuities that took place at the end of the dictatorship. Due to space constraints, I will focus on Catholic narratives, pointing to the diversity of ideas that coexisted within late Francoist Catholicism. For other political cultures that put forward their own nuanced understandings of motherhood and family, such as the female section of Falange, I can suggest the recent contributions of Begoña Barrera (2019a).

In addition to this introduction and some final thoughts, this article is divided into four sections, covering different representations of motherhood and the family during the last fifteen years of Franco's regime. The first focuses on the most conservative standards, particularly those linked to Opus Dei, which tended to glorify the virtues of prolific, self-sacrificing motherhood. Though modern in appearance, reactionary publications aimed at a popular audience disseminated an ideal of a mother who gave herself up

to martyrdom while never losing her smile or optimism. The second section addresses a type of advice literature for mothers. New at the time, it was aimed at promoting the *psychoprophylactic method*, also referred to as *painless childbirth*, which contained a conservative message about the behaviour that women should adopt when giving birth. Thirdly, changes in Catholic views on marriage, motherhood, and birth control in the 1960s and early 1970s are examined. As I will explain in further detail, these developments should be understood in the context of the transition to a consumer culture and in relation to the religious *aggiornamento* of the Second Vatican Council (1962-1965). Finally, the article presents some ideas put forward by the emerging second-wave feminism in Spain. In contrast to the typically romanticised male-dominated narrative, feminists drew attention to the various kinds of violence and discomforts associated with the experience and institution of motherhood.

Following the approaches pioneered by feminist historians of motherhood, I understand reproduction as a polysemic set of experiences shaped and endowed with meaning by diverse culturally and historically contingent practices and discourses. Far from being a purely private or biological matter, motherhood (and fatherhood) is intertwined with contemporary political anxieties, religious attitudes, and regimes of legal, scientific, and pedagogical expertise. Thus, it stands at the intersection of different bodies of legal, political, and medical knowledge, while at the same time it is also affected by women's individual and collective agency (Knibiehler & Fouquet, 1977; Knibiehler, 2001; Tubert, 1996; Franco Rubio, 2010; Bolufer Peruga, 2007). This article is also influenced by the perspectives of the history of emotions. Therefore, it will draw attention to the emotional standards of normative motherhood discourses and the feminist responses and counter-narratives to them (Barrera & Sierra, 2020).

2. HEROIC MOTHERS, HAPPY MOTHERS, ORDERLY SOCIETY

In May 1963, the magazine *Mundo Cristiano*, linked to Opus Dei, dedicated an article to an exemplary woman (Figueras, 1963). Her name was Maite Redondo, the «*simpática madre*» (sweet mother) of twelve children. The publication praised the joys that a large offspring brought while also mentioning

the domestic routine that this woman carried out to cope with everything, always with optimism. According to the article, Maite never lost her temper or her serenity. Everything was in order despite the children's antics. The report conveyed that a large family was no trouble at all as long as it was complemented by a true Christian spirit and efficient domestic management. It was within reach of any well-prepared, hard-working modern housewife. The same issue also featured María Luisa Castro Riveiro, a woman «with a happy expression» who was expecting triplets and was doing so «with astonishing serenity» (Piedrahita, 1963). María Luisa was already the mother of five, but she would welcome «any more that might come along». Hers was a poor, peasant family, which did not stop them from being a «large, happy one», all thanks to their religious devotion. «Nothing is impossible in a home, no matter how humble, when you look up to heaven», the publication stated. The magazine followed María Luisa's last birth, which, despite being multiple, could not have gone better. The midwife assisting María Luisa enthusiastically declared that she had «never seen such a good, such a noble woman, with such Christian conviction». «There is happiness in this house», the journalist concluded. «The sun shines through the window. The voices of joyful children playing in the street. There is peace».

Yet another happy, exemplary mother, Ana, was the subject of the issue's cover, where she was portrayed with seven of her nine children. Three years later, *Mundo Cristiano* (Ayesta, 1966) reported that Ana had died giving birth to her tenth child, becoming a martyr for having been willing to make any sacrifice for her children, even giving her own life to bring them into the world. Her tragic departure was described as the «heroic death of a mother», one that complemented her «joyful and devoted life as a wife», full of «Christian happiness». She was, in short, one of the fallen heroic mothers referred to by Pius XI in his encyclical *Casti Connubii* (1930): «Who is not filled with the greatest admiration», the pope exclaimed, «when he [sic] sees a mother risking her life with heroic fortitude, that she may preserve the life of the offspring which she has conceived?».

The ideals defended by Opus Dei's magazine were entirely in line with those also conveyed by popular films such as *La gran familia* (The Big Family) (Palacios, 1962), which similarly praised the joys of a large brood of fifteen children. The film was followed by a sequel just three years later, *La familia*

y uno más (The Family Plus One More) (1965), in which there was, in fact, one less. Mercedes, the mother of the numerous offspring, had ceased to exist. Like Ana, she had become a martyr mother, having died giving birth to her last child. The saga of *La gran familia*, which was to have two more follow-up movies in 1979 and 1999, extolled the merits of a simple life in which harmony and optimism reigned. «Although we have no money», says the father at one point in the first film, «we are the richest in the world when it comes to hopeful spirits». The film reflected the illusion of a society in order, both in economic and gender terms. The father's salary could support eighteen people without great hardship, and, thanks to Mercedes' efficient management, they could even afford a beach holiday. Their problems did not go much further than the mischief of the younger children. As Aintzane Rincón explains, this rhetoric emphasised the supremacy of spiritual values over material ones, a meaningful message when ideas about economic development were on everyone's lips, and happiness was beginning to be measured in terms of consumption and material well-being (Rincón, 2014, pp. 172-190). Moreover, both the film and the *Mundo Cristiano* articles mentioned above depicted a harmonious hierarchy in which men and women accepted their place within a sex-segregated order without conflict or resentment. Hence, there was no need to impose this hierarchy by force. As Peter William Evans argues, the father in *La gran familia* represents a «benevolent form of despotism» (Evans, 2000, p. 82). Carlos holds authority in the household, but he does so kindly, as the family roles function with few cracks. Thus, he has no need of making coercive use of his power.

Several key ideas can be found in these narratives, starting with joy as the emotional standard of Catholicism, which was closely linked to notions of sacrifice and penance². Hence all the references to happiness, brightness, sunshine, and smiles. In religious discourse, pain and suffering were understood as virtues to be joyfully endured to make oneself worthy before God. This was a model of emotional restraint that prohibited the expression

2. These emotional standards that prescribed joy in the face of suffering and censored the expression of emotional pain are characteristic of other Francoist normative discourses, such as those of the Falange Women's Section (Barrera, 2019b, 2021), romance novels and sentimental advice columns (Martín Gaité, 2011; Caamaño Alegre, 2008).

of pessimism or sadness while at the same time prescribing an obligatory optimism in the face of economic difficulties, life's disappointments, daily discomforts and even, as it will be explained in the next section, physical pain. For this reason, these women mentioned above never lost their nerve, serenity or composure in the face of the demands of an overcrowded household, the children's tantrums, the mess they left in their wake, the lack of help or the domestic chores that piled up. They did not lose their beauty or even their youth, as they were often depicted as young mothers who had not lost their health or youthful charms. Remarkably, the leading actress in *La gran familia*, Amparo Soler Leal, was only 29 when she played this mother of fifteen children. Even more so, her eldest daughter in the film, played by María José Alfonso, was only seven years younger than her fictional mother.

Happiness, in any case, became almost an obligation for the Catholic. As one author pointed out at the time, Christian spouses had to find «joy in the fulfilment of their family duties», for a Christian couple should «always be a happy marriage» (Rosello, 1963, p. 32). While also visible in other media, the presence of this narrative in Opus Dei's publications is constant and almost obsessive. «I look around me. Everything in perfect order», said one journalist describing the scene of yet another home full of children (La cuesta de enero, 1964b). The second key word in this discourse was, in fact, *order*. These were homes in which chaos did not exist, thanks to the talents of the mothers, who were hard-working, industrious, thrifty, and early risers. In this way, these representations of the family showed that, by properly organising their time, it was possible to manage a dozen or twenty children without much difficulty, without losing one's temper or smile.

This order not only referred to the house's physical appearance, but also had specific gender connotations. These were households in which there was no gender conflict, in which there was a natural, harmonious hierarchy, in which there was no need, therefore, for an explicitly severe father to raise his voice or turn to violence. His authority was, however, unquestionable. As could be expected, these ideas had political implications in the context of Franco's dictatorship. This cheerful, orderly Christian family was a metaphor that mirrored the unbroken harmony that was to reign in the nation. The microcosmic nature of the family was perfectly expressed in a 1951 article in *Senda*, the mouthpiece of the women's branch of Catholic Action, which

drew a parallel between the administrative organisation of the country and the functioning of the family unit:

The administrative problems posed by a family are, in a small way, the same as those of a state. Freedom within order and mutual respect, authority, redistributive justice, hierarchy, unity... The functions of the Minister of Finance and Minister of the Interior are entrusted to the mother [...]. The father holds the posts of Head of Government, President of the Supreme Court, Minister of Labour, and Governor of the Bank.

With the functions of the small family state thus distributed, the fundamental legislation of the state is made up of a few laws declaring the state religion to be Roman Catholic and apostolic and the form of government to be a monarchy, with moderate intervention by the people. The law of public order severely forbids excesses of speech and punishes with great procedural speed those of deed so that peace, based on faith and justice, reigns in the home. [...]

The Minister of the Interior —that is, the mother— does not have set working hours or any labour rights. [...] Her day almost always begins very early and ends very late. (González Ruiz, 1951, p. 7).

While Catholic Action underwent some changes in the 1960s, Opus Dei insisted most strongly on these ideals at the end of Franco's regime and continued to extol the prolific birth rate as an indicator of the moral health of society. Moreover, it should be kept in mind that Opus Dei had a privileged position in the regime at the time and an important capacity for cultural dissemination through their publishing houses, which popularised magazines such as *Mundo Cristiano*, *Mundo Joven*, and *Telva*, among others. These were publications with a modern appearance which nonetheless disseminated a markedly conservative message (Moreno Seco, 2012; Rodríguez López, 2020).

3. WITHOUT PAIN SHALL YOU BRING FORTH CHILDREN!

Starting from the late 1950s, the so-called *psychoprophylactic method*, also known as *painless childbirth* or *childbirth without fear*, became increasingly widespread in Spain, at least among a sector of middle-class women. This phenomenon gave rise to a sort of popular literature that connected with a tradition of advice books for mothers aimed at providing them with simple instructions on childbearing, breastfeeding, and childcare. Having flourished

notably since the end of the 19th century in a context of the hygienic and eugenic concerns about infant mortality and the decline of the race, this expert literature both exalted and denigrated the maternal instinct. Thus, while praising motherhood as the most critical function of femininity, at the same time it treated its readers as ignorant women who had to follow the advice of male authorities if they did not want to be blamed for the death and illness of their offspring (Palacio Lis, 2003).

The psychoprophylactic method was based on Pavlov's research on conditioned reflexes and aimed to remove fear and prejudice from the pregnant woman's mind to achieve a better psychological and physiological response that would facilitate a painless delivery. Firstly, this was to be achieved by educating expectant mothers and providing them with basic information on the anatomical and physiological processes of childbirth. Secondly, pregnant women should be taught a series of physical and breathing exercises to condition the muscles' flexibility in the birthing process. While British doctor Grantly Dick-Read had proposed a similar approach under Catholic premises, the version that became standard in Western Europe, especially in France, originated in the Soviet Union and was introduced through doctors close to the French Communist Party (Michaels, 2010). Moreover, it raised questions about its compatibility with the biblical admonition «in pain shall you bring forth children» (Genesis 3:16) (García Fernández, 2014). However, Pope Pius XII gave his approval in a speech in 1956, marking the beginning of its popularisation in Spain.

Certain advice and information about the method claimed that pain in childbirth was not only avoidable but, as a matter of fact, abnormal. As some proponents of the technique maintained, the pain was due to women's fear and unfounded superstitions, often the result of stories passed on by other women about the terrible suffering they experienced in giving birth. Therefore, these ideas had to be eliminated and replaced by scientific information, which was given the status of unquestionable truth. It was necessary, one advice manual pointed out, «to convince the whole of humanity that the painful phenomena of childbirth are abnormal, that they are conditioned reflexes created by fear, anguish, tradition and the stories that women in labour have heard» (Rodríguez Soriano & Domeque, 1963, p. 182). Women then had to free themselves from their unjustified worries

and learn to control their bodies so that they could contract or relax their muscles at the right moments. Dr Domeque, for instance, transcribed in a book the following fictitious monologue of a baby, which he claimed to use in his labour preparation classes:

Hello, mummy, I have just arrived. [...] I heard you complaining. [...] I'm not to blame for the really hard time you've had. I'm sorry. I heard you screaming. Your moaning saddened me. You were thinking of yourself... What about me?... Were you thinking of me? Look at me... [...] My face didn't use to be red and deformed. You've made it look like this by making me go through this tube where you'd imprisoned me without realising it. Too bad you hadn't learned to dilate it with good relaxation techniques! You don't know what relief you would have given me! (Rodríguez Soriano & Domeque, 1963, p. 161).

According to Dr Domeque, a woman who was incapable of loosening her muscles according to the needs of the delivery process was ill-prepared, putting the natural process of childbirth at risk. Hence, this rhetoric intensified women's responsibility for complications that might arise during labour. Anatomical information was also paired with a prescription of feelings, attitudes, and values. Precise descriptions were given of the kind of behaviour and emotions that *normal* women should comply with and feel. Even unpleasant consequences or pain felt by women in labour could be blamed on their attitudes, values, religiosity, and preparation:

Is there an actual suppression of pain? [...]. We must answer that this depends on the woman and her preparation. There are numerous testimonies of women who testify that their childbirth was «a happy event», that the pain was minimal and perfectly bearable. This was the case for pregnant women with calm dispositions, selfless souls, and sincere religious feelings. On the other hand, the method is not as effective in very young women, in those who are unstable, selfish and pleasure-seeking in nature, or in those with poor preparation (Aguilar Caballero & Galbes García, 1958, p. 355).

Therefore, a dichotomy was established between *prepared* and *unprepared* women. It was only women who were unprepared who felt excruciating labour pains (Gómez Estrada, 1965). «What is truly important», said one doctor, «is not the obstetrician, nor the midwife, nor the trainer. What is fundamental is the woman: a woman who has managed to prepare herself well or a woman who has not known how to prepare herself» (Aguirre de

Cárcer, 1959, p. 88). One of the most influential proponents of the method in Spain, Dr Aguirre de Cárcer, promised a painless delivery, but assured that the success or failure of the technique depended entirely on the expectant woman's ability to follow the method and the doctor's instructions. Under the premise that suffering had a psychological origin, women were also made to feel inadequate for screaming and crying or failing to maintain their composure. These emotional expressions had to be suppressed and were strongly censored in doctors' accounts. Otherwise, they were labelled as hysterical, over-reacting women who did not behave as they should and disrupted the work of doctors and midwives. Once again, we see the prescription of a model of emotional restraint that reproached the manifestation of negative feelings as opposed to expressing serenity, joy, and optimism in the face of suffering. Although it was debated whether pain relief was compatible with the conception of suffering as a Christian virtue, the method remained consistent with Catholic discourse insofar as it continued to dictate selfless, optimistic endurance of any discomfort. The Church's support for the method also served to some as proof that science could not replace religion and that the two needed to work together in harmony (Rey, 1965). The female body was also treated in these narratives as a machine whose efficiency had to be maximised and as a mere intermediary, and even as an annoying obstacle, between the doctor and the actual object of interest, the child (Martin, 2001; Oakley, 1984).

In short, women who relied on unscientific knowledge, those who feared childbirth, felt ashamed or embarrassed, were unaware of respiratory techniques, suffered or complained too much, or even those whose muscles were not flexible enough could be considered guilty of ignorance and lack of preparation. In this body of advice literature, specific experiences of pain and displays of suffering in the female body in labour are dismissed as exaggerated and pathological. Not only are the expression and meanings of pain framed by cultural and historical conventions regarding emotions, but as Rob Boddice points out, questions about whose pain is seen as worthy or *authentic* are questions of power (Boddice, 2014, p. 5). Of gendered power, it could be argued, in this case. Therefore, this matter should allow us to reflect on the historical politics and meanings of pain (Boddice, 2014; Bourke, 2014).

If the «in dolore paries filios» in Genesis was a divine curse, the promise of painless childbirth seemingly was no less so. However, I do not mean that the psychoprophylactic method was entirely or intrinsically harmful. Its reception and application, as well as its class and racial components, deserve other, more comprehensive studies, such as the one conducted by Amaya García Arregui (2019) for her doctoral thesis. Nor do I believe that women lacked the agency to resist these patriarchal ideas. My critique in this section refers exclusively and superficially to a type of language we can observe in the early advice literature that the method generated, which manifested itself in a discourse at the service of the medicalisation of childbirth. In any case, this issue merits further in-depth research to address the discourse and practices of the medical establishment and women's childbirth experiences.

4. FROM HEROIC MOTHERHOOD TO RESPONSIBLE PARENTHOOD

In a letter sent to *Mundo Cristiano* in June 1969, a magazine reader expressed his misgivings about the ideal of motherhood presented in its pages. He referred to one of the numerous and repetitive articles detailing the demanding daily routine of a large family that relied solely on God's will and rejected all means of birth control. «Is that living?» he wonders:

In the May issue [...] you describe the life of a mother of a large family, and I ask myself, «Is that living?» [...] It seems normal to me that a married couple should limit the number of children they have, according to the doctrine of the Church. And this is not due to health reasons or housing or any other reason, but because I believe that we can freely choose the number of children we have, each one according to their way of thinking, generosity, state of mind, education [...], or a thousand other aspects [...].

I believe that God will make us accountable for how we have educated our children, but never for their number, because within his Law, we are free to have as many as we consider necessary. Please do not talk anymore about trading a child for a car; I would never trade a child for a car, but I want to have the child and the vehicle. I am a practising Catholic, and this is how I view things. It saddens me that those who do not want to have a large family come under attack (*Cartas que hacen pensar: Más sobre paternidad responsable*, 1969).

This testimony is illustrative of the transformations in the concept of the family within 1960s and 1970s Catholicism. While the praise for sacrifice

and prolific motherhood continued, ideas that valued comfort and consumption emerged. As Eider de Dios points out, motherhood ceased to be understood as a service to the homeland and began to be conceived from the point of view of personal fulfilment (Dios Fernández, 2014, p. 37). The new wife was not to be a house slave, but a friend to her husband and the conscious educator of her children (*Presencia y personalidad de la mujer en la familia*, 1964, pp. 15-17). Thus, although the woman's role as housewife was not questioned, a new emphasis was put on the fact that she could and should have aspirations beyond the home (Moreno Seco, 2005).

The 1960s saw a limited modernisation of gender ideals. Some legal changes also improved women's labour and social situation (Morcillo, 2015; Ruiz Franco, 2007). Magazines like *Senda* promised that introducing household appliances and rational domestic management would allow for free time to cultivate family and affective relationships. This new narrative stressed that women had to be more than self-sacrificing homemakers to be better partners to their husbands and more competent educators of their children. These ideas were coupled with changing expectations regarding motherhood. Whereas high infant mortality rates were the primary concern in the post-war years, with paediatrics as the hegemonic expertise, psychology and pedagogy became relevant now, with the highest expectations set for affective needs and psychological balance. A merely superficial glance at women's magazines and the press of the time shows how articles or advertisements on nutrition and primary hygienic care gradually gave way to advice on psychology. Thus, emphasis came to be placed not only on ensuring the physical health of babies, but also on nurturing their emotional side:

It is just as important, if not more so, that the child's psychological and spiritual development be as splendid as their physical development. The former requires time, which is sometimes lost in preparing baby food. [...] If the mother, for her part, only has time to cook, clean and iron, what will become of our homes? (Martín Sampedro, 1964, p. 4).

These suggestions were accompanied by some recognition of the fatigue, loneliness and discomfort that afflicted housewives, thus breaking with the discourse that only spoke of order and happiness (Arbaiza, 2021). Because «with exhausted mothers», said one article, «who reach the end of the day with their nerves frayed, there can be no peaceful homes, nor can there be

a society that functions normally» (Martín Sampedro, 1964, p. 6). It is not difficult to infer that all these ideas did not translate into reducing the burdens of motherhood and the home but rather into increasing their exigencies. However, it is no less accurate that some Catholics desired to change the conditions under which children were raised. Attitudes towards birth control were also gradually shifting. Although the demand for couples to generously accept as many children as possible continued, it was now acknowledged that a certain degree of planning according to the couple's possibilities and desires was advisable. The aim was to prevent and avoid the adverse effects of too many children on the mother's health, the children's education, and the emotional relationship between the spouses. This shift also concurred with a transformation in the Church's teachings about sexuality, which began to emphasise its affective rather than procreative functions. Marriage was no longer seen merely as an institution aimed at procreation but as a community of affections whose main objective was to bring emotional and material well-being to its members (García Fernández, 2022). Thus, Catholics began to speak of *responsible parenthood*, a concept cemented particularly with the Second Vatican Council (Ignaciuk, 2018).

These shifting standards are apparent in *Senda*, the women's branch of Catholic Action magazine. In a mid-1960s survey on birth control, several female readers wrote to the publication to voice their opinions. While still adhering to values of Christian sacrifice, they called for motherhood to be carried out under better conditions of physical and psychological well-being. Moreover, as we can infer from their testimonies, they also referred to a certain degree of malaise and exhaustion on the part of mothers:

The conscientious Catholic must continue to consider children as a blessing [...] even if this means sacrifice on her part, for it is not Christian to elude the cross. However, even so, I believe that parents should not exceed their capabilities because a child is not like a tree, which germinates and grows by itself; a child is a being composed of body and soul, who requires constant physical and spiritual care. How can a mother overwhelmed with work, often on the verge of a nervous breakdown, without any help, listen to her child and care for them if she herself needs to be listened to and encouraged? (La gran encuesta de SENDA sobre la natalidad, 1965, p. 4).

Several progressive Catholic public figures also favoured responsible parenthood and greater equality for women in marriage (García Fernández, 2022; Ignaciuk, 2018). Lili Álvarez, for example, wrote in *Cuadernos para el Diálogo* to lambast those discourses that turned women into mere instruments for procreation. At the same time, she took the opportunity to call for conscious motherhood, since bringing children into the world meant not only giving birth, but, above all, educating them (Álvarez, 1964, pp. 26-27). «The greatest possible number of children is not the best thing for the family», stated another author, arguing that «spouses should consider whether or not they can support and educate them; and if the answer is «no», they should avoid [having children], without this implying that they should necessarily suspend conjugal relations as well» (Espina, 1967, p. 219). In this context, some Catholic intellectuals advocated for the Church's approval of contraceptives. More specifically, they defended the contraceptive pill as a method of birth control compatible with the Christian faith, claiming that regulations prohibiting contraception not only prevented the free expression of sexual love within the couple, but also pushed women into a state of constant anxiety that had a detrimental impact on their well-being and the marital relationship (García Fernández, 2021a; Ignaciuk & Ortiz, 2016). However, Pope Paul VI reinforced the more conservative views on birth control in his encyclical *Humanae Vitae* (1968). This decision caused great disappointment among those who had hoped for change. Many deplored the pope's pronouncement and even encouraged open readings of the encyclical that would relativise its binding nature. As Hugh McLeod points out, more and more Catholics felt free to loosely interpret the norms of the Church hierarchy according to their interests or to ignore elements of orthodoxy altogether (Harris, 2018; McLeod, 2007, p. 187).

All this coincided with crucial changes in the Catholic understanding of marriage (García Fernández, 2022). Part of the most progressive Catholic community moved away from the conception of the family as hierarchical and emphasised the importance of companionship and equality between spouses. Some even began to consider that fathers should be more involved in the care of children. Along these lines, Juan Arias argued in *El Ciervo* that marriage should not mean a loss of freedom for women to work outside the home and to fulfil themselves as individuals. In addition, he favoured

men participating to a greater extent in household affairs and child-rearing. Nowhere is it «written in the Scriptures», he stated, «that when the child cries at night, it is only the mother who has to get up and rock them» (Arias, 1970, p. 11). These calls for fathers being more involved are also evident in magazines such as *El Hogar y la Moda*, which from the late 1960s began to uphold a prototype of a modern husband and father, even a so-called *maternal* father, who looked after his children, fed them, took them out for walks, pushed the baby's pram, and changed their nappies as often as their wives did. Although very few questioned that the burden of housework should continue to fall on the woman, this new ideal of masculinity advocated for a *new man* who related to his wife on equal terms, showing affection and closeness to his family. Above all, this was a man who was involved in the education of his children, ceasing to be an absent, authoritarian father whose only function was to provide financially for the family (Maridos «para todo», 1969, p. 9; *El nuevo padre: ni tirano ni ausente*, 1973, pp. 44-47).

5. MOTHERHOOD AND VIOLENCE IN THE EMERGING SECOND-WAVE FEMINISM

In contrast to overly romanticised discourses that extolled the joys of motherhood, sour, more negative views began to emerge in the late 1960s. From a feminist perspective, these emphasised the multiple forms of violence motherhood entailed in a patriarchal society. An excellent example of this can be found in the early books by Catalan illustrator Núria Pompeia (Jareño & Sanz-Gavillon, 2018). In *Maternasis* (1967), she narrates a story of nine months, from when a woman discovers she is pregnant to childbirth. With simple but expressive drawings, Pompeia shows the progression of pregnancy using a female figure whose size and discomfort gradually increase, occupying more and more space on the page. Pompeia's skilful strokes show the toll pregnancy takes on the female body and the doubts, fears and uncertainties that beset the story's main character. From the beginning, she suffers from constant nausea, which affects her ability to do her daily chores, leaving her exhausted. It also forces the character to continuously cover her mouth, symbolising a female voice that is silenced and unheard. Furthermore, only she appears in the entire graphic novel, conveying the

sensation of an experience lived in total solitude. A menacing male arm represents the only moment another person is visible. It has no identity, yet is invasive and threatening, contrasting in size with the fragile female figure.

One of the most striking things in *Maternasis*, Pompeia's first illustrated book, is the loneliness and absence of help. It is the main character herself who calls the doctor when she is experiencing her first labour pains. She picks up a suitcase and goes on her own to the hospital, where she gives birth. When it comes time for delivery, we see her alone on a hospital gurney until she wakes up in a bed. Although there are some flowers in the room, she is still isolated. In the last picture, however, there is a big difference. A crying baby now joins her. The collage technique used to include the baby in the composition contrasts with the simple lines used to draw the mother. This creative decision brings overwhelming realism to the scene. The disproportionately large head of the child is heavy, realistic, oppressive, and distressing, evoking the radical life change and the enormous weight and responsibility of motherhood.

The physical and mental deterioration caused by repeated pregnancies and the limited control over reproductive choices appear in another of her illustrated books, *Y fueron felices comiendo perdices...* (And They Lived Happily Ever After...) (1970). Here Pompeia portrays the pitfalls of romantic love through a married couple's life, subverting classic rose-tinted tales. The narrative does not end but rather begins with the happy wedding, in which she is only a young girl, contrasting dramatically with her mature husband. Employing expressive drawings that hardly need the three or four lines of text that accompany them, the author shows the inequality between the spouses and the progressive decline triggered by the consecutive births and the energy involved in taking care of the family, in addition to the wife being abused and abandoned by her husband. Her motherhood is once again lived in solitude. Pompeia illustrates minor, everyday setbacks on each page, which create a sense of naivety, unease, bitterness, and loneliness. Moreover, the main character does not face this reality with the prescribed cheerfulness, but repeatedly refers to the bitterness and unhappy experiences that domestic life has brought her. The rapid passage of time in the story also contributes to this sense of anguish. Likewise, the story touches on how ungrateful motherhood is, as most of her children leave her to live their

own lives without their mother ever seeing them again. At first, only one daughter is left with her. Although this daughter tries to rebel against the structures inherited from the past, she ends up in a situation similar to her mother's, becoming pregnant and being forced to marry the father of her child, with whom she ends up in an ill-fated marriage. The same happens to the granddaughter. The patriarchal cycle repeats itself, despite generational changes and the arrival of modern trends. Moreover, the main character herself contributes to the reproduction of this cycle. She does so inadvertently and naively, for Núria Pompeia does not fail to draw this mother with empathy and compassion.

In a 1974 book, Lidia Falcón conveyed an even more pessimistic view of motherhood. In *Cartas a una idiota española* (Letters to a Spanish Idiot), which also featured illustrations by Núria Pompeia, the author uses the epistolary genre to show, with great irony, the omnipresence and diversity of oppressions that women had to face. The fifth chapter is devoted explicitly to motherhood. It tells the story of a woman who has been dragged into unwanted domesticity by social pressures and whose partner is an absent husband. Elena is a mother overwhelmed by many disobedient children constantly screaming, fighting, and howling. Hence, the author presents an image of disorder in stark contrast to the happy, harmonious order of the normative discourse. She even intuitively describes what we would today call *postpartum depression*, which refers to feelings of guilt for not experiencing what the patriarchy prescribes as the *normal* emotions of a new mother. Falcón also demystifies breastfeeding with a portrayal that spares no macabre detail and emphasises its most extreme negative consequences for the female body: the cracks, the pain, the blood, and the suffering. Her encounters with medical institutions are also heavily impacted by the violence exercised by the doctors during childbirth, crafting a detailed account that is not very different from what we often read today under the category of *obstetric violence* (Goberna-Tricas & Bolanderas, 2018). Falcón thus shows a total lack of concern on the part of the health professionals for the suffering and well-being of the main character, the degrading comments, and the use of techniques nowadays considered unnecessary and aggressive such as the episiotomy or Kristeller manoeuvre:

[...] two midwives and the doctor arrive, and they take my legs and bend them up to my mouth, and he starts rubbing my belly downwards as if he were kneading bread while shouting at me [...]. I tried to do what he was telling me to do, but the others were pulling my legs, and he was almost sitting on top of me, and I couldn't breathe... I think I got furious and yelled that I couldn't take it anymore, that he should leave me alone, I pushed the doctor, and he slapped me and screamed that I was going to kill the child [...]. Finally, he pushed harder on my belly, put his hand inside and pulled on the child, and then I thought my last hour had come... I felt that half my body had come out, and all my insides were hanging down between my legs... and the idiotic midwives were saying: «What a beautiful baby, how happy you must be!». One said it had been a very easy birth...! (Falcón, 1981, p. 113).

These experiences only generated resentment against the child, whom the main character of the fictional story refers to as «that murderer», «criminal», and «predator»; in short, as a parasite who absorbs the mother's strength for their survival. On several occasions, she does not hesitate to wish for the baby's death, probably the most taboo of all her statements. These descriptions are in stark contrast to the optimistic accounts linked to the aforementioned *painless childbirth* method, such as that of Teresa Gómez Estrada (1965), who chronicled her experience of the psychoprophylactic technique. In her book, published in 1965, all the medical professionals she encounters are brimming with smiles, joy, and kindness, while she exudes pride in having been able to give birth serenely, laughing and with no suffering at all, thanks to her excellent preparation.

Conversely, feminist discourses left no room for women's empowerment, nor did they contemplate any positive aspect of child-rearing. Both the maternal experience and the institution of motherhood, to borrow the terms made famous by Adrienne Rich (1995), are described as sources of trauma and sadness. Since both Núria Pompeia and Lidia Falcón were mothers, we may assume to some extent that they were reflecting their own experiences, mixed with the feminist readings and ideas already circulating in Spain at the time. In this sense, they were distancing themselves from previous feminist movements, which tended to use motherhood to claim rights (Allen, 2005; Bock & Thane, 1996). They are, however, typical expressions of 1970s feminism which, following authors such as Simone

de Beauvoir, saw motherhood as one of the primary sources of the subordination and alienation of women and as an obstacle to their emancipation (Allen, 2005; Umansky, 1996;). Evidently, the experiences of motherhood are plural and more complex. However, these early feminist critiques contrasted with male-defined narratives that could make those who did not feel the optimism and joy prescribed by the emotional standard of Catholicism and Francoism feel guilty. Moreover, they placed the female body and its experience at the forefront instead of considering the maternal body as a mere intermediary or container. These early feminist remarks cast a light on the less pleasant aspects of motherhood and domesticity in a distinctly unequal society. In doing so, they also challenged the emotional values of Catholicism which dictated self-sacrificing happiness «as a duty» and the medical view that prescribed restraint and censored the expression of pain and suffering. Using Sara Ahmed's work (2010), perhaps we can consider these ideas as an «unhappy archive». Dwelling on the unhappiness of motherhood in a patriarchal system became a source of resistance for these feminists.

6. SOME FINAL THOUGHTS

Much has been said about the hegemonic discourse on motherhood in post-war Spain, especially concerning the regime's pronatalist policies. However, perhaps surprisingly, we know little about the diversity of experiences and representations throughout the dictatorship. This statement is valid for the early Francoist regime, but it is especially true for its final years. In a recent article, Elisa Chuliá (2022) also points out this historiographical gap and explores, through oral sources, family and intergenerational experiences in the middle decades of the 20th century. Interestingly, she places mothers at the centre of her analysis, seen not as mere victims of patriarchal society, but as active drivers of historical change. Likewise, more research is needed on the different representations and experiences of fatherhood and domestic masculinity that might have coexisted during the Francoist regime. As numerous studies have already argued, fatherhood, no less than motherhood, is historically contingent, making it a relevant subject of study for scholars of women and gender (King, 2015; Tubert, 1997).

The last years of the regime were undoubtedly a period of contrasts in which representations of the family diversified enormously. Not even the most conservative discourses about reproduction remained unchanged; moreover, there was an essential evolution in Catholic ideas regarding the family and the emergence of other alternative cultural conceptions and feminist critiques, of which I have only mentioned a few. Alongside the praise for prolific and heroic motherhood and the annual awards for large families, we can encounter narratives that treat the large family not as a source of joy but rather as an object of scorn and as something undesirable, especially for men. We can see this in the satirical cartoons of the press or in the cinema of the late Francoist era. These do not always represent the family as a friendly refuge and the prolific mother as a virtuous heroine, but more often as something unappealing. Typical, for example, are the tourism-related cartoons and films in which the Spanish wife and mother are depicted as ugly, nagging females who clash, in contrast, with the sexually attractive European tourists (Garis Puerto, 2019; Nash, 2018). Many late Francoist film comedies, such as those starring famous actor Alfredo Landa, differed from the overly optimistic discourse of *La gran familia* (Fernando Palacios, 1962) insofar as they often do not show domesticity as something desirable for men, but as a prison that oppresses them (García Fernández, 2021b). Unlike the mothers portrayed in Francoist and Opus Dei propaganda, these other fictional women have neither kept their youth and beauty nor their joy and serenity. These different, no less patriarchal ways of depicting motherhood in Francoism have yet to be studied.

In contrast to the various male-dominated portrayals of the family, new critiques surfaced during the late Francoist regime which began focusing on motherhood as a space of violence for women. Early second-wave feminism, with figures such as Núria Pompeia and Lidia Falcón, denounced the physical and mental exhaustion derived from motherhood and even drew attention to what today we would call *obstetric violence*. These bitter remarks left no room for optimism or positive experiences of childbearing but are illustrative of a sector of second-wave feminism that thought of motherhood as one of the central elements of female oppression (Umansky, 1996). We still know very little about feminist responses to patriarchal narratives of motherhood in Spain. As shown in this article, some early

feminist discourses from the late 1960s onwards stressed the more perverse and damaging aspects of the maternal experience. One may wonder about the characteristics and evolution of this line of thought, knowing that other feminist narratives soon emerged which emphasised motherhood as a powerful source of agency and empowerment (Saletti Cuesta, 2008; Rich, 1995). A more extensive study would undoubtedly shed some light on the diversity of ideas and alternatives proposed by feminism (Nash, 2010). It is necessary, in any case, to once and for all break with an excessively monolithic vision of the family in Franco's regime and to delve into the plurality of cultural representations of motherhood, using a variety of textual, visual, and material sources, including not only political, medical, and religious discourse, but also film, music, photographs, cartoons, satirical press and, of course, oral history.

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