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New Feminist Approaches



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**Rethinking Motherhood in the 21st Century:  
New Feminist Approaches /  
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nuevas perspectivas feministas**



# RETHINKING MOTHERHOOD IN THE 21<sup>ST</sup> CENTURY: NEW FEMINIST APPROACHES

## INTRODUCTION

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 Serrano-Niza

INMACULADA BLASCO HERRANZ

DOLORES SERRANO-NIZA

Motherhood has been one of the central themes of feminist research and debate since at least the 1960s. Feminist views on this issue have been, however, diverse and changing, and have been linked, in turn, to the different ways of understanding feminism and its theoretical elaborations on sexual difference. Without reflection on the question having stopped since then, in recent years, and in the context of the reactivation of the feminist movement worldwide, there has been a proliferation of publications on maternity or, to be more precise, one should speak of maternities. Publications, it should be said, which have been developed from new approaches, permeating different academic fields. As an example, and with a similar vocation to that which guides our proposal, we highlight the dossier entitled «La maternidad es personal y política. Construyendo un nuevo discurso en torno a las maternidades» (Moreno Hernández, 2020). That same year, the collective volume *Maternidades*

*cuir* (Abril & Trujillo Barbadillo, 2020) was published, which implied a broadening of the look at maternities from the perspective of bodies and subjectivities that transcend gender binarism and the heterosexual norm. Decolonial feminism has also been proposing to rethink motherhood considering the problematization of modern and Western constructions of gender, as boldly exposed in the monograph *What Gender is Motherhood? Changing Yorùbá Ideals of Power, Procreation, and Identity in the Age of Modernity* (Oyěwùmí, 2016). In turn, historians have not ceased to be interested in and produce relevant contributions to the knowledge of the socio-historical construction of motherhood, not only related to its normative aspects but also to subjective experiences, which is evidenced in the collective volume *Motherhood and infancies in the Mediterranean in antiquity* (Sánchez Romero & Cid López, 2018).

Consequently, this special issue seeks to add to and contribute to the interdisciplinary academic reflection on motherhood or motherhoods today. Our starting point is understanding that the concept of motherhood is ever-changing, historically variable, both in its meaning and content, as well as in the identities and experiences to which it refers and generates. At the same time, the cultural burden it carries in different societies and historical contexts does not cease to raise controversy as to its appropriate meanings and the practices that derive from them. To support this reflection, we have relied on specialists in gender and feminist studies who, from their different fields, investigate and discuss the diverse dimensions of motherhood, considering it, as already stated, as a cultural and historical construction that is in constant reshaping. This constant reconsideration is present, in one way or another, in each of the contributors to this special issue since, from their respective fields, they address maternity as a discourse that, on the one hand, normalizes and generates exclusions, but which, at the same time, allows action, occasionally making possible the transformation of experiences and meanings associated with maternity.

Therefore, we can say that the papers that make up the present special issue can be ascribed to three main thematic axes that we will explore in detail. In the first of these we find the contributions that provide historical analysis, carried out within the framework of a broad chronology (16th to 20th centuries) and based on a great diversity of documents. In addition, it

should be noted that most of them make use of the novel approach of the history of emotions and affections. This is the case of Ana Aranda Bernal's article titled «Maternal rule. Affection, power, and patrimony expressed through testamentary wills (15th-16th centuries)». Her paper analyzes the wills of three women of the Castilian elite of the kingdom of Seville in the 15th-16th centuries. The concept of *emotional community* is used by the author to explore the affective maternal experiences that the wills express; in them, the subjectivity of the mother facing death must be highlighted. In the author's opinion, this is due to her desire to maintain, even after death, the influence, and sometimes control, over her respective offspring.

Along the same documentary typology, Dolores Serrano-Niza and María Eugenia Monzón Perdomo construct their «Afectos maternos: los objetos de ajuar en la herencia de las mujeres (siglo XVI)». This paper follows the theoretical trail of the history of emotions, to which material culture studies are added, taking the notarial protocols granted in the Canary Islands in the 16th century as a primary source, with a particular interest in wills. A particularly attentive reading, guided by the previously mentioned theoretical frameworks, reveals that there was an interesting plurality in the way of feeling maternity, dissociating it from the purely biological fact of conception and childbirth. In this sense, the authors conclude that there was a feeling that could be called *maternal affection* and that was translated into practice in the form of last wishes. Together with this, they formulate the concepts of *deferred maternities* and *subaltern maternities*, and they do so by analyzing those objects, mostly elements of trousseaus, which appear in the last wills of women who wish these things to end up in the hands of other women.

María Elena Díez Jorge's paper, entitled «Power and motherhood in the 16th century: Perpetuity and memory through architecture» is also located in the 16th century, but in Granada. Her proposal leads to a reflection on the meaning of motherhood, far removed from the conceptions that linked motherhood and upbringing from the European Enlightenment onwards. Her analysis of archival sources, on the other hand, brings us closer to a different mentality in which motherhood is not only expressed through childbearing, but also to bequeath a lineage, a family name, property or a house, without it necessarily being a matter of women of high social status. Particularly interesting is how the study broadens to the experience of women who do

not belong to the elite, but whose maternal concern will be the defense of their house, even if it is not their own property, for the purpose of protecting their offspring under the protection of a roof.

With the contribution of Inmaculada Blasco Herranz, «The power of motherhood [...], free of obstacles, will amply fulfill its eternal mission'. Feminism and motherhood in the early 20th Century Spain», we move to the Spain of the early 20th century. The author sets out from the analysis and debates of historical feminism in Spain, conceptualized as a social feminism, in whose articulation motherhood had a main role. Her central contribution lies in unraveling how the social constituted an epistemological framework that, influenced by the ideas of medicine and hygiene, modeled the notions of maternity expressed by the feminists of the time, through press articles, essays, conferences, etc. Consequently, feminism, on the one hand, was constituted as a movement for social and national reform through women-mothers; and, on the other, motherhood served to legitimize and demand civil and political rights.

Mónica García Fernández's contribution, «Representations of motherhood in late francoist Spain: From catholic discourses to early feminist critiques», sets us in the late Francoist period in Spain. In this work, an analysis of the discourses and their emotional components is applied to a wide corpus of sources of the period (films, advice literature, medical discourses). The author shows a plurality of rhetorics that breaks with the monolithic vision of motherhood and the family that prevailed during the Francoist period. This article explores three of the prevailing representations of motherhood: the apparently modern but extremely reactionary Opus Dei, the advice literature that promoted «painless childbirth» and, finally, the renewed Catholic discourse following the Second Vatican Council. Particularly interesting is her presentation of the critique that was beginning to emerge from an incipient second-wave feminism that made visible the discomfort and violence associated with the experience of motherhood. This contrasted with the emotional standards of invariable optimism that defined the ideal of the self-sacrificing mother.

The papers that integrate the second of our thematic blocks coincide in addressing certain burning topics related to motherhood that have been emerging in contemporary societies, societies defined by the cultural



diversity of an increasingly globalized world. Among the contributions that make up this axis is Delfina Serrano-Ruano's «¿Qué fue del *niño dormido*? Consecuencias de la reducción de los plazos máximos de duración del embarazo en la jurisprudencia y la legislación islámicas contemporáneas». This paper deals with the transformation that contemporary legal systems in countries with an Islamic majority have undergone by adapting, in a biased and partial manner, scientific advances, particularly those coming from embryology, gynecology and genetics. This transformation has meant, as the author proves, a greater vulnerability for certain groups within Maghrebi societies: single mothers and their children, those who become pregnant after being widowed and those who are rejected or abandoned by their husbands. This diagnosis becomes particularly clear when comparing the current situation with the practices prevailing in these same societies prior to the 20th century, which, to a certain extent, served to protect these groups of women through the acceptance of long-term pregnancies, thanks to the legal doctrine of the *sleeping child*. This work allows us to open a window from Gender Studies to very specialized sources and theories within Arab and Islamic Studies.

M. Aránzazu Robles Santana, with «Ethnographies of migrant mixtec women in California. An anthropological approach to narratives of transmigration, transnational motherhood and pregnancy in the context of western medicine», takes us to another geographical and cultural setting, focusing on transnational motherhood derived from international migratory processes. The source materials for this paper are the narratives of Mixtec women from Oaxaca (Mexico) who have migrated to Oxnard (California). This is a decolonized investigation in which the protagonists of these narratives, the indigenous women, do not conform to the models traditionally formulated by classical feminism. In the first part of this paper, the transmigration narratives are studied in relation to those aspects linked to gender roles. Later, the complexity of transnational motherhood in the society of destination is explored, analyzing the situations of inequality and oppression that affect these women, exposing, in turn, their capacity for agency and their strategies of resistance.

Silvia Almenara Niebla invites us to travel from migration to diaspora with her article «'You have raised me between two worlds': Mothers,

daughters, and emotions in the Sahrawi digital diaspora in Spain». This work emphasizes the emotional links that are established between the geography of destination and origin in diaspora situations, dealing, in this case, with the situation of Sahrawi women in Spain. In this paper, the author studies the concept of digital diaspora considering how the Internet has influenced the construction of social and family relationships, particularly those established between mother and daughters. In fact, an interesting methodology of social network ethnography allows her to examine the tensions derived from the cultural preservation of the place of origin versus those derived from socialization in the place of destination.

Along with transnational and diasporic motherhood, we return to the Western world and other current challenges, such as those related to the construction of non-motherhood and the postponement of motherhood. On the latter issue, with her article «Imagining motherhood and becoming a mother after egg freezing. An anthropological study in the French context», Yolínliztly Pérez-Hernández conducts an empirical study on egg freezing. Her work is based on a large sample of in-depth interviews with white middle-class heterosexual French women who imagine motherhood, but who, for various reasons, are forced to postpone it, resorting to freezing their eggs. The author analyzes the distance between imagined motherhood (constituted by the referents of nuclear family, heteronormative couple and genetic motherhood) and the reproductive trajectory of the women interviewed, when infertility or illness burst into their desire, using the concept of «ontological disruptions». An interruption that Pérez-Hernández interprets as a modification of some normative patterns, but which does not represent a questioning of the prevailing model.

In her article «Impossible motherhood: from the *desire for motherhood* to non-motherhood», Mercedes Bogino Larrambebere describes the process of those cisgender women who, although they have a strong desire to become mothers, do not succeed. To unravel this complex trajectory from the desire for motherhood to non-motherhood, the author analyzes a series of biographical narratives that relate the experiences of women who have suffered miscarriages, multidimensional infertility and the medicalization of their bodies as a result of the use of assisted reproduction technologies. These stories also express the importance of living the socially denied mourning

of non-motherhood. In this sense, mutual support groups are of great relevance in achieving the difficult and complete transition to non-motherhood. A transition that, the author concludes, implies challenging the imaginary of hegemonic motherhood.

The third and last axis of this special issue has different contemporary artistic expressions of motherhood –specifically theater, audiovisual and cinema– as a common link between the articles that comprise it. On this matter, Hadara Scheflan Katzav's article, «The theater of motherhood», makes visible the experience and creation of an Israeli artist-mother, Mali De-Kalo. The author carries out a detailed feminist critique of the representations of motherhood in the history of art and in Israeli society. In doing so, she shows the deep change that the image and representations of motherhood have undergone in the last two decades. According to the author, this is due to the work developed by mother artists, such as the above-mentioned De-Kalo, who have challenged the models established until then. In fact, Scheflan adopts the matricentric perspective developed, among others, by researcher Andrea O'Reilly (Motherhood Studies), which allows her to place mothers at the center of feminist analysis.

Adriana Nicolau Jiménez, in «To be or not to be a mother: Doubtful, fraught, and denied access to motherhood in contemporary Catalan theatre», analyzes four plays written by two Catalan playwrights, Núria Planes and Cocha Milla. Present-day Catalonia constitutes the socio-historical framework (very similar to the European context) in which these creations have been conceived, characterized by deep transformations in the demography of the birth rate, as well as by a growing attention to identity issues and those related to reproductive rights. These plays address topics already dealt with in other articles in this special issue such as the experience of perinatal death, the consequences of infertility and the use of assisted reproductive technologies, doubts about the desire to become mothers and the desire to be a mother in women with intellectual disabilities. The author concludes that these plays and their creators urge us to rethink the hegemonic conceptions of motherhood to the extent that they open a space for the visibilization of previously denied experiences, as well as the tensions that emerge between social norms and personal experiences of motherhood.

Finally, Irene Baena-Cuder in her article «*Mama: An exploration of gender and motherhood in contemporary Spanish horror film*» explores the treatment of motherhood in current Spanish cinema. The author takes as a reference for her work the film *Mama*, as a case study that reflects, on the one hand, the recent interest that horror films have had in incorporating motherhood as a central theme. On the other hand, she exposes the influence that the socio-historical context has had on the above-mentioned film. Baena-Cuder's study focuses on the nature of the transformations that the protagonist undergoes, as well as on the effect produced by the dichotomous representation of motherhood based on the figures of the good and the bad mother. All this leads her to conclude that the film reproduces and promotes an imaginary about motherhood that is already outdated and, in fact, linked to Franco's ideals about motherhood. In addition, she adds, the film penalizes, by exposing its terrible consequences, the defiance of patriarchal norms.

In conclusion, the special issue «Rethinking Motherhood in the 21st Century: New Feminist Approaches» brings together studies from a wide variety of disciplines, methodologies and analytical approaches. We hope to contribute to the reflection on motherhood in different cultural contexts, in diverse past and present, in order to think about a plural, diverse future, filled with reflection and the ability to engage in constructive feminist conversations about social norms, emotional codes, experiences, practices and realities surrounding motherhood.

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# MATERNAL RULE. AFFECTION, POWER, AND PATRIMONY EXPRESSED THROUGH TESTAMENTARY WILLS (15TH-16TH CENTURIES)<sup>1</sup>

## EL MATERNAL IMPERIO. AFECTOS, PODER Y PATRIMONIO A TRAVÉS DE LA EXPRESIÓN TESTAMENTARIA (SIGLOS XV-XVI)

ANA MARÍA ARANDA BERNAL

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### Abstract

«Maternal rule» is the expression used by a Spanish noblewoman from the kingdom of Seville in her last will and testament, written in the 16th century, to justify the authority she holds over her children. Based on the hypothesis that this is not merely her own individual perception, but rather that it corresponds to her experiences living within a specific emotional community, this paper carries out a comparative analysis with the testaments of two other women from the same territory and social group, with a view to understanding their maternal affective experiences.

The documentation examined spans almost a century and includes information and instructions that characterise the lives and lifestyles of three women: María de Mendoza (+1493), Catalina de Ribera (+1505), and María Andrea Coronel de Guzmán y

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Sotomayor (+1589). However, they are written from the subjective perspective of a woman facing death, who wishes to retain her influence and at times control over her children even after she has disappeared from their lives, reflecting on her own soul.

The main conclusions reached would indicate that they belonged to the same emotional community: Christian, aristocratic, with a gender role assignment that did not prevent them from exercising rule in certain areas, especially when they became widowed and gained authority over their children. However, they experience motherhood differently depending on whether their children are adults or still minors as the mothers face death. But above all, the way in which they exercise their motherhood is influenced by their personalities and predisposition.

In any case, they use their last will and testament to give orders and advice to their descendants through a language that shows their motherly affections and disaffections. These are documents through which they can settle emotional scores through their legacies with a view to expressly leaving their children on the same or different footings. And, finally, beyond biological motherhood, we see how the caregiving role taken on by these women extends through affection or responsibility to other members of the social group.

**Keywords:** Motherhood; Maternal power; countess of Los Molares; María de Mendoza; Catalina de Ribera; marquise of Gibraleón; María Andrea Coronel de Guzmán.

## Resumen

«Con maternal imperio» es la expresión que utiliza en su testamento una mujer de la élite castellana, más concretamente del reino de Sevilla en el siglo XVI, para justificar la autoridad que ejerce sobre sus hijos. Desde la hipótesis de que no se trata de una percepción individual, sino que responde a la vivencia de su comunidad emocional, en este texto se realiza un análisis comparativo con los testamentos de otras dos mujeres del mismo territorio y grupo social, con la finalidad de aproximarnos a sus vivencias afectivas maternas.

La documentación abarca casi un siglo e incluye información e instrucciones que caracterizan los modos de vida de estas tres mujeres: María de Mendoza (+1493), Catalina de Ribera (+1505) y María Andrea Coronel de Guzmán y Sotomayor (+1589). Pero están redactadas desde la subjetividad de la madre que se enfrenta a la muerte, desea mantener la influencia —y a veces control— sobre sus hijos cuando haya desaparecido de sus vidas, y reflexiona sobre su propia alma.

Las conclusiones principales determinan que pertenecen a la misma comunidad emocional: cristiana, aristocrática, con una asignación de roles de género que no les impide ejercer el gobierno en ciertos ámbitos, especialmente durante la viudez, y que desarrollan autoridad sobre sus hijos. Sin embargo, viven la maternidad de manera diferente, dependiendo de si los hijos son adultos o aún menores cuando las madres se

enfrentan a la muerte. Pero, sobre todo, influyen sus personalidades y predisposición en la manera de ejercer la maternidad.

En todo caso, utilizan sus testamentos para dar órdenes y consejos a sus descendientes a través de un lenguaje que muestra los afectos y desafectos maternos. Son documentos en los que pueden permitirse ajustar cuentas emocionales con ellos a través de legados que pretenden igualarlos o diferenciarlos expresamente. Y, por último, se observa cómo, más allá de la maternidad biológica, el papel asumido de cuidadoras se extiende a través del afecto o de la responsabilidad a otros miembros del grupo social.

**Palabras clave:** maternidad; poder maternal; condesa de Los Molares; María de Mendoza; Catalina de Ribera; marquesa de Gibraleón; María Andrea Coronel de Guzmán.

## 1. THE CONVENIENCE OF DOCUMENTING EMOTIONS

The power of mothers. Although this power has always had a strong public impact because those wielding this power have also been members of the ruling classes, we have rarely questioned the consistency of this power over the course of history. But when appropriate research strategies are applied to expand our understanding of particular cases, the forms taken by the authority exercised by mothers over their children become evident.

On this occasion, we will analyse the actions and emotions of three mothers who lived in the late 15th and 16th centuries in the former kingdom of Seville, members of aristocratic families and the urban patriarchy that exercised political and economic rule at the time. Their relationships with their children took on different forms, and they expressed their affections and also their disaffections through certain objects, recommendations, and gestures.

From the days of Antiquity up until the first half of the 20th century, there was a common way to reflect on feelings. Emotions were deemed to be an internal phenomenon of the human body, universal in nature, and whose functioning was not related to reason. Frequent metaphorical references were made to caged forces seeking to break free, and although the ideal of the sensible, intelligent, moderate person included the ability to control their feelings and especially the expression thereof, the difficulty of reining in irresistible loves, anger, or sadness from time to time was accepted.

However, this model began to decline in the 1960s. This was not accidental, coinciding with the rise of cognitive psychology and its interest in the emotions. The reason behind this was the new approach taken by researchers in this field, accepting the existence of certain basic emotions, such as fear. But they believed that affections were the result of the perception of an object or situation and its subsequent processing by the brain.

Therein lies the main difference, because through this new vision, emotions become rational reactions, a category that we tend to respect more, although these processes depend on each individual's predisposition in a given situation. At this point, we must take into account this idea of predisposition, because it refers not only to each person's way of being, but also to the circumstances in which that person has lived and the upbringing they have received.

As research continued, in the 1980s, in addition to psychology, another discipline begins to propose explanations about the nature of emotions. I am referring to anthropology, which offers the consideration that feelings are culturally shaped and defined, without a basic or universally shared repertoire. This means that they are generated and organised differently according to each culture.

So, until the end of the twentieth century, the approaches taken by different disciplines have furthered our knowledge of emotions and are complementary to each other. But there were still many guests missing from the table, and in the interceding years neuroscience has taken its seat to explain to us that emotional responses occur thanks to the ability of our brain to, for example, map what happens in our body, which we use as a reference for the explanations we give ourselves of the world.

Although the emotional factor was introduced in the middle of the 20th century (Febvre, 1941), in 1985 it was taken even further, and the concept of Emotionology emerged, a term coined by Peter and Carol Stearns, with which they referred to the set of codes and rules that determined subjective experiences (Stearns & Stearns, 1985). They were no longer only interested in knowing the emotions and understanding their value for the development of psychological, anthropological, or neuroscientific events. Historians are now seeking to define the field of research, which is really a subfield of social history.



Stearns and Stearns have sought to differentiate experience—that is, how each person experiences emotions—from the social norms that make them possible. In fact, social norms became the subject of their research. They wanted to know the emotional standards of past societies. And therein lies the germ of what we consider to be the history of emotions, which naturally has its own method of investigation that will be partially applied to the study of the three cases selected here.

In this way, we can gain an increasingly detailed understanding of the complex emotional processes included in research on the Middle Ages. While we see how in our society an *emotional shift* develops in various aspects, not only in research on the past, but also for our understanding of present lives (Barrera & Sierra, 2020).

In a detailed historiographic analysis, researchers Zaragoza and Moscoso point out how several early 20th century publications seek to establish emotions as objects of study in themselves, not as an adjunct to other histories (Zaragoza & Moscoso, 2017). The new concept of emotional community created by medievalist Barbara Rosenwein (Dixon, 2003) is particularly relevant. This refers to a group of people who share a set of norms about emotions and a common assessment of emotions. Although the historian received some criticism, and she herself modified her initial premises, emotional communities have become the space that allows us to study shared emotions (Zaragoza & Moscoso, 2017, p. 4).

At the same time, these studies have affected research on the history of women. Although some work had been done prior to this, it was again in the 1960s when the development of social history and the history of mentalities, with their diverse theoretical proposals, such as the history of women, introduced into historiography a new category of analysis, gender, which has given rise to a highly productive dialogue with the history of emotions.

## 2. BELONGING TO AN EMOTIONAL COMMUNITY

To analyse the main features of the power that these three mothers developed over their children, all of them members of the same emotional community, it is helpful to describe the sources of information used, beyond other personal and literary documents generated in a specific chronological and

spatial framework, which allow us to detect in their language the emotional values of an era. It is by no means an easy task, for a number of reasons: traditionally the intentional focus of research has not been placed there; it is a novel approach and, moreover, we want to look at the lives of women, which have remained largely undocumented in history so far.

We have explored a wide number of different sources about the three people whose emotions and feelings we are going to examine here. We can approach them through the chronicles of the time, references in the biographies of other people, and studies of contemporaries. Let us not forget that they were members of the aristocratic elite, three rich women and, therefore, we are much more likely to find references to their existence, unlike women from the popular classes, because the poor often leave less of a mark on the archives. In addition, I have managed to consult a variety of documents about these three women, such as dowries, prenuptial agreements, all kinds of contracts and administrative letters, inventories of their property, and lawsuits.

However, for this study, I have preferred to use the same type of documentary source as the main reference for all, their last will and testament, because not only can such documents contain strictly procedural orders, for example, regarding their burial and the distribution of their properties, but they also leave room for reflections on the soul, on how life has passed, the imminence of death, and uncertainty regarding the well-being of loved ones they are leaving behind.

The oldest of these women was María de Mendoza, Countess of Los Molares, born in Guadalajara and died in Seville in 1493, at almost eighty years of age. Daughter of the Marquis of Santillana, Íñigo Lopez of Mendoza, and wife of Per Afán de Ribera, governor of Andalusia, she was widowed at a very young age and raised five daughters by herself, albeit with the support of her powerful Mendoza lineage.

Doña María held economic power and even some political influence and faced difficult situations such as a confrontation with Henry IV who wanted to marry Beltrán de la Cueva to her eldest daughter, lady of the House of Ribera. Indeed, the main objective of her actions was to protect that legacy because she had no male heir, and so the marriage of her firstborn Beatriz became more important than usual. That is why she chose a son-in-law of a very prominent lineage—the Enríquez family, the governors of Castile—

but also with the idea that he would adapt to the Ribera lineage, an arrangement that did not work. In any case, Doña María managed to retain the position of governor from 1454 onwards, although without taking part in military actions, naturally, but in all other administrative matters, including the imparting of justice that corresponded to this position. At least until her daughter and heir married in 1460, and the post passed to her new son-in-law, Pedro Enríquez.

Francisco Enríquez de Ribera was born of that marriage, and, after the boy's mother died when he was just 10 years of age, his grandmother set out to exercise her firm guardianship over him, even intending to remove authority from the boy's father. In this instance, therefore, our analysis of the power of mothers extends to the power of grandmothers.

In this customary marriage policy that María de Mendoza also deployed with the rest of her daughters, three of them obeyed her authority and maintained a good relationship with their mother: the firstborn Beatriz, Leonor, who around the age of thirteen married the future Duke of Medina Sidonia, and Inés who married the Count of Medellin. However, the other two defied their mother's authority. The youngest, María, remained single and lived with the family of the second-born, Catalina, who is another of the mothers I have selected for this study. Thus, in the 1470s, conflict began between mother and child.

When María de Mendoza wrote her will in 1490, she wrapped white twine around the deed and impressed upon it «a seal that resembled the Mendoza coat of arms»<sup>2</sup>. She then placed the document within a white canvas bag that she tied and stored in «a chest covered with a dark green cloth», kept under lock and key<sup>3</sup>. This was found by those who opened the chest three years later, a few days after her death.

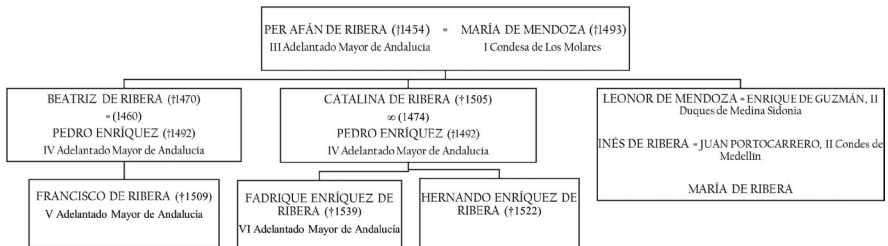
By then, two of her daughters had also died: Beatriz and María. But the complex emotional relationships she had with all her five daughters were reflected in the distribution of properties she bequeathed. They had

2. «Con un sello de masa que parecía de las armas de Mendoza». Own Translation. All primary source quotes have been translated by the author.

3. «Un arca ensayalada con paño verde oscuro». Archivo Ducal de Medinaceli (A.D.M.), Sección Alcalá (S.A.), 1205, 347-385.

all reached adulthood, and it became clear that family relationships are not always easy. Doña María's personality was certainly not easy either.

Consequently, the two main beneficiaries of her will were: her grandson Francisco, the son of her eldest daughter Beatriz and to whom the grandmother had been the *de facto* guardian for years, also heir to the privileges of the Ribera lineage, mainly the governorship of Andalusia; and her daughter Leonor, with whom she had the closest relationship, something that goes beyond the bonds of affection and was strengthened by the pride she felt that her daughter became the duchess of Medina Sidonia, one of the most important titles in the kingdom. To Francisco she bequeathed one third of her property, and to Leonor one fifth.



Genealogy of the Ribera lineage

The second mother, Catalina de Ribera, spent her entire life in Seville and died in her fifties in 1505. She was the second wife of Pedro Enríquez, the widower of Catalina's older sister. She was an impressive businesswoman who apparently never aspired to political power. Although, as usual, she used her family influences, which now extended to the monarchs themselves, for King Ferdinand was Pedro Enríquez's nephew.

Doña Catalina had two sons whom she worshipped, called Fadrique and Hernando, as well as a daughter, Teresa, who died in childhood, although decades later Catalina still leaves money in her will to Teresa's nursemaid. She also raised one of her husband's nieces, Leonor de Acuña, whom she claimed to love as a daughter, making frequent references to her affectionate and empathetic nature. For example, in 1492, Isabel Ponce de León, sister

of the Marquis of Cadiz, refers to the quantity received in a sales document and indicates:

And I, looking to the love that exists between me and you Doña Catalina de Ribera, am pleased to receive the eleven thousand maravedis (...) for the many good deeds that I have received from you and each day I receive, so many and of such consideration, that they are worth much more.<sup>4</sup>

Her own sister María de Ribera, who in 1485 sold her father's inheritance to Doña Catalina and her husband in exchange for a lifetime income of 100,000 maravedis, notes:

It is my will to give it to you for the many honours and benefits and food and aid and other good deeds that I have received and which I receive from you [...], which are so numerous and of such consideration and so honourable and gratuitous to me.<sup>5</sup>

Indeed, even today she is still remembered in Seville precisely for some of the most important feminine values held by that emotional community, which are attributed to her: charity, care, and religious devotion, embodied in the founding of the Hospital de las Cinco Llagas. Although, a deeper reading might reveal other significant personal motivations for this agency.

Despite this, her relationship with her mother was conflictive. But what exactly sowed the seed of their discord? Simply put, Catalina refused to submit to the political machinations and matrimonial plans of her mother, having entered into a romantic relationship that was expressly forbidden: her brother-in-law, the widower of Beatriz, her elder sister (De la Pascua Sánchez, 2015). Although, it is true that here power is not limited to the authority of a mother over her daughters, because the other players at the table were politics, the war in Granada, and the fate of great fortunes and influences.

4. *E io mirando al debdo e amor que entre mi e vos D.<sup>a</sup> Catalina de Ribera hay, me plogue e place de recibir los mrs que montan los dichos once mill mrs [...] por muchas honras e buenas obras que de vos he recibido e de cada un día recibo, tantas e tales que montan e valen mucho más que non el valor de la tal demasia si alguna oviese* (A.D.M., S.A. 1256, 515-546).

5. *«Es mi voluntad de vos lo dar y donar por muchas honras y beneficios y alimentos y ayudas y socorros y otras buenas obras que de continuo he recibido y recibo de vos [...], que son tantas y tales y a mí tan honrosas y gratuitas»* (A.D.M., S.A. 1188, 152-182).

María de Mendoza never forgave disobedience, and thirty years of litigation surrounding economic and jurisdictional matters ensued, which would be reflected in the way she treated her two rebel daughters—because María de Ribera supported her older sister—and the grandchildren she had through Catalina, as expressed in her last will and testament.

Over such a long period of time, there were internal episodes of the conflict. For example, Catalina and Pedro Enríquez wanted to move away from the Ribera lineage and begin the Ribera de Enríquez family name, one of the most expressive acts that, even though La Cartuja in Seville remained the family burial ground, meant that they and their heirs would be buried in the chapter house rather than the church.

For her part, María de Mendoza denounced in 1490 the marriage of her daughter as illegitimate, something about which she must have had a firm conviction, but she used an accusation that was refuted during the ensuing interrogation<sup>6</sup>. She said that Catalina had been named godmother at the christening of her niece María Enríquez, the youngest daughter of Beatriz and Pedro, after whose birth the mother died. The fact that she was godmother established a relationship with Pedro that would indeed have been a cause for marital annulment. However, the priest who officiated the christening declared that Catalina was not even present during the ceremony. It would seem that there was no limit to the grandmother's machinations, who would have condemned the children of Catalina and Pedro to illegitimacy if the false accusation had been accepted. Although, since Catalina knew her mother all too well, she had very wisely waited four years to marry, until the licence had arrived from Rome, an uncommon course of action.

That difficult relationship with her mother might have determined the maternal role that Catalina de Ribera herself wanted to play, and throughout her life she endeavoured to treat her children fairly and without preference.

The loving words and behaviour of her children after she died attest to this: they always got on well and fulfilled all their testamentary pledges, which was rare among this social group. In fact, when she was widowed

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6. A.D.M., S.A. 1195, 424-428.

in 1492, one of her first actions was to sign a document of concord with Francisco de Ribera, her nephew and stepson, with whom she maintained a cordial and affectionate relationship until she died<sup>7</sup>.

One key example of her heirs' keenness to fulfil Catalina's wishes can be found in the construction of the Hospital de las Cinco Llagas, by the Puerta Macarena in the city of Seville. In 1500, Doña Catalina had founded the institution in a house of the area of Santiago, with the initial intention of providing assistance to poor and sick women<sup>8</sup>. In her will, she asked her children to continue that work and they did so in the same house, but in 1535 onwards, her son Fadrique, in memory of his mother, began work to construct a magnificent new building, which remained in use as a hospital until 1972, and today is the seat of the Parliament of Andalusia.

The last mother studied in this paper belonged to the next generation. María Andrea Coronel de Guzmán y Zúñiga was born in Sanlúcar de Barrameda and died in Gibralforte before the age of forty in 1589. Through her marriage to Francisco Diego López de Zúñiga Sotomayor y Mendoza, she became the Marquise of Gibralforte and Countess of Belalcázar. She was the granddaughter of the Dukes of Béjar, daughter of the Counts of Niebla, and sister of the Duke of Medina Sidonia, so the aforementioned María de Mendoza was one of her great grandmothers. She had eight children and the oldest had just turned twenty when she ordered her will and died three days later.

Allusions to her mother and brother indicate that María Andrea Coronel was also loving to her family, without any glimmer of emotional shortcomings. Nor did she have a conflictive relationship with her husband and cousin, who was not known to have any illegitimate children, nor did he remarry during the 12 years he remained a widow, as the Duke of Béjar.

At the age of 20 and 19, respectively, they had married to undertake a complex family project, setting up their home in Gibralforte, building a new palace, becoming patrons of a monastery, and giving birth to all of their children there (Aranda Bernal, 2019).

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7. A.D.M., S.A. 1188, 364-380.

8. Archive of the Provincial Council of Seville. Hospital de las Cinco Llagas, leg. 1B, n.º1.

### 3. AND IN THE COMMUNITY, EVERY WOMAN, A MOTHERHOOD

These three women were educated in the same emotional standards, i.e. the rules governing the expression of feelings that allowed them to define with equal parameters their own emotions and those of the people with whom they interacted, the bonds of affection they had created, and the way they were formulated. In other words, they were linked by a system of feelings and were part of the emotional community shared by the families of the Andalusian elite of the time.

Obviously, the basis of this community was a Christian experience which, beyond a spiritual belief and a philosophy of life, shaped at this time a political identity that bestowed upon them a situation of superiority, because these women lived in the context of the war in Granada and Las Alpujarras. In other words, they occupied the frontier of the Christian community of the kingdom of Castile, bordering the Muslim Nazari kingdom of Granada during the 15th century, already in military decline. And after the conquest of Granada from the end of the century onwards, they lived in close proximity with the *Moriscos*, Muslims who converted to Christianity voluntarily or by force, many of whom were slaves in their homes, along with others of African or Canarian origin.

The correspondence written by the women of the Hispanic court during the 16th century has been studied, but unfortunately in the Spanish archives there are very few personal letters from this century and the previous one (Cruz Medina, 2003-2004). Although such letters were written, they were not saved because family archives gave preference to administrative correspondence. Fortunately, beyond letters, we can also glimpse the nature of relationships between mothers and children in other kinds of documents, such as contemporary literature as well as artistic representations that show us some of their characteristics through iconography and gestural language.

Despite this, not all historians felt it was worth collating such minor details from the archival documentation, which were considered anecdotal because they describe people and situations that do not seem to affect major political and military events. This does not mean that when a woman, under exceptional circumstances, did lead a public life she has not been



subject to scrutiny. The most significant example is that of Queen Isabella herself, contemporary and related to the first two women studied in this article.

However, these other details, often treated as marginal, provide a glimpse into the emotional situation and are often highly evocative. I am referring to the explanations given by a dying woman to justify how she is sharing out her belongings, regardless of whether she had much or little, among the members of her family; to whom she entrusts her young children; or the advice and orders she gives to those who are already adults.

And so we discover mothers with authority; affectionate, worried, protective of the bodies and souls of their descendants, but also selfish, controlling mothers. Women who were all too aware of the fragility of life and the constant closeness of death, who sought refuge in the hope of eternal life. They have been educated in the importance of family, where they are links in the chain of lineage, and in turn convey that concept of alliance as an element of social and emotional articulation. Because the family is the mental space in which their lives unfold, where respect for elders and parental authority is one of the main values of the community.

Once they marry, they reproduce the model, and everything happens in a relatively short space of time, because lifespans are short. Let us bear in mind that life expectancy was around forty years. And when the time of death comes, children may already be young adults, but all too often they are still in childhood.

Summarising greatly, that is the emotional community in which María, Catalina, and María Andrea lived. It should be noted that, although the affectivity of men is not addressed in this text, this is not because it is considered simpler in contrast to the greater emotional capacity of women, something that has often been used to characterise women in terms of their irrational passions to the detriment of rational consideration. What interests me is using this methodology to expand our knowledge of the history of women, considering that we should not continue to interpret historical reality without assuming the significance of the emotional variable and forgetting the fundamental role of gender in human behaviour.

### 3.1. Bequests, advice, and language as a sign of maternal affection/ disaffection

María de Mendoza, who wrote her will when she was an old lady and when her daughters were already over the age of 40, shows no interest in influencing her heirs with advice or opinions. Of course, she expresses her interests through the distribution of her legacy, but only in the way she alludes to the two daughters who had died by then do we glimpse her consideration of each one. She refers to her first-born, the heir and conveyor of the Ribera line, who died in childbirth in her 20s and was always obedient to the tutelage of the mother, as «Doña Beatriz, may she rest in peace»<sup>9</sup>. On the other hand, when referring to her youngest, who supported her sister Catalina when she clashed with her mother, and even preferred to remain single, living with her sister and brother-in-law, she spoke of her as «Doña María, may God forgive her»<sup>10</sup>.

The demonstrations of love shown by Catalina de Ribera and Andrea Coronel towards their children are very different. On the one hand, they frequently use expressions such as «beloved children» or «my beloved daughter doña Guiomar ...» respectively<sup>11</sup>. But they also try to convey a philosophy of life to them, or rather leave in writing the advice that they would have otherwise passed onto them.

Doña Andrea warns that «with maternal authority [...] I urge and command you to have much love and agreement with one other»<sup>12</sup>. Meanwhile, Doña Catalina goes further. Her two children are in their 20s and she shows through her bequests and orders that she is a reflective woman and accustomed to guiding them. Of course, she had been a widow and managing a large economic estate for many years, so she does not doubt the authority she wields beyond motherhood. That is why she writes: «since it was the will of our Lord that I should command; accept it and my will is this»<sup>13</sup>. In other

9. «Doña Beatriz, mi hija que santa gloria aya». A.D.M., S.A. 1205, 347-385.

10. «Doña María, que Dios perdone». A.D.M., S.A. 1205, 347-385.

11. «Amados hijos», «mi amada hija doña Guiomar».

12. «Con imperio maternal [...] encarecidamente les encargo y mando tengan mucho amor y conformidad unos con otros». National Historical Archive (A.H.N), Nobility Section (S.N.) Osuna, C.228, D.5-7. 19-11-1589.

13. «Mas pues nuestro señor le plugo de me dar que pueda mandar, avedlo por bien y mi voluntad es esta» A.D.M., S.A. 188, 459-483.

words, in an effort not to violate gender norms, she attributes her capabilities and the opportunities she has enjoyed to God's plan. And so she instructs:

Beloved children, you already know how I have worked in every way I can to be able to increase the estate that I leave to you, which I hope in the piety of Our Lord that, as your father's children, you will spend doing any good that you can [...]. What I beg of you for the sake of Our Lord is that you should remember the good lineage whence you come and serve God and safeguard your honour and turn away from vices so that you do not lose your honour, I shall say no more.<sup>14</sup>

Such expressive final words. She says so much without saying anything at all. We might interpret this as: I will not repeat something you already know because you have heard me say it for years. She goes on to give orders that sound like advice she has been giving to her two children aged 26 and 28 since they were little. She refers to the ethics of work, honour and lineage, love, empathy, and the expression of affection.

### 3.2. Settling of emotional scores through the bequeathing of assets: equality/inequality

The fact that María de Mendoza intended to settle scores with her daughters through her will was something they all saw coming. In fact, the will was not read at her home, as was customary, but at the home of the Count of Cifuentes who, as well as being her nephew-in-law, in the year 1493 was assistant to the monarchy in Seville, so his home would have been considered neutral territory. In attendance were the servants of her grandson Francisco and daughter Leonor, who benefitted the most from her will, inheriting one third and one fifth, respectively, but there were no representatives of her daughters Inés and Catalina. Although, interestingly, Inés lived with her husband in her mother's house, as shown by the inventory of Doña María's property that took place in the following

14. «Amados hijos ya sabéis cómo he trabajado en todo lo que he podido por vos acrecentar esa hacienda que os queda, la cual espero en la piedad de Nuestro Señor que como hijos de vuestro padre la gastaréis en hacer el bien que podréis [...]. Lo que les ruego por amor de nuestro señor os acordéis del buen linaje donde venís y sirbais a Dios y mireis por vuestras honras y os apartéis de vicios porque no perdáis vuestras honras, no quiero deciros más» (A.D.M., S.A. 188, 459-483).

days: «In an attic of the aforementioned houses, where the Countess of Medellín was staying [...]. In another attic, where his Lordship the Count of Medellín resided»<sup>15</sup>.

However, like her sister Catalina, she receives no legacy except in the hypothetical case that Francisco had no legitimate children, in which case his part would revert to Leonor and Inés. Indeed, when Francisco died in 1509 he had no offspring, but by then his two aunts had already been dead for years. And it should be noted that this inequality in the distribution of her legacy was not due to Doña María's attempt to improve the economic conditions of those who were less fortunate, because everyone enjoyed considerable fortunes. Nor did she have any problem lying to achieve her goals, as she did in a lawsuit filed against Pedro Enríquez about the aristocratic title of Olivares. And we know this from her own statement in the will, for, to discharge my conscience, I say that I did it to help my grandson's fortune<sup>16</sup>. Of course, given the circumstances, it makes us wonder whether she is not now trying to deceive so that her son-in-law does not inherit the title of Olivares.

Her daughter, Catalina, on the other hand, had a generous, carefully considered, and even a poetic way of expressing her wishes in her last will and testament, for example, when she warns her children that «the little that I am leaving you should be shared out with much peace»<sup>17</sup>. However, we must take that final expression with a pinch of salt because it is false modesty; these 'paltry' 25 million maravedis would today amount to around €400 million.

For years, she had worked to equalise her children, probably pursuing that intention from the time they were born, but she did the most to ensure it once she was widowed. Trying to ensure they both lived in very similar palaces and multiplying their fortune so that, when the time came, their inheritance would be considerable:

15. «En un soberado de las dichas casas, donde se aposentaba la señora condesa de Medellín [...]. En otro soberado, donde estaba aposentado el señor conde de Medellín» (A.D.M., S.A. 1205, 347-385).

16. «Por descargo de mi conciencia digo que lo hice por ayudar al dicho mi nieto» (A.D.M., S.A. 1205, 347-385).

17. «Con mucha paz se parta eso poquito que os dejo [...] veynte é cinco cuentos que os dexo en heredades» (A.D.M., S.A. 188, 459-483).

To equalise my children so that, when my days are done, there is no anger, I hereby issue this, my last will and testament [...], and I command that all that I say herein be done [...]. Pray my children that you will be good to one another, for you know that I have always raised you equally, so there should be no envy and you should get on well together, so I beg of you now as well, for the sake of our Lord [...]. For the valuation of the goods let the executors take charge, because it is not appropriate for there to be disagreements between siblings. Between siblings there should be no quarrels regarding their distribution.<sup>18</sup>

As noted previously, despite the different ages at which Doña María and Doña Catalina died, one almost eighty years old and the other in her fifties, close to the general life expectancy at the time in this latter case, they both felt they had lived full lives. Moreover, they are both widows with grown-up children, and so they are looking to tie up all their legacies in their last will and testament. María Andrea Coronel also accepts death, even if she is 38 years old and has young children, as she has been instructed by the Church. But there are clear signs of haste in her will written two days before her death, whereas the other two ladies wrote their wills over several years. That is why there are different nuances. María Andrea is concerned about her moral debts, leaves it up to her husband to resolve the economic issues surrounding her legacy, and leaves the care of her children to her sister-in-law Teresa de Zúñiga, who was married to the 3rd Duke of Arcos<sup>19</sup>.

Some sentences in the will indicate her confidence that the Marquis of Gibraleón will know what to do. It even fell to him to decide where she would be buried. And, regarding the future of her servants: «I beg his Lordship the Marquis to protect them and to grant them mercy, placing where they will

18. «Por el igualar de mis hijos que después de mis días no haya enojo ordeno este testamento [...], e ordeno que se haga todo lo que aquí yo diré [...]. Ruegoos hijos míos que seáis buenos hermanos pues sabéis que siempre os crié igualmente por vos hacer que no tuviesedes envidia y os quisiédeses bien, así os lo ruego agora por amor de nuestro señor [...]. Para lo apreciado que no entienda otro en ello sino los albaceas, porque no es razón que entre hermanos parezca que ay alguna diferencia. Entre hermanos no riñan sobre el partir» (A.D.M., S.A. 188, 459-483).

19. A.H.N., S.N. Osuna, C. 228, D. 5-7.

fare well and act in his honour»<sup>20</sup>. With regard to one of them who wishes to become a nun:

I appeal to his Lordship the Marquis to help her fulfil her goodly desire by seeking a place for her in the convent of Our Lady of El Vado, or elsewhere should his Lordship so desire. And to the poor women that I used to help through charitable acts, that his Lordship should treat them equally, so that they do not miss me. And I also recommend to his Lordship the dwarf Domingo and María Gonçalez who nursed our son Don Manuel for some months.<sup>21</sup>

However, she is very specific about the fate of certain objects that hold a very high emotional value. She does not share them equally among her children, but rather prioritises the criteria of gender and age. Explicit legacies are both material and symbolic. Her firstborn, destined to inherit and pass on the family tradition, should possess those objects related to primogeniture and the lineage, even though some of the jewels, such as the gift María Andrea received at her wedding, held a personal emotional value:

And the golden cross we have, where there are many precious relics, I bequeath to my son Don Alonso de Zúñiga y Sotomayor. And the very precious sword and rich golden dagger of his illustrious lordship, whom I beg to give it to him to become part of the rights of primogeniture... So that the cross, sword and dagger will be inherited in perpetuity. And may his illustrious lordship also incorporate into the primogeniture of his great house the rich and ancient gold chariot that we have.

I command that my son Don Alonso de Zúñiga y Sotomayor, or whomever succeeds him in our house instead, be given a diamond that was given to me by his Lordship the Marquis the night of his marriage to me, so that

20. «*Suplico al marqués mi señor las ampare y les haga merced poniéndolas donde estén bien y a su honor*» (A.H.N., S.N. Osuna, C. 228, D. 5-7).

21. «*Suplico al marqués mi señor socorra en el cumplimiento de su buen deseo procurando que la reçiban en este monasterio de monjas de nuestra señora del Bado o en otra parte que su señoría fuere servido, y a las pobres que yo solía regalar y acudirles con alguna caridad su señoría las trate con la misma, de manera que no me echen de menos, y también encomiendo a su señoría al enano Domingo y a María Gonçalez que dio algunos meses leche a nuestro hijo don Manuel*» (A.H.N., S.N. Osuna, C. 228, D. 5-7)..

my son and heir may give it in turn to his wife when God grants him the holy state of marriage.<sup>22</sup>

To her eldest daughter she bequeaths another kind of legacy composed of those objects that sustain the image of a great lady of the Castilian nobility, so that her daughter —about eighteen years old— can succeed her in the representation of that role. Thus she explains: «To my beloved daughter Guiomar de Aragón Mendoza I command that she receive all my jewels and writing chest and trunks»<sup>23</sup>.

But there are other objects associated with the feminine role among her social group, which add a religious meaning in line with the community in which they all live, to which is added a certain mystical or magical value, that is, they are endowed with the power to perform miracles. Doña María Andrea hopes to be remembered by her daughter as she readies herself for prayer, keeping her in mind at times of meditation, and she also wants to protect her when she is no longer present:

I bequeath to my daughter Guiomar de Aragón Mendoça the rosary with which I pray and the beads of indulgence it contains, because it is a piece I hold in great esteem, and so I ask her to appreciate it and make good use of it, because through its proper use, great indulgences and pardons may be gained, as explained in the memorials on it that lay on my desk.<sup>24</sup>

22. «Y la cruz de oro que tenemos en que están muchas y preçiosas reliquias la haya mi hijo don Alonso de Çuñiga y Sotomayor y la muy preçiosa espada y daga de oro rica de su señoría ilustrísima a quien suplico se la mande dar con cargo de que se yncorpore en el mayorazgo y vaya la cruz, espada y daga dichas sucediendo de uno en otro perpetuamente y que así mismo su señoría ilustrísima yncorpore en el mayorazgo de su gran casa el carro de oro rico y antiguo que tenemos.

Mando que a mi hijo don Alonso de Çuñiga y Sotomayor o al que en su lugar sucediere en nuestra casa se le de un diamante que me dio el marqués mi señor la noche que conmigo se desposó para que el dicho mi hijo heredero lo de a su esposa llegándole Dios al estado santo del matrimonio» (A.H.N., S.N. Osuna, C. 228, D. 5-7).

23. «A mi amada hija doña Guiomar de Aragón Mendoça mando se le den todas mis joyas y mis escritorios y arquilla» (A.H.N., S.N. Osuna, C. 228, D. 5-7).

24. «Mando a mi hija doña Guiomar de Aragón Mendoça, se le de el mi rosario en que yo reço y las quantas de perdones que del están pendientes porque es joya que yo en mucho estimo y así le encargo las preçie y se aproveche de ellas porque con el buen uso de ellas se ganan grandes indulgencias y perdones, como parecerá por los memoriales que de ello hay en mi escritorio» (A.H.N., S.N. Osuna, C. 228, D. 5-7)..

So, did she forget about the rest? When she wrote her will, her children Francisco, Teresa, and Juana had already embarked upon a religious path, so they had received certain amounts. Manuel had died at a young age, and her youngest daughters also became nuns after a while, although their mother could not have guessed that. Rather, she knows that the future of her children is uncertain and leaves responsibility for that part of the inheritance to her husband: «And his Lordship the Marquis will share among his children the holy relics that lie in our chapel, in the order that his Lordship wishes»<sup>25</sup>.

Incidentally, when they married and built a new palace to live in Gibraleón, Andrea and her husband dedicated the chapel to their guardian angel and filled it with protective relics of childhood, which was highly appropriate considering all the children who were born in their home over such a short period of time (Aranda Bernal, 2019).

Doña Catalina has only two children but is guided by similar criteria in the bequeathing of specific possessions, in addition to her insistence that both children receive a similar inheritance. The first also has to do with the construction of identity and the demonstration of power, highlighting the residences she leaves each one in Seville. For the firstborn Fadrique Enríquez de Ribera, Pedro Enríquez had already included in the rights of primogeniture the half of the house that the couple had begun to build in the area of San Esteban in 1483, and begs his wife in his 1491 will to leave the other half to him on her death. Indeed, this was the case with the palace that we know today as the Casa de Pilatos, the initial phase of which was built in the Mudéjar architectural style and was finished by Don Fadrique in the Renaissance style. As a counterpart, in 1493 Doña Catalina buys another estate in the area of San Juan de la Palma, to erect a similar building that is now called the Palacio de las Dueñas, always with a view to making things equal for Don Hernando, her second son.

For the rest of the properties that make up both legacies, she specifies the cost that each one involved, so that there is no doubt about their similar

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25. «Y el marqués mi señor hará merced a sus hijos de repartir entre ellos las santas reliquias que están en nuestra capilla, por el orden que a su señoría diere más contento» (A.H.N., S.N. Osuna, C. 228, D. 5-7).



values. In addition, they were each left sumptuous bed furnishings, highly luxurious fabrics that represented their wealth and status, and which were worth more than one million maravedis. To Don Fadrique: «I bequeath him a canopy of crimson brocade and the bed of green velvet and another oak bed of silk and four green pillows with crimson brocade and three purple velvet ones»<sup>26</sup>. Similarly, Don Hernando received:

The yellow velvet bed and the white and green damask bed, the Moorish brocade bedspread with purple decoration and a canvas bed with white and burgundy ribbons and a white canopy with crimson brocade and four green velvet pillows and two brocade ones.<sup>27</sup>

Interestingly, the second criterion governing distribution is gender, although both her children were male, which needs to be clarified. Because in an effort to equalise them, she also wants the wives of her sons to receive the same treatment, but through possessions related to personal attire and ornament. Don Fadrique had married Elvira Fernández de Córdoba in 1494, but we know little about the trajectory of that marriage, which was annulled. In fact, his two daughters were born of later extramarital relationships. That is why Catalina dictates: «That Don Hernando be given for his wife all the gold things that are in my chests and shirts and silk, because I gave such to Don Fadrique for Doña Elvira without telling Don Hernando»<sup>28</sup>, who had married Inés Portocarrero y Cárdenas. And in this same regard, she bequeaths a necklace to Leonor de Acuña, the niece of Pedro Enríquez, whom they had raised from when she was a child.

María de Mendoza, on the other hand, does not indicate any concrete items that her heirs should receive, although in her inventory of assets, multiple pieces are listed that would have been of great monetary and emotional

26. «Mandóle mas vn doçer de brocado carmesi y la cama de terciopelo verde y otra cama de seda de vnas enzinas y quatro almohadas de carmesi brocado verdes y tres moradas de terciopelo, y vna caravaca de lienzo con cintas coloradas» (A.D.M., S.A. 188, 459-483).

27. «La cama de terciopelo amarillo y la cama de damasco blanco y verde, la colcha de brocado morisco con las apañaduras moradas y una cama de lienzo con cintas de grana y blancas y vn doçer de brocado carmesi blanco y quatro almohadas de terciopelo verde y dos de brocado» (A.D.M., S.A. 188, 459-483).

28. «Dense a don Hernando para su mujer todas las cosas de oro que se hallaren en mis arcas y camisas y seda porque a don Fadrique di para doña Elvira sin contárselo a don Hernando» (A.D.M., S.A. 188, 459-483).

worth. However, she does specify which pieces are destined for the religious institutions with which she was involved during her lifetime, which she also asks to pray for her soul.

### 3.3. Other mothers and other children

Beyond biological motherhood, two issues should be highlighted. That these women delegated some of their maternal duties to other people and feel more grateful for that service than for any other. Catalina de Ribera more than two decades later, still recognises the nursemaids that raised her children: «I bequeath [...] to Doña Teresa's nursemaid the sum of three thousand [...], to Don Fadrique's nursemaid, I bequeath two thousand [...] and to Don Hernando's nursemaid, an equal sum»<sup>29</sup>. And María Andrea Coronel bequeaths to:

Gómez de Corral, my servant, for the love with which he has served and serves my children, one hundred ducats, and I ask him to take care of them as he has done thus far and with the love he has always shown [...]. To María de Rueda who raised me a son, I command that she be paid from my estate one hundred ducats that are still owed to her from the dowry we promised on the event of her marriage<sup>30</sup>.

The other matter is that both women took on the assigned female role of caregivers and guardians for the people assigned to their charge. So it is helpful to examine their relationships with those other children. However, in the will of María de Mendoza there are no allusions to this matter.

Perhaps Doña Catalina raised Leonor de Acuña, her husband's niece and the seventh of thirteen siblings, because she had lost a young daughter named Teresa. When Catalina wrote her will, Leonor had already become lady-in-waiting to the Queen and was married to Rodrigo de Guzmán, III Lord of La Algaba. But she nonetheless makes constant affectionate references to Leonor:

29. «Mando [...] a la ama de doña Teresa tres mil [...], a la ama de don Fadrique mando dos mil [...] y a la ama de don Hernando id» (A.D.M., S.A. 188, 459-483).

30. «A Gómez de Corral, mi criado, por el amor con que ha acudido y acude a mis hijos, cien ducados y le pido que tenga de ellos el cuidado que hasta aquí con el amor de siempre [...]. A María de Rueda que me crió un hijo, mando que se le paguen de mis bienes cien ducados que se le restan deviendo de la ayuda que le prometimos para su casamiento» (A.H.N., S.N. Osuna, C. 228, D. 5-7).

And the last thing I charge you is that you should love and visit Señora Doña Leonor, because I know for certain that she will feel both my death and that of her mother and the first thing to be paid is her five hundred thousand maravedis.<sup>31</sup>

She says she loves her like a daughter, but obviously when it comes to distributing her inheritance, lineage is more important, and she does not treat her as she does her biological children.

So to Señora Doña Leonor de Acuña, whom I esteem as my own daughter, I leave five hundred thousand maravedis, which, according to the affection I have for her, I should leave her more than you<sup>32</sup>.

For her part, María Andrea Coronel also takes into her charge two girls, but under very different circumstances and with much less affection. The first was a *Morisca* (converted Muslim) girl, deported during the War of the Alpujarras (1568-1571). She was called María de la Cruz, and in the house she was treated as a servant, but the Marquise nonetheless feels responsible for her:

I declare that María de la Cruz entered my house at the age of four and is one of the *Moriscas* of Granada. And she came with her mother, who is now deceased. And having already fulfilled the twenty years of service that the King our Lord commanded of the *Moriscos*, I declare that she is now free according to this commandment. And if this girl wishes to marry, she is to be given bed furnishings [...] And I want Francisca de Santo Domingo and her husband Gabriel de la Cruz to be freed for raising this girl and having proved both of them to be good and loyal<sup>33</sup>.

31. «Y lo postrimero que os encargo es que querais y visitéis á la señora doña Leonor que se yo cierto que siente tanto mi muerte como de la señora condesa su madre y lo primero que se pague sea sus quinientas mil mrs» (A.D.M., S.A. 188, 459-483).

32. «Que se de a la señora doña Leonor de acuña que la tengo por propia hija quinientas mil mrs., que según el cargo que le tengo, más que a vosotros le había de dejar» (A.D.M., S.A. 188, 459-483).

33. «Declaro que María de la Cruz entró en mi casa de edad de cuatro años, la cual es de las moriscas de Granada. Y vino con su madre que es ya difunta. Y por haber cumplido ya los veinte años de servicio que el Rey ntro Sor mandó a las tales, declaro que es ya libre por la provisión de su magestad, que de esto trata. Y si esta muchacha quisiere casarse, se le de una cama de ropa. [...] Y quiero que Francisca de Santo domingo y su marido Gabriel de la cruz sean libres por haber criado ya esta muchacha y haber salido ambos buenos y fieles» (A.H.N., S.N. Osuna, C. 228, D. 5-7).

Years later she took another girl into her charge, and in this case her words reveal a greater sense of detachment. She shows a custom among the ladies of the elite understood as charity, but with little emotional involvement:

I have a girl whom the brother superior of La Misericordia gave to my charge because La Misericordia could not raise her. And I have raised her so far. And she is called Magdalena de San Agustín, I wish her to be raised in the house where she has been living up to now and that the nursemaid who raises her continue to be paid as she has so far, and I beg that his Lordship, the Marquis, collect her from our house when she is of age and take her to the Convent of Our Lady of El Vado so that she may serve as a lay sister if she is suited to it, because if she is not suited, I do not wish for her to be taken there so as not to burden the convent with useless people<sup>34</sup>.

That sense of responsibility towards the people awarded to the care of these ladies is also manifested toward weaker groups. As always, Catalina de Ribera expresses it with great empathy:

I order my sons Don Fadrique and Don Fernando to feed the people that I indicate herein, because they are so poor that they cannot fend for themselves [...] and for the sake of our Lord, for as long as they live, I want them to give the people I indicate herein food and money, and half a bushel of wheat every month. And my two children are to pay for it between them. And I beg of Don Fadrique that he should let them be in his house because they are people who aided me, and he shall need them to accompany his wife when God grants him one. And I beg that they are treated with all the love they deserve. Thus they will have God's blessing and mine as well. And because I have given them food and money every year and now, until they die I order them to give what I stipulate herein, I leave them no more. I pray that they will forgive me and pray to God for my soul and as they will no longer have anyone to help them, dress them in mourning, and to

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34. «Tengo una niña que me encargó el hermano mayor de la Misericordia para que la hiciese criar; porque la Misericordia no podía criarla. Y yo la he hecho criar hasta agora. Y se llama Magdalena de San Agustín, quiero que se vaya criando en la casa donde hasta agora está y que se le pague a la ama que la cría como hasta aquí, y suplico al marqués mi señor, que siendo mayorcilla la mande recoger en nuestra casa, y después la lleven al monasterio de Ntra Sra del Vado pa que sirva de lega si fuere para ello, porque no lo siendo, no quiero que la lleven por que no sea cargada la casa de personas inútiles» (A.H.N., S.N. Osuna, C. 228, D. 5-7).

the men give smocks and hoods, and I shall not order it so that they should wear these garments for me, but that they should keep their clothing<sup>35</sup>.

In this regard, María Andrea Coronel makes two very interesting clarifications. The first is on the importance of attire in sociability and awareness of this need in women when she says:

I order that my assets be used to buy thirty-three women's cloaks that they be shared out among the poor in my village and in the village of Cartaya where they do not even have the opportunity to buy them, so that they should not stop going to church and hearing mass and sermons during the year due to a lack thereof». <sup>36</sup>

The second is about the importance of protecting the honour of women as early as the last third of the 16th century, which is not so evident in the previous documents:

I command that all my servants who are living at the time of my death and wish to be in the service of his Lordship the Marquis and my eldest daughter, Doña Guiomar de Aragón y Mendoza, be given and paid their salary as they have until now. And if they do not wish to be in their service, they are given their ration and salary for a year wherever they may be. And I beg all my servants to forgive me for not doing them all the good I wanted and would have done them if God our Lord had given me life according to the love I had for them and the good service that all of

35. «Mando que mis hijos don fadrique e don femando sean obligados de dar de comer a las personas que de mi mano señalare en esta hoja porque ellas son tan pobres que no se podran valer [...] y por amor de dios mientras biuieren quiero que les den de comer a las que yo aqui señalar e dinero y á cada vna den media fanega de trigo cada mes. Y entre ambos mis hijos lo hayan de pagar así dinero como pan. Y a don fadrique rruego que les dex e estar en el aposentamiento de acá dentro y no salgan de su casa porque son personas de quien yo me serui y para acompañar a su muger quando dios se la diere las avia menester y Ruegole que con mucho amor las traten como ellas merescen así dios le de su bendicion y aya la mia y porque yo les he dado de comer y dineros cada año y agora, hasta que mueran les mando dar lo que aqui digo no les dexo mas. Ruegoles que me perdonen y rruegen a dios por mi anima y porque ya no tendran quien les ayude vistanlas de luto y a los hombres den sayos y capuzes, no lo mando porque lo traygan por mi, mas porque guarden su rropa» (A.D.M., S.A. 188, 459-483).

36. «Mando que de mis bienes se compren treinta y tres mantos de mujeres de anascote y se repartan por las pobres de mi villa y de la de Cartaya que no los tuvieren ni posibilidad para comprarlos, porque por falta de ellos no dejen de ir a la iglesia y oír misa y sermón entre año» (A.H.N., S.N. Osuna, C. 228, D. 5-7).

them have done to me and I beg of His Lordship, the Marquis, to protect them and have mercy on them, placing them where they shall live well and with honour.<sup>37</sup>

#### 4. CONCLUSIONS

As indicated previously, the general aim of this text has been to expand our knowledge of the history of women, considering that we should not continue to interpret historical reality without assuming the significance of the emotional variable and forgetting the fundamental role of gender in human behaviour. Of course, the small sample size in this study, limited to just three cases, all belonging to the same emotional community, prevents us from extrapolating our conclusions to other times, territories, and socio-economic groups.

Despite this, it is possible to explore the mechanisms of affective control that they exercised throughout their lives, and which were common among their peers. This is where real power is exercised because the emotionality learned in a certain affective style contributes to shaping personalities. Mothers who are responsible for the upbringing of their children do just that, for better or for worse, from the moment their children are born. These women exercised this power naturally, albeit differently, because of course they had different personalities, and life put particular circumstances in their path that provoked different reactions. That is the interesting thing about these cases which, although they belong to the same emotional community, represent three ways of deploying what was known at the time as *maternal authority*.

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37. «Mando que a todas mis criadas, las que vivieren al tiempo de mi fallecimiento que quisieren estar en el servicio del marqués mi señor y de mi hija mayor doña Guiomar de Aragón y Mendoza, se les de y pague su salario que hasta aquí y que no queriendo ellas estar en su servicio se les de por un año su ración y salario donde quiera que estuvieren. Y ruego a todas las dichas y las demás mis criadas me perdonen por no hacerles todo el bien y merced que yo deseaba y que les hiciera si Dios nuestro señor me diera vida conforme al amor que yo les tenía y el buen servicio que todas ellas me an hecho y suplico al marqués mi señor las ampare y las haga merced poniéndolas donde estén bien y a su honor» (A.H.N., S.N. Osuna, C. 228, D. 5-7).

María de Mendoza shows a controlling approach to motherhood that takes advantage of her will to settle scores with her daughters and grandchildren. In Catalina de Ribera, we can see the love and generosity expressed towards her children who are already adults, who do not need her care, but they do need her advice and example. María Andrea Coronel, on the other hand, feels that her motherhood is still unfinished. She is young and has not yet finished raising and protecting her children, is afraid to leave them alone because they are only children or adolescents. She believes that in order to fulfil her instructions, she requires the complicity of her husband and the protection of a «Guardian Angel», an advocacion chosen as the patron of her new palace in Gibraleon where she has raised them and the main figure of worship in the altarpiece of the chapel there.

All three women developed mechanisms of affective control in their wills, mainly through privileging certain heirs over others or by equalising them, and according to the way they bequeathed certain objects that have known emotional value and are important to them.

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# AFECTOS MATERNALES: LOS OBJETOS DE AJUAR EN LA HERENCIA DE LAS MUJERES (SIGLO XVI)<sup>1</sup>

## MATERNAL AFFECTIONS: THE TROUSSEAU OBJECTS IN THE INHERITANCE OF WOMEN (16TH CENTURY)

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### Resumen

Este trabajo toma como punto de partida el análisis de los protocolos notariales otorgados en Canarias en ese periodo de tiempo que supone el tránsito de la Edad Media a la Moderna con el objetivo último de estudiar los objetos estrechamente vinculados al ámbito doméstico que las mujeres legaban a otras mujeres. Este hecho que hemos interpretado como afecto maternal, tiene, al mismo tiempo, suma importancia para la historia de las mujeres.

Nuestro objetivo, como ya ha quedado dicho, ha sido interrogar a nuestra fuente sobre un territorio largamente orillado por la historiografía: las emociones y los sentimientos, más concretamente por los sentimientos ligados a la maternidad. Sin duda, historizar la experiencia de la maternidad en los inicios de la modernidad no se presenta como una tarea

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sencilla, puesto que el silencio de las fuentes es atonador. Sin embargo, una lectura atenta de la documentación ha desvelado que había muchas maneras de sentir la maternidad. Dicho de otro modo, la maternidad no siempre estuvo asociada al hecho biológico de la concepción y el parto.

El estudio de los ajuares domésticos que se detallan en los testamentos ha puesto de manifiesto, como hemos señalado, que hay una transmisión preferente de los enseres propios de las mujeres a otras mujeres. Aunque los vínculos que unen a estas mujeres de generaciones distintas solían ser de parentesco familiar, sin embargo, no es extraño que también sirvan para recompensar la amistad, la lealtad y el cuidado entre féminas, existan o no lazos de sangre.

En este sentido, no se lega solo el objeto, sino que este lleva consigo el afecto de su propietaria y, junto a este acto afectivo, aparece la intención de arropar materialmente a otras mujeres.

En definitiva, estos ajuares acaban siendo una cuestión de género, en tanto en cuanto estaban destinados a proteger a mujeres más jóvenes, muchas de ellas huérfanas, cuyo destino último solía ser el matrimonio.

**Palabras clave:** maternidad; emociones; ajuares; testamentos de mujeres; Edad Moderna

### Abstract

This work takes as its starting point the analysis of the notarial protocols granted in The Canary Islands in the period that supposes the transition between the Middle Ages and the Modern Age with the ultimate objective of studying those objects closely linked to the domestic sphere that women bequeathed to other women. This fact that we have interpreted as maternal affection has, at the same time, great importance for women's history.

Our goal, as already stated, has been to question our source about a territory long bordered by historiography: emotions and feelings, especially feelings linked to motherhood. Without a doubt, historicizing the experience of motherhood at the beginning of modernity is not presented as an easy task since the silence of the sources is thunderous. However, a careful reading of the documentation has revealed that there were many ways of experiencing motherhood. In other words, motherhood was not always associated with the biological fact of conception and childbirth.

The study of the household trousseau detailed in the wills has revealed, as we have pointed out that there is a preferential transmission of belongings belonging to women to other women. Although the ties that unite these women from different generations used to be familial, it is not surprising that they also serve to reward friendship, loyalty and care between women, whether or not there are blood ties.

In this sense, not only is the object bequeathed, but it carries with it the affection of its owner and, together with this affective act, there is the intention to literally

clothe other women. Ultimately, these trousseaus end up being a gender issue insofar as they intend to protect younger women, many of them orphans, whose ultimate destiny used to be marriage.

**Keywords:** motherhood; emotions; household furnishings; Modern Ages

## 1. INTRODUCCIÓN

Repasando las páginas adscritas a los estudios sobre las mujeres en un amplio espectro temporal, podrá observarse un hecho reincidente: que el aspecto concreto sometido a objeto de estudio, ya sea el trabajo, la participación política o la salud, por poner algunos de los temas más explorados, se estudia en relación con las mujeres, aunque sin conexión con la maternidad. La razón de esta circunstancia deviene de un único hecho, como es el que la maternidad queda confinada exclusivamente al espacio doméstico. Por tanto, al desconectar de lo público la cuestión maternal, surgen varias cuestiones que afectan drásticamente a los Estudios de Género. Una de ellas es que, relegando la maternidad a la dimensión privada, se revelan otros temas vinculados a ella como las emociones, los sentimientos, la relación con el cuerpo, etc. Por otro lado, y tal como indica Mónica Moreno Seco, «considerar la maternidad sólo como un aspecto propio de lo privado es de alguna forma aceptar que la privacidad es el único terreno en que las mujeres se desenvuelven» (Moreno Seco, 2004, p. 20). Esta misma autora asegura que, a partir de la segunda mitad del siglo XVIII, comienza a construirse el concepto cultural hegemónico de la maternidad, un concepto que sigue vigente desde que en aquella centuria surgiera el ideal de *ángel del hogar* y se mitificara el llamado *instinto maternal* (Moreno Seco, 2004, p. 24).

A partir de la anterior cita, nos surgen varias dudas que acaban convirtiéndose en preguntas de investigación construidas como verdaderos faros en la ejecución de este trabajo. Una de ellas es: ¿qué se entiende por maternidad en nuestro contexto histórico, es decir, el siglo XVI?; otra, muy relacionada con la anterior, es si debemos considerar la maternidad un sentimiento natural o, por el contrario, una construcción cultural. En este sentido, nos han servido de guía metodológica unas interesantes palabras de la filósofa Susan Bordo, para quien «las prácticas discursivas que definen las identidades

no siguen siempre los mismos patrones, sino que fraguan dentro de un determinado marco de pensamiento histórico y cultural» (como se citó en Caporale, 2004, p. 13).

Por tanto, de lo que se trataba era de buscar los *patrones maternos* que prevalecían en los albores de la Edad Moderna. Con ese fin, hicimos un primer rastreo de fuentes en las que se hablara de las madres. Sin embargo, pudimos constatar el silencio rotundo a tal efecto, demostrando que, en esta época, el amor maternal carecía de valor para la sociedad y, por tanto, para la moral, y, sin embargo, esa práctica discursiva anunciada por Susan Bordo existió, siendo su búsqueda uno de nuestros principales objetivos; para culminarlo, optamos por analizar los protocolos notariales otorgados en Canarias. En esta tipología de fuentes, de las que se hablará más adelante, y centrándonos preferentemente en los testamentos femeninos, pudimos comprobar que las mujeres legaban a otras mujeres ciertos objetos y que estos se vinculaban fuertemente con el ámbito doméstico. Sin embargo, el mejor de los hallazgos fue, sin duda, advertir que esos objetos llevan consigo una carga afectiva intensa cuyo estudio merecía ser incluido en nuestro análisis sobre las maternidades del siglo XVI. De esta manera, además, los objetos nos llevarán hasta un mundo de emociones poco explorado ya que su ámbito de expresión quedaba reducido al espacio doméstico. Así, se abre una conexión con la idea de *intimidad* expresada por Ranum cuando asevera que en las sociedades antiguas «lo íntimo no es nunca algo evidente; ha de buscarse fuera de los comportamientos codificados y de las palabras. Lo que pertenecía a la categoría de lo íntimo hay que hallarlo en todos los lugares y objetos que encarnan las emociones y los afectos humanos» (Ranum, 1989, p. 211).

Es decir, esos objetos que las mujeres legaban a otras mujeres no solo nos enseñan una manera de vivir, sino que reflejan afectos, apegos y, quizás, necesidades. Esos objetos legados viajan de una propietaria a otra llevando consigo una intención y un afecto y, además, si somos capaces de leer entre líneas esos testamentos, podremos rescatar el concepto de maternidad que prevalecía en este tiempo, que, como ha quedado dicho, forma parte de nuestro objetivo principal en el presente trabajo.

En estas páginas, queremos rescatar el mundo de emociones y afectos que se transmiten a través de objetos sencillos y cotidianos, sumándonos de esta manera a la propuesta ya formulada por Juan Manuel Zaragoza Bernal

en la que se plantea desarrollar una historia de las emociones basada en la cultura material. Con ese fin, el autor analiza «aquellas aproximaciones teóricas que han apostado por considerar a los objetos como protagonistas de los procesos culturales de creación de significados entendidos como el resultado de las interrelaciones entre sujetos y objetos» (Zaragoza Bernal, 2015, p. 30). En nuestro caso, además, otorgamos a esos objetos un valor añadido, el del afecto maternal. Mujeres que *ejercen* de madres a través de sus últimas voluntades sin que, muchas veces, siquiera fueran destinadas a sus propias hijas, abriendo así una línea de estudio más amplia, al indagar en los elementos comunes que estos testamentos femeninos articulan y que desembocan en un territorio lleno de emociones y sentimientos. Ese territorio, por cierto, que cada vez más se va insertando en las diferentes disciplinas, alcanzando ya una categoría útil de análisis, junto al género, la raza y la clase, como apunta Plamper (2014, p. 27). Para que eso ocurra habrá que tener muy presente el concepto de «comunidades emocionales» acuñado por Rosenwein (2006, p. 2) en varios de sus trabajos para el periodo medieval, refiriéndose a esos grupos cuyos miembros tienen normas similares de expresión emocional al mismo tiempo que valoran idéntico tipo de sentimiento.

En lo que a nuestro trabajo respecta, nos proponemos aportar a esa historia de las emociones la lectura implícita con la que poder dilucidar el modelo maternal y sus manifestaciones afectivas que prevalecían en el periodo histórico objeto de nuestro estudio, el siglo XVI. Hay que decir que, dado que nuestro propósito es (re)construir ese relato de los afectos maternos en el contexto de las islas Canarias, nos hemos servido como fuente de los protocolos notariales, extractos publicados por el Instituto de Estudios Canarios, y las transcripciones completas que corresponden con testamentos de los antiguos canarios. De la variada tipología documental existente, hemos analizado la colección de testamentos; y no será casualidad este hecho, ya que, desde que fueran utilizados por la historia de las mentalidades, el análisis de los testamentos otorgados por hombres y mujeres de diversos niveles socioeconómico no ha hecho más que ampliarse: la lectura atenta de los testamentos revela un panorama lleno de dinamismo, derivado de la construcción de las más diversas relaciones sociales, económicas y de poder en torno a unos hombres y mujeres plenamente integrados en su contexto y sociedad (Otero Piñeyo y García-Fernández, 2013, p. 131).

Además, esta tipología documental también ha manifestado su utilidad para desarrollar análisis más cercanos y sutiles de sectores de la población hasta ahora menos estudiados, como, por ejemplo, las clases subalternas, como ha demostrado Ciriza-Mendivil (2017, p. 10), y como podrá comprobarse en el análisis que hemos realizado en estas páginas.

A todo ello se le suma la particular mirada que ofrecen los estudios sobre historia de las mujeres y del género, puesto que esta manera de hacer historia, «ha contribuido de forma crucial a entender los sentimientos y la subjetividad como realidades culturales y, por ello, históricas y no meramente naturales» (Bolufer, 2018, p. 38). En consecuencia, el análisis de la documentación notarial ha visibilizado la presencia femenina en todos los actos documentados, con independencia de la naturaleza de los mismos; en concreto, las hemos oído expresar sus últimas voluntades a través de los testamentos.

En resumen, para nuestro estudio nos hemos rodeado de los testamentos otorgados por aquellas mujeres que habitaron el archipiélago canario en la primera mitad del siglo XVI, un periodo, además, sumamente interesante por tratarse de la etapa en la que se inicia la construcción del modelo político, económico y social que va a imperar en las islas en la etapa moderna. Nuestro objetivo, como ya ha quedado dicho, ha sido interrogar a nuestra fuente sobre un territorio largamente orillado por la historiografía: las emociones y los sentimientos, más concretamente por los sentimientos maternos.

Así las cosas, nos adentramos en el análisis de los testamentos de las mujeres canarias del siglo XVI poniendo especial atención, como sugiere María José de la Pascua, «en las palabras pequeñas, aquéllas que se hallan insertas en la cotidianidad y que nos abren tímidamente los dominios de los sentimientos» (Pascua Sánchez, 2015a, p. 152). Y será así, desde las «pequeñas palabras», como nos planteamos observar, detalladamente, esos protocolos notariales en los que poder bucear para encontrar pistas con las que poder identificar y definir cómo era el ejercicio de la maternidad en el contexto socioeconómico del siglo XVI, a pesar de que la maternidad y el vínculo materno son esquivos desde el punto de vista de la documentación (Calvi, 2005, p. 1).

## 2. LA SOCIEDAD CANARIA EN EL SIGLO XVI. UNA SOCIEDAD DE FRONTERA

Describir el contexto social del siglo XVI en Canarias es harto complicado, y lo es porque todavía son muchas las incógnitas que resolver con relación a cómo se conformó la sociedad resultante de la conquista. Una sociedad que se ha dado en denominar «de frontera» (Aznar Vallejo, 2018, p. 32), concepto que navega entre lo material y lo simbólico, y que, en ocasiones, alude a los espacios del encuentro y otras, en cambio, apunta a la exclusión y al repliegue interior. El hecho es que, finalizada la conquista del archipiélago, el territorio insular recibió la llegada de un contingente poblacional procedente de diversos lugares de Europa. Estos nuevos habitantes se sumaron a la población aborígen, que pese a haber sufrido un importante desgaste numérico, seguía manteniendo una presencia significativa en el territorio insular durante este siglo XVI. En este recuento de diversidades de origen no podemos olvidar a la población negra y morisca que arribó a las islas procedente de las cercanas costas africanas, fruto de las llamadas *razzias*. Es entonces indudable que nos hallamos ante un cuerpo social formado por un heterogéneo conjunto de personas venidas de muy distintos lugares, y por tanto, manejando unas claves relacionales e identitarias muy variadas (González Zalacaín, 2015, p. 122). En consecuencia, una sociedad enmarañada donde factores como el género, la raza y la clase aparecen como elementos relevantes e interconectados.

Un análisis riguroso de esta complicada realidad requiere de un enfoque, también complejo, como el que aporta el concepto de interseccionalidad, entendida esta como una herramienta analítica según fue definida por Sussanne V. Knudsen, «una teoría cuyo objetivo es analizar cómo se entrecruzan las categorías sociales y culturales» (2006, p. 61), y, por tanto, una categoría en las que son examinadas escrupulosamente las relaciones entre género, raza, etnia, discapacidad, sexualidad, clase y nacionalidad. Desde esta premisa analítica, buscamos en las fuentes las experiencias de las mujeres, comprobando su parquedad informativa; aun así, hay documentos, como los procesos inquisitoriales, en los que se señala a mujeres concretas, siendo en esas experiencias donde podemos observar cómo el género, las condiciones económicas y la raza se entrecruzan, como no podía ser de otra

manera en esa frontera, real e imaginaria, en la que se fue conformando la sociedad canaria del siglo XVI; una frontera donde la libertad sexual era un rasgo distintivo, una libertad sexual permitida a los varones que podían entablar relaciones prematrimoniales o vivir en concubinato, sin sufrir el rigor de la legislación de la época (González Zalacaín, 2005, p. 138).

En este entorno permisivo a los deseos sexuales de los hombres, las relaciones entre los amos y las esclavas eran entendidas como prestaciones inherentes a las obligaciones de las jóvenes esclavas de la casa. Por tanto, el género, la raza y la clase se entrecruzan cuando enlazamos las diferencias y las desigualdades. La reiterada práctica del adulterio realizada por los varones isleños con mujeres moriscas, aborígenes, esclavas y, además, pobres, así lo demuestra.

Por suerte, no siempre la vida *desordenada* jugó en contra de las mujeres, pues en este mismo contexto algunas encontraron la brecha por la que hallar algo de libertad y así tuvieron la posibilidad de visibilizar, sin vergüenza, su condición de *madres solteras* a través de declaraciones como esta: «Item declaro que yo tengo por mis hijos naturales a Juan Alonso Rubio, y a Beatriz Gómez, y a Francisca Gómez, las cuales he casado y ayudado con mis bienes en alguna parte y cantidad» (Tabares de Nava y Santana Rodríguez, 2018, pp. 307-309).

En resumen, a lo largo del siglo XVI, a medida que se implantaba el orden político, económico y social de los monarcas castellanos, asistimos a un proceso de integración y acatamiento de las normas de género que regían en Castilla. Las mujeres vinculadas al incipiente grupo de poder económico fueron adoctrinadas para cumplir con el cometido que la sociedad esperaba de ellas. Y es en ese proceso de *normalización* en el que encontramos a nuestras protagonistas.

### 3. EL EJERCICIO DE LA MATERNIDAD EN EL SIGLO XVI. AFECTOS MATERNALES A TRAVÉS DE LOS OBJETOS

El discurso hegemónico de lo que define la maternidad no es ni ha sido siempre el mismo ni es representativo para todo el orbe cultural. La maternidad, como tantos otros, es un concepto cultural que se construye en el marco de un pensamiento histórico y de una cultura concreta en un periodo



determinado. Según Reyna Pastor, la sociedad feudal cristiana, plenamente identificada con el patriarcado, equipara la femineidad con la maternidad (Pastor, 2005, p. 312). Las mujeres desaparecen tras la maternidad a través de un conjunto de estrategias y prácticas discursivas que superponen su condición de madres a la de mujeres. Es decir, el mandato social es el que transforma a las mujeres en personas cuyo único anhelo vital es el de convertirse en madres y este hecho evidencia que tal aspiración femenina no es un deseo natural, sino histórico, producto de la configuración patriarcal de una sociedad.

No obstante, si nos afanamos en buscar referencias que identifiquen la maternidad con la expresión de unos sentimientos particulares que vinculen especialmente a las mujeres con su descendencia, nos topamos con la legislación medieval. Los textos de Las Partidas que se refieren a la maternidad son muy importantes; en opinión de Reyna Pastor, esta legislación medieval ofrece una reflexión moral sobre la paternidad y la maternidad muy rica en matices, incluyendo en la citada normativa la función materna como «oficio de madre» (Pastor, 2005, p. 325). Y, a la pregunta ¿por qué aman o deben amar las madres a sus hijos?, la respuesta se divide en dos ámbitos diferenciados: por un lado, es el instinto natural el que lleva a las madres a amar aquello que ha nacido de ellas; y, por otro lado, porque los hijos serán los legítimos herederos del patrimonio, del linaje. Existe, por tanto, una respuesta dialéctica en la que cabe plantearse qué tiene un mayor peso, ese llamado instinto maternal o, por el contrario, la construcción cultural creada en un contexto concreto.

Las fuentes del siglo XVI en las que se sustenta este trabajo no se ocupan de hablar de las madres; su ausencia absoluta de ellas solo puede indicar que la maternidad no tenía valor efectivo para esa sociedad, sin que esto, obviamente, signifique que no existan afectos y una historia sentimental que, con toda probabilidad, deba ser reconstruida. En cualquier caso, las expresiones de la sentimentalidad debemos ponerlas en relación con las creencias y no con las prácticas *naturales*; pueden ser definidas como prácticas psicosociales que no pueden sustraerse de un marco cultural de referencia (Pascua Sánchez, 2015b, p. 237).

Así las cosas, cabe plantearse cómo se ejercía ese *oficio de madre*, o de qué manera se manifestaba el amor maternal propiamente dicho, o bien, si

existía un comportamiento particular femenino con el que poder identificar el afecto maternal. De esta forma, en una larga sucesión de preguntas y sus respuestas, desembocamos a distinguir entre dos conceptos que dan título a este epígrafe: el ejercicio de la maternidad y los afectos maternos, y que definimos a continuación. Para ello debemos hacer una breve incursión filológica en las palabras que estamos manejando.

Según el *Diccionario de la lengua española*, *afecto* es «cada una de las pasiones del ánimo, como la ira, el amor, el odio, etc., y especialmente el amor o el cariño». Así es que se podría decir que la palabra *afecto* abarca una red de emociones y sentimientos amplia, entre los que destacan el *amor* o, muy cercano a este, el *cariño*.

El *amor*, por su parte, tiene una etimología más que curiosa puesto que su raíz, *am* se encuentra en palabras del indoeuropeo como *ma* o *madre* y, de hecho, el significado de esta raíz en los diccionarios tiene tres acepciones: «en una significa lo propicio, lo bueno [...]; la otra, la madre; en otra, húmedo» (Bordelois, 2006, p. 87). Siendo verdaderamente curioso este hecho, lo que parece indudable es que la propia palabra *afecto* abre ante sí un amplio tejido de emociones y sentimientos que acaba desembocando en otra familia de palabras encabezada por *madre*. De ella, tenemos el adjetivo *maternal*, que significa «de (o como de) madre» (Moliner, 2002, vol. 2, p. 298) o *maternidad*: «circunstancia de ser madre» (Moliner, 2002, vol. 2, p. 298). Por lo tanto, y en lo que en estas páginas se refiere, entendemos por *ejercicio de la maternidad* aquellas manifestaciones de afecto y cariño que las mujeres mostraron en sus últimas voluntades, dirigidos estos afectos a otras mujeres, fuesen sus hijas o no, a través de palabras o determinados objetos en los que se simbolizan estos sentimientos amorosos.

Además, las maternidades son relaciones que se sitúan dentro de la esfera de lo *íntimo*, en el sentido que Ranum (1989, p. 211) entendía el término; por lo tanto, es obligatorio que para indagar en el mundo de los afectos y emociones de las personas del pasado haya que hacer nuevas lecturas de los documentos existentes y añadirles los fragmentos de vida material, o dicho en palabras de Rafaella Sarti, «las cosas modelan, dan solidez a las relaciones sociales, y recíprocamente las relaciones sociales se expresan a través de las cosas» (Sarti, 2002, p. 16).

En efecto, los objetos cotidianos conforman la vida íntima de las personas. En esos elementos habituales hay emociones y afectos acumulados que pasarán de unas manos a otras en el devenir del tiempo. En este contexto, no podremos hablar de lo íntimo de la maternidad sin ligar a esa identidad el significado simbólico que tienen los objetos a los que hemos considerado un vehículo de afectos. Es más, la expresión de esos afectos la encontramos deslizada fugazmente, a modo de relatos subalternos, en los textos hegemónicos del siglo XVI, de cuya lectura entrelíneas obtenemos un relato más actualizado de los actos que constituían un verdadero ejercicio de maternidad, o como sugieren Rosón y Medina: «hay que ‘hacer hablar’ al archivo hegemónico de otra manera y así poder mostrar relatos subalternos, que se ‘colaron’ subrepticamente, atendiendo al desliz y a lo fugaz» (Rosón y Medina Doménech, 2017, p. 421).

Es necesario insistir en el valor que tienen las fuentes que hemos utilizado, pues, al tratarse de testamentos, lo que podemos encontrar en ellos son últimas voluntades, los últimos deseos expresados por la testadora en el momento decisivo del paso a la otra vida. En un acopio de memoria, la otorgante del testamento rememora todo lo que posee y todos los afectos que quiere recompensar, porque su marcha hacia la otra dimensión debe ser en paz consigo misma y con los demás. Se podría decir que «la acumulación de objetos se utiliza para constituir relaciones» (Zaragoza Bernal, 2015, p. 36). Es decir, la tarea impuesta es la de decodificar el significado de esos objetos y de explorar, «en los lugares y objetos que encarnan las emociones y los afectos» (Ferradas Alva, 2009, p. 52).

Hemos clasificado lo que a nuestro entender es una muestra de ejercicio de maternidad en, por un lado, las expresiones de afecto que se han filtrado en el encorsetado lenguaje testamentario y, por otro lado, en dos ideas conceptualizadas por nosotras para este trabajo: las *maternidades diferidas* y las *maternidades subalternas*.

Indagar en la forma en que se ha manifestado históricamente el ejercicio de la maternidad se nos antoja una difícil tarea, sin embargo, los testamentos consultados dejan expresiones que hablan de diversas emociones, como el apego y la protección sobre la descendencia. En honor a la verdad, hemos de decir que no son manifestaciones muy explícitas, pero como plantea Rodríguez-López, las emociones se enmarcan, adquieren, negocian y

experimentan en un contexto cultural (Rodríguez-López, 2014, p. 13). En el contexto de nuestras protagonistas se habla de amor, como el que declara Francisca Vizcaíno por su sobrina Ana Vizcaína: «Todo dio mi hermana Ana Vizcaína, como arria lo tengo declarado, a mi hija Ana Vizcaína, beata, por amor que le tenía y no por mi respeto» (Tabares de Nava y Santana Rodríguez, 2017, pp. 193-198).

Por su parte, Catalina Mayor declara en su testamento a favor de su hija, simplemente porque lo es, y tras esta declaración intuimos los afectos de una madre hacia una hija que se ha comportado como se esperaba que lo hiciera: con obediencia.

Catalina Mayor, mi hija legítima, y del dicho Diego Romero mi primero marido, en el tercio de todos mis bienes [...] por cuanto la susodicha es mi hija y me ha sido muy obediente, y está en la edad de para casar [...] y porque tengo concepto de los demás mis hijos que no irán, ni vendrán contra esta dicha mejoría (Tabares de Nava y Santana Rodríguez, 2018, pp. 179-182).

Más allá de las obligaciones legales que establece la transmisión del patrimonio de padres a hijos, la propia normativa deja algunos resquicios por los cuales se cuelan esos afectos maternales, y es que la legislación castellana en la materia permite la libre disposición del tercio o el quinto de los bienes disponibles a la hora de la muerte (Lorenzo-Pinar, 2009, p. 168). Las mujeres en un acto de plena libertad hacen uso de su derecho para reconocer, agradecer o compensar a su descendencia, parientes, amistades o servidumbre de manera individualizada, independientemente de la existencia o no del vínculo de sangre. Como afirma Abad, este mecanismo permitía a las testadoras expresar mediante un artículo de uso personal un afecto diferenciado, en consecuencia, los objetos se convierten en un vehículo de lo más eficaz (Abad Zardoya, 2016, p. 86).

La mejora selectiva de los herederos, práctica testamentaria, permite observar la inquietud de las madres ante el futuro incierto de su prole, más concretamente de las hijas. Una preocupación constante que se asoma a los textos consultados con la única condición de que haya disposición para interpretarlo. De hecho, una angustia declarada de manera reiterada por las mujeres es la situación de desamparo de las hijas solteras. En una sociedad regida, cada vez más, por las normas dictadas por el patriarcado, el

matrimonio se fue imponiendo como la salida *natural* de las mujeres. Un régimen matrimonial en el que se establecía la dote femenina como un requisito ineludible para conseguir el enlace adecuado. Esta lógica, que entendemos intuitivamente materna, era la que animaba a las madres a reservar en sus testamentos determinados bienes, aquellos que permitirían a sus hijas solteras entrar en el mercado matrimonial con todas las garantías.

Así lo expresaba Isabel de Torres, mujer de Diego García Viejo, en su testamento otorgado en 1537: «[...] manda y mejora a María de Torres, su hija y de Pedro Álvarez, su primer marido, en el quinto de sus bienes, además de su legítima, para que tenga con qué alimentarse y casarse [...]» (Luis Yanes, 2001, p. 170).

Dicha inquietud no solo afectaba a las clases intermedias y bajas, puesto que también la vemos reflejada en las últimas voluntades de las mujeres de la élite social de las islas. Dña. Agueda de Socarrás mejora a su hija Águeda de Monteverde con el tercio de sus bienes y el remanente del quinto: «[...] lo ayais y llevéis ansi por las causas susodicho como para ayuda de vuestro casamiento[...]» (Viña Brito, 2002, p. 356).

La preocupación se podía extender a otras mujeres de la familia; en este sentido, la vulnerabilidad de la infancia conmueve el ejercicio de la maternidad de las abuelas, como podemos comprobar en el testamento de Margarita Martín, otorgado en el lugar de Buenavista en 1535, donde expone que posee:

Item declaro que los bienes que tengo en mi casa de puertas adentro son dos cajas vacías de madera, y 3 colchones, y una frazada, y 4 almohadas, y 4 sábanas y otras menudencias de mi casa, y dos cabrillas. En el mismo documento establece que: Todo lo cual mando se le den a mi nieta Inés Borges para ayuda a su casamiento. Y si yo me muriere mando que la dicha mi nieta, con todo lo mueble que yo le mando de las puertas adentro, la lleven, la den y entreguen a Gaspar de Jorba, vecino de esta dicha isla, al cual encargo que la reciba y tenga en su casa hasta que esté en edad para casar y la den a su marido (Tabares de Nava y Santana Rodríguez, 2018, p. 308).

Como se puede apreciar, la preocupación de la abuela va más allá de los enseres materiales necesarios para el casamiento de la niña. El texto transmite el temor de Margarita Martín ante el posible desamparo de su nieta tras su fallecimiento, es por ello por lo que dispone cómo se ha de proceder para garantizar el cuidado de la joven hasta que se produzca el casamiento.

A veces, incluso, se puede percibir el reconocimiento claro del afecto que existe de una madre hacia su hija, como puede comprobarse en el testamento de Francisca Vizcaíno:

De todo esto declaro que mi hija Ana Vizcaína lo ha [...] trabajado por si sola como si fuera otra persona extraña, sin faltar en el servicio que a mí me daba. Por tanto, es mi voluntad y mando que los dichos mis herederos no entren en partición sobre los dichos muebles, sino que libremente se los dejos a mi hija Ana Vizcaína porque son suyos (Tabares de Nava y Santana Rodríguez, 2018, p. 198).

Además, contamos con el testimonio de Margarita de Castro, vecina de La Laguna y casada en tres ocasiones; a pesar de tener heredero legítimo, su hijo Simón, nacido de su tercer matrimonio, en el momento de testar sus afectos se dirigen a otras personas:

Se den 10 cabrillas a la madre de su primer marido, Juan Rodríguez. A su sobrina Juana, una faldilla negra y un manto negro porque es pobre y ruegue a Dios por su ánima. Manda también 2 cajas, una de cedro y otra de pino [...] Una faldilla de paño de fraile, se de a su madre y 10 cabrillas (Tabares de Nava y Santana Rodríguez, 2018, p. 197).

En definitiva, suegras, sobrinas, nietas, madres: con independencia de la línea del parentesco, las mujeres parecen preferir a otras mujeres en la transmisión de su patrimonio, como queda declarado en el testamento de Juana Hernández: «La caja es para mi nieta Juana, hija de mi hijo Fco. González, porque es mi voluntad» (Tabares de Nava y Santana Rodríguez, 2018, p. 93).

Si, como ya hemos indicado, hasta las muestras de afecto maternal se filtraron a través del protocolario lenguaje de los testamentos, no cabe duda de que ese cariño se manifestaba de muy diversas maneras, independientemente de cuál fuese el vínculo entre la madre y su prole. Esto es, precisamente lo que entendemos por *maternidades diferidas*, aquella maternidad ejercida sin mediación biológica; es decir, las ejercidas por mujeres que no tuvieron la posibilidad de parir. Piénsese que, en el contexto histórico del siglo XVI, el principal mandato de género resultaba ser la procreación y que la imposibilidad de obtener descendencia dentro del matrimonio se achacaba invariablemente a la esterilidad femenina, siendo dicha esterilidad asumida por la sociedad medieval y moderna como un castigo divino. Y esa

maternidad imposible sumía a las mujeres en un vacío absoluto (Pastor, 2005, pp. 333-338).

Así las cosas, y siempre siguiendo la información que los testamentos nos aportan, hemos podido comprobar que en las últimas voluntades de aquellas mujeres que no tuvieron descendencia, también puede observarse ese ejercicio maternal al que hemos denominado *maternidad diferida*. En sus testamentos podemos observar un acto de afecto, que se manifiesta explícitamente como gratitud o protección cuando legan sus pertenencias a otras mujeres a las que a veces les une un lazo de parentesco, pero otras solo el cariño. En estas circunstancias se hallaba María de Moya, mujer viuda y vecina del Realejo de Abajo, que en su testamento estipula:

Mando que la renta de trigo que rentaren mis tierras que yo tengo en Ycod de los trigos por dos años [...] para ayudar a sus casamientos de Luisa de Castro y de Francisca, Juanica y Anica, hijas del dicho Luis de Castro y de la dicha María de Torres, su mujer, para ayudar a sus casamientos por mucho cargo que soy a sus padres susodichos y a las susodichas hijas, así por buenas obras como por servicios que me han hecho [...] la primera que se ha de casar será Luisa de Torres por ser mayor (Tabares de Nava y Santana Rodríguez, 2018, p. 69).

De hecho, cuando María ha beneficiado a las personas que ella ha considerado conveniente, el resto de los bienes van a parar a las manos de su legítimo heredero: su sobrino.

Un último ejemplo sirve de confirmación de estas maternidades diferidas: María de Mena decide dejar «el resto del tercio de todos sus bienes, derechos y acciones a María de Mena, su sobrina, hija de su hermano Juan de Mena, difunto. Lo ponga en poder de persona abonada que lo granjee hasta que se case o tome estado de monja o beata» (Tabares de Nava y Santana Rodríguez, 2017, p. 234).

Dentro de este grupo de *maternidades diferidas* hallamos un amplio número de ejemplos cuyo denominador común es la orfandad. En este caso, se podría considerar que dicha orfandad lleva consigo una falta de afecto, al menos en apariencia. Sin embargo, en nuestra opinión, y a la luz de los ejemplos analizados, estamos ante una verdadera maternidad diferida, según la cual el afecto se ejerce protegiendo a la huérfana en la medida de las

posibilidades existente. Así puede observarse en el documento, según el cual Juana, una niña de unos doce años huérfana, es puesta al servicio de unos parientes:

Servicio a que Juan López Peña, sargento y padre de menores huérfanos, pone a Juana, huérfana, de 11 a 12 años, hija de Pedro Pérez y Gaspara de los Reyes, difuntos, con Pedro Hernández de Vera, su tío, y Margarita Perdomo, su mujer, vs., durante 10 años, para que como hija de padres nobles y honrados la tengan en su casa y servicio de las puertas adentro y le enseñen cosas honradas como a su sobrina y pariente. Pedro Hernández se obliga a darle a su sobrina por su trabajo 60 reales anuales, más comer, beber, cama, y si tuviere que comprarle vestido o calzado se lo descontará de su salario (Lobo Cabrera, 1990, p. 82).

Y más claro aún queda manifestado en la petición que hace el matrimonio formado por Melchor y Margarida, quienes hacen traer a su sobrina Leonor, huérfana, a la que

Recibo que Melchor Peña, v.º, y Margarida de Betancor, su mujer, hacen por cuanto a su pedimiento fue solicitado traer a su poder, servicio y compañía a su sobrina, Leonor, hija de Juana Francesa, hermana de Melchor, que quedó huérfana por muerte de su padre Juan de Antequera y de su madre, y por ser su sobrina y no tener ellos hijos, han tratado de recoger a Leonor, por tanto la reciben en su casa, para que les sirva como su pariente y sobrina todo el tiempo hasta que sea de edad de casarse, en el cual la casarán conforme a su estado y le darán dote y casamiento de sus bienes, y en todo este tiempo la tratarán con mucha honra y nobleza, dándole de vestir, calzado y lo demás necesario, y no casándola le pagarán lo que fuere señalado por persona noble y honrada. (Lobo Cabrera, 1990, p. 133).

Con estos ejemplos, pretendemos reforzar nuestra hipótesis de trabajo ya formulada, en la que consideramos que el afecto maternal es, en buena medida, una construcción histórica. No obstante, ese hecho no es óbice para que existan subterfugios por los que se escapen gestos de cariño que, si bien pueden ser interpretados como mera subsistencia, no dejan de tener el efecto de la protección y el apego a una niña cuya supervivencia está en juego.

Recuérdese que la sociedad canaria del siglo XVI contaba con un volumen significativo de población esclava de la que más del cincuenta por ciento era de raza negra, una mano de obra empleada en todo tipo de tareas tanto domésticas como industriales. Así pues, no es de extrañar la frecuencia con



la que aparecen en los testamentos como una pieza más de las propiedades de las otorgantes. En esta misma sociedad se encuentran, naturalmente, las mujeres sometidas a la esclavitud. Mujeres que fueron madres en una situación jurídica subordinada a los amos y que tuvieron que padecer la sustracción de sus hijos e hijas, puesto que, aunque objeto de sus afectos, su descendencia no les pertenecía. A este tipo de maternidades, las hemos denominando, *subalternas*.

Un ejemplo extremo de este tipo de maternidades lo encontramos en un protocolo firmado en la isla de Fuerteventura:

por virtud de una cláusula de su testamento otorgado ante el presente escribano, y del poder que tiene para pagar su funeral y gastos por su alma, de vender bienes del dicho, los que basten para el efecto, y entre estos bienes está Diego, mulato, niño de 3 años, hijo de Inés, negra, esclava de Simón Hernández, y para pagar lo arriba acordado deciden ponerlo en venta y entregarlo al que más diese, y para ello han hecho todo lo posible y no han encontrado quién lo quiera, y como Juan de León Pérez [...], lo tiene por su hijo y le quiere hacer caridad y buena obra y lo quiere libentar y paga por su libertad 437 reales y medio [...] por tanto como tales albaceas le dan carta de libertad y lo entregan a Juan de León (Lobo Cabrera, 1990, p. 152).

Pero no sólo se podía vender la descendencia de una esclava, sino que también podía ser dada en libertad dicha descendencia por medio de un acto de alhorría, es decir, la concesión de la libertad. Este hecho no deja de ser una prueba más del valor de bien mueble en el que las personas esclavas se encuentran, cuyos sentimientos quedan muy lejos de ser contemplados.

Efectivamente, las cartas de alhorría son un tipo de documentación que nos permite seguir la evolución de la población esclava y, a modo de ejemplo, tenemos la carta emitida por Alonso Pérez y su mujer, Catalina Pérez, en la ciudad de La Laguna en 1536, por medio de la cual dicen que ahorran a Alonso, de diez meses, nieto de Juan Alonso Carrasco, vecino y regidor de la isla de La Palma, e hijo de Serván Carrasco y de Inés, mulata, esclava del matrimonio.

otorgamos e conosco por esta presente carta que ahorramos e lybertamos de toda subjeçion e cativerio a Alonso, nieto de Juan Alonso Carrasco, [...] hijo de Servan Carrasco e de Ynes, mulata, nuestra esclava de edad de diez meses poco más o menos la qual dicha alhorry[a] e lybertad le hazemos por honrras e buenas obras que del dicho Servan Carrasco su padre e

del dicho Juan Alonso Carrasco, su abuelo, hemos rreçeydo, e porque es asy nuestra voluntad (Viña Brito y Hernández González, 2006, pp. 83-85).

Son estos algunos de los ejemplos entresacados de las fuentes donde puede apreciarse el ejercicio maternal de estas mujeres del siglo XVI, pero como ya hemos anunciado, junto a estos actos de cariño aparecen ciertos objetos, todos ellos especiales, que, como última voluntad, llegan a las manos de otras mujeres, portando el afecto de quienes los legan.

#### 4. OBJETOS MATERNALES. LOS AJUARES DOMÉSTICOS, ¿UNA CUESTIÓN DE GÉNERO?

Señalábamos en la introducción a estas páginas, la necesidad de encontrar los *patrones culturales* en torno a los que, en los albores de la Edad Moderna, se construía la idea de la maternidad. Se hacía inevitable hallar las prácticas discursivas que organizaban los afectos maternos, y proponíamos hurgar en la intimidad y, dentro de ella, en aquellos objetos cargados de simbolismo, porque a través de esos objetos se podría desentrañar todo un mundo de emociones vinculadas a ellos. Tanto es así que, de esa maraña emocional se podrían extraer emociones muy concretas, como las que representan el afecto maternal. El caso es que el objetivo es el de desentrañar el papel que ciertos objetos han desempeñado en procesos sociales, definido por Miller como «la humildad de las cosas» (como se citó en Zaragoza Bernal, 2013, p. 32) puesto que los objetos cotidianos están estrechamente ligados a las relaciones entre las personas, y, en nuestro caso, representa la relación que pueda existir entre la madre y su prole. Por lo tanto, la casa se representa como el espacio propicio para descubrir un mayor número de referencias que describan esas íntimas relaciones, así como el valor simbólico que puedan llevar consigo los objetos. El lugar adecuado en el que explorar la maternidad en el siglo XVI. Porque la casa, dicen Rosón y Medina, «contiene materialidades cotidianas de enorme valor emocional, cosas domésticas, efímeras, repletas de deslices, íntimas y subjetivas [...]. La casa, asociada a la domesticidad, se ha entendido como un espacio de reclusión para las mujeres pues sustraía la posibilidad de construir una historia propia. Lo que ocurría en ese interior pertenecía al mundo de lo privado que demandaba del régimen emocional patriarcal la

entrega abnegada y la gestión de lo doméstico» (Rosón y Medina Doménech, 2017, pp. 421-422).

Esa materialidad cotidiana es ahora el objetivo de este trabajo, no tanto por lo que el objeto en sí mismo pueda aportar a nuestro objetivo, sino porque a través de ellos podremos llegar a las personas. En otras palabras, nos ocuparemos de conocer y observar a las personas a través de sus viviendas, sus muebles, sus ropas, en definitiva, todas esas cosas que viven junto a ellas en las casas (Moreyra, 2009, p. 123). Esta táctica la llevamos a cabo con el total convencimiento de que los entornos materiales poseen un alto poder de comunicación y nos pueden devolver una imagen nítida del estatus social y económico de quienes los poseen.

El uso de los testamentos como fuente principal de trabajo se muestra altamente conveniente, pues sus páginas están plagadas de cosas de la vida cotidiana, enseres que formaban parte de los hogares canarios del siglo XVI. Y será a través de ellos la manera de acceder a quienes vivieron en esas casas y las relaciones que se establecieron entre sus habitantes, buscando siempre esa intimidad que viene guiando estas páginas, pues las prácticas con los objetos se identifican con las relaciones que mantenemos con las personas (Villena Espinosa, 2015, p. 12).

El mayor número de objetos que se encuentran en los testamentos de estas mujeres son efectos de uso personal, y es precisamente esta cualidad la que los hace proclives a albergar un contenido emocional (Abad Zardoya, 2016, p. 90). Además, y por razones obvias, podemos concretar que se trata de los propios ajuares femeninos, los que se transmiten para emprender una nueva vida, hasta adquirir un nuevo significado en manos diferentes. Así es que no podemos estar más de acuerdo con Ferradas cuando expresa que los bienes materiales, en nuestro caso los ajuares domésticos que se transmiten en herencia, tienen un alto contenido simbólico, de ahí que podamos considerarlos «vehículo de la intimidad» (Ferradas Alva, 2009, p. 63).

El concepto de ajuar doméstico es amplio, aunque en las páginas que siguen iremos delimitando aquellos más significativos, tanto cuantitativa como cualitativamente. De hecho, las cosas que se transmiten de forma prioritaria entre mujeres son las destinadas al descanso, porque la principal preocupación de quien legaba era el asegurar el casamiento de las jóvenes de su entorno; por eso, no resulta extraño que quisieran dotarlas del elemento

esencial en cualquier matrimonio: la cama. Esta solía ser un objeto que se transmitía de madres a hijas (Sarti, 2002, pp. 66-67). Dicho de otra manera, nos movemos en un territorio genuinamente femenino. Por el hecho de ser mujeres parecía más adecuado que las hijas heredaran los objetos íntimos de la casa y el mismo motivo justificaba que debían ser ellas las encargadas de gestionar la materialidad de las «cosas mundanas» (Monjaret, 2014, p. 5), repitiéndose el esquema clásico de separación de género y división sexual de espacios y actividades.

La documentación corrobora lo aquí ya expresado, ya que en los testamentos puede observarse la importancia que tienen las ropas para vestir las camas y, así, Catalina Mayor, denomina estos objetos como «bienes capitales»: «Bienes capitales míos una cama que tenía un colchón de lana, y 2 sábanas, y ciertas almohadas y unas menudencias de casa» (Tabares de Nava y Santana Rodríguez, 2018, p. 180).

Por su parte, Ana Vizcaína establece en su testamento que deja a: «Ana, mi sobrina, hija de Francisca Vizcaína, mi hermana, un colchón, una frazada, un par de sábanas y un par de almohadas» (Tabares de Nava y Santana Rodríguez, 2018, p. 135).

Las fuentes también nos brindan más información sobre las razones que llevan a las madres a favorecer a determinados miembros de la familia; Beatriz Díaz establece en su testamento que: «Deja a su hija Juana el colchón, manta, cabezal y 2 sábanas, por ser mujer, en mejoría del tercio o quinto o en aquella forma que de derecho haya lugar» (Padrón Mesa, 1993, pp. 278-279).

Las camas ocuparon un espacio principal en los hogares, independientemente del estrato social en que se encontraran. La diferenciación social venía dada por la cantidad y la calidad de los objetos. Los testamentos canarios nos ubican en los estratos sociales intermedios; las testadoras, conscientes de la importancia de contar con una mínima infraestructura para montar el lecho conyugal, otorgan en sus testamentos los elementos básicos, de manera que colchones, sábanas y almohadas se repiten en los tres ejemplos seleccionados, y en el mejor de los casos se añade una colcha o frazada. A partir de estos objetos se iniciaba una etapa nueva en la vida de una familia.

Además del ajuar, en los testamentos de muchas mujeres las ropas de uso son objeto de transmisión a otros familiares, demostrándose con este hecho que la indumentaria femenina solía tener un largo recorrido, ya que

los tejidos con los que se confeccionaban las prendas de vestir podían resistir varias generaciones, de ahí que se encuentren referencias frecuentes en los testamentos.

En el testamento de Francisca Díaz se detalla: «Item mando que un manto negro y una vazquiña azul que tengo lo envíen [...] a Tenerife a mis nietas Angelina y Juana Ruiz, hijas de María de Medina. Y dos de mis camisas que tengo nuevas y dos viejas» (Tabares de Nava y Santana Rodríguez, 2018, p. 170).

Obsérvese cómo Francisca Díaz quiere favorecer a sus nietas con un manto y una vazquiña, a lo que se añade cuatro camisas en diferentes estados de conservación. La camisa fue la pieza básica del vestir femenino desde el periodo bajo medieval (Córdoba de la Llave, 2013, p. 105).

También Margarita de Castro quiere remediar la pobreza de su sobrina legando «A su sobrina Juana, una faldilla negra y un manto negro porque es pobre y ruegue a Dios por su ánima» (Tabares de Nava y Santana, Rodríguez, 2017, p. 197).

Había, además, prendas de vestir especiales, como los fustanes, que la testadora, Margarita Martín, conservaba en el interior de una caja y, por lo tanto, no formaban parte del ajuar cotidiano, sino que, por el contrario, parecían estar reservados para ciertas ocasiones, y que lega a Isabel Mayor, en pago por una deuda pendiente: «Item declaro que unos fustanes que yo tengo en una caja los den a Isabel Mayor, hija de Isabel Alonso, porque es así mi voluntad» (Tabares de Nava y Santana Rodríguez, 2018, p. 308).

A lo ya citado se suman otros objetos cotidianos que aparecen en los testamentos como legados, nos referimos a los muebles contenedores, asimismo, objetos de gran relevancia entre los enseres de la casa del siglo XVI y, por tanto, muy frecuente en los ajuares domésticos debido a su multifuncionalidad, ya que también servían de asiento. Las referencias a ellos son constantes, como el que Beatriz Díaz reserva para su hija Juana: «Manda a Juana, su hija, una caja de castaño que tiene en casa de Juan López, sin darle parte a sus otros hijos» (Padrón, 1993, p. 279)

Asimismo, se traspasan objetos que podríamos denominar, siguiendo la terminología de la propia fuente, «preciados». En nuestra opinión su valor no sólo era económico, sino, sobre todo, emocional, como lo demuestra el legado que hace Ana Vizcaína a su sobrina: «Item mando a María de Medina, mi

sobrino, hija de mi hermano Cristóbal de Medina, un anillo de oro que tiene una piedra jacinto» (Tabares de Nava y Santana Rodríguez, 2018, p. 135).

Y junto a lo ya expuesto, hallamos la transmisión de objetos muy poco frecuentes en los testamentos femeninos, como son los libros. Aun teniendo en cuenta el analfabetismo característico de la mayoría de las mujeres de la época, sin embargo, un libro de horas puede adquirir un valor simbólico muy alto, añadido a su valor real, como lo que le ocurre a María de Mena, cuyo deseo es que su libro vaya a manos de su sobrina: «A Isabel Díaz, su sobrina, sus Horas y libro de Evangelios. (Tabares de Nava y Santana Rodríguez, 2017, p. 234).

## 5. CONCLUSIONES

El resultado de la búsqueda de los patrones maternos que imperaban en el siglo XVI coloca en el foco de la discusión un asunto realmente interesante, puesto que lo hallado es la ausencia absoluta en las fuentes de un mínimo rastro de lo que podría considerarse amor maternal, en el sentido que adquiere a partir del siglo XVIII. Esto nos lleva a varias conclusiones; por un lado, indica que dicho amor maternal podría carecer de valor para la sociedad de la época, demostrando así que la maternidad es un constructo histórico fruto de las prácticas discursivas que prevalezcan en cada época.

Por otro lado, lo que parece evidente es la existencia de un sentimiento al que se podría denominar *afecto maternal*, y esto sale a la luz tras el rastreo de los testamentos femeninos. A través de ellos, comprobamos cómo el ejercicio maternal se manifestaba a modo de últimas voluntades enunciadas en expresiones afectivas del tipo, «por el amor que le tengo». La documentación nos llevó hasta lugares insospechados en los que pudimos comprobar la existencia de un *oficio de madre* cuya expresión presentaba diferentes caras, pero todas ellas vinculadas a la misma figura. En este sentido, conceptualizamos las *maternidades diferidas* y las *subalternas* y lo hacemos a través del relato de objetos legados a otras mujeres, altamente significativos, que nos llevan hasta otra de nuestras conclusiones.

Comprobado que la mayoría de los objetos otorgados a otras mujeres eran componentes de ajuares femeninos, concluimos que dichos ajuares acaban siendo una cuestión de género, en tanto en cuanto están destinados

a asegurar el casamiento de mujeres jóvenes, muchas de ellas huérfanas, cuyo único destino era el matrimonio. Esto conlleva que ciertos objetos sean transmitidos preferentemente a otras mujeres, sumando a su valor económico otra cuantía, la que constituye el afecto con los que son transmitidos.

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# POWER AND MOTHERHOOD IN THE 16TH CENTURY: PERPETUITY AND MEMORY THROUGH ARCHITECTURE<sup>1</sup>

## PODER Y MATERNIDAD EN EL SIGLO XVI: PERPETUIDAD Y MEMORIA A TRAVÉS DE LA ARQUITECTURA

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### Abstract

Traditionally, we associate motherhood with the practice of caring for children. And that is correct, but we must be cautious because in care we find a wide range of habits that encompasses desires and needs that vary greatly according to social class, gender, age and time. In general, in the mentality of the 16th century, the mother not only played her motherhood role through upbringing, but sometimes it was more important to bequeath a lineage, a surname, goods or a house. It is on this point that this text is based in the spirit of recovering the agency of elite women, but also of the ones belonging to other social classes. On the one hand, as women who are promoters and patrons of a

1. Translated by Óscar Jiménez Serrano, Senior Lecturer, Department of Translation and Interpreting, University of Granada. This text is part of the R&D project «Vestir la casa: espacios, objetos y emociones en los siglos XV y XVI (VESCASEM)», reference PGC2018-093835-B-I00, funded by the Ministry of Science and Innovation-State Research Agency and FEDER «Una manera de hacer Europa», PI: María Elena Díez Jorge.

heritage that empowers them in the city (*matronage*) while allowing them to protect their descendants and perpetuate the lineage of which they consider themselves the guardians. On the other hand, women who are not of high lineage but who defend the house in which they live, even if it is not their property; because they have children and ask for shelter to be protected under a roof. Both cases can be interpreted as expressions of power, although at very different levels, because if in one case they are moved by the desire of projection and promotion of that mother as the matron of a lineage; in the other, being a mother and having children in charge can be a burden but also an argument in favor of defending the tenancy or occupation of a house. For this study we make use of archival documentation of the sixteenth century, but specifically from Granada, with a view to focusing on the various cases observed in the same city.

**Keywords:** motherhood; mother; architecture; houses; 16th century.

### Resumen

Tradicionalmente unimos maternidad con la práctica del cuidado hacia los hijos e hijas. Y así es, pero hemos de tener cautela, pues en el cuidado hay un abanico amplio de hábitos que abarca deseos y necesidades muy variados, atendiendo a clase social, género, edad y época. Por lo general, en la mentalidad del siglo XVI, la madre no solo ejerce la maternidad a través de la crianza, sino que a veces era más importante legar un linaje, un apellido, unos bienes o una casa. Este es el punto del que se parte en este texto, con el ánimo de recuperar la agencia de mujeres de élite, aunque también de otras clases sociales. Por un lado, como mujeres impulsoras y mecenas de un patrimonio que las empodera en la ciudad (*matronazgo*) a la vez que permite proteger a sus descendientes y perpetuar el linaje del que ellas se consideran guardianas. Por otro lado, mujeres que no son de alta alcurnia, pero que defienden la casa en la que viven, aunque no sea de su propiedad, pues tienen hijos y piden amparo para estar protegidas bajo un techo. Ambos casos los podemos interpretar como expresiones de poder, aunque a muy diferentes niveles, pues si en un caso les mueve el deseo de proyección y promoción de la madre como matrona de un linaje, en el otro, el ser madre y tener hijos puede suponer una carga, pero también un argumento a favor para defender la tenencia u ocupación de una casa. Para este estudio se hace uso de la documentación de archivo del siglo XVI, aunque con más particularidad en Granada para acotar la casística vivida en una misma ciudad.

**Palabras clave:** maternidad; madres; arquitectura; casa; siglo XVI.

## 1. BACKGROUND AND PRELIMINARY HYPOTHESES

The study of women and architecture in the sixteenth century has not aroused interest until recently. Research in this field must be approached from a broad perspective in which, on the one hand, the distribution of spaces according to gender must be analyzed, but, on the other hand, architectural practice must be thoroughly studied from various angles. One of the most discouraging examples is probably that of women exercising the profession due to the scarcity of data available, in clear contrast to the important patronage that many of them undertook.

This topic has been part of my research in the last two decades, focusing essentially on the historical context of Mudejar art and delving into the sixteenth century (Díez Jorge, 2011). I am interested in the spaces designed or assigned according to gender: forbidden spaces, places designated for women, circulations and times used in a building according to gender. Likewise, I have addressed the patronage of women in architecture and I have revealed the names of women workers and craftswomen in construction. My interest in this line of research has allowed me to lead different research teams and coordinate various projects and collective works on the topic (Díez Jorge, 2014; 2015a).

It is worth mentioning in this realm the works by Esther Alegre Carvajal (2021, 2022), focused on the sixteenth century and including well-documented and accurate reflections. In the specific case of Granada, reference needs to be made to the research carried out by María Encarnación Hernández López (2018), whose doctoral thesis I had the pleasure of directing and which I hope will be published soon.

In the various analyses on women and architecture, it has been possible to confirm their initiative in architectural promotion, sometimes in relation to their role as wives, especially in the case of certain lineages, since marriages entailed both political and family alliances whose importance was reflected in architecture. Equally important was the role of mother, since we should not forget that these marriages and lineage alliances were reinforced and culminated with the birth of a son; however, their analysis in relation to architecture has been hardly explored.

With this background in mind, this text approaches motherhood based on the hypothesis that it was seen as a mechanism of prestige and social recognition that women, especially those of a certain lineage who were aware of this, had in mind to preserve their memory through architecture.

## 2. MATERNAL PRACTICE OR *MOTHERING*

In these pages I cannot cover everything that motherhood in the 16th century entails, so I will focus on reflecting on it through a specific aspect, such as architecture. Some of the practices I point out here are common to both men and women, although it is evident that there is a different nuance since it is a society that clearly distinguishes the roles that correspond to one and the other, that distributes the tasks of daily care that are understood to correspond to women without any questioning, although we find men who also carried out this upbringing. On some occasions, it is the women who, due to the absence of the husband, either because of death or because he is away for long periods of time (as for example during the war), assume the role of achieving prestige for the lineage to which they belong, and then the role of mother acquires a more visible relevance.

It is true that one of the roles traditionally assigned to women throughout history has been that of being a mother. In our current societies, the debate has been going on for years that being a woman does not necessarily imply having to be a mother and that the whole sphere of the ethics of care, as Carol Gilligan (1982) pointed out, should not be an area that is primarily demanded of women. Among these contemporary debates, I am particularly interested in highlighting the reflections carried out on maternal thought years ago by Sara Ruddick (Ruddick, 1989). This maternal thinking and ethics of care assigned to and developed by women throughout history has involved a practice that we can call *mothering*, used to refer to the function of upbringing but not to the biological fact of being a mother. And it is now being advocated that this *mothering* should be shared by men and women.

I do not intend to apply current concepts to the past, and specifically to the sixteenth century on which this text focuses, but it is true that it is extremely interesting and suggestive to approach motherhood at that time from a broader perspective. First of all, we must start from the fact that the

care practices traditionally associated with women were not always carried out by the biological mother; on many occasions, this care was carried out by other women. It was an assumption of roles: they were women who were not biological mothers but took on and assumed this responsibility with minors because they understood that they had to do so. This is the case of the tutorship or guardianship of minors, which was so frequent throughout the 16th century. In a tutorship, the court appoints a physical or legal person—the guardian—to make decisions affecting the minor's assets or patrimony. In a guardianship, the court appoints a physical or legal person—the tutor—to make personal decisions on behalf of the pupil. The guardianship is always for the purpose of managing the minor's estate in the manner that would be most beneficial. Generally, the guardian or the tutor is a person related by kinship, although not always. It is a role that someone acquires legally but that undoubtedly entails a social contract before society that this person is going to take care of the minors, and we find numerous cases of both men and women who accept this responsibility. It is the moment when we clearly see in the documentation the role that uncles, aunts and grandparents exercised in the care of the minors. These tutors are going to defend the houses and the goods of the minors in front of possible abuses of third parties on their patrimony. And of course, women often appear in many occasions playing a strong role and defending this function that they have assumed. This is seen, for example, in the letter of guardianship and tutorship issued in Córdoba and requested by Marina Fernández, widow of Pedro Fernández, for her grandchildren because they were orphans and minors, pointing out that they belonged to her by right as their maternal grandmother and closest relative<sup>2</sup>. Particularly noteworthy is the mention of *aguela materna* (maternal grandmother) in the document, as if being the mother of the mother gave more strength to her petition.

Within this practice of care was the professional practice of child-rearing without being the biological mother. I am referring to wet nurses and nursemaids, a widespread profession in the sixteenth century. Or even women

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2. Archivo del Patronato de la Alhambra y Generalife (APAG), L-103-5, 1545, September, 26. Letter of guardianship and tutorship requested by Marina Fernández, widow of Pedro Fernández, for her grandchildren, because they are orphans and minors.

who accepted to raise children from extramarital relationships with their husbands. They are not the biological mothers but they assume that role. This is the case of María de Loaisa, a neighbor of Ugíjar, in the Alpujarra of Granada, who, probably for various reasons —affection, responsibility for the upbringing of a minor, charity, economic profit— take in *administration* a son that her husband had with a woman in his service, but also the minor girl and the servant girl with whom her husband had relations, we do not know whether forced or consensual, trying to leave everyone in the best possible conditions<sup>3</sup>.

Another contemporary debate is the demystification of the maternal instinct and the assumption of the reality that not all women have it, even if they are mothers, along the lines raised by Elisabeth Badinter (1981) and as shown by Orna Donath in her work *Regretting Motherhood* (2016). I suppose we can also wonder if there were regretful mothers in the 16th century and it stands to reason that there were. Some data that corroborate this show the number of abandonment of children in hospices and convents, but also the unwanted pregnancies that we know there were at the time, or even the tremendously hard situation that some women had to go through when they saw that they could not feed all their offspring and on more than one occasion they must have regretted having so many children. Nevertheless, in spite of hunger and poverty, they did their absolute best to raise their children, pleading with the authorities when necessary. This is the case of Isabel López, a widow who says that when her husband died, she was left with many children and daughters to feed, and in order to escape poverty she married one of them to Bartolomé Pérez, a clog maker who supports everyone with his work «and I have no one to resort to but him because the rest of my children are minors and my daughter, his wife, is pregnant and will give birth in a few days, and he has to go to war as a soldier to war in the service of Your Illustrious Lordship and he is not accustomed to it and if he were to leave, I and his wife and the rest of my children would be lost», for

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3. Archivo Diocesano de Guadix (ADG), Caja 4005, documento 38, folios 6r-7, 1579, October, 12. Testament of Doña María de Loaisa, legitimate daughter of Cristóbal de Toledo and Isabel de Robledo, neighbors of Talavera de la Reina, wife of Hernando de Cepeda, neighbor of Ugíjar in the Alpujarra, new settler with her husband by royal favour.



this reason he begs that his son-in-law be released from going to war because «if he goes, it would mean death for all of us»<sup>4</sup>.

Not all women would want to be mothers, nor did they all experience pregnancy and childbirth happily. When we see 16th century paintings of women giving birth, as is the case of paintings depicting the birth of the Virgin (Fig. 1) or the birth of St. John the Baptist, they generally convey an affective feminine environment that was created among women at the time of giving birth, as the laboring woman usually appears surrounded by other women, whether midwives, servants or members of the family nucleus. We could think of an emotional world of solidarity and female sorority created around childbirth, but we cannot forget that childbirth also took place in dramatic circumstances, alone, without assistance.

It should therefore be noted that not all women would want to give birth; the situation would be very different for those who felt that they had one more mouth to feed in an environment of poverty, for those who had become pregnant as a result of rape, or those who had an unwanted pregnancy and were not married in a society that did not approve this type of behavior, or



Figure 1. The Birth of the Virgin with Saint Catherine. Saint Bartholomew Altarpiece of the parish church of San José, Granada, Petrus Christus II, ca. 1506. Archbishop of Granada. Photograph: Pepe Marín

4. APAG, L-198-70-6, October, 4. Petition of Isabel López so that his brother-in-law, a clog maker, does not go war.

simply for those afraid of dying in childbirth since there was a relatively high mortality rate.

The roles assigned to women throughout history, and specifically in the 16th century, involved learned practices with an inclination towards helping others, and on many occasions, relationships could take precedence over duty, although there were also normative obligations as a mother. That care and those practices meant exercising other skills such as empathy, perseverance, patience, ability to listen, commitment, responsibility (Comins Mingol, 2009). In this sense, and although somewhat prior to our period of study, the words contained in *Le livre de la Cité des Dames* by Christine de Pizan, written between 1404 and 1405, suffice (Pizan, 2000). One of the main virtues highlighted about women in this work was their ability to mediate and care, and both tasks are somewhat interrelated since they mediated with the ultimate goal of caring for or protecting someone. On the more specific aspect of care, Christine de Pizan writes about the capacity of women because «even if all sons were good, it is easier to see daughters stay by their parents' side, visit them often, take care of them in sickness and old age» (book II, chapter VII) and gives examples of this practice of care not only with daughters of kings and illustrious personages but also of other classes such as the woman who breastfed her imprisoned mother (book II, chapter XI).

All this does not imply nor should it deny the role that men could have played in the tasks of *mothering*, and I am not only referring to the recognition of paternity, of which there are many examples, but also to care. This is the case of Hernando Romero Ponce, lieutenant captain of the captaincy of Álvaro de Luna, who decided to take care of his son from war wounds and in 1500 makes the request to be able to live in a room of the houses that belong to his majesty in the fortress of the Alhambra to be able to stay with him and take care of him, a demand that is granted<sup>5</sup>.

It is true that the basic premise of maternal practice is the care and maintenance of the child's life, attending to his or her needs for growth and achieving his or her socialization in the reference group. And in this task men and women participated but undoubtedly in an unequal way, and this implies accepting that the emotional world was from this point of view

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5. APAG, L-1-3, 1500, August, 4.

diverse; for example, the behavioral habits and learning of emotions before the arrival of a minor at home would be different between men and women from the very moment of the birth of the little one and of course later according to the roles assigned to one and the other in their upbringing (Díez, 2019). But in women themselves, motherhood was experienced and exercised in very different ways (Bolufer, 2010).

### 3. PRESTIGE AND SOCIAL RECOGNITION: MOTHERHOOD THROUGH ARCHITECTURE

In certain circumstances, the role of mother sought power and prestige. On the one hand, as an exemplary model of being a good mother, of being virtuous in that facet and thus wanting to be remembered. On the other hand, women of illustrious lineages left orders and commands to keep their surname in the memory and, at the same time, their children strove to promote that ancestry. In this way, women mothers had a way to achieve prestige and social recognition.

A useful instrument to achieve that prestige was through architecture, among other artistic manifestations (Martínez & Serrano Estrella, 2016). Let us take as an example the funerary spaces through which they managed to perpetuate their lineage and their memory. Far from anonymity, during the sixteenth century it was customary to put the name of people of a certain social rank on the epitaph of their tombs, sometimes indicating their place of birth, their lineage or their descent. It was a way to preserve their name with their honors and virtues. This practice was common to both men and women. According to the social class, we will find tombstones that were in the main chapel or presbytery, normally it was the case of the patrons and logically they were people of important lineages. Funeral chapels were also frequently erected on the sides of the church and the closer they were to the presbytery, the more important the deceased person was presumed to be. Those classes with slightly less power were located at the foot of the church.

The fact of being a mother was one of the qualities that stood out in women (Barker, 2020, p. 145). This aspect can be seen and read in epitaphs such as the one written by Diego Hurtado de Mendoza to Juana of Austria (1535-1573), princess consort of Portugal and infanta of Spain, daughter of Charles I of Spain and Isabella of Portugal:

No te detengas, que es muy corto el día  
 y larga la jornada. Doña Juana  
 yace en el hueco de esta piedra fría;  
 hija de Carlo Quinto; cara hermana  
 de Filipo Segundo; madre pía  
 de Sebastián, la gloria lusitana.  
 Lo demás, curioso caminante,  
 es largo de contar, pasa adelante.<sup>6</sup>

(Ponce, 2014).

The infanta is remembered for her illustrious lineage as a daughter and sister and, of course, as a pious mother, in this case of the king of Portugal, Sebastian I. Her prestige and virtue increased by being remembered as a mother who gave birth to a king, who did what she had to do as an infanta and strategically speaking, to give sons and daughters who could be kings and queens consorts with whom to seal political alliances. But it should be noted that this was not the only quality and sometimes it was not the main one during the sixteenth century. In the funeral of Queen Isabella of Valois (1545-1568, wife of Philip II of Spain) that took place in Seville in 1568 (Pozuelo, 2001), the main virtue highlighted was that of having achieved peace between Spain and France, but not as a mother, but for what she herself meant in the marriage policy of the time and for some of her diplomatic actions and wise advice. The role of mother remained in second place, although it was interrelated, since it was considered that the peace achieved with the queen was preserved «with two daughters who, as hostages and pledges of love, left her husband to the king, and with that she finished establishing and confirming peace» (San Pedro, 1568, ff. 39v-40r), as we read in one of the dedications, specifically the one placed by the Cabildo and the people of Seville in the ephemeral architecture that was designed for the funeral honors, following the description made by Laurencio de San Pedro. In the same way it is reminded in this dedication that her death was the result of a third pregnancy, highlighting as a virtue her heroic death due to the longed

6. Translation: Don't stop, for the day is very short / and the journey is long. Doña Juana / lies in the hollow of this cold stone; / daughter of Carlo Quinto; dear sister / of Philip the Second; pious mother / of Sebastian, the Lusitanian glory. / The rest, curious wayfarer, / is long to tell, pass on.

search of an heir that would maintain the political stability. Thus, it can be concluded that the main thing to be remembered in this case was not motherhood but the political action she did and for which she was recognized and praised; but it was intermingled with motherhood, considered as an obligatory and required political task in her case (Fig. 2).

Outside the royal sphere we have numerous examples in which there are times that the epitaphs remember them as mothers, but this is not the case in other occasions, perhaps because they were not or because, if they were, other virtues were chosen for them or they indicated it in their wills. For example, there are tombstones in the main chapel or presbytery of a series of Spanish women of

the sixteenth century in the Church of Santa María de Monserrat de los Españoles in Rome. There is a tombstone of a woman who died in 1586, Isabel Jiménez, which indicates *Charissime uxori*, that is to say, her role of wife is praised but not that of mother, either because she was not or because it was so decided, and close to this there is another burial of a woman in 1560 in whose epitaph *Matri optima* is emphasized (Fig. 3 and Fig. 4).

In numerous churches of the peninsular territory there are tombstones and sepulchers of women who left their name next to that of their husband,

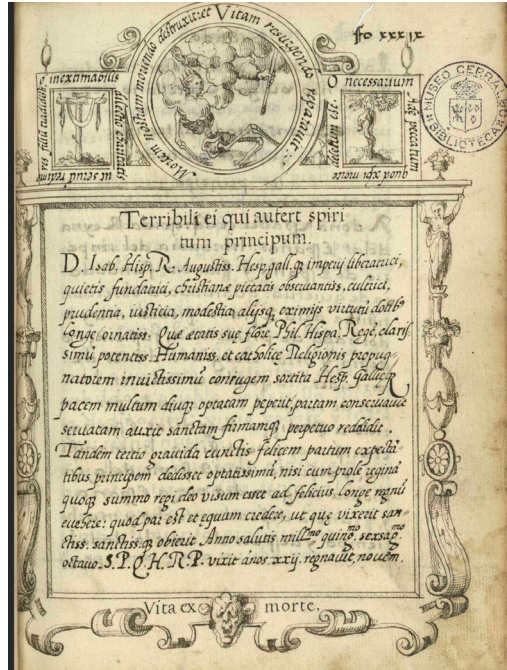


Figure 2. Dedication of the Cabildo of Seville at the royal funeral of Juana of Austria, 1568. Manuscript preserved in the Museo Cerralbo (Catalogue number 264-75), digital copy available <https://bvpb.mcu.es/es/consulta/registro.do?id=485498> [accessed December 17th 2021]. (Creative Commons).

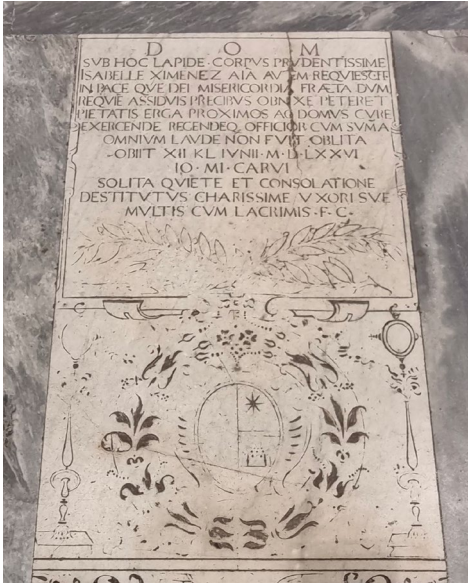


Figure 3. Tombstone of a woman with epitaph as *Charissime uxori* in the presbytery of the Church of Santa María de Monserrat de los Españoles, Rome, 1586. Photograph: María Elena Díez Jorge.

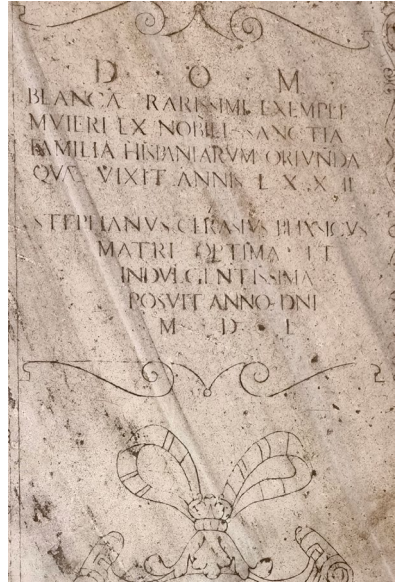


Figure 4. Detail of the tombstone of a woman with epitaph as *Matri optima* in the presbytery of the Church of Santa María de Monserrat de los Españoles, Rome, 1560. Photograph: María Elena Díez Jorge.

in many cases reminding that they were co-founders or founders and promoters. But there is no need for their husbands to be there, since as widows they also sought to promote their image and that of their heirs. This agency of women of a certain class in search for their prestige and trying to perpetuate that of their heirs was assumed by them with a special interest.

There is enough data to prove it, such as the case studied in Granada which provides wonderful examples. Some of those women are remembered together with their husbands. A good example is that of the parish church of San José (Fig. 5). On the tombstone of one of the side chapels we read that Diego Lizano, juror of Granada, and his wife María de Olarte lie there, and that both founded and funded the chapel, reminding that he died in 1528 (Collado, 2007). Also in that church we know of the participation carried



Figure 5. Interior of the parish church of San José, Granada, 16th century. Photograph: María Elena Díez Jorge.



Figure 6. Presbytery or main chapel of the parish church of San José, Granada, sponsored by Leonor de Manrique and completed in 1535. Photograph: María Elena Díez Jorge.

out by Isabel Méndez de Salazar, a funerary chapel right next to the presbytery, although in this case the tombstone only alludes to Alonso Méndez de Salazar, mayor of the court of the Chancery (Collado, 2010, 178). And the most relevant is the main chapel, that of the patrons, carried out by Leonor de Manrique, in which she left testimony of her promotion with an inscription under the framework stating the following (Fig. 6 and Fig. 7):

Esta capilla mando hacer y dotar la muy magnifica señora doña Leonor Manrique para sepultura del muy magnifico señor Pedro Carrillo de

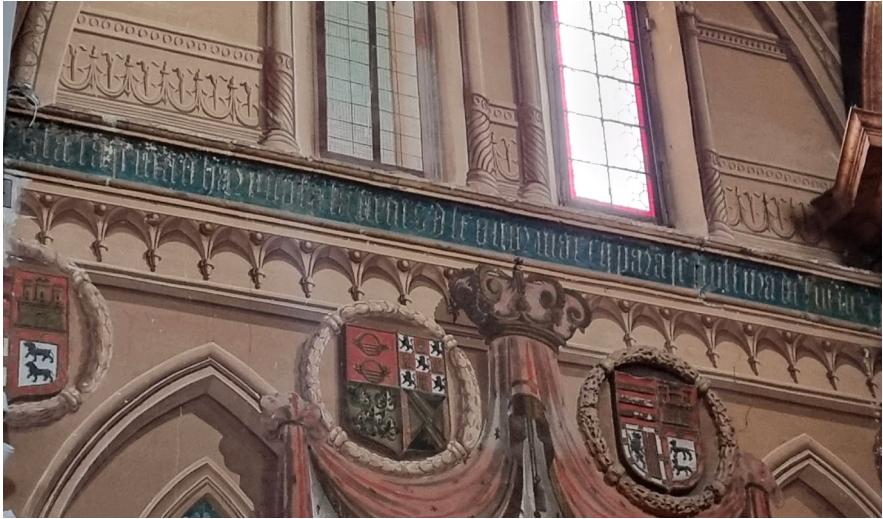


Figure 7. Detail of the beginning of the inscription that runs along the entire presbytery of the parish church of San José, Granada, which states that the chapel was commissioned by Leonor de Manrique. Photograph: María Elena Díez Jorge.

Montemayor su marido y suya donde también está don Martín Córdoba, su hijo a quien Dios en la flor de su juventud quito la heredad temporal para dalle la eterna, acabose año MDXXXV (Collado Ruiz, 2010, p. 171)<sup>7</sup>.

Her name was engraved for the memory, as the maker and founder of this architecture that she sponsored. Not only is she mentioned first, a remarkable aspect since it was common for the name of the man to appear first in the inscriptions, but it also shows her virtues, as men did with their heroic deeds; hers are her marriage and having given birth to a son, being a mother, even though he died at an early age.

In the same Church of San José another series of tombstones illustrate the different ways of being considered a woman, because although in some of

7. Translation: This chapel was ordered to be built and funded by the very magnificent Mrs. Leonor Manrique for the burial of the very magnificent Mr. Pedro Carrillo de Montemayor, her husband, where Don Martín Córdoba, her son, from whom God took away the temporal inheritance in his very youth to give him the eternal one, it was finished in the year MDXXXV.



them the name of the husband and the wife appear as founders of a chapel, as we have already pointed out, in others the name of the man appears but not that of the woman, who remains invisible, as in the case of the one at the foot of the church, which indicates the following: «ESTA SEPULTURA ES DE HERNANDO DIAZ DE VALDEPEÑAS ESCRIBANO DEL CRIMEN DE LA AVDIENCIA REAL I DE SU MUGER I HEREDEROS»<sup>8</sup> (Fig. 8).

Hernando Díaz de Valdepeñas was a registered scribe in Granada and was the one who wrote the wills of Gonzalo Fernández de Córdoba—the Great Captain—and his wife María de Manrique, sister of the promoter of the main chapel or presbytery (Mártir Alario, 2011, p. 49).

There are numerous examples of women who lead these burials, especially when they are widowed, and many times they must be continued by their heirs. This is the case of María de Manrique and her lavish and splendid burial next to her husband, Gonzalo Fernández de Córdoba, in the convent of San Jerónimo. We should especially note one of her daughters, María de Sarmiento, who will fund this space to complete the work started by her

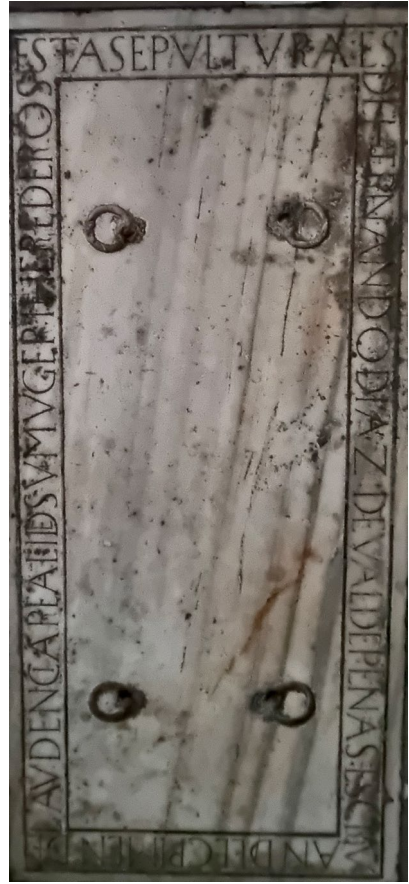


Figure 8. Tombstone of the scribe Hernando Díaz de Valdepeñas in the parish church of San José, Granada, in which only his name is mentioned since his wife and heirs are mentioned but not named. Photograph: María Elena Díez Jorge.

8. Translation: THIS IS THE GRAVE OF HERNANDO DIAZ DE VALDEPEÑAS CRIMINAL SCRIBE OF THE ROYAL COURT AND OF HIS WIFE AND HEIRS.

mother, although it will be her grandson who will finish it (Hernández López, 2018, pp. 79-132).

But they do not necessarily have to be illustrious ladies, there were also women of the second nobility and wives of public officials who had the desire to buy a chapel for themselves and their successors, as in the case of Jerónima de Verdugo, who leaves in her will of 1595 her desire to buy one in the Church of San Andrés, her daughter will try to fulfill that last will, but would not succeed either (Collado, 2007, 257-259). Presumably, in this attempt by the daughter to fulfill her mother's will, there could have been a confluence of affective issues, but also of respect for her mother's authority, as well as the need to promote herself. By making these funerary chapels during their lifetime, or by leaving the dispositions and orders in their will stating how they wanted them to be, these women mothers are exercising control of how to prestige their lineage and their sons and daughters are tied to this. They are heirs to a mother's commands and in a certain way to the submission to comply with those directives and orders by the obedience that is due to the wishes and last wills. However, this does not mean that they always did it, although they did in a great part, nor that they did it willingly, since there are cases in which this will is taken as their own and others in which certain given dispositions are modified and eluded. In this case that we have indicated of Jerónima Verdugo, her wish was willingly continued by her daughter Leonor de Cañaveral, wife of a *veinticuatro* knight of the city, Francisco Maldonado de Ayala, as can be seen in the will of the latter when she insisted on this idea that seems to have been difficult to achieve for both mother and daughter and that the latter transformed into a family will (Collado Ruiz, 2010, p. 182).

In addition to personal promotion, this interest in burial has to do with feelings and family ties, which women especially emphasize in their wills, so it is not surprising to find the desire to be buried with their loved ones, whether or not they were of noble birth. Mari Díaz Navarrete, a neighbor of Granada, ordered that when she died her body should be taken to the Monastery of La Merced in Granada but that she should then be buried in the Monastery of San Francisco in the city of Guadix, where her father and her mother were buried; in this case it is not a question of keeping alive the memory of a family pantheon for a question of lineage or personal promotion

but rather to be with her loved ones, with her parents for whose souls she also ordered that various masses and prayers be said<sup>9</sup>.

#### 4. MOTHERS GUARDIANS OF THE LINEAGE: THE LEGACY OF THE MAIN HOUSES

The ladies in power had a special concern for family housing. Many of them buy and acquire real estate and obtain house favors as I have already studied in other works (Díez Jorge, 2015b). But I would like to focus now on the role they exercised as mothers through houses.

First of all, it is fundamental for the sixteenth century to address the subject of the entailed estate. The purpose of the entailed estate was to perpetuate in the family the ownership of certain goods according to the conditions that were dictated when establishing it or, in the absence of them, to those prescribed by law. It was usually vested in the first-born male. In this way, the main houses passed preferentially to the sons in case there were any, while other secondary houses were transmitted as dowry to the daughters.

The concern that men and women had for the main houses as an image of their lineage becomes evident and this role is not one that women neglected, on the contrary. Married women or widows were involved in leaving the imprint of their surname or that of their husbands and in establishing the entailed estate for their houses, although again the condition of widow makes their names more clearly visualized in the documentation. This practice was maintained throughout the sixteenth and also in the seventeenth century, as is well documented for Granada in the sixteenth century in some cases of widows concerned about the entailed estates and about the main houses being inherited by their firstborn (Casey, 2008, p. 215). However, being a mother does not always mean acting blindly in favor of the children and disputes between the firstborn and the mother are seen more often than expected, since sometimes the link to the entailment of the estate left them with less economic power (Aranda Bernal, 2015).

Faced with the situation of the entailed estate and the primacy of the male, not all women remained impassive and in certain circumstances, they

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9. Archivo de Protocolos Notariales de Granada (APNGR), G-30, ff. 432r– 436r, 1529, July, 5.

filed lawsuits, not so much against an older brother, which would mean opposing the mandate of their parents, but against other men with family ties who, in the absence of a first-born male, claimed the entailed estate over a legitimate daughter and heir simply because she was a woman. Some sources of the 16th century, such as the so-called *Crónica del Emperador Carlos V* by Pedro Girón, left a record of disputes that took place at that time by women who had confrontations for the entailed estate, such as the one that took place in 1540: reference is made to the lawsuit between Gonzalo Vázquez, married to Antonia de Arauzo, and a cousin of hers for the right to the entailed estate since it was maintained that it did not correspond to her because she was a woman, even though she was the heir daughter. It was finally granted to the cousin but feeling some pity the emperor appointed Gonzalo Vázquez court bailiff of Valladolid (Girón, year 1540, ff. 80v-81r, pp. 158-159 of the edition we studied).

They defended their lineage and blood over their husband's if necessary. This is the case of Beatriz Galindo. Not being in agreement with the will made by her husband, Francisco Ramírez de Madrid, secretary of the Catholic Monarchs, who died in 1501, she claimed some goods that were hers and which she considered that her deceased husband should not have disposed of in the will, and for that reason a litigation with the children of her deceased husband and his first wife —Juan Ramírez and María de Oviedo—<sup>10</sup> took place. Beatriz de Galindo claimed several properties and a large amount of money. Among the properties we find part of some houses in the Alhambra. The house had been given as a royal favour to her husband but she claimed the improvements made in this house for herself and for her sons by blood —Fernán Ramírez and Nuflo Ramírez— then minors. Finally, the royal order sentenced that the house was not part of the partition because it had been given to Francisco Ramírez de Madrid and not to her. Beatriz Galindo lost the battle although she fought and defended her patrimonial interests and those of her children.

They were visible women in the society of their time and left their mark in the promotion of architecture, contributing to the expansion and fame of their lineage of which they felt responsible and proud. If their lineage,

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10. Archivo General de Simancas (AGS), Registro General del Sello (RGS), 1-1504.

which could be at the same level as that of their husband, could be undermined by that of their husband, they also fought for it. Nothing better for all this than promotion through architecture and especially with the main house because it symbolized lineage. The main houses were identified with a lineage and had to go to the firstborn or to whoever was to be the visible head of that lineage. This visibility of the main house as the social image of a surname explains why when a serious crime was committed, the house was condemned to be abandoned and sometimes demolished, as happened with the high dignitaries of Castile who rose up against Alfonso X, or with those in Seville who took a stand against the Catholic Monarchs in the war of succession with Enrique IV (Orlandis, 1944, p. 115). The physical destruction of the main houses of those considered traitors was a measure included in medieval law and was maintained throughout the 16th century: a very visible case was that of Fernando de Córdoba y Valor, known as Abén Humeya, whose house in the Alhambra was destroyed and whose land was sown with salt to purify it for the crime of leading the Morisco rebellion between 1568 and 1571, a testimony that is still remembered centuries later<sup>11</sup>.

This personal projection through the main houses is evidently known by women and some of them choose to lead and promote its construction. In Granada there are several cases of this sort, one of them being that of Bazán. We have been able to study in depth the initiative of some noble women, such as the case of the Bazán family in Granada, in which María Manuel, widow of Álvaro de Bazán, began in 1500 to rearrange and group small and diverse properties to constitute some main houses in Granada. Close to those houses, María Manuel founded the church of Sancti Spiritus, blessed in 1504, as a burial place for the lineage, taking the body of Álvaro Bazán to the main chapel for burial; she also built a convent for Dominican nuns. This entrepreneur lived there with her granddaughters and one of them, also called María Manuel, will later maintain part of the houses (López Torrijos, 2006).

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11. APAG, L-190-22. This is a document from 1795 where the accountant overseer of the Alhambra notifies that construction is being carried out on this site and explains that it was sown with salt but that construction had now begun. The Crown replied that the soil had already been purified and that it was of no use to keep it unbuilt on.

Another case is that of Leonor Manrique de Lara, married to Pedro Carrillo de Montemayor, son of the lord of Alcaudete (Jaén), who settled with her husband in Granada at the end of the conquest. In 1505, after the death of her husband, she took advantage of her comfortable economic situation to dedicate herself directly to the promotion and patronage of architecture and art. She became the main patron of the Church of San José (Hernández López, 2016). There, on a nearby lot, she built her palatial house at the same time that the neighboring church was being built. After the death of Leonor Manrique, her daughter Elvira Carrillo, related by marriage to the Mendoza family, made important modifications to the house, providing it, among other things, with a passageway that connected it to the neighboring church. Elvira Carrillo was the one who inherited these main houses as Alonso, son of Leonor Manrique and the one who would have inherited the family estate, had died; as had another daughter, Ana; while the remaining daughters, Francisca and Beatriz, were nuns and had renounced their inheritance upon entering the convent (Hernández López, 2018, pp. 309-318) (Fig. 9).



Figure 9. Main entrance to the house of Leonor de Manrique, 16th century, next to the parish church of San José, Granada. Photograph: María Elena Díez Jorge.

## 5. PROTECTION, CARE AND DISPUTES: THE HOUSE AND ITS ASSETS

Of course, the situation of widowhood in some cases provided women with certain *winds of freedom*, especially in the case of those with certain economic and social power, but often left them in an absolutely unprotected situation as can be seen in the documentation when they argued their misery by being poor and widows. Some with a relatively high position fell into disgrace when they became widows and had children to support. Having a house was essential in order not to become *terribly poor*. A few of them found shelter in relatives and friends or even in the Crown, as in the case of a favour granted by the Monarchs in 1501, in which Juan de Porras, treasurer of Vizcaya, was instructed to give the house he had taken in Granada to Leonor de Villalobos, as she was the widow of Lucas Manuel, who died serving as a guard, to help raise their son<sup>12</sup>. This is not the only case as there are others such as the cession also in 1501 to María Hernández, a widow, of a house built by her near the church of San Pedro<sup>13</sup>; and also, to another widow, Mencía de la Madrisa, a small house in the Alcazaba<sup>14</sup>.

The care and upbringing obviously depended fundamentally on the people who were responsible for the children, but also on having a roof over their heads and a minimum set of household goods to live under. It is an interrelated set that from the inside should create an emotional shelter where the child would be protected. In the will of a widow, Isabel Alderete, who was very ill, there is evidence of the anguish of leaving her children without a home and without care; there is great concern for her four children who would be orphaned when she died because the children's grandmother is older and might not be able to take care of them. The options left to her were few and while for the girls she begged that, being minors, maidens and honest, they should enter the convent of Santa Catalina de Siena, for the boys she asked that their estates be rented to support them<sup>15</sup>.

12. AGS, Cámara de Castilla (CCA), Cédulas (CED), 5, 334, 3.

13. AGS, CCA, CED, 5, 277, 3, f. 277.

14. AGS, CCA, CED, 5, 38, 1.

15. APAG, L-103-101, year 1544. Judicial decrees, inventories, accounts and partitions of the assets of Luis de Dehesa, deceased in the Indies and of his wife Isabel de Alderete, also deceased, among their minor children.

To have a house implied to be protected in some aspects and the truth is that during the XVI century women aspired to be able to leave a patrimony, both immovable and movable, to their children in order to help them survive. When they became widows, their role in charge of the children increased and the pressure and anguish grew, as the obligations that were previously shared in some aspects fell then solely on women who had to earn their living immersed in a society that was full of obstacles. It must not have been easy to be a mother in those circumstances, but as legal guardians of their children, many of them showed their tenacity and their ability to defend those assets. For example, between 1567 and 1568 a lawsuit is documented between a widow, María Jiménez, and her brother-in-law, Pero López Ligeró, for a part of the house and property that she defends as belonging to her children<sup>16</sup>. It is about a house in the Alhambra and some belongings that the grandparents of those minors had left when they died and that the said Pedro López Ligeró did not want to give them.

There are many different examples. For instance, Mariana de Torres, a very poor widow with children, lives in a house that needs many repairs and she cannot take care of them nor pay the ground rent and asks to transfer the said ground rent, also requesting in the same document to be guardian and curator of her children «for greater strength and validation of what she grants and other things that may be offered for the benefit of the said minors»<sup>17</sup>. Inés de Guzmán, neighbor of Granada, widow of the congregation of Santa Escolástica and for the good of herself and her children, as legal guardian of her six children and since they have some houses and an undivided *pro indiviso* store, she leases said goods for a period of eight years with the purpose of obtaining profitability to the real estate and to be able to support her children<sup>18</sup>. I could mention many other cases similar to this one that take place in the same year in the city of Granada, sometimes they ask to be freed of the ground rent of the house or they look for the best profitability, always in name and for the good of the minors, like those of María Avellaneda or

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16. APAG, L-221-13.

17. APAG, L-221-94-25, without date (16th century).

18. APNGR, G-30, ff. 305-306v, 1529, February, 8.



Francisca García, to name but a few<sup>19</sup>. All of them are widows with children and on behalf of them and for them, but also for themselves, they decide to administer and manage the assets in the way they understand best.

And they must not always have done it well. This is how it seems to be read in the claim that two siblings, Alonso de Peñuela and Isabel de Peñuela, children of Lope García de la Peñuela and Isabel de Estremera, issued on a part of the family house they had in Granada. Both were minors, so they made use of a guardian to represent them in the case. The father was dead but the mother was still alive<sup>20</sup>. There was a ground rent on the house and the minors maintained that they were poor because of this tribute and that the house was going to be seized because of this debt. The guardian of the minors alleged that by giving up their property, the minors were deceived and clearly wronged. The thing is that their father had died twenty-two years ago and these minors had an inheritance of eighty thousand *maravedis* that their mother should be in charge of managing as their guardian. This inheritance was to be given to the children by their mother, but as she had been losing everything and nothing was left, it was alleged that this part of the inheritance owed to them by their mother could be paid with the house so that it would not be lost. Who knows if it could be the case that mother and children were not at odds but that it was a legal strategy to try to safeguard the house and that at least it would remain in the hands of the children and would not be sold. The story did not have a happy ending and finally, children and mother were kicked out of the house.

In addition, in each of these houses there are small micro-stories of mothers wanting to bequeath their belongings. The documents show affectionate mothers because between the lines we can breathe affection with the expressions they use in their wills such as «my beloved daughter» or «for the affection I have for her». In others, there is a silence that can oscillate between having handled a cold formalism to testament or the distance of a relationship that not for being a mother had to be full of tenderness. A tense situation can be appreciated, for example, when Marina de Peñuela, widow of Cristóbal Valmeja, appointed mayor of Loja by the King, gives the dowry

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19. APNGR, G-30, ff. 466v-467v, 1529, August, 3.

20. Archivo Histórico Provincial de Granada (AHPGr, Sección fisco, 3164-1), 1523-1738.

to her daughter Inés Mejía; that dowry was retained because there was a lawsuit between mother, on the one hand, and daughter and son-in-law on the other hand; the text is formal, without a glimpse of affection, only lawsuits and appeals that led to part of the goods of this dowry being seized twice<sup>21</sup>.

## 6. CONCLUSIONS

Motherhood is a social fact and has its historicity, and through architecture we can study some of its variables and ways of understanding it. In the case studied we can find certain common patterns such as the use of architecture by some women to show their virtue for having been a mother, for having fulfilled the role they had been assigned. In others to promote their lineage and pass the baton that would have to be picked up by their sons and daughters, knowing that this memory would contribute to their social prestige even when they were already dead. But not all women lived and understood motherhood in this way, nor could they all be promoters of architecture, since for some of them, being widowed and with children, maintaining the house was a very difficult burden to bear. In this way, with a specific case study, we have been able to appreciate that there were mothers who were passive, others active; some who protected their sons and daughters, some who filed lawsuits against them; while others went out to claim their rights.

In short, my initial hypothesis, which posed motherhood as a mechanism of prestige for elite women, is corroborated not so much from the point of view of being considered as a loving mother of her children, but especially from the political point of view, in the sense that the birth of these children reinforced family alliances that began with marriage. The women we have studied from the 16th century made use of architecture to promote themselves as guardians and promoters of these lineages and wanted to be remembered for that, through their epitaphs and through the promotion of funerary chapels and main houses. Men also used architecture to show off their lineage through the exaltation of victories, feats and historical deeds. The feat of women, their heroic virtue, was to conceive children that would

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21. APNGR, G-30, ff. 564v-566v y 567r-569v, 1529, October, 20.

reinforce and perpetuate the union of lineages, preserving that memory through architecture.

## 7. REFERENCES

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«THE POWER OF MOTHERHOOD [...], FREE OF OBSTACLES, WILL AMPLY FULFIL ITS ETERNAL MISSION». <sup>1</sup> FEMINISM AND MOTHERHOOD IN THE EARLY 20TH CENTURY SPAIN

«LA FUERZA MATERNAL [...], LIBRE DE TRABAS, PODRÁ CUMPLIR CON AMPLITUD SU ETERNA MISIÓN». FEMINISMO Y MATERNIDAD A COMIENZOS DEL SIGLO XX EN ESPAÑA

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Abstract

Historical analysis carried out on feminism in early 20th-century Spain has emphasised its social nature. Similar to other feminisms of the time in Southern and Central Europe, Spanish feminism advocated women's social rights (education, equal pay, workers' protection) over suffrage, at least until the First World War. This article aims to contribute to the debate on social feminism from a notion of *the social* as the epistemological frame pervaded by social hygiene and social medicine, in which historical feminism and its demands could conform and deploy. With this analytical horizon in mind, the specific meaning with which motherhood was endowed at the

1. (Galindo, 1917, p. 2). Own translation. All primary source quotes have been translated by the author. This article has been written thanks to the Grant PGC2018-097232-B-C22 funded by MCIN/AEI/10.13039/501100011033 and by "ERDF A way of making Europe".

beginning of the 20<sup>th</sup> century is explored, not only as one of the core values of womanhood as understood by feminists but also as a nuclear argument articulating their demands for civil, social and political rights. In order to offer a contextualised depiction and hopefully a more accurate explanation of *social* feminism, different feminist voices will be heard through their writings, press articles and conferences. The major conclusions of this analysis points to the active role of motherhood in fashioning and presenting feminism as a social and national movement for reform and regeneration through women–mothers. Motherhood orientated feminist action and objectives towards women and children’s well-being and healthcare, and it was used to legitimate and demand civil and political rights. But defining women’s interests, demanding social rights, as well as including mother and child protection in their programmes, were not a natural tendency of women or feminists, but the product of a complex historical construction in which the new rationality of the social, pervaded by gender differences, generated a new space for intervention from different knowledges and practices

**Keywords:** historical feminism; Spain; motherhood; the social; hygiene; social reform

### Resumen

El análisis histórico sobre feminismo en España a comienzos del siglo XX ha puesto énfasis en su naturaleza social. Similar a otros feminismos del momento en el sur y el centro de Europa, el feminismo español defendió derechos sociales para las mujeres (educación, igualdad salarial, protección de las trabajadoras) antes que el sufragio, al menos hasta la Primera Guerra Mundial. Este artículo pretende contribuir al debate sobre el feminismo social desde una noción de *lo social* como un marco epistemológico impregnado por la medicina y la higiene social, en el cual el feminismo histórico y sus demandas pudieron configurarse y desplegarse. Con este horizonte teórico en mente, se explorará el significado histórico específico que se le confirió a la maternidad a comienzos del siglo XX, no solo como uno de los valores centrales de la feminidad, tal y como lo entendieron las feministas, sino también como un argumento nuclear que articuló sus demandas de derechos civiles, sociales y políticos. Las principales conclusiones de este análisis apuntan al papel activo de la maternidad en modelar y presentar el feminismo como un movimiento social y nacional para la reforma y la regeneración a través de las mujeres-madres. La maternidad guió la acción y los objetivos feministas dirigidos al bienestar y salud de mujeres y niños/as, y también sirvió para legitimar y pedir derechos civiles y políticos. Pero el hecho de definir los intereses de las mujeres, solicitar derechos civiles e incluir la protección de madres y niños en sus programas no fue resultado de una esencia feminista o femenina, sino el producto de una compleja construcción histórica en la que la nueva racionalidad de



lo social, imbuida de diferencias de género, hizo posible la emergencia de un nuevo espacio para la intervención desde diferentes conocimientos y prácticas.

**Palabras clave:** feminismo histórico; España, maternidad; *lo social*; higiene; reforma social

## 1. SOCIAL FEMINISM

This article examines motherhood as a changing discourse which shaped historical feminism and its claims in the specific context of early 20th-century Spain. Namely, I will explore how feminists understood motherhood throughout this period and how it functioned in their arguments about women's place in society, social reform, feminist *raison d'être*, vindications and women's rights. It should be noted that these understandings of motherhood and their place in feminist rhetoric, debates and practices were neither static nor natural, but the product of new discursive coordinates which enabled historical feminism to conform.

Consequently, my analysis aims to contribute to the understanding and explanation of historical feminism in early 20th-century Spain, drawing from the excellent work of scholars such as Mary Nash and Nerea Aresti. Since the publication in 1994 of Mary Nash's article on the subject, many contributions have underlined the vitality of feminist discussion in the early 20th century and the social nature of feminism in Spain (Aresti & Lloná, 2019, pp. 359–378). Following Karen Offen's proposal (1988; 2000) of considering Southern European feminisms as «relational feminism», Nash concluded that given the embeddedness of modern gender differences and the undermining of individual suffrage by a highly corrupt electoral system, Spanish feminism was more social, and feminists did not claim the vote until the First World War.

Moreover, historians have shown the centrality of motherhood in feminist claims for women's rights by different ideological strands (republicanism, socialism, Catholicism); it was also used as a mobilising resource until the Spanish Civil War (Aguado, 2010; Blasco, 2003; Moral, 2012; Ramos, 2019; Sanfeliú, 2008). Even anarchism, which challenged hegemonic pronatalist thought and defended women's rights over their bodies, and to sexual

and reproductive freedom, was embedded in the biological and moral regeneration of humanity that led them to assign women a reproductive role in social transformation and to underpin female nature as maternal (Andrés, 2020, p. 20). Discourse on women's social duties and rights rested on modern gender difference (the ontological existence of two completely different biological sexes in a complementary relationship) and reserved a central place for motherhood, which was at the very heart of feminist rhetoric of the time, also in Europe (Allen, 2005; Cova, 1997). As Miren Llona recently stated:

The reassertion of a positive female nature with particular qualities and reappraisal of motherhood assisted the emergence of a feminist movement that aimed to reform society, occupy the public sphere and gain political influence, though without attaining equality with men which entailed women integrating male features to their personality. (Llona, 2020, p. 25)<sup>2</sup>

That gender views around modern sexual difference were shared by every political culture from the Restoration to the Second Republic has been confirmed by Nerea Aresti in her assessment that from all of them emerged «the desire to renegotiate gender, an aspiration that might be described as feminist» (Aresti, 2015, p. 85). She also complicated the discussion on historical feminism by offering a discursive analysis of feminism, drawing from Michel Foucault's concept of «anchoring points for critique» and from Joan Scott's idea that feminists articulated (supported) their demands for equality on arguments based on gender difference (Aresti, 2015, pp. 86–87)<sup>3</sup>. As in other countries, feminists had «difficulty separating the demand for equality from the matter of the difference of sex» (Scott, 2018, pp. 107–108). Consequently, they could maintain that the mind has no sex, while defending matters relating to family, mothers, children and health as being specific female interests that should be represented nationally and on which they could speak and act because their experience as women qualified them to do

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2. Worthy of note are exceptions to these views during the 1920s and 30s, including those of the socialist María Cambrils and anarchists such as Lucía Sánchez Saornil. Carmen de Burgos also changed her opinion on the subject in 1926.
  3. As Scott put it: «feminists argued in the same breath for the irrelevance and the relevance of their sex, for the identity of all individuals and the difference of women. They refused to be women in the terms their society dictated, and at the same time they spoke in the name of those women» (1996, p. 11).

so. Some pushed the notion of male/female complementarity for the government, arguing that only women could bring balance, order and peace to the nation. Finally, Aresti has placed gender conceptualisation and models, and the emergence and development of feminism within the context of debate and controversy around the deployment of scientific knowledge, positivism and the displacement of religious views and explanations by the authoritative voice of medical profession (Aresti, 2001, pp. 17–65).

Although I agree with Nash, Llona, Aresti and others, I want to introduce a somewhat different approach. Besides validating the presence (and intertwined dynamic) of ideas on gender equality and difference (saturated by maternal traits) that articulate historical feminism in Spain, or describing feminists' involvement in social matters and social reform (women's education, mother and child care, and attention to the disadvantaged), I will explore why and how social feminism became possible. In my explanation, the rise of the social as a (gendered) domain is central to understanding the very conditions that enabled social feminism to emerge. In other words, social feminism was social because of the kind of demands it formulated and because it shaped, shared and fed a notion of society as a realm for intervention. Scholarship treats the social as a new knowledge domain consolidated during the second half of the 19th century as the result of a new set of rationalities (Cabrera Acosta, 2019; Cabrera Acosta & Santana, 2006; Donzelot, 1984; Poovey, 1994)<sup>4</sup>. Women became linked to the social domain, thereby affecting the way feminism was understood and how feminists formulated their claims for rights. For Denise Riley, the rise of the social offered a field for women's involvement between the public and private. It then opened the path to women's work helping other women (poor, working class and prostitutes), families and children (Riley, 1998, p. 108). In a similar vein as in other European countries, from 1900 to 1931, Spanish feminists of a different ideology accepted the importance of the social, as defined by reformers, though they approached its intervention and transformation in a variety

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4. This approach to the social (nominal rather than adjectival) is rooted in Foucauldian thought. It was linked to nascent disciplines such as psychology, public health, criminology, social medicine and anthropology and boosted a new governmentality based on intervention pervading families, the workplace, prisons and schools, as well as new forms of self-governance and subjectivities.

of sometimes competing ways. Subsequently, they participated as writers, teachers, and labour and education inspectors in social reform debates and policy, understanding feminism, at least partly, as a way of reforming/regenerating society. They collaborated in defining the meaning of social reform and in implementing social policy. In the 1990s, the debate around «maternalist women» by historians exploring the origins of gendered welfare in Europe and the United States led Koven and Michel to conclude, with others, that «maternalist women put an unmistakable stamp on emerging welfare administration» (Koven & Michel, 1990, pp. 1107; Bock & Thane, 1991)<sup>5</sup>. Although equating feminism and maternalism would be simplifying for the time, it is undeniable that many Spanish feminists relied on maternalist views and advocated maternalist politics.

Moreover, probably since its origins the social had been understood *scientifically* and had been pervaded, in particular, by medical and biological but also demographic, health and hygienic discourses. The social as a domain of intervention met social medicine and hygiene, as well as an increasing nation–state pride to provide a particular response to the impact of urbanisation, industrialisation and the free market (Vázquez, 2009, pp. 201–222). For that reason, almost every discussion around the *social question* related not only to economic and workers' affairs but also to hygiene and health. More specifically, the dissemination of theories on physical and moral human decline, such as degeneration theories (Campos, 1998), concerns about high mother and child mortality rates, and other health/social/moral dangers/diseases such as alcoholism, syphilis and prostitution, placed women as mothers at the centre of reformist discourse and policy (Accampo, 1995, pp. 7–9; Labanyi, 2011, pp. 75–116). All of them provided a particular and

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5. For a recent approach that invites a rethinking of maternalist politics, see Van der Klein, Plant, Sanders and Weintrob, 2012, pp. 1–21. Although it is an analytical concept (not used as such as historical subjects) and has been considered, following Jane Lewis, «a slippery concept» (1994, p. 120), Koven and Michel's definition is still used by historians: «Ideologies that exalted women's capacity to mother and applied to society as a whole the values they attached to that role: care, nurturance, and morality. Maternalism was the central and defining core of some women's vision of themselves and of politics» (1993, p. 4).

complex epistemological frame for reformulating the notion of motherhood and for the emergence of feminism itself.

Whereas social reform policy was infused by health and hygienic discourse, all policy was pervaded by modern notions of sexual difference, family, sexuality, class and morality. These notions were modified in the course of social reform implementation and debate, inasmuch as they all became public matters and the object of state legislation. Feminists complied with the context of the epistemological frameworks of social hygiene, eugenics and population concerns, the social question, the national crisis and health issues. They envisioned women and gender relations embedded in these imaginaries, along with their vindications. My contention is that outside this framework, feminism would have been something different to what it eventually became. The understanding of the social as a domain pervaded from the outset by the language of health and hygiene and fitted to the intervention of women, enabled and framed the articulation of feminist demands and the way they identified and were represented as feminists. This explains why discourse on social duties and rights was one of the principal grounds for demands for equality until the 1930s.

Following on from this rough summary of the broad theoretical coordinate outlining my analysis, I will disentangle the ways in which motherhood was defined, understood and changed, as well as how it worked in feminist writings and shaped feminisms from 1898 to 1931. Whereas medical and social reform, public hygiene and population debates framed feminist arguments and demands, feminists managed these references and contributed to formulating ideas on motherhood and social/hygiene reform, debates and practices. In the thirty years under scrutiny, I focus on two moments when feminist debate intensified: the *fin de siècle* crisis during which national identity was affected by the loss of the last overseas colonies and by criticism of the corrupt functioning of the liberal political system, leading to several national and social regeneration projects in which women became the subjects and objects of intervention; and the context of the First World War and its aftermath, the international background of the Restoration regime crisis and Primo de Rivera's dictatorship (1913–1931), during which regeneration projects had renewed visibility and feminist associations experienced a boost never before seen.

My analysis of feminist interventions (articles in the press, books and conferences) will examine three crucial ways in which motherhood featured in feminist writings, arguments and demands. All of them represented something new compared to the conception of motherhood held in the 19th century, although its roots in an enlightened liberal conception can be identified. First, although motherhood continued to be central to womanhood and women's experience, it was redefined and understood as a biological and social function of increasing national importance. Because of their capacity for mothering, women were designed as social regeneration subjects able to counteract the failure of men's management of the world. Moreover, the rhetoric and concern for hygiene in the face of increasing infant mortality and weakness underscored a reformulation of mothers as desirably aware, scientifically informed and medically advised. Lastly, motherhood became an argument through which to demand civil and political rights.

## 2. FEMINISM AS A SOCIAL REGENERATION MOVEMENT BY WOMEN AND MOTHERS

In Concepción Gimeno's eyes, because women and men were equal in intelligence and morality, both should have the same rights and duties. Gimeno asserted that «intelligence and heart have no sex, [...] rights and duties ought to be the same for everybody» (1908, p. 6). She understood that sexual difference in childhood was irrelevant and only increased from puberty due to the different ways of life led by men and women. Her assertion that the difference between men and women was not a meaningful argument for women's exclusion from rights and duties should be understood as a response to women's differences being judged as inferior, an evaluation already made through medical and scientific knowledge throughout the 20th century and which became radicalised with the spread of scientific positivism in the latter third of the century (Aresti, 2001, pp. 17–68).

These statements coexisted with claims for women's performance in a different role as educators of children given that «maternal love is more generous than all other love» or that «children need a mother's love» (Gimeno, 1900, p. 226). Because only mothers could inspire morality and virtue in children, children's education was seen as a mother's duty to society. Mothers

were especially suited, necessary and responsible for the moral standards of the future of the nation. In a sort of continuity with the old, enlightened discourse, Gimeno demanded instruction for women to become better mothers.<sup>6</sup> Concepción Arenal had already defended women's education so that society would benefit from the motherly qualities attributed to women based on a binary gender scheme and governed by the complementarity of functions (Arenal, 1892/2009; Aresti, 2010). Krausism, which influenced Arenal's ideas (for several years, she was the only author of the *Boletín de la ILE* (Journal of the Free Institution of Education), also managed and spread the same notions of gender differences that paved the way for the defence of women's education and the performance of differentiated social functions.

The novelty at the turn of the century was linked to the social regeneration and patriotic enhancement women as a group could accomplish as a result of their supposed natural condition as mothers and teachers. In Gimeno's appeal for social regeneration, a gendered evaluation of the past, a diagnosis of the present and a vision of the future led to the opening up of a space for women's action. For her, the world was divided into two sexes, and social life («civilisation») needed, and was the responsibility of, both of them. But she considered that because past male action had failed and had been wasted, women's yet unpolluted skills, energies and virtues were essential for social regeneration. In her view, society «needs lively, healthy forces and men's are worn down: a woman's spirit is young because it has not been burdened by the weight of past civilisations [...] and it is not eroded by scepticism» (Gimeno, 1908, p. 27).

The main obstacle for harnessing these unwasted energies was the loss of the current female contribution because womanhood was superficial, unenlightened and obedient, and therefore socially unaware. Her call for «teaming women up for national life» derived from this deeply gendered analysis (Gimeno, 1903, p. 35). Society became an entity imagined by feminists like Gimeno as a space for regeneration by women. First, they would educate children at home before becoming involved in social action and in what came to be known as women's interests and needs. In fact, the presentation

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6. As Accampo suggests, following Joan Landes' exploration of republican motherhood and its legacy to politicians of the Third Republic in France (1995, pp. 12–13).

of society as the domain for women’s action both inside and outside the home was underpinned as a result of the national crisis unleashed by the loss of the last overseas colonies in 1898 (Blasco, 2017, pp. 106–109; 2018, pp. 109–110). Her reference to the «last disaster» was suffused with mentions of «irreparable decline» or «deterioration of race» (Gimeno, 1908, p. 11), which could be explained by the impact of social Darwinism and degeneration theories in Spain (Campos, 1998). This analysis also spread a view of society as an organism (organicism) that required (gendered) attention and care (Accampo, 1995). In the process of locating women (always regarded as potential mothers) in a social field of intervention and responsibility, motherhood was reformulated. Gimeno described the task as multidimensional, involving interwoven physical, moral and intellectual qualities, which could only be carried out by women/mothers.

Therefore, taking care of different aspects of the social realm considered as social problems motivated (middle-class) women to invest their unwasted energy and motherly sensitivities in social reform. For Gimeno, modern woman (implicitly and initially middle class and educated) was an apostle reborn. She was inspired by redeeming ideas, the driving force behind institutions for humanity and a moraliser of individuals through anti-alcohol and temperance campaigns, anti-pornography and anti-prostitution initiatives, and protests against duels and the war, reminiscent of 19th-century women’s movement in other countries, such as the UK or the USA, which Gimeno knew and followed. Modern woman should base her generous moral action on the study of the needs of women workers and the injustices of which they were victims (Gimeno, 1908, p. 8). Feminist social reform discourse retained a strong moral (and individualistic) component as part of the diagnosis and resolution of social problems. But attention to women workers helped shape a group whose special and diverse needs and interests (deriving from their potential maternity) would receive the attention of female social reformers.

In a similar vein, Carmen de Burgos was concerned about protecting women workers as mothers. In *La mujer en España* (1906), she opposed women’s work in an ideal world in which women/mothers stayed at home. She believed that a married woman’s work should always be to help the family and not be detrimental to her duties as a mother (Burgos, 1906, p. 21). But, because the employment of women was inevitable, she called for



laws to protect working mothers, especially unmarried mothers (given the high rate of infant mortality of illegitimate children and infanticides), and paternity investigation. Her concerns about women’s welfare filtered through this vision of the sexual division of labour led her to investigate and suggest, following other countries’ legislation, maternity leave for women workers. In *Misión social de la mujer*, the publication of a conference given by De Burgos in Bilbao in 1910, she stated that the «well-being and education of a woman [...] is the best factor for enhancement», because when «educated, we will be able to fight against tuberculosis and alcoholism. The patient task of every mother will shape the spirit of future generations» (Burgos, 1910, p. 7). Like Gimeno, De Burgos conflated women and mothers, their task being educating children and solving social problems as part of their womanly and motherly qualities<sup>7</sup>.

These arguments were still in place in 1914, during discussions at the Athenaeum of Madrid (Ateneo de Madrid, an important cultural institution of the time) around the «feminist problem»<sup>8</sup>. Recognising the value of women in the social order, that is, their involvement in the same way as men in every aspect of life, was what Julia Peguero, one of the founders of the Spanish Women’s Association (*Asociación Nacional de Mujeres Españolas*—ANME, 1918), understood as feminism<sup>9</sup>. Women were considered equal to men (if they received a proper education, they would have the same understanding) and should fight against inferiority, but without losing their delicate nature in the process. In fact, the difference stemmed from their «exquisite sensitivity», the source of their contribution to a better society, and to the

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7. At that time De Burgos rejected «feminism which tends to make a woman masculine», and her defence of equality was under the condition of not diminishing womanhood or fighting for freedom, dignification of «our sex», a feminism compatible with household duties. But by 1927 she had become critical, heaping praise on the motherly role which she now viewed as a mechanism «to encourage women, by piquing their vanity, not to refuse to perpetuate the species» (Burgos, 1927/2007, p. 219).

8. For women’s involvement at the Ateneo of Madrid, see Ezama, 2018.

9. By 1920, ANME was composed of a president: María Espinosa de los Monteros; vice-president: Dolores Velasco de Alamán; general secretary: Julia Peguero de Trallero; vice-secretary: Luisa Salina de Gorostidi; treasurer: Ana Picar; book-keeper: Benita Asas Manterola; and board members: María Valero de Mazas, Isabel Oyarzábal de Palencia, María Martos de Baeza, Pilar Gutiérrez, Julia Pérez Baza, Natividad Albertos, Emilia Pastor and Isabel Alda.

refinement and improvement of humanity (Peguero, 1914, p. 5). Reproducing the conference given by Julia Peguero, then secretary of ANME, the press underlined her belief in an «enlightened woman». A woman who could be expected to support social regeneration, by exerting a direct and positive influence on humanity, previously not possible because of her state of submission and general ignorance. The influence of women who lacked culture and freedom was sterile and harmful (La mujer en el Ateneo, 1922, p. 2). Society and the family were envisioned as connected spaces for feminist intervention. In fact, Peguero understood feminism not as the cause of the crisis of the family or household (the result of immorality and egoism), but as a mechanism for regeneration:

A natural manager and mother, the woman will bring practical rules to public life through her involvement in state matters, by breaking with old norms and procedures, and transforming official life in the simplest and most rational way. Her energy, equal to a man's, will bring society the well-being in which it is of such need (La mujer en el Ateneo, 1922, p. 2).

ANME's programme reveals how various discourses were combined to model a specific notion of women's' interests. Claims for civil and political rights to overcome inferiority and exclusion cohabited with the drive to contribute as mothers. Once those rights were given, that drive was directed at keeping the peace and, through education (also as mothers), at moralising a disorientated society. An expression of this was the three-fold definition of feminism provided by the organisation (it was then important for them to establish a concrete definition): redemption from inferiority established by law and customs; the perfection of society; and the elevation of humanity. It was hoped that the political and social intervention of women, given that the moral education of children was in their hands, would lead to laws that would moralise men (Espinosa, 1920, p. 10). Subsequent analysis will examine how rights were claimed in order to put an end to inferiority and to enable women to better accomplish their role as mothers.

The socialist Margarita Nelken, who was very critical of conventional morality infused by religious values, shared with *neutral* feminists the idea that women should devote themselves to solving (or alleviating) women's social problems, including childcare, women workers' protection, maternity care and the abolition of prostitution. Her difference with them rested upon

her emphasis on the inadequate and insufficient training for public, social and political activities of women and her critical stance on a charity informed by Catholicism, which lacked *social sense* and featured condescending paternalism. Her proposal was to organise labour in order to provide freedom for women. As we will see, social sense and responsibility were central to her understanding of women as political subjects and for legitimating political rights. They implied an awareness of the social situation, (technical) knowledge and responsibility, the same qualities required for being a proper rather than a thoughtless mother, as we will see later.

### 3. CONSCIOUS MOTHERHOOD AND CHILDREN’S HEALTH

Social reform and health issues (embedded in a discourse on hygiene) increasingly infused feminist rhetoric, thereby affecting women’s understanding of motherhood. They were not immune to a context where, as Mary Nash showed, «doctors intervened significantly in the dissemination of a modernised gender discourse based on the reconceptualisation of motherhood as women’s social duty» (Nash, 1999, p. 33). One of the major concerns of doctors, social reformers and also feminists (influenced by studies on population and the spread of statistical techniques and quantitative data as representative of scientific and objective truths) was infant mortality rates. Infant mortality was approached through the lens of national backwardness and slow progress, which led to the conclusion that in Spain it was higher than in other civilised countries. Whereas in France emphasis was placed on decreasing fertility rates invoking the ghost of depopulation and national decline, in Spain fertility rates were not of special concern until the expansion of neo-Malthusianism (equated to birth control), which was considered to have triggered the fall in birth rates in the 1920s (Offen, 1984).

Increasing concerns about infant mortality and the urgent need for medical guidance to confront it led Gimeno to reformulate motherhood by validating doctors’ diagnoses on the causes of infant mortality and training mothers in health knowledge and practices. Notions of health, guided by doctors, were recommended for mothers to improve their maternal skills:

In order to apply the triple aspects of maternity—physical, moral and intellectual—woman should be enlightened; she shapes the child’s psyche more

than the father. An educated woman who understands hygiene, the basis of disease prevention, will know how to make children stronger. When they fall ill, she could be an important doctor's auxiliary, reporting on the aetiology of the disease. I have heard several doctors remark that one of the most important causes of infant mortality is the ignorance of women (Gimeno, 1903, p. 32).

Attention to children's health and to women's and mothers' training in health and hygiene at home (particularly for children) was spread through different initiatives driven by feminists such as the republican Violeta (the pseudonym of Consuelo Álvarez). In late 1906, she wrote a section in the daily newspaper *El País* («Carnet femenino. Observaciones a las madres») on practical advice for mothers on nutritious food for all ages, emphasising the importance of sport and exercise for strong, healthy children. Violeta understood the vital significance of this maternal task, given that healthy adults would be the first step towards the regeneration of Spain. She recommended training at the school for mothers of the Centro Iberoamericano de Cultura Popular Femenina, directed by the Marquise of Ayerbe (María Vinyals, later María de Lluria) since 1905. This centre prepared women to become better mothers and to have access to a profession and economic emancipation (Ezama, 2015). The dilemma mothers/workers was irrelevant, since economic independence was considered necessary for a balanced and equal relationship at home, which would provide a good setting for adequate childrearing.

Doctors such as Manuel Tolosa Latour collaborated with the Centro Iberoamericano. *El Pensamiento Femenino* reviewed a lecture by Tolosa in which he defined social maternity, claiming that «in her pilgrimage in the world, a woman doesn't always create a family or inevitably have children; but her maternal instinct makes her inspire initiatives wherever she goes» (*La dinámica del hogar*, 1914, p. 5). For him, a constant reminder to women of their role as mothers should be bolstered by financial independence and the right to maternity protection (Barbero, 2014, pp. 38–41). Female teachers and pedagogues shared this view of social feminism, influenced by the rhetoric of hygiene and mother/child protection, collaborated in implementing social reform policy and took an active part in child protection/health campaigns. For example, Encarnación de la Rigada, co-founder of the Centro Iberoamericano and promoter of the Escuela de Madres de Familia worked as

a member of the Sociedad Española de Higiene for the approval (1904) of an Infancy Protection Law drawn up by Tolosa Latour<sup>10</sup>. As vice-president of the Women’s Popular Hygiene Committee (*Comité femenino de Higiene Popular*), María Encarnación de la Rigada aimed to spread and improve hygiene practices. She was an enthusiastic campaigner against infant mortality (resulting from mothers’ ignorance, but also poverty) and for childcare training for mothers (Cabrera Pérez, 2019, p. 3). In 1919, a good friend of María de Lluria’s, Margarita Nelken, founded the Casa de los Niños in Madrid, as a day-nursery for workers’ children aged one to five years and also offering activities to older children (library, gym, singing, gardening, etc.) (Por la Casa de los Niños, 1919, p. 15).

After the First World War, some of the best known feminists featuring in public discussion in the press and at cultural venues such as the Athenæum of Madrid continued the discourse and practice of social/health reform, and supported and fostered institutional initiatives on the matter. Beatriz Galindo (the pseudonym of Isabel Oyarzábal) praised the mayor of Madrid, José Francos Rodríguez, for promoting a course on maternology and childcare. In his prologue to the book *Primera escuela de maternología*, a collection of lectures given to mothers and daughters, and pupils at local and national schools by Doctor Luis Heredero (assistant manager of the Institución Municipal de Puericultura, Municipal Institution for Childcare), Francos Rodríguez provided reliable and eloquent figures on infant mortality (40% of children died before the age of five; of them, 20% through lack of food). For this reason, multiplying *Gotas de Leche* and childcare tasks and training was strongly recommended<sup>11</sup>. Rodríguez campaigned for the nationwide institutionalisation of schools of maternology «to teach and protect Spanish mothers to defend their children’s lives, the nation’s children»

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10. The *Comité* was first (1911) led by Sofía Casanova, who was followed by Doctor Concepción Alexandre and later Milagros Sanchís, Manuel Tolosa’s sister-in-law. Because they are already well known, we will not focus on the tensions (between acceptance and contention, according to case) that Gregorio Marañón’s ideas stirred up among feminists, particularly those concerning *Tres ensayos sobre la vida sexual* [*Three essays on sexual life*](1926). (Aresti, 2001, pp. 235-248).

11. *Gotas de Leche* were establishments founded in the late 19th century based on the French model to reduce high infant mortality rates and malnutrition.

(Francos Rodríguez, 1920, p. 10). Galindo shared this view, declaring that the only way to stop that «horrible plague causing destruction and death that daily plucked from hundreds of Spanish homes the happiness that should have been the future prosperity and strength of the homeland» (Galindo, 1918a, p. 3) was by spreading precepts of hygiene for children unknown by most of the population. In line with reformers' findings, she detected the main cause of the plague of infant mortality (higher in Spain than in other «civilised countries») in the ignorance of mothers (Galindo, 1918a, p. 3)<sup>12</sup>.

Nelken envisioned girls receiving sensible training about the female condition, particularly with regard to their future mission of motherhood. She agreed with her colleague, Eduardo Andicoberry, who declared in the newspaper *Diario de La Coruña* (as cited by Nelken, 1919b, p. 5) that feminists should focus on teaching women to be mothers. And she pinpointed the defence of the rights of mothers and children as the first feminist challenge. She understood maternology as a way of facing the ignorance and embarrassment about women's bodies deriving from the leverage exerted by Catholicism over morals, childhood education and charities. In her view, maternology should be institutionalised in Spain in the same way as in France or Germany under the guidance of sociologists and doctors. Girls would be trained naturally and scientifically about their future role as mothers. Equipping them with knowledge about pregnancy would subsequently lead to knowledge about their bodies (Nelken, 1919b, p. 5)<sup>13</sup>.

Discussion on feminism held at the Athenæum of Madrid at the end of the First World War was embedded in social reformist and health concerns, for which motherhood and women's social action were fundamental. Although various feminists had diagnosed the problem of the lack of social sense (one symptom was the poor functioning of charitable institutions) of Spanish women in comparison to other European women, some considered

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12. For Matilde Eiroa, Oyarzábal's proposal was «a sort of politicised motherhood in which mother was an educator and an agent for socialisation and engagement of their children in society» (2017, p. 369).

13. This article was reproduced, in addition to her lectures given at the Paediatrics Society of Madrid supported by Manuel Tolosa Latour, in the chapter «Maternología y Puericultura» of her famous and controversial book, *La condición social de la mujer en España*.

this absence to be the main obstacle to Spanish women’s suffrage. In addition to her open critique of Catholic charitable institutions as anachronistic, paternalistic and obsessed with imposing Catholic dogma and morals, Nelken established an implicit link between modern social duties and political rights. In her opinion, in Spain women could not ask men to imitate their European counterparts by considering women who display high social sense to be worthy of being their fellows, «women who have fulfilled the duties imposed by social sense» (Nelken, 928, p. 4). María de Lluria (María Vinyals) was more explicit when stating that most women were in «a state of unfortunate ignorance not only of their rights but also of their duties» (Lluria, 1918, p. 4).

Social sense was an ambiguous concept when applied to women, since it could relate to their duties as mothers as much as women’s/feminist social duties and engagement in modern social and hygiene reform. In her review of the conference given by her good friend Margarita Nelken at the Ateneo in 1918, De Lluria supposed a natural continuity of both obligations when she wrote:

Spanish woman has neither social sense, nor understanding of her enormous responsibility in the future of the race. Woman is mother twice over, as a procreant and educator, and in both cases her children’s health depends upon her efforts; then, she must study everything related to improving the human species and keep abreast of every advancement. (Lluria, 1918, p. 4)

Social action and motherhood were connected inasmuch as motherhood was conceived as the (major) social contribution of women. Social awareness and responsible motherhood appeared then as interrelated and deeply connected fields. Nelken and De Lluria maintained that only a cultivated minority of women escaped backwardness and ignorance, afflictions affecting the majority, composed on the one hand by high society ladies and on the other by the working masses who lived in ignorance (Nelken, 1919a, p. 3). This classification was framed and appraised against a European model that Spain should ideally work towards, abandoning prejudice, ignorance and superstition (Lluria, 1918, p. 4). Unenlightened, irresponsible and unaware motherhood—as well as social and charitable action—was contrasted with responsible, aware and conscious motherly agency. As other historians have already pointed out, throughout the 20th century diverse public voices

(doctors, pedagogues, hygienists) evolved a discourse on guilty and ignorant motherhood, which was mostly associated with the lower and upper classes (Palacio, 2003). Feminists were influenced by it and were involved in shaping it by differentiating between conscious/unconscious motherhood, simultaneously structured by other binaries such as animal/human and biology/culture. As María Martínez Sierra explained, despite her understanding that the social significance of motherhood fitted with biological evolution,

Voluntary and conscious motherhood, desired and perfect; motherhood that not only gives birth to a child, but raises, educates and prepares that child for a full, useful and happy life, is a glorious task and mission without equal; but ignorant maternity, imposed by chance or by circumstance, without responsibility, without an educational function, without a progressive ideal, does not distinguish between [...] the merely physical maternity of animal species (Martínez Sierra, 1916/2003 , pp. 47–48).

#### 4. MOTHERS' DUTIES AND WOMEN'S RIGHTS

Motherhood was linked to social duties and social reform, as well as to women's rights. In fact, one of the strongest arguments brandished by many feminists for demanding civil and political rights was that the *vocation* or mission of motherhood entailed duties that could only be properly accomplished when some rights were given<sup>14</sup>. That became one of the main arguments for demanding equal rights in the household as a condition for a good education for children, alongside a liberal view on the family, as a contract of equals, as well as an important unit for social life. In 1911, Carmen de Burgos presented herself (rejecting the perception of others) as an advocate of family and marriage:

The sanctity of the union of two beings who will create a home means so much to me that I wish nothing other than that they be joined together for love and mutual esteem. A marriage that would not enslave people but would join their souls. This is why women should be independent, with no

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14. Several decades ago, Temma Kaplan (1990) had already pinpointed the focal nature of the claims for rights rooted in hegemonic gender expectations, based on the exercise of rights as mothers and caregivers, in the popular protests of the early 20th century.



need to marry out of necessity. They should have the right to choose and be aware of their actions (Burgos, 1911, p. 17).

In other words, women were born to build family and home, and for motherhood. However, if the home were to be happy, equal sovereignty was required for both parents (in economic and educational matters). Overcoming inequality inside marriage was a requirement for a better family and better mothering. Previous enlightened and liberal discourses emphasising women's education appeared to be inadequate, in the new framework of social and health reform, if mothers/women were to perform their now social mission. Feminists demanded equal rights and economic independence, as illustrated in ANME's programme. ANME member María Valero de Mazas put it clearly when answering Diego María Crehuet's lecture against feminism given at the Royal Academy of Jurisprudence and Legislation (Real Academia de Jurisprudencia y Legislación) in February 1920. She defended civil and penal code reforms to place women in a situation of equal rights and duties at home, which would allow them to fulfil their mission with dignity and efficiency (*Charla por las mujeres y para los hombres*, 1920, p. 10). Instead of Crehuet's conception of feminism as the dissolution of the home (*En la Academia de Jurisprudencia*, 1920, p. 2), Valero envisioned it as a way of regenerating the family.

In a context featuring the new social (and national) significance of children and their health, the family also became a space for intervention and change. The liberal ideal of the self-regulated and self-controlled family, imagined by liberal social reformers as being central to social order (Burguera, 2012, p. 131), went into crisis. As Jo Labanyi (2011 p. 116) has asserted, following Jacques Donzelot's approach, in the late 19th century, the family became a space that required reform (by doctors, sociologists, hygienists, etc.). Some feminists shared this image of the family as the backbone of a society in need of change and improvement through the balancing of the duties and rights of both sexes. Mariucha's (Dolores Velasco de Alamán) article, «Maternidad», published in *El Pensamiento Femenino* in July 1914, staked an important claim for educating men to perform their duties as fathers, in addition to calling for women's rights so that they could accomplish their duties. Underpinning this view was a diagnosis of a society, along with the family, damaged by disasters arising from a disorganised and essentially

male civilisation. The key for a more balanced family life, and fertile and healthier parents, to attain peace and counter the culture of war to which men had led humanity resided in giving rights to women. Sweden was cited as an example. This happiest of countries had no wars, hatred or fighting because the spirits of both sexes were united: neither prevailed over the other (Mariucha, 1914, p. 4).

María Martínez Sierra was aware of the tensions that motherhood could arouse and its importance for the feminist question. Motherhood could be interpreted as a reason for denying rights for women (an old conservative discourse), but Martínez Sierra explained it more clearly from a feminist angle:

A statement that antifeminists use as a supreme argument: ‘The only career for a woman is marriage. A woman must be wife and mother’.

A feminist statement proclaimed by a distinguished woman in an American journal for women: ‘The true heart of female current affairs is raising and educating children, and making a home for them’ (Martínez Sierra, 1917, p. 101).

Departing from a notion of motherhood as the highest obligation and mission, the responsibility for the continuation of the species/humanity («Woman has the future of the species in her hands»), she reflected on the duties involving this «vocation» and the rights needed to adequately fulfil it (Martínez Sierra, 1917, pp. 102–103)<sup>15</sup>. Those rights were the logical legal outcome of applying a liberal (and hygienic) notion of subject to mothers: education and culture, *patria potestas*, health, authority, responsibility, freedom, culture and independence were required to properly accomplish their duties as mothers (Martínez Sierra, 1917, p. 102). In other words, woman was born for home, motherhood and family. However, a happy and socially useful household required equal rights for men and women; equality laws were demanded to improve the family and humanity.

The primary civil right called for by Beatriz Galindo (1918b), was the legal personality of married women, necessarily accompanied by paternal

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15. Alda Blanco affirms that with *Nuevas cartas a las mujeres de España* (1932), María Lejárraga moderated her essentialism and sexual difference, and with them the idea that women’s contribution to society had a different quality and that rights were to be gained to better accomplish it (2009, p. 75).

responsibility (through paternity testing). She applauded a reform of the civil code in Argentina worthy of imitation as the path to creating the conditions for women to better accomplish their mission and for the biological improvement of the population, children especially: «How much misfortune would be avoided if projects such as this one took hold in every country! How much stronger and more vigorous would certain elements of the race become [...]! A good woman, of maternal feelings [...], would have the chance to fulfil her mission» (Galindo, 1918b, p. 6). As for political rights, women’s suffrage was conceived as a way to support men who were engaged in dealing with women’s interests, that is, the necessities of «those two big forces of nation which until now have been subjected to many others less important: woman, as effective or probable mother, and child, hope of the future» (Galindo, 1917, p. 2). In practice, what was understood as women’s interests involved their health and their children’s well-being. Through the vote, women were then expected to support politicians who introduced measures such as legislating work at home, protecting women’s work in factories, launching state relief for pregnant and breastfeeding women, and legislating equal pay. Moreover, political rights were requested for the moral improvement of humanity, given the underused potential of women as mothers and in domestic roles (Martínez Sierra, 1917, p. 304).

## 5. CONCLUSION

Historical scholarship has demonstrated that motherhood was central to shaping Spanish feminism and its demands in the early 20th century. This paper examines how motherhood was an inherent part of feminist rhetoric. It had an active role in fashioning and presenting feminism as a social and national movement for reform and regeneration through women–mothers. Motherhood orientated feminist action and objectives towards women and children’s well-being and healthcare, and it was used to legitimate and demand civil and political rights. The reason for the centrality of motherhood, and its contents and workings, was not a natural inclination of feminists (or of women) towards childcare, nor the existence of timeless and fixed *women’s interests*. Defining women’s’ interests, demanding social rights,

as well as including mother and child protection in their programmes, were the product of a complex historical construction.

In order to disentangle this construction here, we have suggested the usefulness of understanding social feminism as a movement in defence of social demands resulting from its emergence within a nascent rationality that was critical of liberal individualism. From the outset, as a new space for intervention from different knowledges and practices, state legislation included, the social was pervaded by gender differences as understood by liberal-modern ideas and by the deployment of social medicine and hygiene (and the concerns with biologically healthy bodies). At the beginning of the 20th century, feminists argued and acted within those discourses of social hygiene and reform. Through them, it was possible to outline the pressing problem of rising infant mortality, whose consequences were so disastrous for national health and whose resolution was mostly dependent on the responsibility and (hygiene) instruction of women. Through them, feminists took part in a reformulation of motherhood as a social mission and the responsibility for the biological reproduction of (quality) human beings. Once conceived that way, a reformulated motherhood not only became central to female identity understood as irreconcilably different and complementary to male identity, but a primary argument to uphold women's social and political rights. Lastly, this complex discursive frame made it possible for feminists to collaborate (informally and through various channels such as private initiatives, women's and general press, lectures and associations, and through debates around the feminist question) in shaping a gendered arguments and practices of social reform.

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# REPRESENTATIONS OF MOTHERHOOD IN LATE FRANCOIST SPAIN: FROM CATHOLIC DISCOURSES TO EARLY FEMINIST CRITIQUES<sup>1</sup>

## 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 penance<sup>2</sup>. 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

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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 20<sup>th</sup> 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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# ¿QUÉ FUE DEL NIÑO DORMIDO? CONSECUENCIAS DE LA REDUCCIÓN DE LOS PLAZOS MÁXIMOS DE DURACIÓN DEL EMBARAZO EN LA JURISPRUDENCIA Y LA LEGISLACIÓN ISLÁMICAS CONTEMPORÁNEAS

## WHAT IS LEFT OF THE *DORMANT EMBRYO*? THE SHORTENING OF THE MAXIMUM DURATION OF PREGNANCY IN CONTEMPORARY ISLAMIC JURISPRUDENCE AND LEGISLATION, AND ITS CONSEQUENCES

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### Resumen

Este artículo toma como punto de partida resultados obtenidos en dos trabajos previos publicados en revistas especializadas del ámbito de la islamología y de los estudios de género e islam (Serrano-Ruano, 2018, 2022). El principal argumento del artículo es que una incorporación parcial y sesgada del conocimiento científico moderno sobre embriología, ginecología y genética por parte de los sistemas legales islámicos contemporáneos, al tiempo que se mantiene en ellos la penalización de las relaciones extra-matrimoniales (*zinā*), ha acrecentado la vulnerabilidad de determinados grupos de personas como las madres solteras y sus hijos, o las mujeres que se quedan embarazadas tras enviudar, ser repudiadas o ser abandonadas por sus maridos. Mientras tanto, el registro escrito parece indicar que con anterioridad al siglo XX, la admisión de duraciones del embarazo muy prolongadas —recogidas en

la doctrina del *niño dormido*— fue bastante efectiva para proteger a las mujeres en la situación descrita anteriormente contra una acusación de *zinā* e impedir que sus hijos fueran considerados ilegítimos y privados de todo tipo de derechos.

Para desarrollar este argumento, en primer lugar, se pasa revista a la jurisprudencia islámica clásica, así como a la legislación y a la práctica judicial de una serie de países de mayoría islámica acerca de la duración legal del embarazo y la filiación paterna. A continuación, se analiza el impacto social y jurídico que la genética y la medicina modernas están teniendo en el tratamiento de estas cuestiones.

En última instancia el trabajo aspira a traspasar los límites estrictos de la islamología y de los estudios de género e islam, y facilitar la recepción de sus resultados entre especialistas procedentes de otras disciplinas y sin capacidad para leer fuentes primarias o bibliografía en árabe.

**Palabras clave:** niño dormido; Magreb; malikismo; filiación; pruebas de ADN; sexo ilícito; *zinā*

### Abstract

This article takes as its starting point the results obtained in two previous works published in specialized journals in the field of Islamic and gender studies (Serrano-Ruano, 2018, 2022). The main argument of the article is that in contemporary Islamic legal systems, a partial and biased incorporation of modern scientific knowledge on embryology, gynecology and genetics on the one hand while maintaining the criminalization of extra-marital relations (*zinā*), on the other, has led to increased vulnerability of certain groups of people such as single mothers and their children, or women who become pregnant after being widowed, divorced or abandoned by their husbands. Meanwhile, the written record seems to indicate that prior to the 20th century, the admission of extremely long pregnancy durations —encapsulated in the doctrine of the *dormant embryo*— was quite effective in protecting women in the situation described above against a charge of *zinā* and prevented that their children were considered illegitimate and deprived of all kinds of rights.

To develop this argument, we first review classical Islamic jurisprudence as well as the legislation and judicial practice of a number of Islamic-majority countries, on the legal duration of pregnancy and paternal filiation. Next, we go on to analyze the social and legal impact that modern genetics and medicine are having on these issues.

Ultimately, the work aims to go beyond the strict limits of Islamic studies and facilitate the reception of its results among specialists in gender studies from other disciplines lacking the necessary skills to read Arabic primary and secondary sources.

**Keywords:** sleeping child; *dormant embryo*; Maghreb; Maliki legal school; paternal filiation; DNA testing; unlawful sex; *zinā*



## 1. INTRODUCCIÓN

Este artículo toma como punto de partida los resultados obtenidos en dos trabajos previos publicados en revistas especializadas del ámbito de la islamología y de los estudios de género e islam (Serrano-Ruano, 2018, 2022). Dichos trabajos se refieren a las opiniones de juristas musulmanes medievales y contemporáneos sobre la duración legal del embarazo, las cuales, aunque referidas a contextos espacio temporales concretos, son exportables a contextos más amplios. En las líneas que siguen, replanteo las cuestiones allí abordadas, deteniéndome en la doctrina del *niño dormido* a la que entonces solo aludía de pasada. Mi objetivo es difundir los resultados de dichos trabajos entre un público no especializado en los estudios árabes e islámicos y sin capacidad para leer fuentes primarias o bibliografía en árabe, contribuyendo así al intercambio entre investigadores que se interesan por las cuestiones de género desde distintos ámbitos disciplinares. Mi intención no es repetir aquí los resultados obtenidos en dichos trabajos, sino mostrar la manera en que los estudios árabes e islámicos, y más concretamente los dedicados a cuestiones legales relativas a las relaciones sexuales, a la gestación y al alumbramiento, cuando las discuten juristas musulmanes tanto medievales como contemporáneos, se prestan a una visión más multidisciplinar y contribuyen a los estudios de género. En ambos trabajos analizo las opiniones de una serie de expertos contemporáneos en jurisprudencia islámica (*fiqh*) sobre dos temas, respectivamente: 1) la manera en que la posibilidad de demostrar la paternidad biológica de un niño mediante una prueba de ADN está afectando a la cuestión de la filiación legal en tres niveles: jurisprudencia islámica clásica, legislación y práctica judicial de países de mayoría islámica; 2) visiones contemporáneas acerca de la duración legal del embarazo y de la necesidad —o no— de adaptarla a los criterios de la medicina moderna<sup>1</sup>. Los resultados de

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1. La lista de expertos consultados incluye a Albar (1986), Āl Šayj (2010), Am`īza (2005-2006), al-Gāmidī (2009), al-Hāy`y (2012) y al-Nūr (2007). Los dos trabajos citados al principio de esta nota recogen resultados de mi participación en el proyecto de investigación «Structure of the Nuclear Family in the Wake of Genetic and Reproductive Technologies», dirigido por Ayman Shabana y financiado por el Qatar National Research Fund perteneciente a la Qatar Foundation, ref. [NRP8-1478-6-053]. La selección de estas fuentes procede, precisamente, de la base de datos elaborada en el marco de ediciones previas de dicho proyecto (Serrano-Ruano, 2018).

ambos trabajos se insertan en una línea de investigación sobre género, familia y derecho penal islámico que vengo desarrollando desde hace ya más de una década y dentro de la cual he prestado especial atención a los denominados *delitos sexuales* (Serrano-Ruano, 2005, 2007, 2009, 2017, 2018, 2022).

He estructurado el artículo en varias secciones y subsecciones cuyos epígrafes considero son suficientemente claros respecto al orden seguido a la hora de plantear las distintas cuestiones y sobre sus contenidos.

## 2. EL NIÑO DORMIDO: UNA CREENCIA INCORPORADA A LA DOCTRINA LEGAL ISLÁMICA (FIQH) CLÁSICA

La expresión *niño dormido* (en árabe *rāqid*)<sup>2</sup> se corresponde con una creencia ampliamente difundida en sociedades islámicas premodernas<sup>3</sup> pero también contemporáneas, según la cual el feto puede permanecer un tiempo indefinido en el seno de su madre antes de nacer. Como es obvio, esta creencia contempla períodos de gestación extraordinariamente amplios y cuestiona el máximo de nueve meses establecido por la medicina moderna, pero también los conocimientos sobre embriología alcanzados en el seno de la medicina de tradición greco-islámica.

Según esta noción, el feto puede *dormirse* en el útero materno y permanecer en ese estado durante un período indefinido de tiempo hasta que se despierta a consecuencia de un trauma acaecido a la madre de forma repentina, del retorno de su sangre menstrual o por mantener relaciones sexuales. Entonces puede que se produzca el alumbramiento o que el feto

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2. En francés *enfant endormi*; en inglés, *dormant embryo* o *sleeping fetus*; en alemán, *Schlafende Schwangerschaft*. Puesto que el tema ha dado lugar a una abundante bibliografía, resulta útil tener en cuenta estas otras expresiones para localizarla. Mi intención no es proporcionar aquí una lista exhaustiva de estudios relevantes, ni siquiera la de hacer un balance de sus resultados (véase un buen resumen del tema y de sus principales implicaciones jurídicas y sociales en Vidal Castro (2016, pp. 235-236). Lo que pretendo es exponer datos extraídos de algunos de esos estudios que me han parecido especialmente útiles para ampliar la perspectiva de mi propia contribución al tema a partir del examen de fuentes jurídicas árabes medievales y contemporáneas.
  3. Con la expresión «sociedades islámicas premodernas» me refiero al período anterior a la colonización europea de Oriente Medio. En los estudios árabes e islámicos, el paso a la modernidad suele situarse a finales del siglo XVIII con la llegada de las tropas napoleónicas a Egipto.

se vuelva a dormir otra vez por otro período de tiempo indeterminado (Colin, 1998).

La creencia en duraciones extremadamente prolongadas del embarazo fue incorporada por los juristas tempranos al corpus de doctrinas legales islámicas (*fiqh*) bajo el supuesto de que, a falta de evidencias más claras en el Corán y en la tradición profética<sup>4</sup>, la cuestión debía regirse por lo que las mujeres—consideradas las principales expertas en la materia—afirmaran ser lo habitual entre ellas. La primera fuente jurídica islámica que nos sirve para documentar la vigencia de la noción del *niño dormido* es *al-Muwatta'*, un libro cuyo autor, Mālik b. Anas (Medina, m. 795) es conocido también como fundador de una de las cuatro escuelas jurídicas sunníes del islam<sup>5</sup>, del que dicha escuela toma su nombre. La escuela mālikí fue predominante en al-Andalus y continúa siéndolo en buena parte del Norte de África y en Emiratos Árabes Unidos. En el caso de Marruecos y de Emiratos Árabes, lo es en tanto que escuela oficial. La propia doctrina de Mālik favorable a la admisión de embarazos muy prolongados parece haber estado condicionada por la creencia de que él mismo nació después de un largo embarazo de su madre, creencia que se habría visto reforzada por la información que recopiló de otras mujeres sobre casos *reales* de embarazos prolongados (Colin, 2003).

Así pues, como se verá más adelante, hasta hace unas cuantas décadas la duración legal del embarazo en sociedades islámicas no ha estado regida por criterios médicos, sino por una ficción legal basada en convenciones sociales como la creencia en el *niño dormido*.

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4. Es decir, las dos principales fuentes de todo aquello que es de obligado cumplimiento en el islam. A este conjunto de normas se alude habitualmente con el término *ṣarī'a*.

5. El concepto de *sunna* (que en castellano ha dado el arabismo *zuna*) puede interpretarse como *ortodoxia* en la medida en que representa la rama seguida por la inmensa mayoría de los musulmanes y no tanto una calificación moral o metodológica del resto de ramas del islam por mi parte. Es decir, *sunna* significa ortodoxia para los musulmanes sunníes. Los shi'íes, por su parte, consideran que la rama correcta del islam es la que ellos siguen. Para más información sobre el significado de este concepto véase Juynboll y Brown (2012). Las cuatro escuelas jurídicas sunníes se conocen por los nombres de los juristas a quienes se considera sus fundadores: la ḥanafí por Abū Ḥanīfa, la mālikí por Mālik b. Anas, la šāfi'í por al-Šāfi'ī y la ḥanbalí por Ibn Ḥanbal.

### 2.1. Duración mínima del embarazo según la jurisprudencia islámica clásica

Basándose en una lectura conjunta de la aleya 233 de la «azora de la Vaca» —o sea, la azora número II— y 15 de la «azora de las Dunas» del Corán —azora número XLVI—, la inmensa mayoría de los juristas musulmanes premodernos y contemporáneos sostienen que el plazo mínimo legal del embarazo es de seis meses y suponen que por debajo de ese periodo de gestación es imposible que el feto sobreviva. Esto implica que consideran ilegítimo al niño nacido antes de que hayan transcurrido seis meses desde la fecha en que sus padres contrajeron matrimonio. Como excepción pueden citarse los casos de al-Nūr (2007) y al-Hāỵy (2012), ambos partidarios de revisar el mínimo a la baja y de determinar la edad del feto mediante pruebas médicas.

### 2.2. Duración máxima del embarazo según la jurisprudencia islámica clásica

Tal como afirman los expertos en *fiqh*, ni en el Corán ni en el hadiz o tradición profética hay base textual para regular la cuestión de la duración máxima legal del embarazo. Las cuatro escuelas jurídicas sunníes mantienen importantes discrepancias sobre la cuestión entre ellas e incluso dentro de ellas. En algunos casos la postura *oficial* no es única. Por ejemplo, la escuela mālikí admite máximos de cuatro y de cinco años. Dentro de cada escuela hay también opiniones minoritarias. Las distintas opiniones, tanto las *oficiales* o mayoritarias como las minoritarias, se pueden clasificar en dos grandes grupos: 1) el de los juristas que rehúsan fijar un límite temporal concreto y optan por que la cuestión se decida en función de las circunstancias de cada caso; 2) el de los juristas que son partidarios de fijar una duración máxima (Serrano-Ruano, 2022, pp. 373-376).

En la mayoría de los casos, estas duraciones máximas, como ya he apuntado, sobrepasan ampliamente los nueve meses, oscilando entre los dos, los siete e incluso los diez años. Sin embargo, Ibn `Abd al-Ḥakam, un mālikí egipcio de principios del siglo IX, discrepó de sus compañeros de escuela y propuso un año completo como mucho. Esta posición se encuentra cercana

a la del jurista cordobés del siglo XI Ibn Ḥazm<sup>6</sup> para el cual, un embarazo no puede durar más de nueve meses. Para el gran filósofo, médico y jurista cordobés Ibn Rušd al-Ḥafīd, más conocido en el Occidente latino como Averroes y que también era seguidor de la escuela mālikī, la norma legal a aplicar debería regirse por la experiencia constatada habitualmente y no por casos excepcionales. En su opinión, Ibn `Abd al-Ḥakam y los zāhirīs se acercaban más a la verdad que el resto. Otro cordobés universal, el gran intérprete del Corán al-Qurṭubī, sostenía la posición contraria, es decir, la norma legal aplicable debía ser elaborada dependiendo de las circunstancias de cada caso en particular, tomando en cuenta las duraciones más extremas y excepcionales que se hubieran registrado hasta el momento, sin fijar un plazo máximo concreto (Serrano-Ruano, 2022, pp. 373-376).

En síntesis, los juristas clásicos parecían estar de acuerdo en la idea de que, a falta de evidencias procedentes de los textos sagrados, lo más aconsejable era someter los plazos legales de gestación al dictamen de la experiencia constatada y de la observación de la naturaleza. La mayoría pensaba que había que contar con los casos más extremos mientras que la minoría era partidaria de basarse en lo más común. Unos eran partidarios de fijar un límite concreto, por amplio que fuera, y otros de admitir lo que dijeran las mujeres por inverosímil que pudiera resultar, sin establecer plazos máximos. Unos aplicaban esta presunción sólo a las mujeres casadas, excluyendo a las viudas y a las repudiadas; otros la hacían extensible a toda mujer que estuviera o hubiera estado casada (Serrano-Ruano, 2022).

De lo dicho podría desprenderse que en la cuestión de la duración legal del embarazo la jurisprudencia islámica clásica manifestó desde época temprana una apertura hacia la adopción de los criterios de la medicina y las ciencias naturales, con todo lo que ello implica para estudiar la relación entre ciencia y religión en el islam o dicho de otra manera, la relación entre el valor probatorio de las evidencias científicas y las pruebas circunstanciales, por un lado, y el de los textos sagrados, por otro. De hecho, como ha señalado Muhammad Ghaly (2014), la jurisprudencia islámica clásica, lo mismo que

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6. Ibn Ḥazm fue el principal ideólogo de una escuela alternativa, la zāhirī, que nunca fue admitida como parte de la sunna, lo cual no implica que sus doctrinas hayan sido irrelevantes para la historia pasada y reciente del derecho islámico.

otras disciplinas, terminó por acusar el impacto de la traducción al árabe de los tratados griegos de medicina y biología y el desarrollo que, como consecuencia, registraron esas disciplinas en la propia cultura árabe islámica. La asimilación del legado médico griego por parte de los juristas musulmanes se reflejó en la incorporación de opiniones médicas a sus discusiones, dando lugar a visiones innovadoras sobre las implicaciones jurídico-teológicas de la embriología humana. Estas últimas propuestas pusieron en cuestión las opiniones admitidas hasta entonces (siglo XIII) por la mayoría de los juristas de las escuelas sunníes de derecho, pero no lograron alterar la anterior división entre jurisprudencia y medicina por lo que respecta al embarazo, ni a las duraciones extensas que se siguen considerando características de cada una de las escuelas.

### 3. ¿QUÉ QUEREMOS DECIR CON LA EXPRESIÓN *DURACIÓN LEGAL DEL EMBARAZO* Y CUÁLES SON SUS IMPLICACIONES?

La duración legal del embarazo que, como se ha visto, ha de distinguirse claramente de su duración médica, tiene una gran relevancia a la hora de determinar los muchos derechos y obligaciones derivados de 1) la filiación paterna (*nasab*); 2) la *`idda* o período de espera que las mujeres tienen que guardar antes de volver a contraer matrimonio tras un repudio o tras haber enviudado. Dicha espera tiene por objeto descartar la existencia de un embarazo, pues en caso positivo la mujer no puede contraer nuevas nupcias hasta haber dado a luz y completado la cuarentena, además de la lactancia del bebé si es ella quien se encarga personalmente, sin recurrir a una nodriza; 3) la pensión de manutención de la repudiada y de la viuda (*nafaqa*); 4) los derechos hereditarios y 5) los legados a favor del no nacido. De esta manera, si se admite que un embarazo puede durar cinco años como máximo, por ejemplo, una mujer que se declara embarazada antes de ser repudiada o de enviudar, o posteriormente durante el período de espera legal (*`idda*), tendrá derecho a recibir la pensión de manutención a cargo de su exmarido o a cuenta de sus bienes si fallece, hasta que se produzca el alumbramiento o el embarazo quede interrumpido por un aborto, por un plazo máximo de cinco años, y cuando dé a luz, hasta que termine de amamantar al niño, hasta un máximo de dos años. La espera

legal de la repudiada y de la viuda que no se declaran embarazadas o en la duda de estarlo, es de tres menstruos. Si se trata de una esclava que cambia de propietario, la espera legal es de un menstruado y se denomina *istibrā'*. El niño nacido durante la espera legal es afiliado a su padre presunto (o sea, al exmarido o al marido fallecido de su madre), con todas las consecuencias legales, es decir, derecho a llevar el nombre de familia de su padre y a ser mantenido a su cargo o a cargo de su herencia hasta alcanzar la mayoría de edad; derecho a heredarle y, finalmente, a recibir legados hechos a su favor en calidad de hijo legítimo suyo. En caso de fallecimiento del presunto padre antes de que el embarazo haya llegado a término, la madre o los valedores del no nacido tienen derecho a solicitar un aplazamiento del reparto de la herencia hasta que se produzca el alumbramiento e incluso hasta que el niño alcance la mayoría de edad. Todo ello siempre contando con que la madre no haya tenido relaciones con un tercero antes de dar a luz.

Hasta aquí he expuesto las consecuencias legales de la duración máxima del embarazo. Para que un niño se considere legítimo, ya he mencionado que su nacimiento tiene que producirse como mínimo transcurridos seis meses después de la fecha en que sus padres contrajeron matrimonio. Si nace antes y la madre no ha estado casada anteriormente, el niño se considera ilegítimo, es decir, no se atribuye al marido pues se supone que no puede haber sido concebido en el seno del matrimonio en curso. Si la madre ha estado casada anteriormente, el hijo se atribuye al anterior marido, suponiendo que los plazos máximos mencionados anteriormente puedan aplicarse.

La duración legal del embarazo tiene también importantes implicaciones penales. La jurisprudencia islámica clásica tipifica como grave delito las relaciones sexuales fuera del matrimonio, o del concubinato cuando estaba en vigor. Este *delito* se denomina *zinā* y está sujeto a duros castigos denominados *ḥudūd*<sup>7</sup>. En el caso de las personas que nunca hayan estado casadas, el castigo es de cien latigazos para hombres y mujeres, y un año

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7. Plural de *ḥadd* o pena estatutaria, es decir, que viene ya determinada en el Corán y/o en la tradición profética. El término *ḥadd* y su plural se aplican tanto al castigo como al tipo de delito al que corresponden dichos castigos.

de confinamiento para los varones. En el caso de personas que estén o hayan estado casadas, el *zinā* se castiga con la lapidación hasta la muerte. A los esclavos que incurren en *zinā* les corresponden cincuenta latigazos indistintamente de sus circunstancias en el momento de producirse los hechos. En muchos casos, en especial en zonas donde la escuela *mālikí* es o ha sido predominante, el embarazo de una mujer que no tiene marido se considera prueba de que ha cometido *zinā*. Un nacimiento que se produce antes o después de los plazos legales mínimos y máximos establecidos puede acarrearle a la madre la misma imputación. Además, en el islam sunní, el hijo nacido de relaciones consideradas ilegales no es afiliado al padre biológico, aunque se conozca su identidad, con todo lo que ello implica: privación del nombre paterno, del derecho a ser mantenido por él y a heredarle; el hijo se vincula automáticamente a la madre, que es quien termina cargando con toda la responsabilidad (Serrano-Ruano, 2005, 2007). En sociedades patriarcales y tradicionales, la maternidad fuera del matrimonio y la falta de un padre legítimo suponen además un enorme estigma social.

No es que los juristas musulmanes premodernos no supieran que un embarazo dura nueve meses a lo sumo. Los ejemplos de opiniones minoritarias que he citado en la sección anterior así lo atestiguan, lo mismo que las reacciones del común de los musulmanes y musulmanas que podemos observar a través de las fuentes que tenemos a nuestra disposición para estudiar la doctrina y la práctica del derecho islámico en sociedades pre-modernas. En al-Andalus, por ejemplo, las duraciones admitidas por la doctrina no eran necesariamente tenidas en cuenta en la práctica por jurisconsultos y jueces. Las fuentes jurídicas revelan una cierta tensión entre las doctrinas legales en vigor y la percepción generalizada acerca de la duración real de un embarazo. Por otra parte, hemos de pensar que el recurso a los tribunales era algo excepcional, no la manera habitual de resolución de diferencias y conflictos entre la gente (Serrano-Ruano, 2005).

Cuando se evidenciaba que una mujer estaba embarazada sin tener marido —por haberla éste repudiado o por haber fallecido o desaparecido mucho tiempo atrás—, algunas abandonaban a la criatura al nacer. Otras alegaban haber sido seducidas bajo la falsa promesa de un matrimonio, o incluso violadas. Cabe pensar que las mujeres que recurrían a este último



tipo de estrategia lo hacían en la confianza de poder presionar al acusado para que se casara con ellas. Sin embargo, si el acusado se negaba a asumir su responsabilidad por el embarazo, o si la alegación era tenida por falsa, la estrategia se convertía en una trampa muy peligrosa pues se trataba de un reconocimiento explícito de haber incurrido en relaciones sexuales fuera del matrimonio (*zinā*) (Serrano-Ruano, 2005, 2007).

Cuando lo que suscitaba las consultas legales que han llegado hasta nuestras manos no era tanto una acusación de *zinā* sino cuestiones económicas [por ejemplo, el pago de la manutención o el reparto de la herencia del marido si fallecía], las circunstancias solían ser las que siguen: en el momento de enviudar o de formalizarse el repudio, la mujer se declaraba embarazada. En el contexto geográfico y temporal que tengo en mente, es decir al-Andalus, el plazo máximo de duración del embarazo era el de la escuela *mālikí*, que admite duraciones de cuatro y hasta cinco años. Sin embargo, transcurridos los primeros nueve meses, dos años a lo sumo, desde que la mujer se había declarado embarazada, si el exmarido o los familiares del fallecido se negaban a seguirle pagando la manutención o no aceptaban su alegación de estar embarazada para que el reparto de la herencia se pospusiera hasta el alumbramiento —algo que podemos suponer sucedía con cierta frecuencia—, la mujer podía ser obligada a someterse a una especie de reconocimiento ginecológico por parte de *mujeres expertas*. Los juristas discrepaban sobre si una mujer libre podía ser sometida a dicho examen o si bastaba con su palabra. Si la mujer no lograba evitar el examen, pero las expertas emitían informes discrepantes, se daba preferencia al informe positivo. La preponderancia del informe positivo sobre el negativo daba ocasión a alguna de las implicadas de ejercer una cierta solidaridad femenina, pero si todas las expertas declaraban que el embarazo no existía, o que el feto había muerto, la mujer podía ser obligada a devolver todo lo recibido en concepto de manutención hasta entonces. No obstante, algunas mujeres estaban al tanto de las posibilidades que les proporcionaba la doctrina jurídica en relación con las duraciones prolongadas del embarazo y conseguían esgrimir las con éxito para hacer frente a la presión de su entorno y evitar ser sometidas a examen antes de que se cumplieran los plazos máximos permitidos. Disponer de esa información resultaba pues fundamental. Otra cuestión es hasta qué punto los casos de esas mujeres

—las fuentes documentan algunos que son realmente fascinantes— eran representativos de la realidad a la que estaban sujetas la mayoría de sus congéneres. Cabe sospechar que se trataba de mujeres pertenecientes a las familias más influyentes social y económicamente que, o bien eran capaces de leer o de recabar la información que necesitaban conocer por propia iniciativa, o recibían el asesoramiento legal necesario para responder a la presión, o neutralizar una grave acusación de manera eficaz (Ibn ʿIyād, 1990, pp. 269, 277-280; Marín, 2000, pp. 294, 508-510; Serrano-Ruano, 1998, pp. 447-448, 457-461; al-Wanšārīsī, 1981, IX, p. 227).

El hecho es que, aunque eran plenamente conscientes de que un embarazo no duraba más de nueve meses, la mayoría de los juristas premodernos se oponían a que la duración legal del embarazo se sometiera el criterio que podríamos denominar médico o científico. En primer lugar, los conocimientos de la medicina tradicional, por avanzados que fueran entonces, no aportaban una total certeza sobre la cuestión, al contrario de lo que sucede hoy en día. Sin embargo, el factor determinante aquí es que para salvaguardar el orden social islámico, los juristas musulmanes consideraban que la necesidad de establecer la filiación paterna en el seno del matrimonio prevalece sobre la de verificar si el marido de una mujer era o no el padre biológico de su hijo. Por otra parte, si un hombre sospechaba que el hijo de su mujer no era suyo, no estaba obligado a aceptarlo y podía recurrir al juramento imprecatorio (*liʿān*). Dicho juramento permitía al hombre rechazar la paternidad del hijo de su mujer eludiendo la acusación de calumnia de adulterio contra ella. A su vez, a ella jurar le suponía eludir las consecuencias penales de una acusación de adulterio y proteger a su hijo de las consecuencias sociales. Tras el juramento, el matrimonio quedaba disuelto para siempre y el niño se afiliaba a los parientes varones de la madre. No obstante, rechazar al hijo de la propia esposa estaba muy mal visto. Se consideraba que el hombre que sospechaba de que su mujer no le era fiel debía repudiarla cuanto antes sin dar tiempo a que se quedara embarazada (Serrano-Ruano, 2017).

## 4. LA DURACIÓN LEGAL DEL EMBARAZO EN LA JURISPRUDENCIA Y LA LEGISLACIÓN ISLÁMICAS CONTEMPORÁNEAS<sup>8</sup>

### 4.1. Legislación

Hoy en día, los castigos contra las relaciones sexuales pre o extra-matrimoniales antes mencionados (*hudūd*) han sido sustituidos por otro tipo de penas menos severas como las multas y la cárcel. Sin embargo, en países como Irán, Libia, Pakistán, Sudán, Afganistán, y algunos estados del norte de la federación de Nigeria los castigos *hudūd* fueron *reintroducidos* tras las olas de *reislamización* política y legal que se produjeron a partir de la década de los 70 del siglo pasado. En Arabia Saudí, nunca han dejado de estar en vigor y de vez en cuando llegan noticias de su aplicación en la práctica. Otro tema no menos preocupante es el de las ejecuciones extrajudiciales perpetradas sobre todo contra mujeres, a menudo a cargo de sus propios parientes, por haber incurrido en conductas consideradas indecentes. Independientemente de la severidad de los castigos y de su grado de conflicto con los derechos humanos y la dignidad de las personas, lo cierto es que, en la práctica totalidad de los países islámicos, las relaciones fuera del matrimonio siguen siendo objeto de criminalización, y que el embarazo de una mujer no casada lleva aparejadas graves discriminaciones legales y sociales para las madres y para sus hijos. Ello explica que las tasas de abandono infantil en ciertos países sean preocupantes. Al riesgo de terminar siendo castigadas y al temor a asumir las consecuencias psicológicas y económicas de la maternidad no deseada o no compartida, se une el estigma social que recae sobre las madres solteras y sus hijos. Hay que añadir que, en los países de mayoría islámica, excepto en Túnez, la adopción está prohibida. La prohibición queda en parte paliada por la figura del acogimiento parental o familiar al que se denomina *kafāla*. Sin embargo, la *kafāla* no da derecho a la filiación ni a heredar de los padres de acogida, ni representa un compromiso de tutela efectivo y permanente (Serrano-Ruano, 2018; Simoncini, 2017).

Paralelamente, y con la excepción de Arabia Saudí, la duración legal del embarazo ha pasado de regirse por la jurisprudencia islámica clásica (*fiqh*) a

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8. Para entender la diferencia entre jurisprudencia y legislación o derecho codificado en contextos islámicos véase Peters (2002).

estarlo por códigos legales promulgados en su mayor parte durante la época colonial o tras la independencia de cada país. En las modernas codificaciones legales relativas al derecho de familia y al estatuto personal, la duración del embarazo ha quedado sujeta a los criterios de la medicina moderna, con mínimos que no se han movido de los seis meses, pero con los máximos acortados a un año a lo sumo: 1929 en Egipto, 1953 en Siria, 1957 en Túnez, 1974 en Yemen del Sur, 1976 en Jordania, 1984 en Kuwait, 1991 en Sudán, 1993 en Marruecos, 2005 en los Emiratos Árabes Unidos, etc. (Albar, 1986, p. 438; al-Nūr 2007, pp. 35-39; Ruiz de Almodóvar, 2007, pp. 286-287)<sup>9</sup>. Esta es la situación incluso en los casos de los países con sistemas penales *reislamizados* donde la *reislamización* se tradujo en una reintroducción de los castigos de flagelación y lapidación, pero no en una vuelta a las antiguas duraciones legales extensas del embarazo (Köndgen, 2017; Peters, 2003).

Cierran este círculo las leyes que impiden establecer la paternidad legal (*nasab*) de un niño nacido fuera del matrimonio, las cuales han sido mantenidas en los códigos de familia en vigor a pesar de que los avances de la genética permiten identificar al padre biológico por encima de toda duda. El argumento más citado para justificar esta prohibición es una tradición del Profeta Muḥammad—que constituye, por tanto, el tipo de base textual de la que carece el caso de la duración máxima del embarazo— que se interpreta en el sentido de que la paternidad legítima solo puede establecerse en el seno del matrimonio. Otra cuestión es si esa es o no la única interpretación que cabe hacer de dicha tradición, cuál es el destino al que avoca a los hijos de madres solteras y en qué medida esa situación es compatible con el ideal de justicia social y equidad que promueve el islam (Serrano-Ruano, 2018).

No obstante, el código de familia de Emiratos Árabes Unidos presenta una interesante excepción para casos denominados con el término *sabāt*. Estos casos, también descritos como embarazos en *inactividad* o en *tiempo*

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9. Existe traducción al castellano de un buen número de estos códigos a cargo de Caridad Ruiz de Almodovar. Dada la importancia de la terminología legal empleada en cada caso—un pequeño matiz como la diferencia entre los términos árabes *nasab* y *bunuwwa*, ambos empleados para aludir a la paternidad, puede tener profundas repercusiones, véase Serrano-Ruano, 2018, pp. 297-299, 305-307—, la capacidad de leer las versiones originales en árabe resulta fundamental antes de extraer conclusiones sobre su articulado.

*de reserva* (*mustakīn*), si son avalados por un certificado médico, permiten soslayar el límite máximo de 365 días que establece el código (al-Nūr, 2007, pp. 35-39). El caso emiratí se asemeja al marroquí en este punto en particular. El código de familia marroquí, conocido como *Mudawwana*, fija un plazo máximo de un año para que un niño nacido después del divorcio de sus padres o de la muerte del padre presunto se atribuya a este último. Sin embargo, según el artículo 134 del código, en el que se fija el plazo de espera legal de la viuda, si la mujer afirma estar embarazada y su alegación es cuestionada por parte de terceros ante los tribunales, el juez está autorizado a consultar con un comité de expertos. Se admite la posibilidad de que, a pesar de que hayan transcurrido los plazos máximos contemplados inicialmente, el comité considere que sigue embarazada del anterior marido. Así pues, el tribunal no puede decidir en función de un mero cálculo del tiempo transcurrido desde que se produjo el divorcio, y el juez, sobre la base de un informe médico, puede aceptar duraciones más extensas de las establecidas inicialmente. El artículo 61 del Código de Familia de Mauritania, que como el de Emiratos Árabes Unidos y Marruecos pretende ser una refundición de las normas jurídicas relevantes de la jurisprudencia *mālikí*, parece haber seguido la misma línea. La duración máxima del embarazo se ha fijado allí en un año solar. Sin embargo, en caso de duda, la parte interesada —por ejemplo, el ex-marido— tiene la opción de solicitar al juez que la mujer sea sometida a un examen médico, o el juez puede solicitarlo por propia iniciativa, siendo el informe resultante lo que sirva de base para la decisión final, no un mero cálculo del tiempo transcurrido desde un repudio o la viudedad de la embarazada (Abu-Sahlieh, 2008, p. 189; Colin, 2003, p. 117).

El hecho de que el informe tenga que ser elaborado por médicos o expertos no implica necesariamente que su contenido responda a una verificación de la edad exacta del feto; de esta manera, los códigos mencionados dejan una puerta abierta a la admisión de duraciones que sobrepasen ligeramente el límite impuesto inicialmente —un año— en reconocimiento de una práctica secular considerada por muchos como todo un distintivo cultural (Colin, 1998) que no conviene perder del todo para que no parezca que la reducción del plazo legal del embarazo supone una cesión a valores ajenos a la identidad islámica tradicional. El mantenimiento de estas excepciones deja entrever una cierta conciencia por parte de los legisladores del desequilibrio

que representa reducir la duración máxima del embarazo, pero mantener la criminalización de las relaciones fuera del matrimonio —en Emiratos Árabes están sujetas a los castigos *hudud* de flagelación y lapidación— y la denegación del derecho a la filiación paterna para el hijo nacido a consecuencia de ellas.

#### 4.2. Jurisprudencia (*fiqh*)

El proceso de cambio legislativo que ha dejado sin validez legal la doctrina del *niño dormido* y las duraciones extensas características de la jurisprudencia islámica clásica, se ha visto acompañado por un cambio paralelo en la posición que mantienen las organizaciones internacionales contemporáneas de jurisprudencia islámica. La consulta y toma de decisiones colectiva en el seno de este tipo de organismos transnacionales es un fenómeno relativamente reciente, siendo sus deliberaciones consideradas como representativas de la opinión mayoritaria dentro del *fiqh* contemporáneo (Shabana, 2013, p. 199). Esta nueva forma de colaboración no excluye la circulación de otras opiniones emitidas por expertos a título individual que, aunque minoritarias, pueden llegar a ser muy influyentes.

Entre los organismos transnacionales de jurisprudencia islámica cuyas deliberaciones han resultado más determinantes a la hora de establecer la posición mayoritaria del *fiqh* contemporáneo en materia de duración legal del embarazo, se encuentran el Islamic Fiqh Council, perteneciente a la Islamic World League, y la Islamic Organization for Medical Sciences. Todos los expertos en medicina que participaron en la undécima Conferencia del Islamic Fiqh Council celebrada en La Meca en *rayāb* de 1409/febrero de 1989, coincidieron en que el embarazo no puede durar más de un año, ni siquiera un día; la existencia del embarazo y la edad del feto pueden establecerse con total exactitud por medio de una ecografía; para que el derecho del feto a heredar del marido difunto de su madre sea reconocido, es necesario demostrar la existencia del embarazo en el momento de la muerte (al-Gāmidī, 2009, pp. 216-221). La Islamic Organization for Medical Sciences, por su parte, recomienda tomar en consideración que un embarazo dura como máximo 280 días o 40 semanas a contar desde el último ciclo menstrual de la mujer. En algunos casos, este plazo puede prolongarse una o dos semanas

más, como mucho, siendo prácticamente imposible que el bebé nazca vivo si el parto se produce en la semana 45 (Shabana, 2019, p. 118).

Estas posiciones constituyen una transformación legal muy relevante y tienen un gran impacto social. Cambios similares no han sido frecuentes en la historia del *fiqh* y los que pueden documentarse se impusieron de manera mucho más progresiva. El cambio legislativo que nos ocupa se ha justificado en la necesidad de someter la duración legal del embarazo a los criterios de la medicina moderna para adaptarse a la mentalidad de los musulmanes contemporáneos. En la época colonial las percepciones populares sobre la medicina moderna cambiaron a medida que se iban abriendo nuevos hospitales y clínicas en las zonas rurales y la gente iba viendo que en ellas se conseguían tratar con éxito enfermedades y males que hasta entonces habían considerado incurables. La autoridad de las prácticas tradicionales quedó minada, en especial entre los jóvenes, y la adhesión a las doctrinas clásicas sobre los embarazos extremadamente prolongados puso a los ulemas y alfaquíes (es decir, expertos en *fiqh*) en riesgo de parecer ridículos y de perder su credibilidad (Miller, 2006, pp. 422-423). Conviene tener presente que fue un cambio social lo que condujo a un cambio legislativo y que este último es el que ha terminado forzando el cambio en la opinión jurisprudencial, y no al revés.

Los expertos contemporáneos en *fiqh* citados anteriormente<sup>10</sup> se esfuerzan por demostrar que, por lo que respecta a la duración legal del embarazo, la jurisprudencia islámica clásica y la medicina moderna son perfectamente compatibles. Destacan que, a pesar de algunos fallos metodológicos aislados, las estimaciones de algunos alfaquíes premodernos sobre la duración del embarazo o las causas por las cuales una mujer puede creer que sigue embarazada después de haber sobrepasado los nueve meses de rigor, se acercaron sorprendentemente a las establecidas por la medicina moderna. En opinión de esos expertos, los cálculos y los descubrimientos de la medicina moderna han venido a reemplazar la vieja confianza en la experiencia compartida y en la autoridad de las mujeres en todo lo relativo a sus cuerpos y a sus *asuntos*. Esta transición se ha visto facilitada por la ausencia de indicaciones específicas en las fuentes de la *šarī'a* (Serrano-Ruano, 2022).

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10. Véase la nota 1.

## 5. NORMA LEGAL FRENTE A NORMA SOCIAL. LA DOCTRINA DEL NIÑO DORMIDO EN LA ACTUALIDAD

Para muchas personas, la doctrina del *niño dormido* no es una mera ficción legal sino una firme creencia. De hecho, hoy en día, aunque ya no tiene valor legal (Ruiz de Almodóvar, 2007, p. 287), en el Magreb (incluida Mauritania) y en áreas que han estado históricamente bajo la influencia de la escuela jurídica *mālikí*, la doctrina del *niño dormido* sigue gozando de aceptación social y cumpliendo una función protectora (Abu-Sahlieh, 2008, pp. 187-188; Bossaller, 2004; Colin, 1998; Fischer, 2008; Jansen, 2006, p. 523; Miller, 2006, pp. 421, 424).

En sus relevantes estudios sobre el tema, Joël Colin considera la doctrina del niño dormido como un recurso concebido por las mujeres que no pretende cuestionar su desigualdad legal tradicional ni cambiar las mentalidades. Por medio de esta doctrina, ellas interiorizan el papel que la sociedad les ha asignado, pero tratan de sacarle ventaja abriendo un espacio para el juego social (Colin, 1998; 2003, p. 110) que se ha visto estrechado considerablemente por la mencionada limitación de la duración legal máxima del embarazo a un año.

Aunque Colin les asigna una imaginación creativa, hay algo en su caracterización tan quietista y conformista de las mujeres del Magreb que me resulta problemático. Según otras aproximaciones más matizadas, la noción del *niño dormido* es una forma de resistencia específicamente femenina que las empodera porque subvierte el mundo masculino de la autoridad médica que juzga demasiado rápido la condición de las mujeres. En un sistema en el que los hombres hacen las leyes, la noción del *niño dormido* ofrece una demostración marginal del poder de las mujeres; les proporciona la sensación de que tienen la capacidad de cambiar las cosas y las protege contra las injusticias más rigurosas de un orden social que pone límites a sus personas (Jansen, 2006; Miller, 2006, p. 424). La creencia en el *niño dormido* y las prácticas asociadas a ella también han sido descritas como una forma de revancha femenina contra su vulnerabilidad frente al castigo de adulterio que evidencia la alianza entre los alfaquíses y el género femenino (Moulin, 2013, p. 20).



Según la antropóloga Araceli González (2008) las mujeres marroquíes sobre las que ha realizado trabajos de campo negocian hábilmente con fuentes de conocimiento tradicionales y modernas; son receptivas a nuevas evidencias e ideas y tratan de utilizar los discursos que les llegan para idear estrategias de género que convienen a sus intereses. Por su parte, el arabista Jorge Aguadé (2008, p. 229) considera que la idea del feto dormido en la matriz materna rara vez ha sido esgrimida para ocultar embarazos extra-matrimoniales, pues la noción no lleva aparejada tales dosis de ingenuidad. Las evidencias reunidas por Jöel Colin (2003, pp. 117-118) y Jamila Bargach (2002, p. 59), sin embargo, parecen sugerir lo contrario.

La idea del *niño dormido* constituye también un instrumento para preservar el propio orden social patriarcal al que los hombres pueden recurrir para apropiarse de la futura descendencia de sus exmujeres, especialmente en el caso de los recién nacidos varones, o en otros casos, para ocultar su propia infertilidad (Colin, 1998; González Vázquez, 2008; Jansen, 2000, p. 221) pues, como apuntan Aguadé (2008, p. 229) y Vidal Castro (2016, pp. 235-236), la infertilidad masculina es todo un tabú que tradicionalmente se ha atribuido en exclusiva a las mujeres. Al mismo tiempo, y dado el estigma social que lleva aparejada la infertilidad, la doctrina del *niño dormido* pone a las mujeres en una posición de inseguridad que, paradójicamente, se puede tornar en su favor en tanto en cuanto puede servir para posponer la decisión de sus maridos de repudiarlas pues se considera que el sangrado puede ser compatible con el embarazo (Colin, 2003, p. 119; Miller, 2006, p. 423).

La medicina moderna ha venido a reemplazar la autoridad de la observación y de lo que es habitual a la hora de decidir la duración del embarazo. Al reducirse la duración legal máxima del embarazo a un año o 10 meses en los códigos de familia de los países del Magreb, el cambio a la modernidad se ha hecho a costa de un rasgo cultural original e instrumental como es la doctrina del *niño dormido*, la cual no podía seguir siendo admitida sin reticencia por un sector de la sociedad que no habría entendido la preservación de una dicotomía semejante entre la fisiología y el derecho (Colin, 2003, pp. 116-117, 119; Miller, 2006, pp. 421-422).

## 6. CONSIDERACIONES FINALES

Con anterioridad al siglo XX, la admisión de duraciones del embarazo muy prolongadas parece haber sido bastante efectiva para proteger a las embarazadas viudas, repudiadas o abandonadas por sus maridos contra una acusación de *zinā* e impedir que sus hijos fueran considerados ilegítimos y privados de todo tipo de derechos. Hoy en día, sin embargo, con la adaptación de la duración máxima del embarazo a los criterios de la medicina moderna, la vulnerabilidad de todos ellos parece haberse agravado (Benomran, 1995). En algunos casos como los de las nigerianas Amina Lawal y Safiyya Hussaini, llegaron a dictarse sentencias de lapidación en primera instancia. Es cierto que estas sentencias fueron luego anuladas tras las apelaciones de sus abogados ante las instancias judiciales superiores (Peters, 2006), pero cabe preguntarse qué hubiera sucedido si sus casos no hubieran salido a la luz provocando una auténtica oleada de rechazo dentro y fuera de Nigeria, y si las acusadas no hubieran contado con buenos abogados que consiguieron que las penas fueran anuladas con argumentos extraídos de la misma *šarī'a* con la que se las había pretendido condenar. Cabe también preguntarse por el calvario por el que tuvieron que pasar estas mujeres hasta tener la certeza de que las terribles sentencias dictadas contra ellas habían sido anuladas. En otros casos más recientes, como el de la empresaria marroquí Hind El-Achchabi (Burke, 2017), la pena impuesta ha sido la cárcel. En todos ellos, la acusación implicaba un embarazo fruto de relaciones fuera del matrimonio. Otras mujeres en situaciones similares no gozan de una buena posición social y seguramente no han podido beneficiarse del impacto mediático que han tenido sus casos.

Bajo unas leyes que criminalizan las relaciones fuera del matrimonio, y marginan legal y socialmente a los hijos nacidos a consecuencia de ellas, el avance de la medicina está representando más una amenaza que un progreso, porque solo se aplican las desventajas, mientras que las posibles ventajas despiertan fuertes reticencias y son rechazadas en el nombre de su supuesta incompatibilidad con la *šarī'a*.

En el caso concreto de la duración máxima del embarazo, parece que tanto los jurisconsultos musulmanes como los órganos legislativos nacionales tenían razones fundadas para adaptarse a las transformaciones

sociales impulsadas por los avances tecnológicos. Este hecho, sin embargo, no resta incongruencia a la posición de los unos y de los otros con respecto al marco interpretativo premoderno en el cual tanto la admisión del embarazo como prueba de *zinà* como las reglas que regían la filiación paterna fueron concebidas, justificadas y aplicadas. Con este tipo de inconsistencias, los códigos de familia y del estatuto personal de los países islámicos han terminado reforzando el sesgo de género que ya estaba presente en el *fiqh* clásico, han intensificado la vulnerabilidad de las mujeres viudas, repudiadas y abandonadas así como la de sus hijos, dando pie a pensar que los profundos cambios legales que han experimentado las sociedades islámicas contemporáneas al hilo del avance tecnológico se han hecho a costa de todos ellos.

Que nos encontramos ante una incorporación sesgada de las evidencias de la medicina moderna lo demuestra el hecho de que la duración mínima legal de seis meses no se haya modificado a pesar de que se han documentado casos de supervivencia de bebés prematuros nacidos antes de ese plazo (Albar, 1986, pp. 436-437; al-Hāyî, 2012, p. 310; al-Nūr, 2007, pp. 13-16). Resulta incoherente adaptar la duración legal máxima del embarazo a los criterios médicos y al mismo tiempo seguir negando la filiación paterna a los niños nacidos fuera del matrimonio incluso cuando una prueba de ADN permite identificar al padre biológico. Es innegable que la posibilidad que existe hoy de conocer la identidad del padre biológico de un niño pone en cuestión el principio según el cual la filiación paterna sólo puede establecerse dentro del matrimonio, y con ello, todo el prototipo modélico de familia y de orden social islámicos. Es cierto que la doctrina clásica da preponderancia a la presunción legal sobre la biología (Shabana, 2013, p. 199) pero ello se debe en buena parte a la imposibilidad de determinar con exactitud la identidad genética antes del siglo XX, no a que el factor genético jugara un papel menos relevante que la presunción legal. Por otra parte, la preponderancia que el derecho islámico, lo mismo que otros sistemas legales, otorga al marido de la madre sobre el padre biológico en caso de disputa, no tiene por qué llevar aparejada la denegación de derechos al niño que nace fuera del matrimonio (Serrano-Ruano, 2018).

Con todo, el cuestionamiento al que se está viendo sometida la concepción islámica tradicional de la paternidad a consecuencia de los avances de

la genética, no tiene marcha atrás. Lo demuestra el hecho de que en Túnez una nueva ley permita localizar mediante pruebas de ADN a los padres biológicos de los niños nacidos fuera del matrimonio y les obligue a darles su nombre y a contribuir a su manutención. Lo demuestran también algunas interpretaciones minoritarias del *fiqh* clásico y de la legislación vigente por parte de jurisconsultos y jueces de Argelia y Marruecos. Son avances muy tímidos, pero han conseguido abrir brecha en la férrea oposición al establecimiento de la filiación paterna fuera del matrimonio (Serrano-Ruano, 2018). Aunque alguna de estas sentencias pueda ser anulada en la fase de apelación, como ha sucedido en el caso marroquí (EFE, 2017), el mero hecho de que las mujeres persistan en sus denuncias y acudan a los tribunales invita a una moderada esperanza.

La gran asignatura pendiente sigue siendo la revisión de la doctrina y la legislación islámicas relativas a la criminalización de las relaciones fuera del matrimonio. Por una parte, los contrapesos que contemplaba la doctrina premoderna para mitigar la severidad de los castigos (*ḥudūd*) correspondientes —castigos que, por cierto, en época premoderna fueron rara vez dictados y ejecutados por las autoridades judiciales islámicas (Serrano-Ruano, 2005)— han quedado sin efecto. Por otra parte, los avances de la medicina en embriología y genética socavan la base del principal argumento esgrimido tradicionalmente por los juristas musulmanes para explicar la necesidad de criminalizar el *zinā* y de castigarlo con tanta dureza.

La criminalización de las relaciones fuera del matrimonio se basa en el Corán y en la tradición del Profeta o hadiz, de manera que su condición de grave contravención a la legalidad islámica es incuestionable en términos religiosos. El *zinā* es un grave pecado que compromete las posibilidades de salvación del creyente que lo comete. Se considera que el castigo, aunque pueda acabar con la vida del acusado, sirve para limpiar esa tacha de cara al Juicio Final. En los textos sagrados, sin embargo, no se explican las razones por las cuales las penas que corresponden a dicha conducta son más severas aún que las del asesinato. Los juristas clásicos no dieron las razones por sobrentendidas. Por el contrario, consideraron necesario explicar que la dureza de los castigos se debía a que el *zinā* conduce a la *mezcla de filiaciones* (*ijtilāt al-ansāb*). Con anterioridad al siglo XX, el matrimonio o el concubinato eran las únicas formas de garantizar que un hombre tuviera la certeza

de que los hijos de sus mujeres eran suyos. En un sistema patriarcal donde el hombre es el encargado de proveer al sustento de su prole, se supone que solo se va a sentir inclinado a mantener a los hijos de su mujer si tiene la seguridad de que son suyos, de tal manera que el matrimonio pasó a ser considerado como el pilar fundamental de la organización social islámica. Según esta organización, el varón puede tener hasta cuatro esposas a la vez y cuantas concubinas pueda permitirse, mientras que la mujer solo puede tener relaciones con un único hombre a la vez dentro de una relación legítima (matrimonio y concubinato). El adulterio, o las relaciones entre personas no casadas, ponían en riesgo este sistema y con ello, la supervivencia de la propia comunidad islámica pues si el hombre no tiene la seguridad de que el hijo de su mujer es suyo, seguramente no querrá hacerse cargo de él y esa criatura quedará a merced de sí misma. De ahí la necesidad de disuadir tan duramente de todo aquello que pusiera en riesgo la estabilidad del matrimonio y del orden social islámico. Es un razonamiento que puede sorprender pero que cito a partir de importantes autoridades musulmanas como al-Gazālī (m. 1111) o Ibn Jaldūn (m. 1406) (Serrano-Ruano, 2009, pp. 114-118).

Frente a lo que suponían los juristas que elaboraron la doctrina islámica clásica sobre el *zinā* y la filiación paterna, la embriología moderna ha demostrado que, fuera del laboratorio, el óvulo de la mujer solo puede ser fecundado por el espermatozoide de un único hombre, mientras que la genética permite establecer la identidad de su propietario en caso de duda —por ejemplo los casos excepcionales de mellizos de distinto padre— o de disputa. Ni la *mezcla de filiaciones* es ya un riesgo, ni los varones son los únicos proveedores de sus hijos, ni un niño cuyo padre —presunto o biológico— rechace hacerse cargo de su manutención está condenado a perecer. Los varones musulmanes no están hoy en día —ni lo han estado nunca—, obligados a asumir la paternidad de un niño que sospechan que no es suyo. Y para terminar, el marido de una mujer cuyo hijo reclame otro hombre tampoco queda privado del derecho a seguir ejerciendo su paternidad si una prueba de ADN establece que el progenitor es el demandante

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# ETHNOGRAPHERS OF MIGRANT MIXTEC WOMEN IN CALIFORNIA. AN ANTHROPOLOGICAL APPROACH TO NARRATIVES OF TRANSMIGRATION, TRANSNATIONAL MOTHERHOOD AND PREGNANCY IN THE CONTEXT OF WESTERN MEDICINE<sup>1</sup>

## ETNOGRAFÍAS DE MUJERES MIGRANTES MIXTECAS EN CALIFORNIA. UNA APROXIMACIÓN ANTROPOLÓGICA A LAS NARRATIVAS DE TRANSMIGRACIÓN, MATERNIDAD TRANSNACIONAL Y EMBARAZO EN EL CONTEXTO DE LA MEDICINA OCCIDENTAL

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### Abstract

This article examines the narratives of mixtec women from Oaxaca, Mexico, who migrated to Oxnard City, California, USA. The ethnographies derived from their migratory process were analyzed through 27 in-depth interviews.

The complexity involved in the study of international migration, intersected with

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gender and ethnicity, has required a multi-methodology in accordance with this specificity. Through a decolonized investigation this research examines the situations of inequality and oppression that affect indigenous women, defined in different historical contexts than those of urban, white, western and heterosexual women, which classic feminism has formulated.

The first section of the article focuses on the narratives of transmigration, which are analyzed in relation to the dimensions that influence and intervene in terms of gender roles. The second section explores the complexity of transnational motherhood in the host society as mothers or mothers-to-be, approaching the multidynamics of transnational care, and how the health management of pregnancy is a complex issue in the face of cultural difference and the lack of an inter-ethnic sensitive health care system. This research highlights the challenges and cultural impacts that they face as indigenous women, migrant women, and mothers, in a transnational and migratory context.

Everything related to their role as mothers is very complex, since they are the ones who entirely take care of their family. This assumption of care empowers the agency of these women who are attentive to their family on both sides of the border.

This research has focused an approach on these subjects and underline how colonialism, gender and ethnocentrism constantly act on indigenous populations, greatly affecting women, as well as to highlight on the transformative and significant involvement and agency of these women.

**Keywords:** ethnic migration; indigenous women; transnational motherhood; mixtec community; gender roles.

## Resumen

En este artículo se examinan las narrativas de mujeres mixtecas provenientes de Oaxaca, México, migrantes en la ciudad de Oxnard, California, Estados Unidos. A través de la realización de 27 entrevistas en profundidad, se han analizado las etnografías derivadas de su proceso migratorio. La complejidad que conlleva el estudio de las migraciones internacionales, cruzada con el género y la etnicidad, ha requerido de una multi-metodología acorde con dicha especificidad. A través de una investigación descolonizada, este estudio examina las situaciones de desigualdad y opresión que afectan a las mujeres indígenas, definidas en contextos históricos distintos al de las mujeres urbanas, blancas, occidentales y heterosexuales, que el feminismo clásico ha formulado.

En la primera sección del artículo se analizan las narrativas de la trans migración en relación con los aspectos que influyen e intervienen en cuanto a los roles de género.

En la segunda sección, se explora la complejidad de la maternidad transnacional en la sociedad de destino en su condición de madres o futuras madres. El artículo se aproxima a las multidinámicas del cuidado transnacional, y a cómo la gestión sanitaria

del embarazo es un asunto complejo ante la diferencia cultural y la carencia de una sanidad con sensibilidad interétnica. Este trabajo pone de manifiesto los múltiples desafíos e impactos culturales que concurren en sus personas como mujeres originarias, migrantes y madres, en un contexto transnacional. Todo lo relacionado con su papel de madres es muy complejo, ya que son ellas las que íntegramente se ocupan de su familia. Esta asunción de cuidados potencia la agencia de estas mujeres que están pendientes de su familia a un lado y al otro de la frontera.

El foco de esta investigación se dirige a subrayar cómo el colonialismo, el género y el etnocentrismo actúan constantemente sobre las poblaciones indígenas, afectando en gran medida a las mujeres. Asimismo, se enfoca en la significativa participación y agencia transformadora de estas mujeres.

**Palabras clave:** migración étnica; mujeres indígenas; maternidad transnacional; comunidad mixteca; Roles de género.

## 1. INTRODUCTION. MIXTEC MIGRATION TO CALIFORNIA

The migratory context and how such process differentially affects indigenous mixtec migrant women in Oxnard, California, in terms of gender roles and the so-called transnational motherhood, is the subject of this paper.

Mixtec migration to the U.S. is not recent, indeed it has a long history. Since the 19th century, various indigenous mexican ethnic groups have been working in the mines and agriculture of the United States (Oehmichen Bazán, 2015). Fox and Rivera-Salgado point out that the implementation of the *North American Free Trade Agreement* (NAFTA) led to large migratory movements from the countryside to the city in the interior of the country, or to the United States (Fox & Rivera-Salgado, 2004). However, these international migration flows to the US are more recent. Rivera Salgado points out that it was not until the end of the 70s of the last century that they began to arrive in a more considerable way to the states of California, Oregon and Washington, principally (Fox & Rivera-Salgado, 2004; Zabin, 1992).

In this sense, it seems pertinent to highlight the periodization of stages that Laura Velasco proposes in relation to mixtec migration, incorporating the integration of women in these stages. This author places the first stage between the years of 1940 and 1960, being Veracruz, Mexico City, and the USA the main destinations. Women were incorporated into this migration as domestic workers. In the second stage, from 1961 to 1980, agricultural

migration to the northwest of the country took hold, and women began to migrate in order to regroup their families. The third stage refers to the years from 1981 to 2000, when the establishment of the mixtec community on both sides of Mexico's northern border was consolidated. A fourth stage, from the 2000s to the present, could be defined as the continuity and permanence of the mixtec settlement in California. At this stage, women do not migrate exclusively for family projects, but also for personal autonomy projects.

On the other hand, the Oaxacan indigenous people have represented the so-called «ethnic replacement» (Oehmichen Bazán, 2015; Velasco Ortiz, 2005; Zabin, 1992), by a certain tolerance for harsher working conditions, and by the resistance of mestizo day laborers to accept new precarious conditions after years of struggle in the Californian countryside. By the 1990s it is estimated that the mixtecs were the most numerous indigenous people in California, surpassing even Native Americans (Oehmichen Bazán, 2015). The exact number of mixtecs in California cannot be known today, given the irregularity associated with their migration. However, in 2010 there was an estimation of 165,000 mixtecs working in agriculture in the Central Valley of California (Rivera-Salgado, 2014; Velasco Ortiz, 2005).

The region in which they reside in Mexico, the Mixteca, was one of the most populated in Mesoamerica, and of great political and artistic importance. It is a large territory divided into four regions that stretch from the border between Guerrero and Oaxaca, to the Valley of Oaxaca, and from the south of Puebla to the Pacific Ocean. These regions are known as: The Mixteca Alta, the Mixteca Baja, the Mixteca Costa and the Valley of Oaxaca.

## 2. METHODOLOGICAL FRAMEWORK

The methodological framework that has been articulated for the development of this research has been multimethodological, which, according to Ariza and Velasco «does not have a unified theoretical body» (2012, p. 19). The complexity involved in the study of international migration, intersected with gender and ethnicity, has required a multi-methodology in accordance with this specificity. The result allows establishing a greater focus and level of reflection revaluing the knowledge of indigenous communities and women, through their narratives (Ripamonti, 2017) in order to displace the hegemony

of the western understanding of the world, to give way to an «ecology of knowledge» (De Sousa Santos, 2012).

In order to carry out this type of research, I have worked in the context of the civil society organization, Mixteco Indígena Community Organizing Project (henceforth MICOP), which is located in the city of Oxnard (California). It is made up mainly of indigenous Mixtec migrants, although Zapotec and Guerrero migrants also swell its ranks. Collaborative research was established with the organization (Hale, 2001; Speed, 2008; Paris Pombo, 2012; Stephen, 2012), through which participant observation was developed in that organization during the month of April 2014, and in the months of April and May 2016.

I conducted 27 in-depth interviews with mixtec migrant women, who were farm workers and community promoters in MICOP<sup>3</sup>. Participant observation also consisted of being part of the workshops they attended and coming to social events that took place in the context of the city of Oxnard, as well be present at various programs on Radio Indígena. This organization promotes the leadership of the indigenous migrant community through information campaigns and social programs. The different programs have a common denominator: to reinforce the positive meaning of the mixtec identity. This reverses the focus on ethnicity as a value, rather than as a stigma.

According to M<sup>a</sup> Dolores París, this type of research «highlights the social agenda [...] This signals an important epistemological transformation: our counterparts are considered as subjects (and not objects) of knowledge, their knowledge and experiences are valued as a central part of the research process» (2012, pp. 259-260). This aspect comes to question the authority of the researcher's knowledge as valid or unique.

The gender perspective, present in their programs, has been the guiding thread of this study. This approach allows us to analyze how patriarchy in a silent way promotes more hostile contexts for the development and social acceptance of women as epistemic and productive subjects, as opposed to their role as social reproducers (Beauvoir, 1949/2000; Scott, 1996; Butler,

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3. The real name of the interviewed people has not been used in the verbatim quotes included on this paper. Conversely, I used a pseudonymous (quoted in italics) to protect their identity.

2007), and in turn, how their reproductive role is conditioned by their position in the social structure. Thus, being a mother, indigenous and migrant, entails roles, impacts and stigmatizations that are far from the more idealized vision of motherhood. Indigenous women are affected by historical social displacement (Robles Santana, 2014) that increases the structural and accumulated vulnerability they carry. Their gender condition increases the ideology linked to the development paradigm that has justified their stigmatization, since as women in their communities of origin, they have had less access to formal education and to the possibility of being included in organic structures outside the domestic-family order.

Indigenous migrant women in the USA, placed at the crossroads of irregularity, associated discrimination, and integration into the new destination society, are in addition highly pressured by patriarchal social mandates. In the migratory framework, the assumption of other identity models, is extended in terms of the incorporation of new roles and gender relations that are emerging in new contexts outside the community. This gives rise to an identity readjustment which underlies a symbolic border, since in some way they continue to live between two cultures, and between two cultural systems of gender, both of which are crossed by norms contextualized in the current coloniality of power (Quijano, 1991), and the coloniality of gender (Lugones, 2008).

Likewise, through a decolonized investigation (Hale, 2001; Speed, 2006), I wanted to examine the situations of inequality and oppression that affect indigenous women, defined in different historical contexts than those of urban, white, western and heterosexual women, which classic feminism has formulated (Espinosa et al., 2014; Millán, 2014; Suárez & Hernández, 2008). Theoretical and methodological assumptions were based on the consideration of the cultural differences of the population under study and myself, the researcher. Taking into account the above and following the proposals and guidelines of several authors (Speed, 2008; Castañeda Salgado, 2012; Oehmichen Bazán, 2014), these differential power relations between the researcher and the person being researched must be taken into account. In this way, it is intended to avoid being mediated by coloniality in the production of knowledge, and that the knowledge generated is produced in dialogue with the population studied (Hale, 2007).



### 3. ETHNOGRAPHIES OF TRANSMIGRATION: RESISTANCE AND REACTION STRATEGIES

The narratives of Mixtec women regarding their motivations and experiences of migration to the *North*<sup>4</sup>, indicate that many of them decided to go alone, a situation that has been documented in other investigations (D'Aubeterre, 2003; Klein & Vázquez-Flores, 2013). The years 1984-85 could be identified as the time when the migration of mixtec women to California began to increase in number and frequency (Nagengast & Kearney, 1990). The decision to migrate is not insignificant, since the route entails risks that many are aware of, but do not measure the extent of them. Other women, on the contrary, are not aware and prepare themselves for a venture that seen in the temporal distance, has not left them indifferent. However, despite the insecurity of the route and the crossing, many of them, even if they are detained and deported, repeat it and try again as many times as necessary:

*I came on my own but with a coyote just the same, the second time it didn't go so well, the first time two hooded men had assaulted us on the line [border], they surrounded us, they had kidnapped us and I was the only woman they had stopped, and I don't know, they wanted to do something more about it. It was a terrible experience because I expected the worst, so that was the first time. The second time there were shots, we all ran, a lady was shot but on one foot... very ugly experiences... we passed by Tijuana. At that time, I did not measure the consequences, I was a child who did not care about the consequences of these acts. I was just making the decision of the acts, I want to go, I leave and that's it. But once being there one sees the things that happen, but that didn't stop me. I came to this country to work in the fields again, maybe I didn't last long, maybe I didn't know what I wanted anyway. I also suffered from domestic violence, just once with a relative here in the United States, because I had no father in my house and in that matter no one hit us more than my mother, so we never knew it was a male's hit. I decided to report that, I have never been one of those submissive people, never have been and never will be, I think. I called the police but this person managed to get out in time and that's when I said, I'd rather go back with my mother, and be there. I left again and went to Mexico, I was there only for a short time, I came back again, it was the third time and I said enough. (Ana, April, 2016)*

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4. Migrants speak of the «North» to refer to the United States of America.

Ana's narrative gives an account of the personal agency that involves her decisions, with projects of autonomy and liberation beyond the family. It also reflects the intersection of multiple pressures and oppressions linked to her gender (Robles Santana, 2020), which are not only present at origin, but in the migratory trajectory and at the destination.

The decision to migrate is related to a range of facts and circumstances, among which the following stand out: 1) The motivation preceded by successful migration experiences in the North by other migrants in their community. 2) Flight from gender violence by a family member or neighbor. 3) The financial motivation to help their family, which leads to the conscious separation of one or more of their children. 4) The absence of personal development options in their community, or because of the structural violence that plagues indigenous communities. 5) Family reunification, whether are women who reunite with their husbands, or minors and young people who reunite with their families.

Regardless of the different motivations, it has been documented after the discussions held, that there is an idealization of migratory opportunities, which is based on the idea of getting out of the cycle of poverty-violence in which they find themselves and weaving a more promising future, mainly for their offspring. However, the decision to migrate in women, involves a lot of resistance from their family and community, which can be seen in the maintenance of control beyond the border.

*My dad objected and said, «If you leave and come back with a son, you're no longer my daughter because you're underage, I'm gonna throw you out».* (Elisa, May, 2016)

Women have to face several challenges in the context of international migration: the separation from their community and family, the questioning of the *abandonment* of their children under the patriarchal punishment linked to being a *bad mother*, the transmigration with the associated dangers, and the beginning of a new life very different from that of their origin. As they begin the journey alone, they are faced with a journey full of uncertainties, dangers, risks, and multiple violence, where male presence and domination is a constant.

*We came walking across Tijuana through the desert, there were several women from different states, and so, among women we protected each other. It's what we always do, when we don't know anyone because we say OK, she's my relative, she's my cousin, she's my aunt whatever, even if you're nothing, because it's the only way you protect yourself from someone... Sometimes, the leaders are the ones who hurt us, or rape the women, or do any evil. We are in agreement. (Sofía, April, 2016)*

The above words show gestures and strategies of sorority among women against male dominance, which helps to increase their protection. These women weave networks of communication and mutual support to face migratory vulnerability, increasing their security in defenseless scenarios. This way of acting, shows how they defy the same gender strategies where only men are sought for support. Women themselves form a nucleus of defense that serves as a shelter, as a guarantee of care and reciprocity in watching over themselves, as opposed to the insecurity projected on them by men.

On the other hand, the young Mixtecs who take the route to reunite with their families endure added stress. Being a minor, a woman, a migrant and an indigenous person increases their vulnerability and the possibility of being the subject of violence(s) on the route when they go to meet their parents —often against their will— of whom they have vague memories, or do not remember them. It is not a decision of their own, but they are forced to leave their community because their parents demand it, something that also generates nervousness and stress. Along the way, in addition to being exposed to the abuses described, they may also be detained and sent to juvenile facilities in the United States (from now on the US), without knowing what will happen to them.

*When I came to the border it was difficult. I came here alone. I took a truck that was leaving my town for about an hour and I arrived in Tijuana, I lasted about 3 days, and from there my father was already talking to a man, he had contacts that could help me get through. When I tried the first time it was difficult because they caught me, I was a minor, they had to put me in a Juvenile Center. I was there for about two days, and my dad talked and they took me back, they took me out in Tijuana, I was there for about 15 more days with an aunt who lived near there. And again I tried, again they grabbed me, but my dad spoke again, he said to take me out, but it wasn't like that. From there they kept me for about*

*a week in the Juvenile Detention Center, but there were older people, and from there they sent me to San Diego and they just put me there. I was there around 20 days and my father was already worried because he didn't know anything about me, some people told him that I had disappeared in the desert, others told him that I had already returned... Since the Migration agents took me to San Diego, I had to stay there. I didn't know my dad's number, I had no way to reach them, until my dad started talking to Migration. When they finally found me, about 20 days had gone by. Even though I was treated well in that shelter, I didn't like the food because we hardly ate anything... My father arranging all the papers, asking for records, 'Yes I am his daughter'. It took me more than a month like that... I didn't bring all the papers with me, my grandmother was also worried, they sent the papers, my parents received them, but... It was difficult to be with many young people in the same situation, but there were different ones, some came from El Salvador, Ecuador, Honduras. I didn't speak any Spanish, none at all. (Sandra, May, 2016)*

All women, regardless of their age, are susceptible to detention, abuse, and legal limbo, and therefore fall prey to the uncertainty and insecurity associated with irregular mobility. However, the minors and young women claimed by their families to be reunited in the United States suffer more intensely these consequences, since they are sent and it is not a decision of their own in many cases.

*I arrived and got in the car but I didn't feel so happy, I felt sad, I didn't feel so happy, my parents, my mom, I felt that they weren't my parents, I arrived somewhere else...and I was here for two more hours in Oxnard and I arrived at the house and it was so different, and my mom 'is that you', and she hugged me and cried! She hasn't seen me for 7 years and then she said, I don't know you but I'm beginning to acknowledge you and I didn't call them my parents because I didn't feel they were my parents. And then my mom was like this, she made me chicken broth...in the village I didn't eat that and when I arrived I didn't feel like eating because I didn't feel like it. If I had gone to where my grandmother is, I would have wanted to eat there because it is the joy. And I arrived here and I felt sad and they asked me many things but I did not feel like my parents, I am going to tell you many things, and it has been a long time and I had already gotten used to the United States here, and when I entered the school I felt how my world changed, what existed before in my class, in the school, no longer existed. The kids made fun of me because I didn't know how to speak much Spanish, English. Even now I don't understand much English, but well, there I didn't know and I felt very sad, and now life is like... (Dolores, May, 2016)*

After the study, it has been observed that whether they are adults, young people, teenagers or girls, they develop strategies of resistance and reaction, which allow them to prepare themselves for the changes they continually encounter. The reaction capacity is what builds the change, because it is the product of the initiative, of the management of the problem. In the transmigration route it is not easy, because they find the normalization of the abuse to their bodies, crossed with their defenselessness. Therefore, in this context, they experience the vulnerability associated to their bodies, and even more, they are more likely to be harassed by their biological sex, ethnicity, irregularity situation (Robles Santana, 2017). Bodies, which because of the historical burden of ethnic-gender discrimination, for the other non-ethnic, involve the articulation of power relations with a strong colonial burden<sup>5</sup>. Even in the existing tension between accumulated vulnerability and migratory vulnerability —the latter represented by the system that sustains it, and by the authorized criminality that is present along the way— there may be nooks that allow them to maneuver in other directions, or at least to build spaces of defense. One of them, as we have seen above, is the practice of sorority. They do not save them from situations of domination, but they protect and empower them. These strategies of resistance and reaction account for the agency they develop as transformative agents, which operates and modulates in different ways according to the factors involved, allowing them to alleviate the socks they face. The different ways in which women react to the various circumstances that they experience throughout their migratory project are the responses to those external limits and structural constraints that are imposed on their daily lives. Consequently, their responses are the different strategies that they consciously or unconsciously develop to resist these obstacles, or to transform the situation (Robles Santana, 2017).

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5. Ethnicity and gender are constructs that justify social differences and hierarchies. Therefore, they cannot be separated from the migration process of indigenous women, since ethnicity is constructed from an occidental and colonial domination that has historically excluded ethno-cultural otherness.

#### 4. NEW CHALLENGES AND IMPACTS ON THEIR STATUS AS MOTHERS: ARTICULATING MULTIDYNAMICS OF TRANSNATIONAL CARE

Mixtec women, upon arriving in the United States, find themselves in the circumstance of having to change their life habits. Through fieldwork, it has been documented that a drastic change is revealed between their life in the community and their life in an unfamiliar city far from their cultural codes; between Mexico and USA. However, not only the lifestyle changes, but also the language, the experiences, the interpersonal relationships, and even the family ones.

Other difficulties faced by migrant women are those related to transnational motherhood (Hondagneu-Sotelo & Avila, 1997), that is, not only those derived from family separation and the organization of care on both sides of the border, but also from social criticism and the difficulties of exercising the role of mother from the distance. According to several authors, transnational motherhood contradicts white and middle-class models of motherhood, as well as most notions of Latina motherhood, which has profound costs (Hondagneu-Sotelo & Avila, 1997). These costs are located in the financial, social, and emotional domains, according to the authors themselves (Bruhn & Oliveira, 2021; Hondagneu-Sotelo & Avila, 1997; Oliveira, 2018; Parreñas, 2000).

Today, in Mixtec communities in the state of California, Mixtec migrants are faithful to their community obligations by participating in the social, religious and political organization of their community of origin. In this way, the community on the other side of the border is recreated, in what has been called the transnational community (Kearney & Nagengast, 1989). However, women do not participate, so they are left out of this social reproduction of the community in terms of the community political-economic system. It has been detected that they maintain the link with the transnational community insofar as they participate in its symbolic reproduction. In some communities they are invited to express their opinions, but not to hold community positions. What they emphasize is the permanent bond due to the family they have left there and which they still take care of. Transnational motherhood connects them emotionally, being subject to what we could call for

this case a culture of waiting, uncertainty and continuous care insofar as they do not feel their migratory project is complete as long as their children are still on the other side and cannot join them to the migratory project they have initiated.

For women, crossing the border does not mean that they are no longer subordinated to the dichotomous structural subordination of gender; the role of care continues to be exercised by women. However, as Carmen Gregorio points out, immigrant women are not «mere passive reproducers of patriarchal structures of societies considered more backward in comparison to the West» (Gregorio Gil, 2004, p. 23). Nonetheless, the decision to leave one of their children behind is not trivial, as it implies a strong transnational family architecture, what several authors describe as an «intergenerational family network that motivates and facilitates migration» (Bruhn & Oliveira, 2021, p. 2). In their study of Latin American migrant women in Boston, these researchers report on how women approach transnational caregiving through the extended family. The women interviewed in this research have articulated the intergenerational family network by leaving their children with their grandmothers, operating this (gender) network in a multidirectional manner. Patriarchal cultural codes perpetuate gender mandates in line with what Marcela Lagarde (1992/2005) conceptualized as the captivities of women, placing these transnational mothering practices within the western stigma of bad mothers. However, this study reveals the opposite, since their objective is to improve the structural living conditions of all their offspring, those they leave behind and those who accompany them.

Family separation entails strong emotional costs for children and parents, due to detachment. Many go through depressive processes that are equally connected with the low self-esteem that begins to get triggered in the society of destination as a result of interethnic estrangement, the new structure of life, which a priori is very violent. Later, when they get the money to bring their children, the reunion can be very painful because, as it has been documented, many no longer recognize their mothers and fathers because of the time that has passed since their parents left them, as shown above. This situation increases the anxiety of the women in this venture, since they have done it to improve the quality of life of their family. All the years in which they have built a sort of transnational maternity, that is, the

sustainability of the family at both sides of the border is initially questioned by the opposition of those who are no longer children.

In Oxnard, the destination society, the new family situation, in which the two main family members become wage earners, and proceed to work for others, does not disrupt gender roles. Women do not neglect their role as mothers or as wives, the difference resides in the fact that they now have to combine it with their new role as extra-domestic workers. They begin a daily routine that burdens them with responsibilities that did not exist before and therefore, with more time invested in the management of family welfare. The absence of co-responsibility for family tasks produces states of discomfort in women in this new environment. The assumption of new tasks in the society of destination, previously absent in their daily lives, is a profound cultural shock. In addition, they face the management of an unknown bureaucracy, in which the language barrier overshadows and hinders the scenario and its resolutions, since many only speak their native language.

Among the new roles that mothers should include in their routine is hiring a nanny to care for their children until the time they enter school, since they begin their workday in the fields hours earlier. Because the migration, they lose the family network linked to care; moreover, they lose money by investing it on this task (Stephen, 2007). Added to this, is the anxiety of leaving your child with a stranger.

In the social organization where the collaborative research was conducted, the community promoters are counseling parents to report if they see their children have bruises on their bodies, encouraging them to lose their fear of the threats they receive to call the migration authorities.

*My children suffer a lot, you have to get them up early, you don't know the kind of people you leave your children with, you just knock on the door and say how much do you charge? And right, but you never know who the people are... and it happened to me with my child, I cried a lot, I suffered a lot and I felt very bad because when I arrived my son had bruises on his legs and I told the nanny what had happened to my child and she didn't want to tell me, and it's like something ugly because you don't know. We go to work all day, from 6 in the morning to 5/6 in the afternoon, and you just look at them for a little while and again. And no, you don't ask our children, or check their bodies... I made the police report, but those people don't live there anymore. I told her dad and he told me that if I was crazy, how could it happen... it was something... instead of supporting me, they*



*were just against me. That's why I say that many people sometimes don't realize where they are leaving their children. That's what I don't like here, leaving our children, that there isn't much help, like day care, having more support in this is what is missing. Children cannot defend themselves. (Patricia, April, 2016)*

The school paperwork for the children is also managed by the mothers. They begin a complicated task by having to deal with the language, school administration and meetings they must attend. Most of them need interpreters. In some schools, there are already Mixtec translators trained by the MICOP organization, however, on many occasions it is the children themselves who have to carry out this task, which is not easy, and which causes them conflict with their mothers:

*It was very difficult for me because I have no family here, I had to adapt to a new life, learn English. It became more complicated because I had to go to meetings with my parents and they wanted me to translate for them, and I was barely learning English, and then they would scold me and say the same thing to me as they did to her [her partner and friend, Carolina]: «I sometimes said 'I don't know how to say this', and my mom said, 'Aren't you going to school? They don't teach you this?', and I said 'No, I don't have classes in this, they don't educate us to be interpreters'». (Esther and Carolina, 20 years old both, Zapotec and Mixtec respectively, 2016)*

Even for the same interpreters, translation is sometimes complicated because of the different variants of the Mixtec language:

*In the beginning it was difficult to partner with the families, especially because there are some who are very shy, they don't trust anyone, and we gained the confidence by going to the house, handing out flyers, giving information about the resources that are there, that MICOP offers, such as the monthly meeting, help for their children. Also in the adaptation of the language, we all speak Mixtec, but it has variations, so, it was a little difficult for me to adapt to how to communicate with the families, as words that can be offensive... but I ask them, and the families clarify it for me. (Silvia, 2016)*

Everything related to their role as mothers is very complex, since they are the ones who entirely take care of their family. This assumption of care empowers the agency of these women who are attentive to their family on both sides of the border (Bruhn & Oliveira, 2021).

*As a woman, I have a lot of work, besides working outside, also the children, feeding them, the escuela, the language. If we only speak Mixtec, there is a*

*lot of mockery towards us. Also domestic violence, a lot of it. You are oppressed because you just work and take care of children, you can't improve yourself, you can't study. Many women can't read, they can't write, some don't know how to read a paycheck, and so it's very difficult. (Iria, April, 2014)*

Added to this is the culture shock, which not only affects them because of the need to adapt to a new social structure, but also because they see their ancestral mixtec practices in the relationship with their children threatened, since they can be removed from their guard and custody.

The Consul for Protection of the General Consulate of Mexico in Oxnard, relates it to the vulnerability in which the indigenous mothers are:

*In the case of the indigenous women there is a very recurrent problem which is that they take care of their children like if they were there [in Mexico], and they wrap the babies up like tamales and here you can't do that, in that sense it is very vulnerable, you do something based on what you see. What she actually saw in Mexico was that, so it's very difficult that kind of thing and there are no programs to educate women in that sense. Where women are very vulnerable is in that part of caring for children. Having the social workers say that the person is very negligent, and they take them first to a shelter and then to a Foster Home which is the most rounded business here. I think there is a lot of abuse because if social workers don't keep a number of children dependent on the court, they run out of work.*

*If the police report a case of neighbors calling because there is a scandal in the house, and then there are kids in the house, the police call the social workers and they take the kids away. First they take him to a shelter and then to the foster homes that are the Foster. Social workers have a very stable network in terms that each social worker has a home and they are not free. There are many of such cases. The mother has to do a responsible parenting program, besides going to therapy. The responsible motherhood sessions are 30\$ each session and the women see themselves in a circle that they cannot afford nor comply with (they also have to work). They get to see their children once a week, the children are seen kicking, the social worker keeps the children there, because she tells the mother that she is not ready yet. If that child cannot leave, the children after 18 months of dependency on the court automatically go for adoption, and if it is a child 6 years old or younger, they are adopted. If they are older, there is already a lot of trouble about adoption, because they already know what is happening and they are still growing up in Foster Homes. When they reach the*

*age of 18, the United States regularizes them. Indigenous women are much more unprotected in terms of having their children taken away<sup>6</sup>.*

This shows the coloniality of power and the ethnocentrism implicit in the so-called *responsible motherhood*. This is a strong detriment to the education that mothers give their children, as they are being considered irresponsible. They are being judged and deprived of the education of their offspring because of cultural difference. Thus, there is a lack of a decolonial, cultural and ethical perspective, which has as its main consequence the separation of the family.

However, even if this and other pressures influence them, they turn vulnerability into resistance, because their children need them to keep the family machine running. In the end, they are the engine of their lives.

*He is now going to finish his High School [her son]. Right now, I am already married, but my children do not have their father, and I have tried to raise my children as best I could. (Cristina, April 2014)*

Nevertheless, an important point in the context of the United States is that to be able to function autonomously they need a driver's license and a car, otherwise it becomes very difficult to function in this country, which is built for the automobile, and not for the citizenry. Public transport is practically non-existent: *«I drive out of necessity, not because I want to drive. I asked for an interpreter,»* says Pamela (April, 2016). Therefore, one of their first goals is to get a license so they do not depend on anyone, and to be able to manage their time according to their needs.

The MICOP organization offers a wide range of workshops aimed at educating mothers (and fathers) about the cultural change that is taking place in their lives. Workshops such as «Women and our emotional well-being», «Voice of the indigenous woman», «First five», «Learning with mom and dad», or «Healthy baby» are examples of this.

*In the organization, I took training as a promoter, baby classes. Healthy baby management, a program on mental health, another on women's cancer. With the healthy baby program, the community is given eight classes in Mixteco and Spanish, at the end of which they are given a gift. The «Learning with Mom and*

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6. Consul for Protection of the General Consulate of Mexico in Oxnard. In-depth interview. April 28, 2016.

*Dad» classes are for children 2 and 3 years old who are not going to pre-kindergarten or kindergarten, and they are taught basic things, the five colors, also in Spanish and Mixtec, songs also in English. I do all those programs here, now full time. I also worked in «Bridges» helping the community with their medical papers, family leave, referring them to different places where they need... (Iria, April, 2014).*

In spite of the difficulties, women have known how to manage a whole family structure, even before shaping their own, because as some emphasized «*I didn't have much childhood, from home I already took care of my brothers*» (Tania, May, 2016).

Mothers, whether single or married, put in place the strategies they can use to move the family forward, despite the obstacles and barriers they encounter. The help of their children in many cases is essential, because all the difficulties that accompany the time they live, along with the handicap of language, require that a team is formed among them. The children, in addition to helping in matters of daily assistance (domestic, bureaucratic), also, in some cases end up supporting the family economy, working on weekends, or summers in the fields mainly.

## 5. WESTERN MEDICINE: CULTURAL AND EMOTIONAL IMPACTS IN PREGNANCY

*They gave us training on HIV, prenatal care, mammograms, about all the care. And it helped us a lot, it is very different from our community, there our body is sacred, it is your intimacy. That's the biggest change we've seen in our community, to have a doctor touch you, you just get touched by your partner. We are trying to help them with this process. When it happened to me, I felt that the people in the waiting room were looking at me and knew what they had done to me, I felt bad, embarrassed... and that is what we share with new moms... the process of pregnancy here. The food, the laws... everything is different, it is a very strong change for us when we arrive here [...] and little by little we are adapting. (Olivia, April, 2014)*

Another aspect that affects Mixtec women in a differential way and has a strong cultural impact is the management of a new pregnancy in the context of the United States. Western medicine involves the constant manipulation and medicalization of their bodies, which they feel as something very

violent, because it is not part of their cultural codes. Assimilation of western health models affects their traditional practices and impacts different aspects, such as health (Espinoza et al., 2014; McGuire, 2006). Therefore, a series of barriers and cultural changes begin to operate, conditioning the entire process of pregnancy and childbirth. Among the aspects that women report, the lack of knowledge of the language implies multiple limitations, since they can neither understand what will be done to them, nor express themselves freely (Crivelli et al., 2013; McGuire, 2006). The medicalization of pregnancy brings them a strong sense of shame and rejection. They have to learn to accept a new relationship with their body through unfamiliar professionals in a hostile environment such as the hospital. In this context, there are several people who are not associated with healing and childbirth (administrative staff and non-healthcare personnel). They start a schedule of vaccinations, blood tests and medications that have never been present in their traditional pregnancies or culture. In addition to the above, there is a continuous practice of cesarean sections, which they see being practiced assiduously, which makes them completely distrustful of labor and doctors. This brings them anxiety and postpartum psychic repercussions.

*When they are going to have their children they are very uncomfortable because of so many people, students. With the shame they close and do not dilate. Very uncomfortable having the baby in the hospital, they are used to being alone with the midwife and no one touching them. Just like the position in which they have to put themselves. They don't like blood tests either. Why so much blood? They don't take pills, vitamins, and here they are constantly being checked, having their blood drawn, coming to appointments. They don't like appointments very much. They don't understand the culture of the people here and say why this, why that. They do not accept each other. (Jimena, interpreter at Clínica Las Islas, May, 2016)*

*There you have to be in quarantine and then a steam bath [when you give birth], so what they say is that the bones help you to recover. And just now to think that there isn't a mother, a sister, a relative who doesn't help you in those days... We didn't know what postpartum depression was. (Rosa, May, 2016)*

The above quotations show the existence of certain structural changes, as well as cultural barriers that evidence a supervening difficulty for women who undergo these practices. According to Minerva Saldaña-Téllez and María Montero (2009) in a study on zapotec women and the taking of cervical

cytology, indigenous women are crossed by three types of barriers: structural, psychosocial and cultural. In the present research it has been possible to observe a large part of the obstacles that these researchers have documented, and which in the case at hand, are detrimental to them, since in some cases they become practices that generate strong impulses that act in a bidirectional manner. The triangulation of these barriers provides a framework for analysis that should be focused on in future research. Health for indigenous communities differs from the conceptions practiced by other migrant communities that do not come from native populations (Crivelli et al., 2013; McGuire, 2006). Health in indigenous communities is not an individualized concept, but a communitarian one (Crivelli et al., 2013; Espinoza et al., 2014), so the introduction into a western health system entails the assumption of patterns and protocols that are difficult to assimilate under a communitarian gaze in which there is another relationship with the bodies and with the people who are dedicated to healing. Everything related to motherhood, as explored, is an abrupt handicap for them, with which they feel strongly violated. In a certain way, transnational maternity also operates in this hospital dimension, assuming other obstetric patterns that differ greatly from their traditional forms of pregnancy, childbirth and postpartum.

## 6. CONCLUSIONS: THE GRADUAL AND AMBIVALENT CHANGE OF ROLES

According to Pierrete Hondagneu-Sotelo and Ernestine Avila, when women leave their communities behind, «they are embarking not only on an immigration journey but on a more radical gender-transformative odyssey» (Hondagneu-Sotelo & Avila, 1997, p. 552).

The women interviewed, although all belonging to the Mixtec community, the vast majority of whom are farm workers, are women who are attending the workshops offered by MICOP. This may give a false idea about generalizing in relation to their own experiences, because to a greater or lesser extent they are training themselves and are losing the fear of speaking, of telling their experiences, while at the same time it is helping them to know their rights.

In the daily life in the society of destination, one can see how they have been acquiring new tools to continue with the autonomous administration of their lives. Once they face the taboos that surround them as women, indigenous people and migrants, some women come to light and make a vital transformation in which their ancestral customs are recontextualized. So those who traditionally held the power and authority of women's speech, action and representation are being questioned. New life strategies and changes in gender relations are being developed in migratory contexts, which are very complex (Cruz Manjarrez, 2014; D'Aubeterre, 2000; Hondagneu-Sotelo, 1994).

The complexity is bidirectional, since in many cases it is a matter of making the changes together with the couple, trying to involve the men. The shift away from hetero-patriarchal patterns and those linked to notions of motherhood, interculturality and ethnicity, is not complete without the participation of men, the community, and the institutions. Considering this dynamic that is beginning to be woven in the context of migration, it has become evident that ethnic roles remain intact, because the fact that mixtec women take care of their lives and focus on co-responsibility does not interfere with the totality of community practices and their philosophy of life, which, insofar, continues to be exercised as much as possible.

*I have seen women who know their rights and apply them. They are empowered on the issue, «my husband stayed with the children, I came to take this workshop because it is good for me». But there are still women who are very submissive to their husbands, and they have twice as much work, they do everything, and the husband worked and that's it. Those women have arrived here. That does exist, but less so than when they first arrive in this country. (Ana, health promoter, May 2016)*

Nonetheless, the change of gender roles does not apply to the whole community. The fact that women are beginning to turn around both the tasks they traditionally perform and the conception that sustains them has strong consequences for their immediate environment. Therefore, it is not easy for this to happen, since the social and family pressures are very strong, as well as the repercussions. This drive in some cases not only comes from the community in Oxnard, it can also influence the community of origin (Klein & Vázquez-Flores, 2013). Laura Velasco points out how migration facilitated

changing gender roles and relationships since Mixtec women began migrating to northern Mexico and southern United States, stating that they «have an essential role in implementing survival strategies when pioneer migrants were absent from their homes» (Velasco Ortiz, 2005, p. 164). For the case studied, it has been observed that these changes come progressively over the time of stay in the destination country. In such a way that migration slowly generates changes in gender roles, which will be more or less perceptible in some families than in others.

All in all, the combination of several elements, such as: facing multiple barriers when they arrive, assuming new life habits linked to the system they are starting to be part of, and knowing their rights as a woman and as an indigenous woman, are the combination that allows them to start acting based on other social criteria within the sex-gender system.

The responsibility that the women who participate in the organization MICOP have been acquiring has been one of the main factors that corroborate the gradual change in relation to their previous status in the family and the community. An alteration in the traditional roles of women and mothers as a consequence of migration is beginning to emerge. Change that they themselves do not expect but that nevertheless, as a result of the continuous development in the organization and the new tasks they must face, is being managed and produced.

All the above allows us to observe the multidynamics that indigenous migrant women deal with in the face of the constant sociocultural and transnational impulses that have repercussions on their condition as mothers in the society of destination, Oxnard. In this sense, it should be emphasized that migration increases cultural adaptations that can have strong emotional costs.

The western obstetric health system requires awareness from both a gender and cultural perspective. This would improve the intervention and behavior of professionals with the mixtec community and with any other non-western culture. It would also break with the colonial stigmas inscribed in the collective imaginary, which place the indigenous populations in underdeveloped spaces, discriminating their cultural practices and rejecting the otherness.



The impact of western medicine on the women interviewed occurs in the context of a neocolonial ideological-structural system that is insensitive to diversity and cultural difference. The solution is not to be found in women changing their beliefs, since they are in that continuous negotiation and modification of their cultural practices. Institutions must be sensitive to the socio-cultural transformation that is taking place because of globalization and the multiculturalism that operates in western countries. By understanding the cultural abyss that exists between both cultures, it will be possible to empathize and manage changes that will have a positive impact on women and professionals, since they can also be affected by the lack of knowledge about their ailments and the mistrust they cause in them.

As some scholars assert about research related to maternal health in indigenous populations, this topic «needs to engage directly with indigenous women and indigenous organizations, acknowledge the context of and influence of colonialism, and seek to value and incorporate indigenous conceptualizations of health and indigenous knowledge» (Patterson et al., 2022).

The aim of this research has been to outline an approach on these subjects and underline how colonialism, gender and ethnocentrism constantly act on indigenous populations, greatly affecting women, as well as to focus on the transformative and significant involvement and agency of these women.

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# «YOU HAVE RAISED ME BETWEEN TWO WORLDS»: MOTHERS, DAUGHTERS, AND EMOTIONS IN THE SAHRAWI DIGITAL DIASPORA IN SPAIN

## «ME HAS CRIADO ENTRE DOS MUNDOS»: MADRES, HIJAS Y EMOCIONES EN LA DIÁSPORA DIGITAL SAHARAUI EN ESPAÑA

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### Abstract

The theoretical development of the concept of diaspora accounts for almost any transnational population that maintains strong emotional ties based on nostalgia and memory with their territories of origin, but also affects and ties with their territories of destination. These processes are generated through intrinsically diverse experiences that are constructed in-between both social realities. The emergence of digital technologies has provided these populations with a new scenario wherein the past and present homes are connected by immediate communication, which currently reduces distances, and uprootedness. However, few investigations have analyzed the frequent communication paradoxes that occur within these communities based on not only the need to be connected but also the failure to meet family expectations. Most studies have focused on the experience of mothers and the role they play in maintaining traditions linked to their places of origin, leaving behind the experience of daughters and their mutual relationship. This article addresses this gap while

exploring the challenges that these contradictions present for the Sahrawi digital diaspora in Spain. Specifically, it investigates relationships between mothers and daughters and their impact on the social media practices of the latter. Through a social media ethnography that was developed between 2016 and 2018 together with Sahrawi refugees in Spain, this research examines how aspects such as the maintenance of family honor and the need to build one's own life plan constantly clash in relationships between mothers and daughters with respect to cultural preservation, the emergence of new forms of belonging, emotional relations, and community expectations.

**Keywords:** Saharan diaspora; mothers; daughters; Facebook; belonging.

### Resumen

El desarrollo teórico del concepto de diáspora describe hoy a casi cualquier población transnacional que mantiene fuertes vínculos emocionales basados en la nostalgia y la memoria con sus territorios de origen, pero también afectos y vínculos con sus territorios de destino. Estos procesos se generan a través de experiencias intrínsecamente diversas que se construyen en el intermedio de ambas realidades sociales. La aparición de las tecnologías digitales ha dotado a estas poblaciones de un nuevo escenario donde el hogar pasado y el hogar presente se conectan, reduciendo distancias y desarraigos a través de la comunicación inmediata. Sin embargo, son pocas las investigaciones que han analizado las frecuentes paradojas comunicativas que se dan dentro de estas comunidades basadas, por un lado, en la necesidad de estar conectadas, y, por otro, en no alcanzar las expectativas familiares. La mayoría de los estudios se han centrado en la experiencia de las madres y el papel que desempeñan en el mantenimiento de las tradiciones vinculadas a sus lugares de origen, dejando de lado la experiencia de las hijas y la relación entre ambas. Este artículo aborda esta brecha, al mismo tiempo que examina los desafíos que presentan estas contradicciones para la diáspora digital saharauí en España. En concreto, analiza las relaciones entre madres e hijas y el impacto de las redes sociales en su cotidianeidad. A través de una etnografía de redes sociales desarrollada entre 2016 y 2018, esta investigación explora cómo aspectos como el mantenimiento del honor familiar y la necesidad de construir su plan de vida propio chocan constantemente entre madres e hijas en esa relación continua entre la preservación cultural, el surgimiento de nuevas formas de pertenencia, las relaciones emocionales y las expectativas de la comunidad.

**Palabras clave:** diáspora saharauí; madres; hijas; Facebook; pertenencia.



## 1. INTRODUCTION

The theoretical concept of diaspora accounts for almost any transnational population that maintains strong emotional ties with its territory of origin based on nostalgia and memory but also with its multiple territories of destination through everyday relations and life projects. This tension between spaces and cultures is often experienced as problematic because it evokes a feeling of ambivalent belonging. The hybridity or fluidity of the sense of belonging in the diasporic experience could be both liberating and problematic due to the intersection between social and cultural realities. Thus, because of its emotional roots, the notion of belonging is one of the most heavily negotiated aspects of the diasporic space—especially in the case of refugee diasporas, which maintain strong connections with the first asylum countries in which their refugee camps were located, despite migrating away from them (Van Hear, 2009).

For refugee diasporas, refugee camps become the primary space of socialization with others through family and kinship relations, even though they are associated with mobility violence and a sense of limbo. In these cases, the sociality process in refugee camps continuously marks the migratory experience beyond them in terms of the maintenance of social relations with other members of the group as well as the cultural preservation of traditions and emotional relations linked to the refugee community (Hajdukowski-Ahmed, 2008). These social relationships structure day-to-day interactions with other family members, such as in paternal-filial relationships and those with siblings or cousins. In this sense, the possibilities that digital technologies offer to maintain constant contact with family and friends have influenced diasporic relations within and outside of the camps in regard to the emotional exchange of the group. The emotional impact of everyday conversations through digital technologies has determined transnational intimacy in personal communication, rapid exchange of information between places, and social control and surveillance.

However, scarce attention has been directed to family-related paradoxes that originate from the exchange of information in the diaspora space that is facilitated by digital technologies. In fact, the mother-daughter relationship and the emotional distance that is generated by everyday digital media practices remain understudied in the emergent field of digital migration studies

(Leurs & Smets, 2018). This article examines the everyday digital media practices of daughters and considers the rarely explored topic of emotional distance from their mothers in the refugee diasporic context. Although several inquiries have focused on transnational motherhood (Gedalof, 2009; Kofman & Raghuram, 2015), there is a lack of research on the mother-daughter relationship in a diasporic context.

In view of this research gap, this paper studies the case of the Sahrawi refugee diaspora, which has been displaced to the Tindouf refugee camps since 1976 but has been experiencing a new migratory wave from the camps to Spain since the 1990s. The incomplete decolonization process of the Western Sahara by Spain and the occupation of the territory by Morocco and Mauritania incited a war between these countries as well as the liberation movement of the region, the Polisario Front. The immediate consequence of the war was the displacement of a substantial part of the Sahrawi population to the Tindouf region of Algeria, where refugee camps were built, which was proclaimed the Sahrawi Arab Democratic Republic (SADR) as a state-in-exile. As in traditional nomadic Sahrawi society, feminine mothering roles formed part of a division of labor during this wartime period (Allan, 2019). Sahrawi women heavily dedicated themselves to a variety of duties within and outside the *khayma*<sup>1</sup> (Sahrawi nomadic tent), whereas men were at the battlefield. As in the traditional nomadic society, men usually spent time away from the *frig* (nomadic encampment) to attend to the grazing, while women carried out the majority of mothering tasks and were responsible for the daily affairs of the *khayma* (Allan, 2008). After the decision of Mauritania to leave the war, Morocco and the Polisario Front continued the armed conflict until 1991, when a ceasefire was declared following a negotiation process by the United Nations and an agreement to hold an internationally monitored referendum of self-determination, which never took place. The ceasefire period also influenced the division of labor due to the return of men from the battlefield to the camps. Consequently, women assumed a more domestic role despite the particular political role that they had claimed during the war. It also expanded their function as mothers in the society in terms of dedication to their families and the provision of

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1. For words in Hassaniya dialect, the American Library Association-Library of Congress system is followed. Any errors are the author's responsibility.

education to their children about the values of the society. While women tended to their daughters' education, fathers assumed responsibility for educating their sons. According to Allan (2008), this difference derives from the idea that care of the elderly and young children is usually a task for daughters rather than sons, as the patriarchal system and its division of labor position women in the role of a care provider. Such differences are particularly marked by the gender norms of Sahrawi society, which support the expectation that women maintain the *sharaf* (honor) of the family (Errer, 2015). Hassanophone societies observe morality as central to social behavior and consider honor and modesty to be their core values (Abu-Lughod, 1999; Popenoe, 2004; Wilson, 2016).

The end of the war also produced a new migratory wave of Sahrawi refugees to the former colonial power, Spain, to seek a more promising future and improve the life conditions of their families and fellows in the camps (Gómez, 2011). Initially, the majority of Sahrawis who arrived to Spain had studied in Cuba during the years of the war. The Cuban government signed a cooperation program with the SADR to train Sahrawi refugees in the country as cadres for a future Sahrawi independent state. When they subsequently arrived to the camps, they experienced a cultural clash, as their moral and social codes differed from those of the people in the camps, especially the women (San Martín, 2010).

As a result, several Sahrawi refugees with high-level training decided to migrate to Spain to develop careers and improve the lives of their families. However, eventually, other Sahrawi refugees, who had not studied in Cuba, decided to migrate as short-term workers (Wilson, 2016) or with their own families through the *Vacaciones en Paz* (Holidays in Peace) program, which allows Sahrawi children to spend summer periods with Spanish families. Some of those children stay with their host families after the summer if they have medical problems. This means of entry is a key for some parents to request family reunification, while others arrive to Spain as instructors of the program and then decide to not return to the camps. Many of these instructors are women who arrive to Spain to pick up their children and then stay for several months in an irregular situation until they receive permission for residence.

The daughters and sons who grow up in Spain or live with a Spanish host family usually experience Sahrawi culture in a more distant way

(López-Belloso, 2016). In particular, Sahrawi women are positioned between two patriarchies with their respective gender norms: one is defined by the relations established by society and by the perpetuation of displacement in the camps, while the other is framed by their social position in the destination society—in this case, Spain—which intersects with their bodies and experiences according to their gender, race, class, sexuality, age, and other attributes. In this sense, Sahrawi women are situated at a «crossroads» (Anzaldúa, 1987) of gender norms that influence not only their daily lives and life projects but also—and especially—their mother-daughter relationships. This situation is currently accentuated by the role of digital technologies in maintaining contact with relatives in the camps. Gossiping or exchanging information about others on social media has become a common practice among refugees in the camps and beyond (Almenara-Niebla & Ascanio-Sánchez, 2020), which has influenced emotional affiliation in mother-daughter relationships.

By referencing the work of digital migration scholars who have explored the connections between emotion, media, and migration (Alinejad & Ponzanesi, 2020), this paper offers empirical insights into how refugee diasporic mothers and daughters have developed their own emotional relationships based on the digital media practices of the latter and the paradoxical roles of being connected with the refugee community. In this sense, most prior research around this topic has focused on women who migrate alone (Oso, 1997; Madianou, 2016) or the perspective of children who are left behind (Madianou & Miller, 2012), while few studies have addressed the relationships between mothers and children—especially their daughters—in their countries of destination (Liberatore, 2016). In investigating the emotional impact of the diasporic process and feelings of belonging, this paper argues that the digital media practices of some daughters have generated an emotional distance from their mothers due to social visibility and its implications in Sahrawi society.

## 2. MOTHER-DAUGHTER RELATIONSHIPS IN DIASPORA AND TRANSNATIONAL DIGITAL SPACES

The mediation of emotions, affects, and belonging through digital media in transnational contexts has been discussed by a range of scholars (Wilding,

2006; Baldassar, 2014; Alinejad & Ponzanesi, 2020). Increased mobility and improvements in digital technologies have allowed more people to experience transnational family lives through the possibilities of instant communication. The development of a sense of co-presence (Madianou, 2016) and the emotional implications of mediation of caregiving (Baldassar & Merla, 2014) have accentuated the «affective turn» (Clough and Halley, 2007) in media and social studies, which refers to analysis of the implications of emotions and affects in the communication practices of diasporic and transnational families. In this sense, a variety of scholars have addressed the emotional consequence of transnational motherhood for migrant women who leave their children at home (Hondagneu-Sotelo & Avila, 1997; Madianou & Miller, 2012; Parreñas, 2005). These inquiries have investigated how these women perform two active roles: one of mothers at a distance who utilize constant communication practices, and one of migrants who send remittances and contribute to the well-being of their families. These particular roles have intensified the «pressures and expectations on the responsibility of motherhood» (Madianou & Miller, 2012: 24) that perpetuate gender roles in the migration context with respect to kinship obligations of caregiving practices and maintenance of the family institution.

In sociological and anthropological terms, parents teach their children to be well-integrated members of society (Parsons & Bales, 1955) who follow concrete cultural and social norms. In diasporic contexts, the cultural realities of different places are combined with the cultural heritage of the country of origin and the cultural experience of the country of destination. This situation implies processes of social interactions based on multidimensional social relations between the origin and destination (Young, 2009). Feminist postcolonial theory has clarified the significance of family interactions—and their emotional consequences—in borderlands (Anzaldúa, 1987). These intimate social relationships are characterized by moral obligations (Baldassar & Merla, 2014) that position women differently according to «a set of regulations based on hegemonic interpretations of gender roles within both their country of settlement and that of origin» (Al-Ali, 2007, pp. 45). This idea situates women in a particular space because of their emotional attachments to the family and the construction of their own narratives.

Diasporic groups develop strong, collectivity-based politics of belonging that conform to in-group boundaries in multiple ways. In refugee diasporas, women tend to maintain their traditions in exile and become symbolic guards (Yuval-Davis & Anthias, 1989). In this sense, refugee diasporic mothers frequently teach their children about their own social and cultural heritage, which, in several cases, relates to maintaining the assumption of gender roles from their origin countries (Liberatore, 2016). Despite this socialization process, diasporic children and daughters especially adopt a more cosmopolitan approach to the challenge of experiencing gender roles based on a combination of their formal education in the country of destination and their family education at home.

Intergenerational networks of reciprocity, obligation, love, and trust, which characterize family relations, are not exempt from conflict and problems. In fact, mother-daughter relationships in diasporic spaces also involve moral obligations and failed expectations. In her research on the construction of the self by a young Italian Muslim woman, Menin (2014) has addressed a sense of fragmentation and the moral conflicts that are associated with the necessity to achieve personal desires and family allegiance. Failed expectations on the basis of their everyday activities, social relations, or social media practices generate negative emotions (Turner, 2009), which pose consequences for the maintenance of family and community networks. In this sense, mothers are usually considered responsible for the gendered deviation processes of their daughters in, for instance, failing to assume a particular dress code, maintaining romantic relations, or even engaging in particular behaviors that are recurrently related to sexuality in specific cultures (Puleo, 2007). Informal agents, such as family members or relatives, usually address these deviation processes by applying sanctions to enforce rules, norms, and social values.

In a social media context (Miller et al., 2016), online presentation and public visibility are relevant to the configuration of the public and private self (Goffman, 1959/1994). Social media has become an important arena for social interaction and digital reproduction of the gendered values and norms of groups. Community values and social codes influence the kind of content that individuals publicly share online. In this regard, gender scholars have studied how diasporic women position themselves on an online crossroads

of moral codes that differ between their societies of origin and their destination countries (Subramanian, 2013). They have also investigated how social control is performed online through the development of a negative public reputation on the basis of personal pictures or comments, which can affect mother-daughter relationships.

### 3. METHODOLOGY AND ETHICS OF RESEARCH

This paper sources evidence from social media qualitative research (Postill & Pink, 2012) with young Sahrawi women in Spain that was conducted from 2016 to 2018. The research process followed a non-digital-media-centric approach (Pink et al., 2016) that focused on activities, relationships, and experiences around digital media. Therefore, it employed a qualitative methodology that involved interviews with users, the collection of digital material from social media platforms (e.g. Twitter, Facebook, and Instagram) through virtual ethnography, and the attendance of a Sahrawi feminist event, which hosted a particular debate session about «our grandmothers, our mothers and ourselves.» This online-offline approach allowed for the generation of a complete vision of narratives and digitally mediated experiences.

The analysis in this paper draws from the narratives of 24 young Sahrawi women and the assistants to the feminist event. This population includes young women between 19 and 32 years of age who were born in the Tindouf refugee camps and have been living in Spain between 3 and 21 years. The majority also lived in the refugee camps for various periods of time. For most participants, their mothers were in Spain as well, and they lived with their families; the exceptions were three participants who lived with Spanish host families and two who lived alone with their mothers in the camps. Five participants had the status of stateless person, while the remainder possessed Spanish citizenship. In addition, they reported high levels of education, ranging from pre-university studies to bachelor's and master's degrees. The interviews were semi-structured and conducted in Spanish with participants who were recruited through snowball sampling. Pseudonyms were used to preserve anonymity. A similar strategy was applied for the assistants of the event, and their opinions and experiences were also anonymized. Interviews

and face-to-face events were followed up by digital participant observation of participants' profiles and groups on social media with their consent.

According to Estalella and Ardévol (2007), in social science research, it is imperative to avoid damaging those who are part of the inquiry and to respect their security and privacy in the research process. Power differences have been a significant concern in my research process. In this regard, I engaged ethically with participants by forming an honest relationship with each person on the basis of equality, respect, and confidentiality. As a feminist researcher, some crucial considerations for this study are my positionality in the research and the power dynamics that derive from hierarchies of class, race, education, and other factors, which could affect the research process. Further considerations include confidentiality, ownership of the research, and my responsibilities to the participants. These circumstances have led me to be continually conscious and critical of my research, in terms of my position within it and the ethics that it implies. The knowledge generated from the research is founded on this concrete position, which is traversed by not only hierarchies but also situated knowledge (Haraway, 1991). It is based on the real experiences of the research participants as well as my own conditioning factors and knowledge structures, which are informed by my personal experiences and the Westernized learning that determines the analysis.

In relation to social media issues, I perceived that some women were not comfortable engaging with certain issues that usually embarrassed them. In such cases, I intentionally refrained from pressuring the participant to talk, and I did not stress the issue. After carrying out some interviews, I realized the importance of conducting the interviews after our first meeting to ensure adequate time to develop trusting relationships with participants. During our second meetings, participants seemed more comfortable. Although this approach was more time-consuming than I had anticipated, it was a worthy pursuit to ensure high data quality and ethically obtained responses. During the event, I decided not to conduct any personal interviews, as I did not want to disturb the logic of the event itself, where the women discussed several topics, lived together for an entire weekend, and expressed themselves sincerely to each other. Instead, I performed interviews with participants online or in person after the event. I appreciated the trusting relationship that we established after spending the whole weekend together and conversing about intimate issues.



#### 4. SAHRAWI DAUGHTERS AND THEIR DIASPORIC EXPERIENCES TOWARD THEIR MOTHERS

On one of the nights of the feminist event, the organizing team prepared a special evening dedicated to grandmothers, mothers, and themselves. As part of this segment of the event, they displayed a paper on the wall that was divided into the three groups entitled «our grandmothers,» «our mothers,» and «us.» They decorated each section of the paper with pictures: Sahrawi women in the war to represent their grandmothers; Sahrawi women in assemblies of the Polisario Front and the *Unión Nacional de Mujeres Saharaui* (UNMS; National Union of Sahrawi Women), women diplomats, and the famous Sahrawi singer Aziza Brahim, who recalled their mothers; and pictures of the well-known Sahrawi actress Mariam Bachir, among others, in the «us» portion.

They then talked about each category and the valuable role of women in Sahrawi society. For instance, they acknowledged the invisibility of their grandmothers and lamented that their names went unrecognized even though these women had built the camps, used their strength to carry out their children to Tindouf, and managed the basics of everyday life in the refugee camps. Participants in the event also compared the economic situations of their grandmothers with those of their grandfathers, who, as members of the Polisario military force, received a small pension after the war. The participants agreed about the importance of addressing this discrepancy through symbolic recognition of their grandmothers' role and acknowledgement of their specific names in place of using the general label of «women.»

When they moved on to the category of «our mothers,» the discussion changed to incorporate differing personal perspectives. Some of the participants emphasized the contribution of their mothers to the spread of the Sahrawi political cause. However, they also highlighted their mothers' role in their migratory trajectory away from the camps. One participant, Zeina, who was a 23-year-old Sahrawi woman, expressed the following:

*Our mothers who have had to come here, who have had to endure the difficulties of being a migrant woman who comes and rents a house and looks for a job and educates her daughters and also grows up with the paranoia that we grow up with—of living between two things, you know?*

All of the participants recognized the relevance of their mothers and the particularities of the migratory process that they carried out. They also identified a common experience that they share with their mothers: a feeling of living here and there after migration. Zeina’s expression «living between two things» implies a sense of coexistence of different cultures in a balancing act between those spaces and the performance of cultural practices from one’s culture of origin while also adopting customs from one’s destination. The interwoven relationships between both places and cultures have an influence on mother-daughter relationships and, in particular, daughters’ understandings of themselves (Young, 2009). In this sense, some of them dedicated their interventions to elaborating on their complicated mother-daughter relationships and how they had generated an emotional distance from their mothers out of a sense of guilt about their own self-presentation, their failure to fulfill the expectations or aspirations of their mothers, or negative sanctions that their mothers imposed when they did not afford certain attitudes or relationships.

Some young Sahrawi women explained how they had run away from home after misunderstandings with their mothers. They delivered strongly emotive descriptions of how their mothers forced them to reconsider their romantic relationships with Spanish men, their way of dress, or their choice to spend their free time at parties where alcohol was present. After providing these testimonies, some of them reflected on the necessity to create a sorority network between young Sahrawi women who want to run away from home and need a place to stay for a period. As in other contexts (Menin, 2014), young Muslim women experienced conflicts with their families—especially their mothers—because their «Western way of life» clashed with the maintenance of traditional gender roles. Aisha, a 26-year-old Sahrawi woman, emotionally recounted her difficulties with her mother due to her relationship with a Spanish man. When the situation worsened, she decided to leave her home, and her relatives started pressuring her to change her mind:

*I left for about a year and a half. During this time, I did not see my mother. Then I came back, and I sat with my mother because she was super overwhelmed... crying, like, «and with all I’ve done for you.» Of course, I said, «I appreciate what you’ve done for me, right? What you have done for me...thanks to that, I am this. You are the one who has taught me to be a strong woman—you alone.*

*You have brought me forward and taught me that I, as a woman, can do it...you are the one who incited this. You are the one who brought me here. I did not say, ‘bring me to Spain.’ You have to be consistent with your actions. You brought me here. You have raised me between two worlds. I am the result of two cultures, and it is not my fault.» I’ve never cried as much as I did that day.*

Her words deeply affected the participants of the event and revealed similar realities among other young Sahrawi women who had created a distance from their mothers after their lack of understanding of their daughters’ self-definition led to a complicated relationship between them. According to Young (2009), the mother-daughter relationship plays a large part in the development of a daughter’s understanding of herself—beyond the idea of selfish disobedience against a mother’s parental authority. Aisha’s words illustrate how she formed a sense of self on the basis of her mother’s position as a strong migrant woman; however, at the same time, she understood that her mother should be more aware of her reality in terms of recognizing her coexistence in different spaces, cultures, and realities. Another example was provided by Fatimetu, who was 27 years old and had lived in Spain for 19 years. She explained how she had left her house to take space from her difficult relationship with her mother and, after some years, restarted their relationship. She passionately emphasized the importance of reconnecting with her mother to establish an honest relationship and comprehension of one another:

*My mother has never given me a hug or kiss in my life, but this last year when I went to see her, and even when she told me to leave her house, I stopped, kissed her, and left—but it was a way of making her feel that, in the end, I am not making the mistake, but that you [her mother] are taking a stand that is separating us.*

Despite the problems that the participants admitted in terms of emotional distance from their mothers due to various misunderstandings, the majority considered their mothers to be role models in view of their courage and adaptability as migrants in a new country. They also appreciated their dual roles as protectors of Sahrawi culture and champions of equal opportunities for their daughters and sons. Hayat, a 20-year-old Sahrawi woman, argued that, regardless of disagreements with the opinions of other participants in the event, she understood that her mother made an effort to educate her

about Sahrawi culture and traditions despite living in Spain. She clarified, «my mother, I think, is the one who insists more on my identity all the time.» For Hayat, such education reflects her mother’s commitment to instilling the Sahrawi cause and its political ideas in her.

During the interviews, multiple other young Sahrawi women similarly described their mothers as guarantors of the continuation of Sahrawi culture and protectors of its culture and traditions despite their migratory context. An important symbol of their mothers’ role in the maintenance of traditions is the *milhafah* (traditional Sahrawi veil for women). Some young Sahrawi women recalled how their mothers instructed them to wear the *milhafah* to cultural and political events about the Sahrawi cause, though they were ordinarily more flexible about it, including in religious and cultural respects. For example, Sukeina, who was 27 years old and had lived in Tenerife for 20 years, shared her experience and the influence of her mother:

*I always go to Sahrawi events with my mother, and she tells me, «put on the milhafah» (laughs)...And sometimes I go as I want, no, and sometimes I say, «well, come on, I put on such.» Because I understand her too, don't I? When I went to the European Parliament, she told me, «come on, put it on,» and I said, «okay, I'll put it on because it's a way of identifying my cause.»*

Similar experiences are present in other refugee diasporic communities; for instance, second-generation Somali women in the UK have noted that their mothers are excessively focused on clothing and external markers (Liberatore, 2016). In the present case, the political cause of the Sahrawis encourages an emphasis on external and symbolic markers—which are especially based on gender—to accentuate their differences from Moroccans (Allan, 2019). In this regard, mothers reinforce the activism of their daughters in pursuit of their cause and teach them to render their identity visible by displaying these elements at any political event.

#### 4.1. Social media in the debate

Beyond the mother-daughter relationship in a diasporic context, another relevant topic was raised during the event and in the personal interviews. Specifically, several young Sahrawi women mentioned the significant impact of social media on their daily lives in terms of not only maintaining

relationships with family and friends who are still in the camps but also advocating for their political cause. Facebook, Instagram, and Twitter have become integral to Sahrawi communication because they can facilitate a sense of co-presence despite physical distance.

During the event, Alia, a 25-year-old Sahrawi woman who had been residing in Spain for 11 years, suggested a debate about their feelings toward social media. The immediate responses of the group of Sahrawi women included words such as «dangerous,» «fear,» and «panic.» Alia then asked whether the women typically used social media even though its use provoked such feelings in them. Some participants consecutively intervened to explain why they associated these words with the use of social media. The majority narrated feelings of pressure when engaging with social media. They also described a general phenomenon of having their pictures stolen and shared on various groups and profiles.

One Sahrawi feminist activist who participated in the event presented her ideas about Facebook and the possibilities of social media for Sahrawi women. She stated that she started a campaign about women's rights and originally intended to accept all friend requests on Facebook because she wanted to spread her message to as many people as possible. However, after several years, she decided to limit the acceptances after several negative comments were directed toward her and her family. Sharing her ideas on Facebook also affected her relationship with her mother in the camp, as people told her mother about her Facebook page and the opinions that she expressed on it. She constantly received phone calls from her mother, who asked her to refrain from publishing certain ideas about gender roles, marriage, and beauty ideals in Sahrawi society. Although she ultimately chose to continue vocalizing her ideas, she recognized the problems that it introduced in her relationship with her mother and sisters in the camp. This outcome was also a consequence of her lack of anonymity, as she used her real name on Facebook when expressing her views. She believed that writing about women's issues on Facebook can impart notions of justice to Sahrawi society.

According to Subramanian (2013), second-generation migrant women often have disputes about Facebook with their mothers. Community control of their peers occurs when they violate gendered community boundaries, as relatives may inform families and mete out community punishment. In

this sense, Hondagneu-Sotelo (2007) has argued that attempts to control the bodies, reputations, and mobility of daughters is one mechanism that subordinated racialized groups have reinforced during years of migration processes to strengthen their sense of national, cultural, and ethnic authenticity.

In several interviews, some young Sahrawi women elaborated on the impact of their mothers on their own social media practices. Such impact intimately connects to the importance of public reputation and its strong association with the gender norms and moral values that characterize Sahrawi society. However, it is also linked with the responsibility of mothers to educate their children. For instance, in her interview, Amina, a 26-year-old Sahrawi woman who had been living in Andalusia for 14 years, mentioned a limitation to uploading her own pictures to Facebook and especially to Twitter, where she was more active. She showed me a publication in which she described how a picture of herself without the *milhafah* was stolen from her profile and shared in multiple WhatsApp groups. She explained, «when this happens, my mother is made to feel like the worst scum for having given birth to me.» Amina’s words reflect the pressure to which her mother is subjected when her daughter uploads such a picture. Her mother is responsible for her education, and some people in Sahrawi society consider such pictures to be unacceptable.

According to Costa (2016), the need to preserve privacy and protect intimate spaces from the gaze of outsiders is a component of Muslim culture that is associated with modesty and reputation. From this perspective, pictures on social media are understood as elements that amplify the possibility of exposing intimate aspects of a person’s life to observation by others. Since Sahrawi society deems mothers responsible for the education of their children, transgressions regarding modesty, reputation, and the honor of the family translate to a failure of the mother to provide successful education about the social norms of the society. For example, Jatri, a 21-year-old Sahrawi woman who had been living in the Basque Country and La Rioja for 16 years, explained how her mother was worried about her active engagement with social media as well as her self-presentation on her Facebook and Instagram profiles:

*Recently, a video came out of a girl who has a shaved side, who has this tattoo... my mother said, «your aunt said it was you, and it scared me.» I said, «she*

*doesn't even look like me,» and she said, «but I was very scared thinking it could be you in front of the camera.»*

Through the word «scared,» Jatri's mother revealed her anxiety about the possibility that her daughter was on the screen, which would pose consequences such as others gossiping about her family.

In this sense, some participants referenced the expression *Iṭrḥā min lamāt* (literally that flies, that escapes from mothers, but it is used as an expression of a bad mother). This phrase is usually connected to such a lack of control of mothers over the social media activities of their daughters. According to Madianou and Miller (2012), in migration contexts, mothers experience heightened pressure and expectations about the responsibilities of motherhood.

During my research, I observed two ways in which Sahrawi daughters performed the self on social media with regard to the opinions of their mothers. On the one hand, some daughters would share any content they wanted on Facebook despite their mothers' reservations; on the other hand, some sought to avoid damaging their mothers with their digital media practices. One example of the former is Fatimettu. She explained that one factor that debilitated her relationship with her mother was having her pictures stolen from her profile and distributed on various Facebook profiles and WhatsApp groups, wherein some men called her *unsahrawi* or *naṣrāniyya* (Christian). With these words, they discredited her as part of the Sahrawi community. Her mother typically approached her to demand answers:

*My mother phoned me and said, «it's just that they called me and told me that they've seen you in Madrid in a club» ... And she said, «well, they told me» and I said, «well, whoever told you, what the fuck is he doing in a club? Why don't you ask him for an explanation?» And she said, «it's not that...he was...» and I said, «look, mom, stop being silly.»*

Despite this situation, Fatimettu was adamant that she would not change her social media practices in response to her mother's influence or because other people may not consider her to be a «real Sahrawi woman.» This attitude and her active use of social media caused an emotional distance with her mother, with whom she had a complicated relationship.

Sukeina also described the implications of the expression *itayarha men lamat* for her mother. Initially, Sukeina accepted all friend requests on Facebook and approved all followers on her Instagram profile. However, after her mother started to ask her to stop uploading the type of pictures she usually shared, which depicted her way of life in the Canary Islands, she decided to eliminate several contacts and be more conscious of the consequences of her social media practices—not only for herself but for her mother as well:

It's just that my mother...do you know what happens? That her culture continues to be the other, even though she's here...her sisters, all of that carries a lot of weight for her...and I understand that because, damn it, my cousins, my friends, my whole environment here also carries weight for me...what happens is that this also causes her way of thinking to clash with mine many times.

Unlike Fatimettu, Sukeina chose to be more mindful of the impacts of her actions with respect to her mother's reputation, and she limited her social media practices to minimize conflicts with her mother.

According to Young (2009), in diasporic families, there is a key tension between cultural assimilation and cultural preservation that heavily influences how mothers and daughters relate to each other. A particular personal identity implies an expectation not only to assume certain attributes, but also to maintain the norms of behavior and appearance that are conferred by the social group to which one belongs (Goffman, 1959/1994). In this sense, for daughters, becoming aware of how the construction of their digital selves has impacted their mothers also implies a need to self-adapt to the context and social behaviors of Sahrawi society when engaging in digital interactions on social media platforms.

#### 4.2. Developing digital honest relationships with their mothers

In their interviews, some of the young Sahrawi women reported that they decided to reduce their mother's control over their social media practices by using more than one profile on the same social media platform. This practice was intended to avoid provoking gossip and to allow them to express themselves in their Spanish life (Almenara-Niebla & Ascanio-Sánchez, 2020). At the same time, it enabled them to manage their public reputation and



demonstrate *ih̄tiram* (respect) for their family members, especially their mothers. Despite the additional time that is needed to manage two profiles and the potential problems that might arise from it, some young Sahrawi women argued that, for them, the practice constitutes a normal mode of interaction because it mirrors how they have to behave in normal life in terms of navigating their own sense of belonging. Zaura, a 29-year-old Sahrawi woman, recalled that she initially contended with problems regarding her personal identity; however, once she accepted that her «reality was to be in the middle of two worlds,» she decided to respectfully adapt to the two contexts on account of her mother’s public prominence as a politician in the Polisario Front.

Besides the practice of using two profiles, some interviewees reported limiting friend requests to reduce the range of people who can learn about their personal issues on social media. Sukeina noted that she accepted only particular Sahrawi people on her Facebook account in order to maintain a better relationship with her mother:

*I don't have Saharawis who don't think as I do because then I wouldn't be free on my own Facebook. I also have some who don't...so I block their posts because it is a shock for them, and the problem is not that it is for them, because I don't care what they think, because everyone is free to think...but for my mother...so I have to fight against what my mother thinks.*

This selectiveness about her Facebook friends relates to her mother’s opinion of her and, specifically, to the types of pictures that she would usually upload to her profile, which included images that were taken at the beach or at parties. Sukeina never uploaded pictures in the manner of other young Sahrawi women who include only part of their face or are completely dressed in the *mil̄hafa*. In this regard, Najat, a 32-year-old Sahrawi woman, stated,

*Oh yes, pictures in which you only show half a face—«the guillotine,» as we call it—we always do that...I always wear the mil̄hafa in my pictures, principally because of my society...my mother in the camps perfectly knows that I do not wear the mil̄hafa in my everyday life in Spain, but it is better that she knows that from my part, not from social media.*

Najat decided to talk honestly with her mother about her way of life in Spain, even though she knew that her mother does not share her lifestyle. She also chose to wear the *mil̄hafa* on social media based on how she wanted to be

perceived by others (Serrano-Puche, 2014). Najat’s words reflect the value she places on remaining loyal to her mother in terms of self-presenting as her mother is accustomed to while reinforcing their relationship with honesty and not creating distance from each other. Najat also considered it vital for her mother to receive information about her everyday life in Spain from her directly and not through other people.

Meanwhile, Sukeina adopted another strategy to talk openly with her mother and cultivate an honest relationship despite the situation:

*There are many things that I try to work on with my mother many times to remove all those barriers. I always tell her, «Mommy, I know that there are things that you don’t want to know, but you are the most important person. You are the person that I love the most—am I going to hide who I am?» Then she always tells me, «Stop fooling around.» She always tells me that, but even so, there are many taboo things in terms of relationships and so on...I feel free. She, for example, respects me. She knows what kind of lifestyle I lead, but she believes that we shouldn’t share certain topics too...because she is very happy that I am happy, but because of the weight of what they say, and that weighs a lot on her.*

According to Usita and Du Bois (2005), constructive behaviors between mothers and daughters include communication and displays of loyalty. Sukeina’s statement evidences the importance she affords to honestly managing her relationship with her mother in order to maintain a strong bond, demonstrate loyalty to her, and avoid neglecting each other despite their diasporic way of life. She did not want to feel guilty about hiding her life from her mother to avoid negative emotions (Baldassar, 2014).

## 5. CONCLUSIONS

The literature on transnational migration has rarely focused on the mother-daughter relationship in refugee diasporic contexts. Emotional distance and tension in the negotiation of gender norms in the diasporic space are present in not only the everyday lives of refugee diasporas but also their digital media practices, which create a sense of co-presence while also amplifying the social surveillance of these communities.

The situated analysis of the Sahrawi case illustrates that the sense of a «crossroads,» as observed by Anzaldúa (1987), is foundational to the relations experienced by mothers and daughters in terms of accepting and

challenging discourses of power that are articulated from both the refugee camps and the destination spaces. These discourses of power constitute the basis of the legitimization of certain forms of gendered behavior and the marginalization of those who evade the control and politics of belonging of the refugee diasporic group. However, the transformative nature of the diasporic space positions both mothers and daughters as active agents of changing these discourses and behaviors, which, as indicated by the analysis, develop in a «tug-of-war» relationship between them. This challenging relationship is managed within the intimate space but is directly related to the digital public space, in which the attentive gaze of the other can judge transgressions of these gender norms and their repercussions.

By enabling users to follow and create content with images and self-exposure, social media have amplified possibilities for group surveillance. This situation poses consequences for women all over the world. In the present case, the forced displacement experience and generational dynamics are important, intersecting processes in the everyday lives of women as the reproducers and agents of community maintenance.

Likewise, these media have intensified social control within the community with respect to not only self-exposure but also the social and moral codes of Sahrawi society. This effect has impacted the reputations of mothers as providers of education and, in turn, their relationships with their daughters. Beyond personal experiences and social media practices, feelings of responsibility, guilt, and failure to meet expectations have become relevant to mother-daughter relationships in the Sahrawi refugee diasporic context.

This article has illustrated how some Sahrawi daughters have refrained from publicly displaying their daily lives in Spain to avoid creating emotional distance from their mothers, as well as to produce their own sense of belonging to the Sahrawi community through the fluidity of the diasporic space. This concept of emotional distance has allowed for our analysis and comprehension of the intimate processes at play and their affective consequences for Sahrawi refugee diasporic women. Although some of the women found that the creation of such emotional distance was the only solution for managing the tension in their relationships with their mothers, specific forms of control over their daily digital media practices affected not only their own personal constructions but also their daily relationships in the intimate sphere. The

digital surveillance of the daughters’ lives and the particular costs of their social media practices for their mothers directly influenced their intimate relations and emotional well-being. Some young women opted to limit their social media practices to reduce their sense of responsibility for the impacts on their mothers and to foster an honest relationship with them. Together, some of the women abandoned their «tug-of-war» dynamic in favor of changing restrictive gender norms in unison.

In summary, this article has illustrated the emotional responses of daughters and their attempts to develop their own self at the crossroads of multiple places, cultures, and feelings. The complex combination of experiences of belonging has influenced their relationships with their mothers as well as their emotional responses. Through these insights, this article reveals the perspectives of daughters and the impacts of digital technologies in a migration context intersected by a protracted situation of displacement and the fluidity of belonging processes.

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# IMAGINING MOTHERHOOD AND BECOMING A MOTHER AFTER EGG FREEZING. AN ANTHROPOLOGICAL STUDY IN THE FRENCH CONTEXT

## IMAGINAR LA MATERNIDAD Y CONVERTIRSE EN MADRE DESPUÉS DE UNA AUTOCONSERVACIÓN DE ÓVULOS. UN ESTUDIO ANTROPOLÓGICO EN EL CONTEXTO FRANCÉS

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### Abstract

This paper examines how women accessing social egg freezing (SEF), medical egg freezing (MEF), and egg sharing (ESH) imagine becoming a mother (normative motherhood) in contrast to how they become a mother (reproductive trajectory). It uses data collection from 43 semi-structured in-depth interviews with French women who have had their eggs cryopreserved in France and abroad, five of whom have had children. It was found that most of the women interviewed associate motherhood with heterosexual coupledom, the nuclear family, and a normalized desire for biogenetic motherhood. Nevertheless, *ontological disruptions* caused by infertility, singlehood, or illness introduce the possibility that they will be unable to have children as expected, which leads them to imagine (and consider) both medical and non-medical ways of having a child. Women's narrations of alternative paths toward motherhood describe a *fragmentation* of motherhood into genetic, biological, and social components, which are combined and hierarchized in unexpected

ways. I argue that, although alternative reproductive trajectories might modify the kinship ties between the parties involved, they do not necessarily defy normative motherhood. To my knowledge, this is the first empirical study conducted among French women undertaking egg freezing. It seeks to contribute to a growing corpus of empirical research that analyzes egg freezing and its links with motherhood. Second, it mobilizes an innovative approach by examining similarities between SEF, MEF, and ESH. Furthermore, it proposes that women who freeze their eggs for medical reasons or in exchange for an egg donation also inscribe their egg freezing procedure within a heteronormative, biogenetic ideal of motherhood, and a normalized desire for a nuclear family. Finally, it contributes to analyzing the decision-making processes of women who become a mother after egg freezing.

**Keywords:** France; qualitative research; social egg freezing; medical egg freezing; egg sharing; normative motherhood; reproductive trajectory

## Resumen

Este artículo examina cómo las mujeres que acceden a la autoconservación de óvulos por razones sociales, médicas y en el marco de una donación de óvulos (*egg sharing*), imaginan ser madres (maternidad normativa) en contraste con cómo se convierten en madres (trayectoria reproductiva). Metodológicamente, se utilizan 43 entrevistas en profundidad semiestructuradas, conducidas entre mujeres francesas que han criopreservado sus óvulos en Francia y en el extranjero, cinco de las cuales han tenido hijos. En el análisis se constató que la mayoría de las mujeres entrevistadas asocian la maternidad con la pareja heterosexual, la familia nuclear y un deseo normalizado de maternidad biogénica. Sin embargo, diversas *interrupciones ontológicas* causadas por la infertilidad, la soltería o una enfermedad introducen la posibilidad de que no puedan tener hijos como lo desean, lo que las lleva a imaginar (y considerar) otras vías para tener hijos/as; vías médicas y no médicas. Las narraciones de las mujeres que se han convertido en madres sobre sus trayectorias alternativas hacia la maternidad describen una *fragmentación* de la maternidad en componentes genéticos, biológicos y sociales, que se combinan y jerarquizan de forma original. A través de mi argumentación muestro que, aunque las trayectorias reproductivas alternativas pueden modificar los vínculos de parentesco entre las partes implicadas, no necesariamente desafían la maternidad normativa. Que yo sepa, este es el primer estudio empírico realizado en Francia sobre la congelación de óvulos. El mismo contribuye al emergente corpus de literatura académica que explora la autoconservación de óvulos y sus vínculos con la maternidad y moviliza una aproximación innovativa al examinar las similitudes entre congelación de óvulos por razones médicas, sociales y *egg sharing*. Igualmente, propone que las mujeres que congelan sus óvulos por razones médicas y por *egg sharing* también aspiran a una maternidad normativa. Finalmente, este

artículo contribuye a analizar el proceso de toma de decisión de las mujeres que se convierten en madres después de una autoconservación de óvulos.

**Palabras clave:** Francia; investigación cualitativa; autoconservación social de óvulos; autoconservación médica de óvulos; egg *sharing*; maternidad normativa; trayectoria reproductiva

## 1. INTRODUCTION

Oocyte vitrification or egg freezing is a new assisted reproductive technology (ART) that aims to cryopreserve ova (female gametes) to keep open the possibility of procreating in the future. Oocyte retrieval is preceded by traditional ovarian stimulation (the same used for *in vitro* fertilization (IVF)), which consists of hormonal stimulation for 12-14 days to stimulate the development of follicles in the ovaries. Egg harvesting occurs under local or general anesthesia and requires a short hospital stay. Apart from in exceptional cases<sup>1</sup>, the same protocol of hormonal stimulation and retrieval is used regardless of the woman's age, although this factor influences the success of IVF with vitrified oocytes (Cobo et al., 2016). Oocyte vitrification became possible in the late 20th century (American Society for Reproductive Medicine & Society for Assisted Reproductive Technology SART, 2013); the first baby conceived from devitrified oocytes was born on June 20, 1999 (Kuleshova et al., 1999).

Two main categories of women freezing their eggs are identified in scientific literature. The most controversial and the most commonly studied is elective or social egg freezing (SEF). Scholars (Baldwin, 2016; Brunet & Fournier, 2017; Göçmen & Kılıç, 2017; Görtin et al., 2019; Inhorn et al., 2018a, 2018b; Pérez-Hernández, 2021; Stoop et al., 2011) agree that so-called social reasons for SEF are mostly related to singlehood and age. This category is often distinguished from medical egg freezing (MEF), that is, women who

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1. Some women with cancer cannot undergo the hormonal stimulation protocol. In these cases, *in vitro* maturation (IVM) or ovarian tissue freezing (OTF) may be offered. IVM involves obtaining immature oocytes from the ovaries and maturing them in the laboratory instead of stimulating the ovaries and then harvesting them. OTF involves removing ovary or cortex fragments for future self-transplantation.

undergo oocyte vitrification as part of a medical treatment or after a diagnosis of a disease potentially affecting fertility. MEF studies are extremely rare (Inhorn et al., 2017; Birenbaum-Carmeli et al., 2021). While there is an academic consensus on the legitimacy of the latter, the former is the subject of significant ethical, philosophical and feminist debate (Goold & Savulescu, 2009; Lafontaine, 2019; Martinelli et al., 2015). Some authors (Blyth, 2004; Gürtin 2012; Gürtin et al., 2019; Kretz et al., 2020) have also researched a less well-known and less studied practice, egg sharing (ESH), which involves free or discounted treatments to patients who agree to share their eggs with other patients.

Feminist debates on SEF and motherhood are polarized and frequently put two positions in tension: emancipation versus the risk of exploitation of women (Van de Wiel, 2014; Inhorn, 2017). For its supporters, egg freezing is a good *secondary strategy* for women who wish to pursue a career while waiting for a reorganization of society (Goold & Savulescu, 2009). The prohibition of SEF in some countries has been described as medical paternalism (Sándor et al., 2018), because after being made aware of the available options and associated risks, women might decide to vitrify their oocytes as insurance for reproduction without ethical risks (Tan et al., 2014). Likewise, it has been argued that egg freezing can prevent women from having to undergo late, long, and painful IVF procedures in the future (Brunet & Fournier, 2017; Froidevaux-Metterie, 2017). Its detractors argue that there are important ethical and medical risks, such as the medicalization of healthy bodies, the side effects of hormonal stimulation, the risks of late pregnancies, and the risks of creating *false hopes* of having a child with vitrified oocytes (Argyle et al., 2016; Baldwin et al., 2014). Some authors also question the consumerist and neoliberal meaning of the discourse of oocyte cryopreservation as part of reproductive autonomy (De Proost & Coene, 2019; Shkedi-Rafid & Hashiloni-Dolev, 2012).

However, the majority of researchers agree that egg freezing cannot solve the structural problems that prevent women from being able to balance motherhood and professional life (Cattapan et al., 2014; Miner et al., 2021). From this perspective, policy changes such as parental leave for all parents and increased access to childcare should be enacted to enable such conciliation (Harwood, 2009, 2017), as the use of egg freezing cannot resolve

gender inequalities linked to the perpetuation of the sexual division of *care* activities in the private sphere or to productive work (gendered jobs, pay gap, and the *glass ceiling*). Egg freezing would appear to reaffirm women's sole responsibility for reproduction and their assignment to reproductive work (which they are now supposed to be able to defer over time) (Pérez & Rozée, 2019). Oocyte vitrification also establishes the possibility that every woman can, potentially, become a mother irrespective of her health, age, and life-course and «reinstates the assumption of a universal maternal desire as part of women's nature. It may result in a 'normative' situation, in which women find themselves questioned at any stage in their life if they abstain from motherhood» (Neyer & Bernardi, 2011, 170).

This paper takes a different approach to the debate on egg freezing and motherhood. The analysis developed is not concerned with exploring the conciliation of career and motherhood. Instead, it aims at exploring the gap between the desired and imagined path to motherhood (i.e., normative motherhood) described by women having their eggs frozen and the path taken by those having become a mother (i.e., reproductive trajectory). The gap between normative motherhood and reproductive trajectory will be explored by presenting the ideal path to having a child described in interviews, the changes that this normative description experienced when the women were confronted with ontological disruptions (Franklin, 1997) (i.e., being single, ill, infertile), and the ways in which those who have had children became mothers.

My analysis brings two research findings together. On one hand, although academic literature on SEF consistently shows that women freezing their eggs wish to have a child within a committed relationship (Baldwin, 2016; Göçmen & Kılıç, 2017; Inhorn et al., 2018a), their reproductive trajectories show that this is not always what they end up doing (Baldwin et al., 2015; Hammarberg et al., 2017; Hodes-Wertz et al., 2013; Stoop et al., 2015). On the other hand, several French authors (Rozée, 2013; Rozée & Mazuy, 2012; Vialle, 2017) have observed that not becoming a mother within the norm (mostly because of singlehood) is experienced as a *failure* and that the paths taken in consequence challenge the *reproductive norm* (e.g., by having children outside of the couple) without breaking with it. Based on these findings, I propose the hypothesis that *ontological disruptions* lead

women to consider different paths towards motherhood, both medical (e.g., egg freezing, egg donation, sperm donation, surrogacy, IVF) and social (e.g., adoption, co-parenting, coupling with someone with children), and in so doing, they theoretically fragment motherhood into several parts –genetic (genes), biological (gestation), and social (mothering)– allowing them to take non-normative paths to have a child.

### 1.1 New challenges: rethinking motherhood from egg freezing

Reproductive medicine has enabled the disembodiment of motherhood from reproduction, not without paradoxes. In recent decades, three major shifts in the Western conceptualization of (heterosexual) reproduction and motherhood have taken place: 1) the separation of intercourse from reproduction through birth control; 2) the fragmentation of the sexual intercourse-pregnancy unit via ART; and 3) the calling into question of the fetus-mother unit via surrogacy (Mehl, 2011; Ragoné, 1997). In turn, egg freezing has enabled the separation of *reproductivity* (i.e., a disembodied potentiality of having a child with one's genes in the future) from bodily temporality; in other words, «bodies age while frozen eggs, and the reproductive potential they embody, are understood to assume a latent mode of living unaffected by the passage of time» (Van de Wiel, 2015, p. 9).

Despite this tendency of reproductive medicine towards the disembodiment of motherhood, empirical research among women using ART points to the strategic naturalizing of particular traits, substances, precedents, and behaviors (Thompson, 2001) to establish who is the real mother of a baby. As Thompson shows, biology and genetics can be mobilized to differentiate ambiguous kinship and, in the process, the meaning of biological motherhood is transformed and becomes partial. In other words, with the medical fragmentation of motherhood via reproductive medicine, either the egg donor (the person who provides the oocytes), the carrier (the person who carries the pregnancy and gives birth) or the intended mother (the person who mothers) might claim the legitimacy of motherhood. It is thus important to analyze how women make sense of new paths to becoming a mother and how this modifies women's representations of normative motherhood, conjugality, and the family, but also kinship relationships.

Egg freezing might represent a revolution for normative motherhood, but qualitative research consistently shows that SEF systematically reinforces heteronormative, White, and class privileged motherhood. Indeed, mostly used by heterosexual women wishing to *give themselves time* to find a suitable partner with whom to have children (Baldwin, 2016; Hammarberg et al., 2017; Inhorn et al., 2018b), oocyte vitrification reinforces the heterosexual, nuclear family and notions of biogenetic motherhood (Carroll & Kroløkke, 2018). Furthermore, statistics (Katler et al., 2021) and socio-demographic analyses (Baldwin et al., 2015; Inhorn et al., 2018a) show that egg freezing is mainly used by highly educated White women. Given that in most countries SEF is self-financed (Shenfield et al., 2017) and offered in private clinics (Gürtin & Tiemann, 2021), funding constitutes a restrictive barrier for egg freezing. Prices vary widely by country and by clinic. Reported costs range between 9,380 – 10,720 USD in the UK (including the whole process for egg freezing and thawing cost) (Human Fertilisation & Embryology Authority, 2022); 3,930 – 7,865 USD in Canada (considering only collection, freezing and storing eggs) (Petropanagos et al., 2015); and 6,000 – 20,000 USD, plus 500-600 USD annually in storage costs in the USA (Hoffower, 2020). In 2021, France became the only country worldwide to reimburse SEF. The scarcity of research on MEF and ESH makes it impossible to describe the general socio-demographic characteristics of users.

This paper proposes an original contribution to feminist debates about motherhood based on ethnographic research on egg freezing in the French context. First, it contributes to a growing corpus of empirical research that analyzes egg freezing and its links with motherhood. Second, it mobilizes an innovative approach by examining similarities between SEF, MEF, and ESH. Furthermore, it proposes that women who freeze their eggs for medical reasons or in exchange for an egg donation also inscribe their egg freezing procedure within a heteronormative, biogenetic ideal of motherhood, and a normalized desire for a nuclear family. Finally, it contributes to analyzing the decision-making processes of women who become a mother after egg freezing.

Three main sections compose this article. The first will be devoted to exploring the ideal conditions for becoming a mother or *normative motherhood*. I will focus in particular on what the women I interviewed defined

as the *pre-conditions* for having a child. In the second part, I will describe the *ontological disruptions* these women experienced that led them to start imagining different paths to having a child, both medical and non-medical. In particular, I show how, in their narratives, they mix both medical and social paths toward motherhood in unexpected ways in order to construct a coherent narrative. In the third part, I describe in detail the paths taken by the women I interviewed who had already become mothers and how they make sense of the *fragmentation* of motherhood that they might have experienced.

## 2. METHODOLOGY

This article is based on my doctoral dissertation in Social Anthropology and Ethnology, for which I employed two main research methods over a period of 20 months (from March 2018 to December 2019), in-depth semi-structured interviews and direct observation. The first one allowed me to understand how egg freezing is experienced by women undergoing this procedure. Forty-three interviews were conducted with women living in France who had undergone or were about to undergo MEF, SEF, and ESH. I also conducted direct observation in three French fertility centers, in particular in their IVF laboratories. This article draws primarily on data collected from the interviews.

At the time of my research, French legislation followed Bioethical laws of 2011, which authorized egg freezing for (only) two different types of users, women suffering from a potentially sterilizing medical condition (MEF) and egg donors without children (ESH). MEF is generally undertaken after the diagnosis of a life-threatening medical condition, typically cancer, for which treatment (i.e., chemotherapy and/or radiotherapy) may provoke a significant reduction of ovary reserve, and thus infertility. Some gynecological diseases, such as endometriosis and premature ovarian failure (PIO) are also medical reasons for egg freezing in France. According to the health professionals I met with, breast cancer and endometriosis are the main causes for oocyte vitrification among French women. In turn, given the strict interdiction of oocyte commercialization in the French context (no ART market exists), ESH was a measure devoted to encouraging and increasing the number of



Table 1.  
 Characteristics of women interviewed (all reasons included) at the time of the interview

Women interviewed	N=43	
	n	%
<b>Type of egg freezing</b>		
MEF	17	40
SEF	16	37
ESH	10	23
<b>Age</b>		
< 35	24	56
≥35	19	44
<b>Profession</b>		
Highly qualified	29	67
Intermediate	6	14
Employee	7	16
Unemployed	1	2
<b>Level of education</b>		
Doctorate	3	7
Master	9	21
Bachelor	29	67
High school or equivalent	2	5
<b>Relationship status</b>		
In a relationship	22	51
Single	20	47
Not mentioned	1	2
<b>Plans for a child/Children</b>		
No plans	33	77
Current plans (including pregnancy)	5	12
Child	5	12

*Note.*

MEF = Medical egg freezing

SEF = Social egg freezing

ESH = Egg sharing

egg donors. In exchange for their donation, egg donors were offered egg freezing. This possibility was only available for women without children, in good health, and under 37 years old. In both cases, health insurance fully reimbursed the procedure. At the time of my study and until 2021, SEF was strictly prohibited within the French territory. It is now allowed and reimbursed for women between 29 and 37 years of age, with the exception of a yearly payment of 45 euros for egg storage that is covered by the patient (*Décret n° 2021-1243 du 28 septembre 2021*).

The characteristics of the women I interviewed are described in Table 1. They were between 23 and 44 years old, with a median age of 31.5 years, lived mostly in the Paris region, and were mostly White and heterosexual. Two were lesbians and one was looking for a male or female partner. A majority of them (n=22) were in a long-term relationship at the time of the interview, 20 were single and one did not mention her relationship status. Concerning their occupation, 29 (n=67%) worked in highly qualified positions (e.g., lecturer, psychologist, project manager, odontologist, architect, journalist, businesswoman), 6 (n=14%) had *intermediate* positions (i.e., social worker, schoolteacher), and 7 (n=16%) were *employees*.<sup>2</sup> One was unemployed. Regarding their level of education, 67% (n=29) had a bachelor's degree, 21% (n= 9) a master's degree and 7% (n= 3) a doctorate. Taking these criteria into account, they belong to rather privileged socio-professional categories. 17 had or were going to have their oocytes vitrified for MEF; 16 for SEF; and 10 for ESH. Of those who went abroad because of SEF interdiction, their main destination was Spain, followed by Belgium and in one case England. Most of the women who underwent MEF had gynecological diseases, such as endometriosis and POI, two had cancer and one Turner's syndrome. Finally,

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2. In France, the National Institute of Statistics and Economic Studies (INSEE) classifies professions into eight categories to produce statistical information, three of which are represented here: professionals or highly qualified professions, intermediate professions, and employees. The first one includes intellectual, information, arts, and entertainment professionals, as well as administrative and commercial professionals who have management responsibilities. The second one refers to a group of intermediate positions between professionals and operative workers or employees, including teachers and nurses. Finally, the category employee regroups a heterogeneity of occupations, such as secretary, salesmen/saleswomen, firemen/firewomen, business administration or commercial employees.

33 did not have plans to have a child in the near future, 5 had current plans to have children (including 2 who were pregnant), and 5 had already had one or more children.

Recruitment occurred through non-medical (i.e., patient associations, social media, feminist organizations, and academic networks) and medical (i.e., health professionals) channels. In both cases, a call for volunteers informed potential participants about the study, its objectives, and the conditions of anonymity and confidentiality while inviting them to contact the researcher and propose their testimony or ask for further information. Volunteers willing to participate were contacted by phone or by email, and received further information about their right to access and rectify the information (under the law *Informatique et libertés*, January 6, 1978). All agreed to be recorded on audio. Completed interviews were transcribed verbatim, edited to erase all possible identifying information, and uploaded into Atlas.ti. I analyzed them using the grounded theory method. Emerging themes were then described and studied in detail.

### 3. THE REPRODUCTIVE NORM: THE IMAGINED PATH TO MOTHERHOOD

A growing number of empirical studies in the social sciences on the topic of SEF have centered on women's motivations for freezing their eggs. The data consistently shows that delaying motherhood to pursue a career is not the main objective; being single and not having *the right partner* with whom to have children has been found to be the most significant reason for women who have so-called social reasons for freezing their eggs (Hodes-Wertz et al., 2013; Waldby, 2015). Researchers have also argued that *delayed* motherhood is the consequence of complex personal and situational factors that lead women to have a child later in life (Vialle, 2018; Vialle et al., 2016). In the case of MEF and ESH, few studies have been conducted, so it is not clear whether in these cases women who undergo egg freezing have children later in life and whether other factors such as career or singlehood influence their decision to have their oocytes vitrified. In the case of MEF, it is possible that *delaying* motherhood would be the consequence of illness either because of

medical restrictions to getting pregnant (until remission) or because of the incompatibility of pregnancy with medical treatment.

In the three mentioned cases (SEF, MEF and ESH), motherhood may not be possible because of singlehood, career concerns, illness, infertility, or other factors related to their personal, contextual, and social conditions. However, what most of the interviewed women have in common is their description of the *right conditions* to have a child, which has been studied in France as the *reproductive norm*. This *norm* is understood as the *right time* to have children in terms of age (Bajos & Ferrand, 2006), but extends to other criteria such as marital status, sexual orientation (Rozée & De la Rochebrochard, 2010; Rozée & Mazuy, 2012) and health conditions. These requirements are accompanied by representations of *good* parenthood: having a partner and being in a stable relationship, planning births at the *right age* and at the *right time*, and a set of social norms that translate into a desire to *have a family* that is widely shared by the French population (Debest et al., 2014).

### 3.1 The *right conditions* to have a child

Women I interviewed report that having a child requires being at the *right moment* in life, but also having the right personal, social, situational, and health conditions to do so. Some of the *pre-conditions* they cited to describe this moment were: being comfortable in one's own skin; having a stable, permanent, and fulfilling job and a house; having recovered from one's illness or no longer being a victim of disabling pain. An example of the financial and material aspects that need to be fulfilled were listed by Romy: «[To have a child] we have to have two permanent jobs, to earn a good living to be able to pay for all of the baby's needs, so the financial aspect is very important. But we also need to have a two-room apartment, to have a little garden or a little terrace so that he/she has a place to take his/her first steps» (Romy, 25, in a relationship, employed in a supermarket, ESH).

For some, career, short-term contracts and financial instability were mentioned as reasons for being single and the impossibility to develop plans for motherhood. Remedios (30, single, temporary assistant professor, ESH), explains: «I regularly move for short periods of time... Now I am in Paris,

before I was in Bretagne, and soon I am moving to London, hoping to meet all the criteria for recruitment in a scientific career». Not only her career choices, but also poor working conditions in academia (low wages and short-term contracts) made it difficult for her to establish a long-term relationship and make plans to have a child. Likewise, Angelines refused to have a child when her ex-partner wanted to and later, when she was single, she froze her eggs after a diagnosis of endometriosis: «[When I was in a relationship] I was not planning to have a child right away, so I kind of put it aside. I studied a lot and I wanted to have the career that goes with it. I wanted to prove myself in the professional world [before giving birth]» (Angelines, 36, single, architect, MEF). As other scholars have shown (Vialle, 2018; Baldwin, 2017), not having met these pre-conditions is frequently associated with the impression of not feeling ready, thus with the deferral of plans to have children. The right timing for motherhood refers to the moment and the conditions considered sociably legitimate to be a mother: not too young nor too old and, more importantly, within a long-term relationship (Mazuy, 2006). Indeed, in most cases, the women I interviewed held that being in a couple was the determining condition for having a child.

### 3.2 Looking for the right partner, genitor, and father

Most of the women interviewed, either in a relationship or single, expressed that they wanted to have a child with a stable and permanent partner. The right partner would eventually become the genitor and co-parent of their children. A commonly expressed desire was for a partner who would be an invested father, someone willing to commit to the upbringing of the future child, as illustrated in the following extract from an interview with Clarice (31, in a relationship, primary school teacher, MEF): «[In order to have a child, I have to] live with my partner, because I want us to experience the pregnancy together. And then, of course he also has to want to have children, having a baby should be a mutual decision». This coincides with what Kylie Baldwin (2017) calls the *ideologies of parenthood*: they look not only for a *genitor*, but also for an involved and active father.

As Franklin (1997) has described, the sense of progression that goes from conjugality (being in a couple), to stability, to motherhood might be

interrupted by unexpected events, such as infertility. In the cases I describe, although for some women the sense of progression was indeed disrupted by infertility, others were profoundly affected by singlehood, illness, or the infertility problems of friends. These factors highlighted for them the non-naturalness of this progression, as Luisa's and Amparos' narratives show:

With my former partner, I tried to get pregnant and it didn't work. So, I went to see my gynecologist and he told me that I was not very fertile. Three months later, my boyfriend and I split up. At that point, I said to myself that I had to do something because I couldn't wait another 40 years to meet the man of my dreams and have my body tell me: «It's too late.» So I froze my eggs (Luisa, 40, single, company executive, SEF).

A month ago, doctors discovered a malignant tumor in my head. So, I had radiation and chemotherapy, which may affect my ovaries. So here we are, freezing my eggs. After the treatments, I and my husband can consider having children; we were going to try to have a baby this summer, but we'll have to wait a little longer (Amparo, 33, in a relationship, high school teacher, MEF).

In Luisa's case, the fact that it was difficult for her to get pregnant through sexual intercourse with her partner, and after that being single, were obstacles to her plan to have a child. In Amparo's case, it was the diagnosis of a disease and her medical treatment that prevented her from becoming pregnant when she and her partner wanted to. Undergoing chemotherapy and radiation, she was strongly advised against pregnancy by the medical staff. In both cases, a disruption in the trajectory of their lives, prevented them from becoming pregnant at the desired time. These disruptions profoundly affected the sense of life progression and denaturalized that journey: «Instead of having a continuous flow across the 'natural' and 'normal' events of the lifecourse, 'life's progression' is disrupted» (Franklin, 1997a: 144). This, in turn, led them to start considering other ways to become a mother, some of which were far from the normative motherhood ideal.

#### 4. ONTOLOGICAL DISRUPTIONS: OTHER MOTHERHOODS ARE POSSIBLE

Singlehood, illness, infertility or increased awareness about infertility made women realize that they might not be able to have a child in the desired framework or at the desired moment. This led most of them to imagine other ways to access motherhood. These ways, diverse and multiple, combine not only simultaneous alternatives for trying to become a mother (to carry and give birth to a child using their own genetic material), but also non-medical ways. Indeed, several authors (Mathieu, 2017; Rozée & Mazuy, 2012) have shown that the *failure* to become a mother *within the norm* causes them to reformulate their representations of motherhood.

##### 4.1 When motherhood becomes a stroke of luck

For women I met, *ontological disruptions* in their life course towards motherhood made them question having a child as a *normal* and *natural* path. When nothing comes up to prevent having a pregnancy and then giving birth, undergoing egg freezing seems incomprehensible, as illustrated by Karen: «My grandmothers don't understand anything, so I don't tell them anything anymore. They asked, 'Are you sure you need to do this?' For them, it's a crazy thing to do, because the way they see it, you have a child and then you don't talk about it anymore, but nowadays you have to think about everything» (Karen, 27, in a relationship, bank employee, MEF). For Karen's grandmothers, becoming a mother is perceived as a *normal* and *natural* process that does not (and should not) require major reflection; for Karen, the fact that reproductive processes are the object of reflection, and of medical intervention, attests to its non-naturalness and non-normalness. Or, said in terms of McMahan (1995, p. 51), where childbearing is culturally normative, women do not need to explain why they can have children, only why they *cannot*.

Contrary to those women who have a baby and «don't talk about it anymore», for women who experience disruptions in their life courses, motherhood becomes something to be achieved, sometimes, by a stroke of luck. Frequently, women talk about finding a partner as lucky, but also about having the luck to have a child, and of having the luck to become a mother

one day: «Not all of us are lucky enough to meet our Prince Charming at 25, get married and have kids right away» (Berta, 34, single, communication director, SEF). Or Romy (25, in a relationship, employee in a supermarket, ESH): «There are couples who cannot have a child. I just hope to be able to experience motherhood, and if I experience it two, three, four, five times, even better!» When they describe other possible ways to become mothers, they usually combine both medical and social paths.

#### 4.2 Harmoniously combining *social* and *medical* paths to having a child

Because normative motherhood appears to be something that can only be achieved *through luck*, women I met often anticipate alternative paths to become a mother. These paths usually involve privileging one element over others, for example, pregnancy over genetics or mothering over pregnancy. The unexpected aspect of these women's discourse is the ease with which they combine both medical and social paths towards motherhood. Likewise, in their narratives, they describe a *fragmentation* of what before the ontological disruptions was a unit: pregnancy, genetics, and motherhood.

During the interview, Marcela (36, in a relationship, radio director, SEF), for example, said that she wanted to have a child, ideally with a long-term partner (not her current one). But, while waiting to find the right one, she tried to become pregnant via artificial insemination with a couple of homosexual friends so the three could co-parent. And, in parallel, she went to Spain to freeze her oocytes so that she could use them in the future within a couple, if needed. Other women, like Frida (28, single, project manager, MEF), imagine using their oocytes to have a child or becoming a mother via non-medical alternatives. If she cannot have a child through her own body and/or with her vitrified eggs because of her health problems (adenomyosis), she thinks about coupling with a woman who might carry and deliver a baby or with a person who already has children. For her, carrying a child is not fundamental: «Maybe I will date a girl and then if we want to have kids, she could be the one who gets pregnant. Or maybe I'll end up with someone who already has a kid. I mean, I don't know. It's not something that's vital to me, to have my own baby that I give birth to and everything».



Most of the women interviewed described multiple pathways, medical and non-medical, to motherhood that imply the possibility of having children without necessarily going through pregnancy or having a genetic bond. The feelings evoked towards these two biological components are varied. For some, such as Karen (27, in a relationship, bank employee, MEF), carrying a child is an intrinsic experience to motherhood, even if the child does not share her genes: «I would like to carry the child. I could even accept having an egg donation, and after [if I cannot become pregnant], adoption too». For others, such as Remedios (30, single, temporary assistant professor, ESH), neither pregnancy nor genetics are fundamental to the experience of motherhood, but she does not see how she could become a mother otherwise: «Pregnancy itself was never something I dreamed about, like it is for some women. It wasn't like I had a specific desire to have a child that shares my genes. Adoption could have been a possibility, but I became very critical of it. But now that adoption is off the table, it goes without saying that it's my own body that will allow me to have children».

What these testimonies highlight is, on the one hand, the coexistence of representations of both medically aided (egg freezing, egg donation) and social (adoption, co-parenting, parenting the partner's children) motherhood, which share space, within the framework of possibilities, with normative motherhood (becoming a mother through heterosexual intercourse in the context of a couple). And, on the other hand, they attest to a kind of fragmentation of the biological components of motherhood: genetic, gestational and social (Ragoné, 1997, 1998; Mehl, 2011), rendered possible both by technological advancement and by the ontological disruption of life progression. An analysis of the reproductive trajectory of those women who became mothers after egg freezing offers a detailed vision of how they give sense to the maternal bond.

## 5. REPRODUCTIVE TRAJECTORIES: BECOMING A MOTHER AFTER EGG FREEZING

As shown, *ontological disruptions* in the desired path to motherhood lead women to imagine different ways of becoming a mother by dissociating pregnancy, genetics, and mothering. However, only a few of the women I

met already had children at the moment of the interview. Studies conducted on the reproductive trajectory of women after egg freezing (Baldwin et al., 2015; Hammarberg et al., 2017; Hodes-Wertz et al., 2013; Stoop et al., 2015) suggest that some women who freeze eggs because of so-called social reasons become a mother within the desired framework, that is, they find a partner and have a child without medical help; others become single mothers with the aid of a third party, usually a sperm donor. Among the women I met, five had had at least one child: two via sexual intercourse with a male partner; two with a sperm donation and their frozen eggs as single mothers; and one with an egg donation and her partner's sperm.

### 5.1 To become a mother as imagined

Doris (23, in a relationship, home childcare assistant, ESH) and Artemisa (32, in a relationship, associate professor, ESH) had children through sexual intercourse with their long-term partners. Both had been childfree egg donors who were offered egg freezing in exchange for their egg donation. Artemisa –who reports no medical problems and has no prior history of infertility– accepted to have her ova vitrified *in case* of future infertility, but she ended up getting pregnant when she and her partner decided to try. She had decided to become an egg donor after her awareness about infertility was heightened because of friends who had difficulty conceiving. Her description of the effects of being in contact with friends' infertility problems on her representations of motherhood is not rich enough to be analyzed in detail. On the contrary, Doris's story of infertility associated with her endometriosis revealed a rich reflection on what makes a mother.

At the time of egg sharing, Doris had been trying to get pregnant for a while, but her endometriosis complicated her chances to do so. She and her partner had decided to undertake IVF in France but, shortly before starting it, she got pregnant. Before getting pregnant, she had already imagined other medicalized ways to have a child if spontaneous pregnancy did not work. Besides IVF, she considered the possibility of using surrogacy with her own oocytes in order to have «her own child». For her, sharing genetic material with her children is fundamental to motherhood. She therefore would have found it difficult to receive an egg donation or to adopt.

From her narrative, the idea emerges that genetic motherhood is more important than biological motherhood and social motherhood. Indeed, she would be the mother of a baby sharing her genes but carried and delivered by another woman (surrogacy), but she finds it more difficult to imagine becoming a mother through egg donation (someone else's genes) and adoption (no biogenetic connection). Paradoxically, while talking about her egg donation, she diminishes her genetic contribution and gives primacy to mothering:

Some people in my family told me that egg donation was really weird, because it would be like my own children walking down the street. They are not my 'own' children. I am the mother of my own daughter and that's it. A mother is not only a biological connection, it is a person who raises us and who loves us. So yes, there is a little bit of my DNA, but mixed with someone else's, raised by someone else and borne by someone else (Doris, 23, in a relationship, home childcare assistant, ESH).

In the above quotation, Doris gives primacy to *social motherhood* (a mother is «a person who raises us»). At the same time, she reaffirms the centrality of the body and genes in the maternal bond, since she is the mother of her daughter because the child is born from her genes and body and because she intends to raise and care for her. Finally, she challenges this bond by arguing that the children who could potentially be born from her egg donation will not be her own. This testimony shows how the fragmentation of motherhood into biological components (gestation, genes) imagined in this case, puts its various dimensions in tension and creates paradoxes. Doris plans to have a second child. If she cannot achieve this through sexual intercourse, she will use her frozen eggs or other ART, which may lead her to modify her relationship to motherhood.

## 5.2 Single motherhood by default and sperm donation

Luisa (40, single, company executive, SEF) and Leonora (44, in a relationship, company executive, SEF) used sperm donation to become single mothers. Both had children from their vitrified oocytes and a sperm donation. Single at the time, they had their eggs frozen in Spain and in England, respectively. A few years later, not having met the man who would become the father and genitor of their children, they decided to have a child with the help of medicine, without a partner. This decision is however experienced as a *default*

*option*. As Rozée (2013) and Vialle (2018) have argued, the impossibility to find a partner leads women to make the decision to have a child on their own at a certain age (over 35) and to reverse the order of family entry by starting with the child, with a father possibly coming later.

Indeed, Luisa recounted that having a child as a single mother was a decision she made after a breakup. She hopes, however, to be able to find a father for her son. For her, a family is composed of a mother and a father and this idea has not changed despite her reproductive trajectory:

I was once again in a relationship and, when it ended, I was 38 years old. I was in a good place in my life, in a good place emotionally, I had a good job and it kind of happened naturally. But I think that this path requires a lot of reflection, because he didn't ask for anything from anyone [she looks at her baby in his stroller next to us], he arrived in a world where he has only a mom to guide him. I hope he will have a daddy soon (Luisa, 40, single, company executive, SEF).

For both Luisa and Leonora, using a sperm donor who resembled them physically was central to their construction of motherhood. Physical likeness reduces intrusive questions about the origin of their children and is thus a way to escape stigmatization or the questioning of their family's legitimacy (Becker & Nachtigall, 2005; Rozée, 2013). In Luisa's case, it was the Spanish clinic that chose «a donor that looked like her» based on «her preferences» (i.e., desired phenotype): «I had a 20-year-old sperm donor, 6 feet tall, 184 pounds, who is blond with blue eyes». Leonora, contrary to Luisa, chose a sperm donor herself from a catalogue from an American fertility clinic based not only on physical resemblance (Caucasian), but also on familial and personal affinity (e.g., closeness of their family histories and musical tastes). This shows that genetic ties (and thus egg and sperm donations) only make sense to the extent that they are socially *coded* (Thompson, 2001, 2005).

Yet, even though the terms mobilized before and after Luisa and Leonora's solo motherhood processes are the same (mother, father, child, and family), the kinship ties between the parties are not identical. They had a child born from the genetic mix of their own oocytes and a sperm donor, who will not be the father. They want to find (Luisa) or have found (Leonora) a father. However, the father they are talking about has no genetic bonds with their children, and the child will not be born from the mix of the genetic

components of the person designated as mother and the person designated as father. Therefore, the family they aim to form or have already formed is not exactly the one described in the first part of this paper. The disruption of the life course that pushed them to look for other ways to become mothers spurred changes not only in their relationship to motherhood, but also to conjugality, fatherhood, family, and kinship.

### 5.3 Motherhood with the aid of an egg donation

Micaela (44, in a relationship, neurolinguistic trainer, SEF) went to Spain to freeze her eggs when she was 38 years old. A few months later, she met her current partner with whom she decided to have a child. Due to her primary ovarian insufficiency (i.e., premature reduction of ovarian reserve) and a double fallopian tube removal that she underwent at age 30, the couple tried IVF in France and made a first attempt that did not work. They then tried using vitrified oocytes in Spain, but it did not work either and a new egg retrieval was medically discouraged. She was informed by health professionals that a baby born from her own eggs may carry serious diseases, such as Down syndrome. Thus, based on the medical advice, the couple decided to use an egg donation. Micaela shared with me that even if it was not an easy decision, this option made sense considering her family history. Her aunt had had Down syndrome, so the possibility of having a child with this disease did not discourage her, but her partner refused to have a child with this condition. According to Micaela, avoiding being pushed to have an abortion was a primary factor in her decision to use an egg donation:

Mom's half-sister had Down's syndrome; she lived to be 60. I'm Catholic, somewhat practicing, but my partner isn't religious at all. He told me: «I do not want to keep a disabled child.» I said to myself: «I am 42, with a grandmother who had a daughter with Down's syndrome and a husband who is going to put me in a terrible position, because it means that I might have to make the decision to have an abortion even though I don't want to. Because I would feel completely ready to have a disabled child, but he would not.» The advantage of an egg donation is that they are young women and that there is less risk of malformation.

For Micaela, using an egg donation means not having a genetic relationship with her child. In cases like hers, this *lack* is compensated for both by the

gestational bond and physical resemblance, resulting from the *match* between the egg donor and the recipient or between the egg donor and their partner (Becker & Nachtigall, 2005; Hammond, 2018). Micaela recounted that one of her friends «keeps saying to me, ‘She [your baby] looks just like you.’» A white donor «who looks like her» was chosen by the Spanish clinic: «They take a picture. And I only know the age and blood type of the donor. They tell us that they choose a donor who looks like us». Several elements emerge from Micaela’s discourse that contribute to constructing the mother-daughter kinship ties between her and her daughter: the physical resemblance, the biological bond, and the care she gives to her daughter –interestingly, the fact that her partner is the genitor and father of her daughter was never mentioned as a determining element of her motherhood.

## 6. CONCLUSION

In this paper, I analyzed the gap between normative motherhood and the reproductive trajectory of French women who have frozen their eggs for either medical or social reasons, or in exchange for an egg donation. Building upon Franklin’s concept of *ontological disruptions*, I proposed that the possible shifts in women’s imagined and desired path towards motherhood are not only caused by infertility, but also by singlehood, illness, and increased awareness about infertility. Faced with the possibility of not having children as desired, women begin imagining alternative paths to becoming a mother, describing in their narratives both medical (e.g., egg freezing, IVF, surrogacy, egg donation) and non-medical (e.g., adoption, parenting the partner’s child, co-parenting) options. In their discourses, the women disassociate, combine and frequently hierarchize different elements of motherhood: genetic, biological, and social, sometimes in complex and paradoxical ways. This imagined *fragmentation* is fundamental for women taking non-normative paths towards motherhood *by default*. Although becoming a single mother with the aid of a sperm donation or a mother via egg donation modifies the kinship ties between the parties involved, it does not necessarily defy heteronormative motherhood, the nuclear family, and the naturalized desire for biogenetic motherhood.

This analysis exposes some of the new challenges that egg freezing represents to feminist debates on motherhood. Indeed, despite its disruptive potential (e.g., single motherhood, lesbian motherhood, motherhood beyond the reproductive span), this new ART is being used to reproduce heteronormative motherhood, the nuclear family, and the normalized desire for biogenetic motherhood. Moreover, it appears to reinforce the idea that women can (and want to) become mothers regardless of their particular conditions –some authors (Birenbaum-Carmeli et al., 2021; Pérez-Hernández, 2021; De Proost & Paton, 2022) have shown that some of those who have frozen their eggs chose not to have children. Interestingly, the analysis of the desired and imagined path towards motherhood that I made in this paper corresponds to what some authors (McMahon, 1995) have studied as a middle-class vision of motherhood. According to this author, the readiness presented in terms of maturational, relational, social, and economic achievements (i.e., to have a child at the right time with the right partner under the good conditions) is class-specific. Future research might consider furthering this hypothesis by comparing how women belonging to different social classes experience egg freezing regarding their motherhood project. Likewise, it would be interesting to study how non-normative motherhood is achieved using egg freezing (e.g., ROPA method<sup>3</sup>) or how the members of the LGBTIQ+ community use oocyte vitrification, and whether and how their practices challenge normative motherhood. In addition, although racial minorities rarely have access to egg freezing because of cost restrictions as well as other factors, it might be important to explore the socio-demographic characteristics of those who indeed cryopreserve their ova and which mechanisms contribute to racially stratified reproduction.

This paper has important limitations. In the first place, the particularities of the French context concerning egg freezing regulation impose major considerations on all possible comparisons. No generalizations are proposed. In the second place, this research was conducted before the authorization of

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3. ROPA stands for Reception of Oocytes from the Partner. In the ROPA method, a couple formed by two women to share the process of in vitro fertilisation: one of them will be the genetic mother who provides the eggs and the other one will be the biological mother who carries the pregnancy.

social egg freezing in 2021 in France. Thus, this description might evolve in the coming years, and new studies will be needed. Finally, no intersectional approach was taken. This limits the possibility of analyzing class-specific or ethnic/racial-specific paths of becoming a mother of women interviewed.

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# MAMA: AN EXPLORATION OF GENDER AND MOTHERHOOD IN CONTEMPORARY SPANISH HORROR FILM

## MAMA: GÉNERO Y MATERNIDAD EN EL CINE DE TERROR ESPAÑOL CONTEMPORÁNEO

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### Abstract

Motherhood can be argued to be a central theme in many recent Spanish horror films. From *El Orfanato/ The Orphanage* or *Los Otros/ The Others* to, more recently, *Las Brujas de Zugarramurdi/ Witching and Bitching* or *Musarañas/ Shrew's Nest*, to mention but a few, their narratives are based on the figure of the (Good/Bad) mother. Their struggles and choices in mothering move the action forward and bring horror to the story, ultimately depicting them as «the problem to be solved» (Davies, 2011, p. 82). Using *Mama* (Muschetti, 2013) as a case study, this article seeks to explore how motherhood is constructed in contemporary Spanish horror film and how this might respond to the specificities of the Spanish social and historical context. For this purpose, the research will particularly focus on the journey that the main female character

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undergoes throughout the narrative, from the reluctant mother and rock star to the «all-nurturing and self-abnegating Angel of the House» (Kaplan, 2000, p. 468).

However, the outcome of the research highlights that this transition is strongly based on patriarchal principles that shape the ideal of good motherhood. The problematic narrative also conceives maternity as a woman's ultimate goal and fulfilment vehicle and assumes maternal instincts exist and are innate to women. Moreover, the study has also uncovered how the confrontation between the good and the bad mother functions as a reinforcement of a very specific maternal style that is highly influenced by Franco's ideology in relation to family, gender roles and female identity. Thus, although the film depicts the struggles of motherhood from a female point of view, it also portrays the horror and terrible consequences of challenging the patriarchal order, therefore promoting an outdated and patriarchal notion of good mothering.

**Keywords:** gender; motherhood; horror; Spanish horror; film studies.

## Resumen

La maternidad como eje argumental central aparece en numerosas producciones cinematográficas de terror español estrenadas en los últimos años. Desde *El Orfanato* o *Los Otros*, a títulos más recientes, como *Las Brujas de Zugarramurdi* o *Musarañas*, entre otras, sus historias se basan en la figura de la (buena/mala) madre. Sus inquietudes y comportamiento en relación a la maternidad mueven la acción y traen el elemento de terror a la historia, lo cual conlleva la problemática construcción de estas mujeres como «El problema a resolver» (Davies, 2011, p. 82). A través del análisis de *Mama* (Muschietti, 2013), este artículo explora la representación de la maternidad en el cine de terror español contemporáneo y cómo ésta puede verse influenciada por el contexto histórico y social. Con este objetivo, la investigación se centrará en la transición de la principal protagonista de roquera reacia a ser madre, a la «abnegada cuidadora y ángel del hogar» (Kaplan, 2000, p. 468).

Sin embargo, la investigación ha demostrado que esta evolución se basa en ideas patriarcales que conforman el ideal tradicional de maternidad. La narrativa también recoge aspectos problemáticos, tales como la construcción de la maternidad como meta y medio de realización de las mujeres, así como reconocer la existencia y biología del instinto maternal.

A su vez, este estudio muestra que el enfrentamiento entre la buena y la mala madre sirve para promover un estilo de maternidad muy específico y fuertemente influenciado por principios franquistas en relación con la familia, los roles de género y la identidad femenina. Así, aunque la película representa las dificultades de la maternidad desde un punto de vista femenino, también refleja el horror y las consecuencias catastróficas que acarrea desafiar el orden patriarcal, promoviendo, por lo tanto, un modelo de maternidad patriarcal y obsoleto.

**Palabras clave:** género; maternidad; terror; terror español; estudios cinematográficos.



## 1 .INTRODUCTION

In recent years, the on-screen depiction of motherhood has experienced a significant increase. It is therefore frequent to find approaches from different genres, such as drama (*Tully* [Reitman, 2018], *Room* [Abrahamson, 2015]), super(s)hero (*Jessica Jones* [Netflix, 2015-2019]), musical (*Mamma Mia!* [Lloyd, 2008] and its sequel *Mamma Mia! Here we go Again* [Parker, 2018]), comedy (*Bad Moms* [Lucas and Moore, 2016], *Working Moms* [2017-], *Mamá / Mom* [CBS 2013-2021]), an *auteur* approach (*Mother!* [Aronofsky, 2017], *Mommy* [Dolan, 2014], *Madres Paralelas / Parallel Mothers* [Almodóvar, 2021]) and, of course, horror (*Bird Box* [Bier, 2018], *Hereditary* [Aster, 2018] or *The Curse of La Llorona* [Chaves, 2019]). While different approaches to the topic have been argued to respond to patriarchal constructions (Arnold, 2013) the present study focuses specifically on the horror genre as «horror films about mothers and maternal relationships articulate a great sense of dis-ease about the discursive construction of motherhood» (Harrington, 2018 p. 184), offering a perfect corpus for the specific research of this topic.

Within the Spanish context, the new century brought to our screens a series of high quality and profitable stories whose narratives developed around a main female character portrayed as a mother. This is the case of films such as *Los Otros / The Others* (Alejandro Amenabar, 2001), *Trastorno / Demented* (Fernando Cámara, 2006) *El Orfanato / The Orphanage* (Juan Antonio Bayona, 2007), or *No-Do / The Haunting* (Elio Quiroga, 2009). The theme of motherhood continues to be at the centre of more recent titles, such as *Las Brujas de Zugarramurdi / Witching and Bitching* (De la Iglesia, 2013) *Musarañas/ Shrew's Nest* (Andrés & Roel, 2014), *El Pacto* (Victori, 2018), *Malasaña 32* (Pintó, 2020), or *El Páramo / The Wasteland* (Casademunt, 2021), among others. Unlike Hollywood's maternal horror films, focused on childbirth, monstrous progeny or exploring the abjection of the female reproductive system (Creed, Clover, Fisher), these productions seem to be more centred on the behaviours of these women as mothers, and their maternal (in)abilities. Thus, rather than just than following the pro-natalist trend identified in other genres (Zecchi, 2005), the article would argue how these horror narratives promote a very specific and traditional motherhood, highly influenced by Francoist ideal of femininity and maternity. In these

productions, women are constructed as «the problem to be solved» (Davies, 2011 p. 82), portraying «the mother as both the monster and the monster's pursuer» (Davies, 2011, p. 81).

This aspect would be further studied through textual analysis of *Mama*, directed by Andrés Muschietti in 2013. The Spanish-Canadian production was created by the director and her sister Bárbara Muschietti from a homonymous short film. It was produced by Guillermo del Toro and filmed in English with an international cast. The filming locations include Canada and Spain, where the siblings resided for many years, before moving to the United States to continue their work on other successful (Hollywood) horror productions. The film adopts elements from the Gothic to blend maternal melodrama and a ghost story that became «one of the most profitable films of 2013» (Hager & Herzog, 2015 p. 121). It tells the story of two little girls whose mother has been killed by their father, who also tries to hurt them. *Mama*, a ghostly monster, saves them and takes care of the two orphans until they are found by their father's twin brother. Furthermore, the narrative introduces another potential surrogate mother: Annabel, whose process of becoming (good) mother becomes the real protagonist of the film. This article would focus on these two surrogate mothers, their confrontation, and their different maternity styles, arguing that both personas are heavily based on patriarchal ideals of femininity and maternity.

Moreover, I would argue that the explicit and physical construction of *bad* mothers as monsters (supported by make-up and special effects) in the horror genre, could be understood a step forward in the demonisation of women who do not meet the traditional ideal of motherhood and/or who threaten the patriarchal order by offering an alternative to the traditional nuclear family. In other words, these monstrous constructions are based on gendered stereotypes that add negative connotations to the personae, resulting in a problematic representation of women resisting patriarchal constructions onscreen.

## 2. MAMA

*Mama*'s character was developed from *Mamá* (Muschietti, 2008), the horror short film where two little girls run scared from their monstrous mother.

Accordingly, from the very beginning, this persona was designed to strike terror and created as a monster. In the words of the director, Andrés Muschietti, she is «a decaying Modigliani's portrait» (*Mamá*, n.d.). She is also interpreted by Spanish actor Javier Botet, known for impersonating monsters in recent Spanish horror film and theatre, mostly for his actorial debut playing the Medeiros girl in the *REC* saga (Balagueró, Plaza, 2007-2014), and by playing both male and female monsters in international productions such as *Crimson Peak* (Del Toro, 2015) or *Slender Man* (White, 2018). He gives the character his long bony extremities and her hyper-flexible movements. *Mama* is not a real-life character, but a combination of CGI and digitally treated images of Javier Botet's movements, whereas his antagonist, the father of the girls (and later, his twin brother) is interpreted by the photogenic Danish actor Nikolaj Coster-Waldau, known for his role as Jaime Lannister in the popular television series *Game of Thrones*. The contrast between the attractive actor and the monstrous CGI constructed persona emphasises the problematic gendered construction present in the film as, by extension, the film does not represent equally the traditional patriarchal fatherhood and the alternative motherhood that embodies *Mama*, which is made visibly monstrous, and therefore something to fear, from the beginning.

These two characters are introduced in the opening sequence, before the initial credits, which presents the two sisters as well, and how they became orphans. In this sequence, the aesthetic is marked by its predominant deep blue colour. In her analysis of Kieślowski's film *Three Colours: Blue* (Kieślowski, 1993), Emma Wilson follows Kristeva's notions on colour to explain that «all colours, but blue in particular, as the first colour perceived by the child's retina, take the adult back to the stage before the identification of objects and individuation. Blue is linked by Kristeva to the semiotic and to the space of symbiosis between mother and child» (Wilson, 2003, p. 21). Accordingly, this first part introduces the girls in the family house, a domestic space that symbolises the child-mother bond. As a result, as soon as the father enters that intimate space, Victoria, the elder sister, suspects something is wrong, and she is surprised to see her father there with them. In addition, the artist Wassily Kandinsky states that the colour blue tends to deepness and, more interestingly, he relates it with endless sadness. In this sense, Wilson relates this colour to Julie's mourning for her lost daughter

and trauma «the use of colour forms an integral part of the film's analysis of trauma and mourning for a lost child» (Wilson, 2003, p. 21) in her analysis of *Three Colours: Blue*. However, in the case of *Mama*, the use of this chromatic option seems to increase the feeling of traumatic loss of the mother from the girls' point of view. This feeling is also related to the cold and the loneliness that they are experiencing after becoming orphans, and that can be observed in close shots of the girls.

After their father tries to kill Victoria, pointing a gun at her head in a close-up of the girl's face illuminated by the blue light, the ghost *Mama* is introduced in the film, almost heroically, as she saves the girl's life by killing the father. It is important to note that the narrative constructs maternal instincts so strong that they do not only transcend animal species (Harrington, 2018) but also death, allowing a dead woman, a decaying ghost, to mother. It seems that, even after death, women are expected to fulfil their roles of (good) mothers, to respond to their innate duty to look after the needy.

Nevertheless, through this murder, *Mama* not only embodies the epitome of motherly instinct, but she also embodies transgression in her undead flesh. Accordingly, while the murderous father, whose killing spree is justified by the pressures of a demanding job, is an attractive young man, *Mama*'s horrific monstrous appearance embodies the abjection, establishing a border between the «clean and proper body» and the abject body, or the body which has lost its form and integrity (Creed, 1993, p. 11). Therefore, by depicting *Mama* as a decaying ghost, always surrounded by decomposed nature, mould stains, moths, and brown and green tonalities, she is constructed as the abjection, in opposition to Annabel's or Lucas' «clean and proper body» (Kristeva, 1980 p. 102). Her nature is emphasised by the dialogue: «Daddy, there's a woman outside... She's not touching the floor» tells a worried Victoria to her father, when she first glimpses her. *Mama*'s hands are her first feature shown to the audience, as she grabs the father from the head and drags him away from Victoria, displaying her power, and killing him. In the close-up shot, we can observe that her fingers are too long and bony and her skin looks decomposed. Her hands are the hands of a cadaver. She is meant to cause fear. At the same time, the scene presents *Mama* killing the father, both literally and symbolically, as she puts an end to the patriarchal order, bringing the

girls back to a pre-symbolic stage in the womb-like forest hut. She creates a single-mother family unit in which the father is absent. As a result, her monstrous construction is inextricably linked to her maternal role, which threatens the symbolic order (Creed, 1993). As Barbara Creed points out, this type of monstrous construction of women in relation to maternity «is a construct of patriarchal ideology» (Creed, 1993 p. 83). Accordingly, with the murder, Mama brings abjection to the story and moves it forward, as patriarchal order must be restored. Significantly, it is the father's identical twin brother, also played by Coster-Waldau, who would take the girls back to the symbolic order, within the core of a traditional patriarchal family.

Moreover, the construction of Mama as monster is emphasised by her portrayal as a bad mother, particularly in her inability to self-sacrifice. According to Sarah Arnold, «The Bad Mother of horror does not fulfil her self-sacrificing duties for the child. She is not the quietly suffering and patient mother and, ultimately, she must pay a price for this (where the Good Mother is rewarded for her sacrifice)» (Creed, 1993p.79). In this sense, «by refusing to relinquish her hold on her child, she prevents it from taking up its proper place in relation to the symbolic» (Creed, 1993, p. 12). Consequently, Mama is a bad mother because she has failed in sacrificing her fulfilment as mother for her daughters' sake. Instead, she becomes more and more violent as she sees her position and identity as mother threatened by the traditional nuclear family represented by Lucas and Annabel. She then becomes the fearful character depicted in the original short film, from which the scared girls run and hide.

In an attempt to further develop her monstrous nature, the film offers a backstory disclosed through a flashback dream sequence, since Mama, as a representative of the pre-symbolic, «communicates through dreams, games, snarls, and lullabies» (Clark, 2014 p. 69). The scene reinforces the maternal melodrama aspects in this horror narrative. This blend of generic conventions is not uncommon in horror films dealing with motherhood, where the narrative incorporates «both the visual imagery of the horror genre and the emotional narrative of the melodrama» (Arnold, 2013, p. 78). Moreover, for Kaplan, the maternal melodrama is «centred on the female protagonist and on ostensibly female concerns (love, seduction, motherhood, marriage, children, abandonment, jealousy, role conflicts, etc.)» (Kaplan, 1992, p. 70)

and she points out how this subgenre depicts «the longing of the mother for the (lost) child object.» (Kaplan, 1992, p. 70). Resembling the scene in which *Mama* was first introduced, the flash-back begins with a female hand holding a sharp object that has presumably been used as a weapon. It also frames the action with a general view of an old orphanage, surrounded by children and nuns. The choice of a point of view shot contributes to the identification with the character, which helps to establish an alignment. Additionally, it has a different texture and colour, to mark the different timeline and oneiric nature. It begins with *Mama* panting and showing her hands, now distinctly human, as she grabs a baby held by a nun, and stabs her before running away. *Mama*'s physical appearance is also different, as she is not the decayed monster, but a woman in full corporeal representation. This new, human face of the monster is very significant because it shows how «even female monsters are humanised through their mothering instincts» (Paulson, 2005 p. 137). Moreover, because of the point of view perspective, we only see her through her brief reflection on a mirror, which shows her human face in a medium shot, framed in an old mirror as she holds the baby with one arm and the pointy weapon with the other. This shot reinforces the idea of *Mama* becoming mentally unstable in relation to motherhood. She does not seem to be just defending her baby, but also her right to be a mother. She refuses to be separated from her offspring and, when she feels threatened, she reacts like a wild animal, embodying the archetypal, widespread image of the *mama bear* (Paulson, 2005). Immediately after this, she runs away as a group of angered men, led by a priest, follow her closely. «She is both scared of and angry with religious and scientific institutions, whose respective members have penetrated her both sexually and surgically» (Clark, 2014, p. 69). As she finds herself trapped between the group of men and a cliff, she decides to jump with the baby, failing again to self-sacrifice and allow the child to enter the symbolic.

Furthermore, the backstory also presents *Mama* as a mother struggling to meet the ideal of motherhood and a victim of patriarchal authorities. She was a single mother whose baby was taken away from her and she was forced into a mental hospital by these authorities. She is then portrayed as a victim of them and their repression. Accordingly, the scene explores how both *Mama*'s humanity and her construction as a monster and violent behaviour

are deeply related to maternity, reproducing patriarchal concepts of women becoming complete only through motherhood or how women's madness and violence are also inextricably linked to this aspect of their lives.

Although no specific person is held responsible for the actions against her, it can be observed that the Roman Catholic Church, the R.C. from now on, is involved as the orphanage shown is run by nuns and, when she runs away with her baby, she is followed by a group of armed men, led by a priest. This involvement of the R.C. Church as a repressive institution, especially towards women, is reminiscent of Spanish recent past. In this sense, it is also worth mentioning that this story of a single mother whose baby has been taken away presumably by the R.C. Church could be related to the scandal known as the *Stolen Babies* (*Niños robados*). This case is the story of hundreds of children (more than 900) who were taken away from their mothers at birth. It happened under Franco's dictatorship and the R.C. Church seems to be again the regime's tool for women's indoctrination and, ultimately, punishment as the only convicted responsible for these crimes was the R.C. nun Sor María, who took the babies away from single mothers or leftist, working class families by telling the women that their children had died, in order to give them to *good catholic* families, that is, traditional patriarchal family units sympathetic and supportive of Franco's regime. It is worth mentioning that during the dictatorship, families «represented the microcosm of the Francoist regime, with ultimate authority resting in the father» (Morcillo, 2000 p. 75), while women, confined in the domestic realm, «were limited to their duties as mothers and wives» ((Morcillo, 2000 p. 75)). This is significant because it is precisely this type of family organisational mode that is constructed by the patriarchal authorities in the narrative, represented by Scientist Dr. Dreyfuss, to reinsert the girls back to civilisation, and the reason why he will pressure Annabel into the right type or good motherhood.

As the Argentinian lawyer Carlos Slepoy explains, «In Spain, 30,000 children were stolen from the Spanish Civil War to the end of the fifties. Children of up to three years old were taken away from Republican mothers, later, this became a general action against dozens of single and/or poor women» (Slepoy, as cited in Rebossio, 2013). Although the powerless women suspected that the nun's version of the deceased babies was not true, there was

nothing they could do to prove it. «I couldn't accuse them of lying. This was Franco's Spain. A dictatorship» (Adler, 2011) states one of the many women whose baby was stolen. Furthermore, Sarah Wright has identified a trend in Spanish contemporary horror which relates ghost narratives, children, and historical memory. Wright discusses «the common practice under Francoism of separating the children of incarcerated *rojos* and killing them or sending them away either to state run orphanages or for adoption by Francoist families» (Wright, 2013 p. 119) in relation to films like *The Orphanage*, *The Haunting*, *El laberinto del fauno / Pan's Labyrinth* or *El espinazo del diablo / The Devil's Backbone*, although her theories are resonant with *Mama*, as the film follows a similar pattern to those mentioned in her research. It is also significant that this revelation of *Mama's* past coincides with Spain's, and it is disclosed through a flash-back. For Wright, «These revelations mean that the memory that these films evoke is still ever-present for spectators, performing revisionist exercise as the discoveries about Spain's past continue to appear in this overdetermined landscape of Spanish historical memory with enormous rapidity» (Wright, 2013 p. 119). In this sense, *Mama's* timeline brings to the present the recent past, in a ghostly, undead way, showing that is still very present and haunting. Moreover, it does so in relation to the maternal discourses present in the film. Accordingly, the film shows a clash between past and present and between two different types of motherhood. At the same time, it highlights how family and motherhood are still influenced by Francoist principles and identities.

While *Mama* is this scene's subject, telling emotionally her own story, a male character, Dr. Dreyfuss, would make her the object of his male, rational, scientific research. As Zoila Clark explains, «it is no surprise Science typically chooses woman over man as the object of study» (Clark, 2014 p. 71). Dreyfuss is intrigued by her but, as a representative of a patriarchal institution, he is determined to reinsert the girls back into the symbolic order, which is why he will be a key character in *Annabel's* journey towards (traditional) motherhood. His research allows us to learn more information about *Mama* but, significantly, this information, told from a male point of view, comes with negative connotations. One example of this is her name. When we finally learn her name, Edith Brennan, it comes with a very specific adjective: mad. Accordingly, *Mama* will be known as Mad Edith Brennan from this



point. This establishes a gendered division that responds to Clover's theory of Black Magic versus White Science (Clover, 1992). As Clover explains, «within the Western rational tradition, White Science representatives are nearly always white males, typically doctors, and its tools are surgery, drugs, psychotherapy, and other forms of hegemonic science» (Clover, 1992, p. 66). His discourse contrasts significantly with a public servant who is assisting him in his investigation and who would give him the key to Mad Edith Brennan's story. The wise worker is an older woman with long, white, braided hair. She is knowledgeable, and she finds the remains of Mama's lost baby. She embodies the Black Magic, a world of spiritualism, and seances whose representatives are «children, old people [...] but first and foremost women» (Clover, 1992, p. 66). As a result, she is the one who introduces the word «ghost» to refer to her, as the doctor states that he does not believe in them. Moreover, she tells the doctor that someone did something «wrong» to Mama that needs to be made «right», showing a deeper understanding of the situation but perhaps also alluding to Spain's conflicting recent past and present. As a depiction of the black magic, she adds the emotional element lacking from the doctor's rational investigation.

Whereas Mama's flashback scene was personal and emotional, the sequences derived from Dreyfuss research, inserted in the narrative at different points, the persona does not appear at all. Instead, Dr. Dreyfuss is reinforced as the subject and Mama the object of his impersonal investigation. Therefore, he is displayed visiting local archives and public records, checking number and impersonal, rational data. He is shown in medium shots sitting at a desk, surrounded by files, wearing his glasses while he is looking for the real story behind his object of study. This portrayal emphasises the white science construction and his personal detachment with the woman, which contrast deeply with the high emotional sequence in which Mama tells her own story. Nevertheless, it is important to consider that in both versions and timelines, Mama is portrayed as a bad mother and a monster.

Finally, as an in-text representative of patriarchy, Dr. Dreyfuss promotes the traditional nuclear family, supporting the idea of the girls staying with Lucas and Annabel, instead of favouring the option of the girls living with their maternal aunt, a single woman. He would grant them a house to live in, facilitating their transition into a nuclear family and helping the girls to

get back into the symbolic order, putting and abrupt end to the transgressive pre-symbolic matriarchy in which the ghost and the girls live in the womb-like hut. By restoring the patriarchal order, he would end the abjection. Moreover, he would push Annabel in her transformation from her role of independent, childless woman to the ideal of motherhood.

### 3. ANNABEL

According to María José Gámez Fuentes, because of the relevant role that motherhood held in Franco's regime, the theme became central to many narratives in democratic Spain, exploring the tensions and (dis)continuity between our national past and present (Gámez Fuentes, 2004). In *Mama*, this tension is embodied by the other motherly figure in the film, Annabel, a modern woman who, after being pushed to adopt a maternal role, would be haunted by the ghosts from the past. She is interpreted by the attractive Hollywood actress Jessica Chastain and her transition from an irresponsible, adolescent character to the patriarchal construction of the good mother is the centre of the storyline. «Annabel is reluctant to look after the children and, soon after that, she is willing to sacrifice her life to prevent any harm on them», explains Chastain in a recent interview (*Mamá*, n.d.). This transition, spread throughout the narrative, could be divided into three different stages: a presentation of the persona constructed as a bad mother, her struggle to adopt the constraining role of motherhood imposed by the patriarchal institution and being always under scrutiny, and her completed successful transformation into the good mother.

#### 3.1. Annabel, the rock star

After the opening credits, the film introduces Lucas and Annabel in their small studio, before the girls are found. In this sequence, the mise-en-scene is key to understand the construction of Lucas and Annabel as a single, childless couple. The walls are covered by posters and drawings, the bed is not made, clothes are spread all over the place and so are books and other objects. Music plays in the background as the camera explores the set, which looks like a teenager's bedroom, untidy and disorganised. Regarding the characters, they are both young and they wear casual clothes. More interestingly, in this

introductory sequence, whereas Lucas is presented working and talking on the phone with the men he has hired to find his brother and nieces, Annabel is presented in the bathroom, taking a home pregnancy test. The camera tilts around her, increasing a feeling of anxiety and concern, as Annabel stares intensely and very seriously, at the pregnancy test. When a close-up of the test shows that the result is negative, her face changes and smiles, thanks God, and even celebrates the result. Furthermore, the next sequence focused on this persona, depicts her playing the electric bass during one of the rehearsals with her punk rock band. By constructing the character as a punk rocker, covered in tattoos, wearing black, heavy eye shadow and Ramones T-shirts, the narrative presents Annabel as a Bad Mother as «Rock represents oppositional culture in the popular imagination, a space of rampant sexuality, noise and unruliness [...] this space is constructed as male and young; it is a place outside of the responsibilities of increased age, responsibilities that include parenting» (Coates, 1998, p. 320). Moreover, she seems clearly upset when Lucas interrupts the rehearsal to tell her that they have found the girls alive. Accordingly, the film presents Annabel not only as a woman who clearly does not seek motherhood, but as a woman with no motherly instincts whatsoever. She is selfish and unsympathetic.

Later on, after the girls are found alive and taken under Dr. Dreyfuss custody, the parenting ability of the couple is questioned in a trial that discusses the girls' custody. Whereas it is pointed out that the couple live in a small apartment and that Lucas' job does not provide with a steady, considerable income, Annabel is pointed out as not a good mother because she is a bass player in a rock band, relating again bad parenthood with rock music. The other option defended in the trial is embodied by the girls' mother's aunt, who is a single middle-aged woman who, significantly, reminds the judge that her niece was murdered by Lucas' brother. Dr. Dreyfuss, a white, middle class, middle-aged, man of science, has the power in this decision and he decides to support the possibility of a traditional nuclear patriarchal family instead of the single motherhood option by letting the couple a house free of rent. At this moment, Annabel's life changes completely and she is forced into the role of mother that she has been rejecting from the very beginning. Her frustration is shown in a short sequence in which she talks to the singer of the band in the rehearsal room. She is visibly upset. When

her friend suggests her to leave Lucas to avoid the imposed maternity, she responds that she cannot do it and it is disclosed that she dutifully accepts this imposed role because of her unconditional love for Lucas. This alludes to another patriarchal myth in relation to femininity: romantic love. Her friend reminds her that she is in a rock band, she sadly states: «I was in a rock band» in an intimate close-up shot, showing that she is expressing her emotions and saying goodbye to Rock as it seems that it is not compatible with (good) motherhood (Coates, 1998). Through this scene, Annabel is shown sacrificing her hopes and dreams in order to commit to motherhood and restore the patriarchal order, «putting herself in service of the needs expressed by male characters» (Lee, 2019, p. 58). This self-sacrifice is the catalyst of her journey to become a good mother, and it is also reminiscent of the abnegation and main principle of the Francoist ideal of motherhood. As Morcillo explains, «Spanish women were expected to render their traditional self-denying service by devoting themselves with love to the family and home [...] They supported their husbands and the national endeavours without asking any questions» (Morcillo, 2000 p. 68), which is exactly what Annabel is doing in this part of the film. She is self-denying and leaving the public sphere to enter the domestic realm and devote herself to the family and home. Significantly, self-denying also marks the beginning of her journey as a good mother.

### 3.2. Annabel, the forced mother

Immediately after she has accepted her new role and put on hold indefinitely her career in rock music, the girls are taken to the new house, where Lucas and her receive them, emulating the traditional nuclear family. The darkness of the previous sequence has disappeared, and the equally dark and dirty rock setting has been changed to a residential location full of trees, light and family houses. As Lucas introduces Annabel to the girls, Lilly, the youngest one who is still learning to speak, whispers the word «mama» and Annabel reacts immediately to stop the girls to call her that, reinforcing her initial rejection of motherhood and lack of maternal instinct. This is the beginning of her journey.

In this part of the film, Annabel is depicted confined in the domestic sphere. She wears casual clothes that contrast with her previous rock clothing style, and she is portrayed engaged in domestic work and caregiving. However, although we can begin to observe a physical change in her, at this stage, she is still struggling to accept her new role and therefore, she openly shows her discontent. This attitude can be clearly observed in a scene that shows her in the kitchen, a traditional female locus, but instead of cooking or feeding the girls, she is playing her bass, still holding on to her previous childless lifestyle. As discussed above, in relation to Coates theories, rock music and style are constructed as unmotherly in the film. Thus, by still depicting her playing rock, the narrative shows that she has not yet reached the ideal of motherhood. Furthermore, she also questions her own ability to mother, expressing to Lucas how she doesn't think she can do it. The pressure she is experiencing increases when Lucas falls into a comatose state after being attacked by Mama, leaving her as a single mother. In the absence of the *father*, Annabel tries to reject once again motherhood, but Dr. Dreyfus forces her to accept her (natural) role of mother in the patriarchal family he has been defending since the beginning of the film. In this scene, the psychiatrist assertively tells her to grow up in a very paternalistic way. He is standing in a medium shot while Annabel is sitting on the hospital bed, by Luke's side, crying, emphasising her suffering and the patriarchal authority exerted over her.

As a result, Annabel is left alone in the house and is the sole responsible for the girls' wellbeing, but she is still a neglectful mother who does not show any maternal instinct or sympathy for them. She is just coldly fulfilling her duty, with no feelings attached. She is shown in the kitchen opening cans of food and spilling its content brusquely in bowls to serve for dinner, showing that she does not know how to cook, and she is not even concerned about that. She does not care. Additionally, she shows detachment to the girls. She is shown in the girls' bedroom at night, helping them to their beds. She fails to be the loving mother as she refuses to kiss her good night and, when Lilly refuses to sleep in her bed, she just walks away and says «whatever» with an attitude. Annabel is a bad mother as she does not care for the girls. Consequently, she is still portrayed as an unlikable character who could be interpreted as a monstrous mother, who reminds of the fairy tale evil stepmother archetype.

She is not only neglecting two little orphans but also because she is failing to fulfil what patriarchal society considers «a natural and essential part of a woman's experience» (Harrington, 2018 p. 180). As Harrington explains, «this marks a very particular type of gynaeohorrific monster» (Harrington, 2018 p. 180.). Thus, it could be argued that at this point of the narrative, both maternal discourses are portrayed as lacking and inappropriate in relation to the ideal of motherhood. While Annabel's mothering lacks «essential motherhood, the innate, instinctual and perhaps animal ability to mother» (Harrington, 2018 p. 193), Mama lacks, in both timelines, «the ideal motherhood, the ability to mother in a socially and culturally appropriate manner» (Harrington, 2018 p. 193). As a result, at this stage, both women are bad, monstrous mothers.

For this reason, Annabel does not pose a threat to Mama and, consequently, she does not attack her, as she did with Lucas. Both women co-exist in the house and Mama is still the motherly, loving figure in the film, who plays and looks after the girls, singing lullabies to the girls, as seen in the film. She displays a raw, visceral animal-like mothering style (Harrington, 2018) that is, however, still nurturing.

In addition, another aspect implicit to motherhood that Annabel is seen struggling to adjust to is the constant monitoring of her mothering skills. As part of her new role as a mother, Annabel is now constantly being policed by patriarchy representatives, such as Dr. Dreyfuss or Lucas, but also by other female characters, such as the girls' great aunt, a middle-aged single woman, whose visit highlights that the house is unkept and Lilly has bruises all over her body, visibly looking neglected. The constant scrutiny proves that becoming mother is not enough and she must become a good mother, that is, a perfect embodiment of the (impossible) ideal of motherhood. Her previous coldness has changed for suffering, an essential pillar of the construction of the good mother. She is seen struggling alone with the girls and constantly suffering, proving that «both motherhood and the pressure to live up to an ideal vision of it become the true horror» (Davies, 2011 p. 92) of these maternal horror narratives.

### 3.3. Annabel, the good mother

The real turning point in Annabel's attitude towards the girl comes when Lilly goes missing and she realises she has failed in her maternal responsibilities. After Annabel sees her outside, under a tree, she runs to check if the girl is ok, but she is shaking, close to hypothermia. Then, she takes her back inside the house and tries to warm the little girl. Although the girl fights when Annabel wraps her with her body in a warm, motherly hug, after a few seconds of fight, Annabel wraps her closer, in a tender hug that both she and Lilly start enjoying, unexpectedly bonding with each other. In a close-up we see Annabel warming the girl's hands. Then, the girl dedicates a meaningful look at Annabel, who realises that she likes to feel her warm love. The background is blurred, which focuses the attention on the two characters connection, and a melodramatic music starts to sound, increasing the emotional content of the moving scene. After the camera focuses on the two gazes, Lilly, looking up at Annabel and Annabel, tenderly looking back at her, it comes back to the long shot from the beginning but now showing a very different sight. Whereas in the first shot the two were fighting, in this last one they are calm, smiling, they have bonded. This scene marks the anticipated awakening of Annabel's mother instincts, reinforcing the patriarchal construction of the biological nature and innate aspect of motherly feelings, linking them to female nature.

Annabel has now successfully transitioned from the monstrous bad mother to the good mother, the «all-nurturing and self-abnegating - the Angel of the House» (Kaplan, 2000, p. 468). Consequently, she is finally seen smiling and enjoying the company of the girls. She is portrayed engaging happily in housework and children care. This new Annabel has embraced the patriarchal ideal of motherhood and has somehow defeated the previous Annabel, the rock star, the deviant bad mother, putting an end to the horror she brought.

In contrast, this milestone threatens Mama's motherhood and, as a result, she becomes aggressive. «Mama tries to kill Annabel because the girls start to love her and she becomes her rival» states Chastain, in an interview (*Mamá*, n.d.). According to Kaplan, «Female jealousy possessiveness and competition are the product of woman's 'incompleteness', her positioning

in patriarchy as objects, not subject» (Kaplan, 2000, p. 81). As mentioned above, the narrative has constructed Mama's humanity and worth in relation to motherhood and, as a result, she «fulfils herself only through her children, and thus, lives through them» (Hager and Herzog, 2015 p. 128), which might explain why she reacts with violence.

Mama's advances towards the girls triggers the final fight. This last scene takes place at the cliff where Mama jumped to her death with her baby, anticipating her plan and adding tension to the story. The cliff is depicted as a long, rocky platform where each woman stands facing each other from opposite ends. This symbolises not only the clash between good versus evil, but also between the world of the living and the world of the dead, and between present and (haunting) past.

Thus, whereas Lucas and Annabel stand at the beginning of the platform, representing the traditional patriarchal family, Mama floats at the end of it, as a threatening monster. The girls are depicted sitting, halfway from each end. The sequence brings back the deep blue light tonality from the beginning of the film, alluding to the deep sadness, the mourning for a lost child and the mother-child bond. Suddenly, Mama opens her arms, welcoming her children with the purpose of taking them to the world of the dead, where she belongs. Lilly stands up immediately and walks towards her but just before Lilly falls from the cliff, Lucas stops her. While Mama is now attacking Lucas, Annabel tries to trade Lilly for the remains of Mama's long-lost biological baby. Then, Mama walks the platform back to the *living* side, as the baby reminds her of her mortal existence and her unsolved matters.

When mother and child are finally reunited, Mama walks away, holding the remains of her biological baby, whereas Lucas, Annabel and the girls are again together, as a family. Justice has been done and as Mama unfolds the remains in a close-up, she falls to her knees, crying for her baby in a long descriptive shot, as melodramatic music starts to play, increasing the dramatic feeling of this emotive scene. Moreover, the camera moves around her showing how the evil, decayed ghost recovers her human form again, turning her dark decomposed skin to pale, making her look like an old black and white Modigliani portrait. This scene emphasises Mama's human side, which brings sympathy towards the monster in what looks like a happy ending, where both mothers leave with their children.



Nevertheless, as the restored nuclear family attempts to leave, in what seems like the perfect happy ending, Lilly calls for Mama, who then looks back at the other side of the cliff and turns again into the evil, decomposed monster. This shows that what really threatens Mama is the patriarchal nuclear family that has been encouraged by the narrative since the girls were found alive. Thus, Mama attacks Lucas, the paterfamilias, and Annabel and she starts walking back to the other side of the platform with the girls. However, Annabel is determined to get the children back and she fights her injuries and crawls after them, despite the pain. This reinforces her construction as a good mother who self-sacrifices and is also subject to attacks in the narrative (Arnold, 2013).

In the final, climatic scene, Mama jumps off the cliff with Lilly, as she did with her baby when she was alive, and Victoria stays with Annabel, who is still wrapped around her legs. The camera shows now how Mama surrounds Lilly with her dark dress and the two of them are depicted in a close-up in a shared, dark, small, intimate space which reminds of an intra-uterine cavity, until the shot fades to white, presumably when they reach the world of the dead. Allowing Mama to *mother* Lilly could be interpreted the *wrong* made *right*, that the public servant explained. By extension, it allows the present to repair the wrongs of the past.

Finally, the last shot is a long shot of Lucas, Annabel and Victoria who melt in a hug as the camera moves away from them. This ending reminds of the biblical judgement of Solomon (Hager and Herzog), where two mothers fight custody of a baby. Nevertheless, although scholars like Hager and Herzog have read this fight between two bad mothers, in relation to the biblical story, this research has shown that the character of Annabel has undergone a transformation to become a good mother that is central to the film's narrative. Accordingly, I would argue that the fight takes place between a good mother (product of patriarchal institutions and highly influenced by our recent past) and a bad mother (who poses a threat to the patriarchal order and is therefore depicted as a monster).

Thus, open ending is ambiguous, as the Solomon's *baby*, the two sisters, has been cut in half. It could then be argued that the perfect happy ending would have involved defeating the ghost and her abjection to restore the patriarchal order, as seen in some other films within the Spanish corpus

in which the traditional, nuclear family lives *happily ever after*. Instead, the ending offers different interpretations, but it is important to consider that *Mama* has disappeared and with her, the terror, while Lucas, Annabel and Victoria have finally become the traditional, nuclear family that can live (almost) happily ever after. It is also worth mentioning that both maternal discourses respond to patriarchal principles. While *Mama* was constructed as a monster because of her transgressive maternal role that threatened the patriarchal order, Annabel had to undergo a transition into an imposed role and self-denial in order to become the ideal mother needed for the traditional, nuclear family.

Additionally, the maternal fight also highlights the struggle to meet the patriarchal construct of ideal motherhood, as well as the weight that Francoist identities and gender roles still hold today in relation to motherhood and family.

#### 4. CONCLUSIONS

Within the patriarchal order, motherhood is conceived as the only vehicle for women to reach fulfilment and happiness. In other words, to be complete in society, women have to become mothers. Nevertheless, becoming mother is not enough per se and there is a very specific (impossible) ideal of motherhood that women must meet. Within the Spanish context, this ideal still involves some of Franco's ideals related to the family, gender roles and a gendered division of labour. The female-led film *Mama* focuses on various styles of motherhood, offering a significantly different treatment of the two main female characters in relation to this aspect and showing, at the same time, the past haunting the present in connection to this theme.

On one hand, the monster *Mama* embodies what Harrington calls «essential motherhood» (Harrington, 2018 p. 193), a raw and animal type of maternity. Despite saving the girls from their murderous father and nurturing them for five years, she is depicted as a decayed monster. The research has shown that her monstrous appearance is not connected to the established parallelism with a wild animal but to her transgression of the patriarchal order and her consequent construction as a bad mother. The narrative deepens on her deviant single motherhood and shows how she has repeatedly

failed to let her children enter the symbolic order, challenging the patriarchal authorities policing her maternity. Furthermore, when these authorities try to take her children away from her, she reacts with violence, like a wild animal, as her status as a mother is threatened. Female violence and madness are therefore linked to maternity and her own victimhood. Her failed motherhood is reinforced by her failure to self-sacrifice, which ultimately results in her own death, the death of her biological child and, later, of Lilly, reinforcing the idea of her inability to (good) mother.

Thus, *Mama* and her matriarchal family model are constructed as monstrous and must, therefore, be eliminated in order to restore the peace (and the patriarchal order). It could be said that single women and women organised in alternative family units (with absent men) to the traditional nuclear family are a threat that needs to be eliminated in this type of narratives. Accordingly, the present study has argued that the monstrous and therefore negative depiction of these alternative family units and mothers could be understood as a step forward in the vilification and criticism of women who do not conform to the traditional (Francoist) ideal of motherhood, contributing to the narrative reactionary gender politics.

On the other hand, the other motherly figure, Annabel, embodies both the bad and the good mother, as the narrative focuses on her becoming good mother. This transition, forced, shaped, and policed by patriarchal institutions, shows the struggles, repression and suffering that entail the ideal motherhood. Annabel is firstly introduced rejecting motherhood and is pushed to take on this role, resulting in her embodiment of a bad mother. Unlike *Mama*, Annabel's bad motherhood does not translate in a monstrous/decayed appearance as she is a product of patriarchal institutions and has therefore been placed within the core of a traditional nuclear family. She does not transgress her traditional role neither does she pose a threat to the patriarchal order. Moreover, the fact that the film constructs her journey and resulting role as positive can be read as problematic again, from a gender perspective, since her self-denying has been rewarded by the narrative.

Finally, *Mama*'s cinematic construction of motherhood is based on the patriarchal myth of innate maternal instincts. Whereas *Mama*'s maternal instinct is so strong that even after death, she responds to it, adopting and nurturing two orphan girls in need, Annabel's journey from reluctant mother

to the good mother is based on her acceptance of her maternal instinct. Although innate and intrinsic to female nature, motherly instinct does not guarantee becoming a good mother, as the research has shown.

Thus, the outcome of the analysis shows that whilst Hollywood generally explores the body politics in maternal narratives, focusing on women's bodies through pregnancy, childbirth and depicting as monstrous her reproductive capacity and organs, the Spanish genre seems to approach maternal horror through women's deviant behaviour in relation to motherhood and the abjection of transgressive matriarchies. Accordingly, while Barbara Zecchi points out a pro-natalist tendency in Spanish contemporary cinema, the Spanish horror does not seem to promote natality per se but a very specific type of traditional mothering, highly influenced by Francoist principles, always within a nuclear, patriarchal family. This transgression is reflected in the monstrous construction of mothers and motherhoods outside this order, which has been argued to function as a step forward in the demonisation of these women. In this sense, contemporary Spanish horror creates narratives that explore not only the struggles of motherhood but more specifically, the horror that challenging the patriarchal order bring to these narratives.

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## THE THEATER OF MOTHERHOOD

## EL TEATRO DE LA MATERNIDAD

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## Abstract

The basic premise of this article is that despite the many representations of mothers in the history of art, the maternal image has almost invariably been presented in the status of object, i.e., a reflection of the value system, interests, and perspective of the patriarchal culture, and not of the mother herself. This study examines the construction of the maternal ideal in western, particularly Israeli, culture, and suggests the turning point over the past twenty years as contemporary artist-mothers (mama'artists) have undermined this ideal.

To avoid the traditional structure into which the mother has been relegated, the article adopts the matricentric perspective of Canadian scholar Andrea O'Reilly, who places the mother at the center of feminist discourse. With the understanding that the category *mother* intersects with, but is distinct from, the category *woman*, art scholarship must formulate more valid narratives.

This paper has two goals. One is to examine how matricentric research can contribute to analysis of the work of artist-mothers. The second is to identify the tools in art that enable expression of the political-maternal subjectivity. The methodology proceeds from these goals, and includes the voice of the artist, her personal story, and her perspective as she creates an imagined art world. These

were obtained by studio meetings with the artist, personal interviews, and a gender analysis of the art.

The video series under study was created between 2005 and 2015 by Mali De-Kalo, an Israeli mother-artist. The research revealed an original, thought-provoking, and ironic artistic reaction with dramatic theater-of-the-absurd elements that reflect her critique of the mechanisms of construction and replication of the social order and its expectations of the Israeli mother.

De-Kalo represents a new spirit in Israeli art—a contemporary artist in courageous defiance of the social norm that casts the mother as object; she depicts in her art a political-maternal subject who exposes and opposes patriarchal power in the social and artistic realms.

**Keywords:** matricentrism; maternal subjectivity; motherhood; Israeli art.

## Resumen

La premisa principal de este artículo es que, más allá de las múltiples representaciones de las madres en la historia del arte, la imagen maternal ha sido casi siempre presentada como objeto, por ejemplo, como reflejo del sistema de valores, de intereses y perspectivas de la cultura patriarcal y no de las madres en sí. Este estudio analiza la construcción del ideal maternal en la cultura occidental, en particular la israelí, y sugiere la existencia de un cambio relevante a lo largo de los últimos veinte años en la medida en que las artistas-madres han cuestionado este ideal.

Para evitar la estructura tradicional en la que se ha relegado la figura de la madre, el artículo adopta la perspectiva *matricéntrica* de la estudiosa canadiense Andrea O'Reilly, que sitúa a la madre en el centro del discurso feminista. Comprendiendo que la categoría *madre* se cruza con la de *mujer* pero es distinta de esta, los estudios sobre arte han de formular narraciones más válidas.

Este artículo tiene dos objetivos. Uno es estudiar cómo la investigación *matricéntrica* puede contribuir al análisis del trabajo de las artistas-madres. El segundo es identificar las herramientas artísticas que hacen posible la expresión de la subjetividad político-maternal. La metodología procede de estos mismos fines, e incluye la voz de la artista, su historia personal y su perspectiva en tanto en cuanto ella crea un mundo de arte imaginado. La obtención de todo ello se hizo a través de encuentros con la artista en su estudio, entrevistas personales y análisis del arte desde una perspectiva de género.

La vídeo serie que se estudia fue creada entre 2005 y 2015 por Mali De-Kalo, una artista-madre israelí. La investigación reveló una reacción artística original, provocadora e irónica con elementos dramáticos del teatro del absurdo que reflejan su crítica de los mecanismos de construcción y réplica del orden social y sus expectativas sobre las madres israelíes. De-Kalo representa un nuevo espíritu en el arte israelí, una artista contemporánea que desafía valientemente la norma social que moldea a la madre

como objeto; ella representa en su arte un sujeto político-maternal que expone el poder patriarcal y se opone a él en medios sociales y artísticos.

**Palabras clave:** *matricentrismo*; subjetividad maternal; maternidad; arte israelí.

## 1. INTRODUCTION

The maternal image is one of the most prevalent in the visual arts. One might therefore expect to find an almost infinite variety of the maternal subject in the history of Western art, and yet the historical record reveals this image invariably represented as object. Historically, the maternal image in art appears primarily as the bearer of meaning for the other, not as generating meaning about the maternal subject herself. We know little of the distinctive emotional organization of the mother depicted; instead, she is constrained and obscured by the existing artistic and social symbol systems.

The absence of the maternal subject in art extends a long tradition in which the materials that make up the myths, legends, stories, and ideas derive from the pain, existential fears, and fantasies of men. These culture-defining materials transformed feminine content, including the experience of motherhood, into mere backdrop to tell the story of men.

This paper takes a matricentric approach (O'Reilly, 2016), placing the mother at the center of feminist discourse, relating to her as the subject, not object, of art. It has two goals: first, to examine how matricentric research can contribute to an analysis of work by artist-mothers; and second, to identify tools in art that allow for the representation of the maternal-political subject, i.e., art that refuses to conform to social norms that establish the mother as object, but rather expose and oppose the patriarchal structures of power in both the social and artistic realms.

O'Reilly identifies ten ideological assumptions in the patriarchal construction of motherhood: *Essentialization*, *Privatization*, *Individualization*, *Naturalization*, *Normalization*, *Idealization*, *Biologicalization*, *Expertization*, *Intensification*, and *Depolicialization* of motherhood (2016, p.14).

My research discusses the relationship between these western bourgeois approaches to motherhood and those rooted in Israeli culture, as presented in the work of Mali De-Kalo, a contemporary Israeli artist, whose art challenges

these structures, with particular reference to the six characteristics, as described below. The first is *Naturalization*, which assumes that maternity is natural to women and that the work of mothering is driven by instinct rather than intelligence and skill. I will show how her art, especially the pair of works *Dinnertime Stories*, challenges the premise of innate and instinctive knowledge of motherhood work. The second is *Normalization*, which limits and restricts maternal identity and practice to one specific mode: the nuclear family. De-Kalo's painful work *Relaying* shows how precisely the great promise of the nuclear family for healthy and normative foundations serves as a veil to cover its shaky foundation for maternal functioning. The following three are *Idealization*, *Expertization*, and *Intensification*. These categories that set unattainable expectations of and for mothers receive a sharp critical artistic expression in de-Kalo's works, especially in *Awake at Night* and *Eight Lifts*. The last characteristic that O'Reilly points out and will be at my use is *Depolicialization*, which characterizes childrearing solely as a private and nonpolitical undertaking, with no social or political import. I will show that the entirety of De-Kalo's work presented in this study formulates a critical position that seeks to formulate motherhood as part of socio-political discourse and not as a collection of mere individual cases.

De-Kalo's work demonstrates how art can function as a site where motherhood is stripped of its sanctity and exposed in its nakedness. The aim is to show how a mother-artist critiques the social demands made of mothers, and how the dichotomous image of the mother (good versus bad) dissolves through the special performance choreography.

## 2. THE MATERNAL IDEAL IN BOURGEOIS, WESTERN THOUGHT

One of the social structures that has been re-examined in recent decades is the bourgeois family that emerged in Western Europe at the onset of the Enlightenment in the late 1700s. During that period, a new concept of the family was formulated—an intimate and harmonious social unit in which the individual finds happiness. The reshaping of the family met certain needs of modern bourgeois culture that came in the wake of social, cultural, political, and economic changes. The traditional extended family, based on stable and virtually unchanging economic and social

conditions and on a collectivist perception of family members and their ambitions, did not suit the liberal politics and bourgeois capitalism that called for individualism and socioeconomic mobility. The new ideal was designed to address the physical and emotional needs of all members of the family—parents and children. The capitalist business world, a much more impersonal and competitive model than the traditional business world, required a serene and secure refuge at its side, one that would absorb, ease, and soften the demands and pressures of the workplace. Awareness also changed of the public and private spheres, and the gender division between them (Davidoff & Hall, 1987). The private and female sphere—the home and the family—was intended to be a place that allowed for intimacy and warmth; it was defined and shaped as an antithesis to the outside world, which was the male, public sphere—marked by impersonal and alienated relations that governed economic and civilian life (Chadwick, 1990). This binary gendered space required functional efficiency and strived for maximum satisfaction, but it completely ignored the pressures in the home itself and the unceasing demands on the middle-class mother in the domestic sphere.

In France, the moralizing of philosopher and writer Jean Jacques Rousseau about the role and standing of women, combined with then current scientific-medical writings on the issue, shaped a distinctive sexual politics for women/mothers (Schwartz, 1984). Britain did not lag far behind: Much medical writing during the Victorian era asserted that deviance by a woman from the new social norms of the period—marriage at the appropriate age, breast-feeding, and an abundance of children—could lead to medical abnormality (Nead, 1988).

Women were intimidated into devoting themselves to the maternal vocation, and, for the hesitant, more sophisticated means were applied. In *L'amour en plus: Histoire de l'amour maternel, XVIIe-XXe siècle*, French philosopher-historian Élisabeth Badinter (1980) notes that this period saw the first explicitly articulated reference to the happiness of the woman. Her happiness, however, has boundaries of place—the home, and of role—motherhood. In other words, to achieve happiness, the woman has only to conform to the new model; she was educated to desire and strive for what was required of her within the framework of the family.

The idea that early childhood is a critical stage in the life of a human being was one of the Enlightenment discoveries and it launched a demand for change in the education of the child. The child does not understand punishment, rules, or dictates, and could be harmed by them. In the new education, the mother was expected to completely devote herself to childrearing—understanding the child's nature, need for affection and approval, natural tendency to learn by imitation, and love for play and freedom of movement.

Thus, the mother/wife enabled the existence of the new family. Rousseau's heroines, such as Julie from *Julie ou la Nouvelle Héloïse* (1761), were the model of a beautiful, devoted, and modest mother, whose happiness derived from satisfying the needs of her husband and children.

Western European art in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, particularly in France and England, changed accordingly, and the image of the happy mother played a starring role according to the pioneering research of Linda Nead (1988), who writes about artistic representations of women during the Victorian era, and Carol Duncan, who writes of this period in France. Note, for example, the work of eighteenth and nineteenth century French and English artists such as Jean-Baptiste Greuze, *La mère bien-aimée* [the well-loved mother] (1765); Jean-Honoré Fragonard, *La bonne mère* [the good mother] (1763); Angelica Kauffman, *Cornelia, pointing to her children as her treasures* (1785); or Constance Mayer, *L'heureuse mère* [the happy mother] (1810). Duncan notes the fundamental change in the iconography of the painting during the eighteenth century—from the sensuous debauchery of the rococo period to the tender mother at the end of the century, and relates to the disparity between the ideology and the reality of motherhood at the onset of this era, and the recruitment of art to bridge the gap. The visual representations that depicted family relations, such as the warmth between the mother and child, breastfeeding, the mother's childrearing, were not common maternal practices among the upper or middle classes of the eighteenth or early nineteenth centuries. These practices began to spread, however, and toward the close of the nineteenth century, one finds more and more convergence of the functioning of the mother and her representation in art.

These watersheds in the history of modern Christian Europe underscore the important role played by the cultural ethos in shaping the image of the mother and perceptions of motherhood. Although Christian tradition

provided an important precedent in maternal representations via the image of the Madonna as an expression of infinite purity and maternal devotion, this image was also layered with pain, loss, and mourning. The secular bourgeois adopted the virtue and maternal devotion, but went beyond this and for the first time held out to the woman an offer of happiness, satisfaction, and a unique *raison d'être*: motherhood. In other words, the happiness of the woman could derive from only one source: her womb. This thought, fundamentally secular, moves away from the Christian ethos, which sanctifies virginity, and toward the Jewish ethos that sanctifies the principle «be fruitful and multiply» —the blessing of motherhood and the curse of barrenness.

### 3. THE JEWISH-ISRAELI IDEAL OF MOTHERHOOD

The family, particularly the sanctity of mothers, is a value of singular importance for broad sectors of Israeli society (Izraeli, 1992), deriving, *inter alia*, from the unique attempt to merge Jewish religious law with a democratic state. This merger is exemplified in the personal status laws of Israel—those related to family matters, especially marriage and divorce (Raday, 1995).

The critical role played by the family in Jewish religious tradition derives from the call to «be fruitful and multiply» (Genesis 1:28) —the first biblical commandment and one that signals a divine blessing. Even though this commandment legally obligates only the male to procreate (Mishnah, *Yevamot* 6:6, in Gilat, 2007), it is the Jewish woman who actually fulfills the sacred mission. The Jewish-Israeli ethos defines motherhood in terms of devotion, self-sacrifice, giving, and self-effacement (Lachover, 2018). In Proverbs (31:10-30), the ideal woman is described as an *eshet hayil*, a virtuous woman—humble, wise, God-fearing, conscientious, and guardian of the family purity. According to Jewish tradition, it is the mother's mission to raise the children and instruct them in Jewish values, and therefore her job is extolled by all, including her children, as she guards the flame of the Jewish people and its heritage.

The secular civil code of Israel, which applies to all citizens regardless of their religion, gender, or race, remains loyal to the religious directive: Parenthood is enshrined as a supreme right in Israel's Basic Law (Bombach & Shaked, 2002). Israeli policies are pro-natalist, promoting motherhood as

a woman's essential task. And yet, even though the state deeply values childbirth and reproduction, this does not translate into any significant power for the mother —political, social, or economic.

An extensive essay by art scholar Gideon Ofrat (1991) on the metamorphosis of the national-female myth in Israeli culture observes that Israeli art found the image of the mother to be a useful visual tool for expressing the national myths of the state, and remained fundamentally loyal to the maternal archetypes articulated in western art —the goddess of fertility, mother earth, the bereaved mother, and the happy mother. Each archetype was adapted to the Israeli and Jewish experience and to local sociopolitical events.

From Israeli independence in 1948 until the 1970s, motherhood was a central theme in Israeli art. However, the image of *the mother of the nation* that prevailed denied all subjective agency to her: She was presented not as a private mother, but as a collective matriarch who represents biblical figures, such as the four matriarchs, Hannah whose seven sons were killed before her eyes, and others. This is the mother who gives birth to sons, but also the one who buries them.

This special connection between secular Zionism and religious Judaism created a maternal image linked to two main concepts. One was bereavement and national revival, rooted in the trauma of the Shoah and renewal in the state of Israel as well as the political and military reality of Israel as a war-riven country. Images of keening, bereaved mothers were borrowed from the biblical tale of the sacrifice of Isaac in which Sarah, his mother, grieves over her son's intended pyre, or from Christian pieta art in which the Virgin Mary mourns her son.

The second concept links the body of the mother to the holy land (Ofrat, 1991, p. 131). These maternal images, which metaphorically associate the maternal body with the Israeli landscape, also drew from both Israeli and international culture. In Hebrew, the word *em* or «mother» is embedded in the word *le-om*, or «nation», and carries into the word *moledet*, or «homeland». Thus, the national mother foreshadows the biological mother and connects to the Great Mother archetype, alluding to the para-historical image that integrates the fertility goddess with mother-earth.



The symbolization of the mother, formulated over the first decades of Israeli independence, continued in the following decades with developments influenced by local politics.

After the 1967 war, Israeli society experienced its first significant ideological split, this in the matter of the occupied territories. Not surprisingly, the image of the mother was enlisted by artists on both sides to express this division. The nationalist camp continued to identify the land with the female appendages of the Great Mother, while the critics of occupation cast the nationalist mother as a whore. Another version of this critique arose in the 1980s with the emergence of new maternal images —as a devouring goddess, an aggressive bloodletter of her sons, or one who views her sons in coffins as national heroes. One way or another, whether the Great Mother was portrayed as an inclusive and loving mother earth, or as the bereaved mother whose entire essence is pain and trauma, or as the mother who sacrifices her children for the sake of the nation, the representations of mothers in Israeli art persisted in ignoring maternal subjectivity, and the shaping of the maternal image continued to conform to the needs and interests of its shapers.

Clearly, these representations reinforce the dichotomous perception of the woman —the positive, beloved, loyal, and moral woman versus the lethal one, who, because she owns her sexuality, has also embedded within her the powers of destruction. Interestingly, unlike most western representations in Christian religious art that forge a clear antithesis between the good, god-fearing mother and the femme fatale who is not a mother, Jewish theology reflects a dichotomous female division through the image of two mothers, Eve and Lilith. According to early tradition, it was not Eve who was Adam's first wife, but Lilith, who was born of clay earth like Adam himself (Abarbanel, 1994, p. 25). Her name in Hebrew derives from the word *layla*, meaning «night», and she is depicted as a nocturnal, demonic creature. Lilith's difficult story begins with her refusal to be subservient to her husband Adam; indeed, she rebels against him, pronounces God's secret name, and disappears into the light-filled ether of the universe. God punishes Lilith by slaying daily one hundred of her children, the sons of her copulation with demons. In revenge, Lilith engages in a never-ending search at sea for babies whom she strangles in their cradles and for men whom she seduces in their

nocturnal dreams, then tortures and kills. Lilith herself escapes death as she has separated from Adam before the original sin and his banishment from the Garden of Eden (Abarbanel, 1994, p. 26). The image of Eve, whose name in Hebrew derives from the word for «life», («the mother of all life» in Genesis 3:20), is even more complicated than Lilith as Genesis records two versions of her creation: In verse 1:27, Eve and Adam are created together in the image of God, and in verse 2:22, Eve is created after Adam from his rib. In Jewish culture, the two mothers, Eve and Lilith, are mirror images of each other—each a negative of the other.

Modern Israel embraces religious elements in its view of mothers and overlays them with a western, bourgeois construction of a woman's ambitions. Despite the profound transformation of Israeli society since the 1970s—from a socialist to a capitalist socioeconomic system, right-wing political leadership, and more power to ultra-Orthodox politicians, together with modern western influences regarding the status of women and the structure of the nuclear family—motherhood remains a core institution in Israeli society. The maternal role is still viewed as natural and basic to female existence, and the mother is expected to covet motherhood and devote herself to optimal functioning in the family framework (Rothler, 2018).

The changes undergone by Israeli society in the last quarter of the twentieth century have also affected Israeli art: After some five decades of enlisting the image of the mother to serve nationalist goals or to criticize the state, Israeli art lost interest in the maternal image. As private forces grew more powerful in the field of art, the mother with her nationalist symbols gradually faded from art discourse—the maternal issue did not suit the agendas of postmodern Israeli art. Only in the past decade has the mother won renewed attention, now primarily from mothers who are artists and seek to challenge the cultural structure of the ideal mother as well as the maternal ideal.

#### 4. THE COMPLEXITY OF THE PERFECT-MOTHER IDEAL

The perfect mother is one who desires a large number of children, provides them with endless and unconditional love, is omnipresent in their lives, and has the emotional resources to steer them through times of distress and

crisis<sup>1</sup>. Moreover, the needs and desires of her children always take priority over her own needs and desires. Feminist psychoanalysts have identified the notion of the *ideal mother* as having a significant formative influence in child psychology, hence in the perception of the mother, as well. In *The Mermaid and the Minotaur*, for example, Dorothy Dinnerstein (1976) has shown that the presentation of the mother as either good or bad evokes ambivalent feelings in the child. The child's experience of being mothered is so powerful and threatening that he must repress and deconstruct it into two different forces, which move between the myth of the omnipresent, sacrificing mother to the predatory, neglectful, and sadistic one. Dinnerstein examines the historical period when the biological mother became the child's sole caregiver (primarily since the emergence of the capitalist bourgeoisie). Such changes are not typical of Jewish culture in which the role of the biological mother has always been reserved for the care of children. For this reason, Dinnerstein's conclusions are important and significant to the Jewish maternal experience. In her view, being the sole caregiver is the reason for maternal failure: Society, which strives for an ideal mother, blames the mother for all her children's failings, while at the same time is hostile toward her exclusive authority. The over-glorification of motherhood—in the world at large, and in Jewish society in particular—makes impossible demands of the mother, inevitably labeling her *not good enough*. The moment a mother fails to meet the high standards, her value plummets, with devastating damage to her identity as a woman and mother.

The notion of ideal motherhood creates difficulties on multiple levels. On the social level, giving sole responsibility to the mother for raising the children exempts all other parties—the father, society, and government institutions. On the personal, social-psychological level, the notion of an ideal mother means delegitimizing any ambivalent feelings the mother might have toward her child, as such ambivalence marks her as *dysfunctional*. As a

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1. So writes Adrienne Rich about her conversation with her eldest son who, at age twenty-one, read his mother's journals of early motherhood and commented: «You seemed to feel you ought to love us all the time. But there is no human relationship where you love the other person at every moment.» And Rich replied: «Yes I tried to explain to him, but women—above all, mothers—have been supposed to love that way» (Rich, 1986, p. 23).

result, her true self is hidden from the child, who is instead given one-sided and unambiguous messages. Thus, a worldview threatened by emotional and intellectual complexity is perpetuated, and a long tradition of psychological repression is established. Moreover, a mother who learns to hide her feelings of helplessness, frustration, fears, aggression, and resentment—which most people experience—will not know how to accept such feelings in her children.

In contemporary times, when a significant proportion of mothers are salaried employees and devoted to their out-of-home careers, a new concept has emerged, the modern sister of the mothering ideal: *intensive mothering*. According to sociologist Sharon Hays (1996), this ideology demands that the mother devote vast amounts of time, energy, and money to childrearing, though working outside the home cuts into mothering time. This conflict between a career driven by efficiency, self-interest, and maximizing profits versus intensive mothering, which demands tireless commitment to the children, is clearly evident in Israeli society, where mothers are expected to hold down a job outside the home (Fogiel-Bijaoui, 1999).

In the context of discussion about the perfect mothering ideology, the artwork of Mali De-Kalo is relevant in its ironic, absurdist, and theatrical critique of the expectations of the social order with its mechanisms of construction and replication.

## 5. THE THEATER OF MOTHERHOOD

The messages of ideal motherhood have permeated the arts—both high and popular—and our culture is replete with its fictional representations. These not only reflect messages about the ideal, but are used to transmit and reproduce them, as well. Indeed, one might say that the history of representations of mothers is also the history of misrepresentations of good, ideal, pure motherhood. Most female artists (mothers or not) have gone along with this representation, and it is only in recent years that one finds art that exposes what I call the *theater of motherhood*: the theatrical aspects built into maternal functioning. Theater is a medium that contains an inherent disparity between reality and fiction, between the original and its presentation. In contrast, motherhood is perceived as an authentic and, some would say,

instinctive experience—one accorded the truth value of the original—an indisputable emotional and physical truth. Over the years, the prevailing assumption has been that this truth can coexist in harmony with the social expectations of mothers and their expectations of themselves. In recent years, however, some art has tackled the question of how social and personal maternal fantasy can be reconciled with the reality of motherhood, i.e., with the mother's daily activity within and outside the home.

What I call the *Theater of Motherhood*, the American feminist author Susan Maushart calls the *Mask of Motherhood*. In her book she explains it as «an assemblage of fronts [...] that we use to disguise the chaos and complexity of our lived experience. Like all social masks, the mask of motherhood is an invaluable means for organizing and domesticating the more rapacious aspects of the realities we confront. Yet the personal and political price we pay for this control has far exceeded the value of its social dividends» (Maushart, 2000, p. 2). Despite the changing reality of motherhood today, mostly to the better and more candid, the mask still exist, even if compared to what was the situation in the past. Moreover, it is a useful coping mechanism, and therefore replicates itself. The danger is that the make-believe can become so convincing that we fool even ourselves. Maushart explains that «Ultimately, we no longer make a life –we fake a life», and concludes while asking: «how many of us will admit, or are even aware, that we are faking motherhood?» (2000, p. 6).

## 6. MALI DE-KALO

Mali De-Kahlo is a multidisciplinary Israeli artist who has been creating large-scale video installations for the past two decades. Their focus is on different ways of looking at family territory in general, and at motherhood in particular, by using techniques that involve both genres of fiction-drama and documentary. Her video installations cast light on the theatrical aspect of the outward appearances that the mother maintains, at great effort, consciously and unconsciously, in order to survive within a system of conflicting forces and interests. The mother plays a role in the great performance of her life. Maternal happiness, endless maternal love, pure and unequivocal love, maternal tenderness, maternal instinct—comparatively new, idealistic

bourgeois notions that have seemingly become *natural* and self-evident in our world—are revealed in De-Kalo's works as misrepresentations, as scenes in some other play (possibly in the grotesque genre or a melodrama), whose plot can only be understood if one looks carefully between the lines, at the spaces, at the moments when the actress forgets or has over-memorized her lines. In all her work, there is a subtle moment in which the maternal act flies out of control, shatters norms, and perturbs the viewers.

As noted, discomfiting viewers through overt demonstrations of motherhood has become common in art only in recent years. In the past, viewers who enjoyed idealized representations of motherhood—like a sweet to soothe the troubled psyche—must now come face-to-face with disconcerting works. The 2019 series *Shit Moms* by Iranian-American artist Tala Madani, which interprets the expression «shit mother» literally, is a case in point. The paintings depict female figures made of a filthy-looking, brown substance, which disgusts the viewer due to the association with feces. The incongruity between the intimate and tender presentation of the mother-child relationship (in keeping with the western iconography of the Madonna and the infant Jesus) and the repugnant color/substance underscores the dissonance between the exalted maternal ideal and the accusatory regime that induces guilt and frustration among mothers.

As in any theatrical performance, the viewer's experience is a major part of the signification in De-Kalo's work. The mothers who *perform* in her works elicit an emotional response in the viewer, evoking feelings of distress, partial identification, repulsion, or understanding—depending on the viewer's gender and situation. In her early video works—the two films entitled *Dinnertime Stories* (2009, 2012) and *Awake at Night* (2010)—the artist turns the camera lens inward, toward her own family and home. In two subsequent series—*The Eight Lifts* (2013) and *Relaying* (2015)—women outside the intimate circle of the artist's family are depicted. In both instances, the intimate and the public, the viewer is led to the realization of the potential for things to go wrong in motherhood. In De-Kalo's works, the maternal dichotomy is a formula bound for failure: Our expectation of the maternal representation is undercut, as aggression, exaggeration, pain, and anguish manage to undermine the foundations of the Big Show—motherhood.



Fig. 1. Mali De-Kalo, *Finkielkraut*, 2009, from *Dinnertime stories*, single-channel video, 6 min 11 sec.

*Dinnertime Stories* is the title of two video works that link a mother's act of bedtime reading to her children with her role as constitutive of the children's personal narrative and self-identity. The artist ostensibly follows the demands of the intense motherhood according to which she has to spend *quality time* with the children, which include, among other things, the time of reading them a story.

In both works, the artist sits with her daughter in the kitchen at dinner-time and reads texts to her about French philosophers. In the earlier work (Fig. 1), De-Kalo reads to her five-year-old daughter an article from the Israeli newspaper *Haaretz* about Alain Finkielkraut's views on the riots of French citizens of North African descent that took place in Paris in 2005. She reads the article in a tone usually reserved for a children's story, but the young daughter, who does not understand the *story*, plays with an umbrella out of



Fig. 2. Mali De-Kalo, *Baudrillard*, 2012, from *Dinnertime stories*, single-channel video, 5 min 9 sec.

boredom, occasionally nodding to please her mother. In the second video (Fig. 2), produced seven years later, De-Kalo reads a text to her daughter from Jean Baudrillard's *The Spirit of Terrorism*. This time, the preteen is withdrawn into her own world, no longer even pretending to humor her mother, who is clinging to the old interaction between them—and finally gets up and leaves the dinner table, effectively bringing the video to an end. Both works present a bizarre scene that exposes the flaws in the paradigm of the good mother reading a story to her eagerly attentive child. The pretense of two souls coming together in the intimate moments of story-time falls apart into two contradictory wills—an experience familiar to every mother who reads stories to her children. Each of the characters is in a different place and has very different needs: The mother, who seeks to express the issues that interest her, ignores the contrasting wishes of her bored daughter, who is not





Fig. 3. Mali De-Kalo, *Awake at Night*, 2010, single-channel video, 9 min 41 sec, installation view.

at all interested in the maternal story, demonstrating that even on the *good* side of motherhood, there are conflicting needs, inattention, indifference, self-interest, and moments of dissatisfaction.

Similarly, in the video installation *Awake at Night* (Fig. 3), the mother and children are depicted in two different realms of existence, highlighting the disparity between them. De-Kalo filmed her three children during their night's sleep. She attached the camera to her chest, and so its movements, rising and falling with her breathing, attest to her presence in the work itself. As we witness her breathing, we hear the breathing of the sleeping children. She herself is not seen in the video, but is present throughout the unique recording. We, the viewers, breathe with her as we gaze at the children and take part in her task of supervising and protecting, which is so familiar to us as parents and children. In her Book *Maternal Thinking: Toward a Politics of Peace*, Sara Ruddick argues that the first duty of mothers is to protect and preserve their children (1989, p. 80). There is no doubt that mothers in areas

of military conflict are affected by the security situation and their level of anxiety about the well-being of their children is increased. This is also the case in Israel, where maintaining the safety of young children becomes a top-priority task for both parents, which increases with their adolescence towards the time of their enlistment to the mandatory army service (Scheflan Katzav, 2018). However, the sheer length of the film, and the knowledge that De-Kalo continued filming the entire night, shifts us from the safe, comfort zone of normative maternal concern to an extreme of maternal anxiety and over-protection, and an understanding of the ambiguous role of the gaze in this relationship.

Toward the end of the work, the artist's young daughter wakes up and looks with one half-open eye at her mother who is watching her. This uneasy moment, in which the two gazes meet—that of the daughter, surprised by the maternal monitoring, and that of the mother, disappointed by the child's sudden awakening—reveals the discordance between the maternal and the artistic subject. The artist must decide, immediately and instinctively, what to choose—either to continue recording, while being aware of her daughter's sense of invasion of privacy, or to stop recording. Either art or motherhood. The work probes boundaries while transgressing them. The experience of the maternal subject is perceived as transpiring between boundaries—and as such will always be either too little or too much in relation to the child. The gap between mother and child always exists, but is flexible and tends to shrink or expand, depending on the situation.

In stark contrast to the quiet of *Awake at Night*, the video installation *Eight Lifts* (Figs. 4 and 5) is noisy and aggressive. In it, De-Kalo filmed six mothers, whom she instructed to pick up their children into their arms. By speeding up the frame rate through digital post-processing, the act of picking up the child is transformed from a hug into a shaking—from maternal tenderness into a threatening and deadly act. Benevolent, laborious maternal actions carried out in the monotonous and wearying routine of daily life can traverse a wide range of emotions—from playfulness and inclusive, loving hugs to the other extreme—irritation, exhaustion, violence, robotic responses, primal urges, and loneliness. Picking up a child over and over again—an obvious, somewhat Sisyphean, motherly action—is but one example



Fig. 4. Mali De-Kalo, *Eight Lifts*, 2013, stills from video.



Fig. 5. Mali De-Kalo, *Eight Lifts*, 2013, stills from video.

of a moment that can go wrong and dissolve the dichotomous distinction between a good and bad mother.

Exposure of the dichotomy underlying our perception of mother-daughter relationships can also be found in *Sacha and Mum* (1996), an early video work by British artist Gillian Wearing. Shot in black and white, the film shows a mother and daughter (played by actresses) trapped in a bedroom in an emotional and physical conflict. Sacha, the daughter, is wearing a bra and white pants—semi-nudity that makes her more vulnerable than her mother, whose body is hidden and protected in a floral dress. Wearing choreographs the physical relationship between them: At first, the two women hug, but they soon turn to violence, with the mother pulling her daughter's hair and wrenching her head back and forth, while the daughter kneels on the ground. Thus, the two fluctuate between tenderness and aggression, which culminates when Sasha's face is covered with a towel—both a protective mask and a means of suffocation. The soundtrack, created by playing backwards the original sounds recorded during filming, is a sequence of annoying noises, crying sounds, and mumbling that is hard to make out. The discomfort of the viewer at the unfolding scene of abuse that runs counter to expectations of a mother-daughter relationship reflects the confusion often felt in family relationships in which love and hostility are difficult to separate. This ambiguous mixture of tenderness and cruelty perhaps echoes the experience of people who have been physically or psychologically abused by family members they love and trust. The close-ups of the two heightens the sense of claustrophobia created by the relationship between them, as it does not allow viewers to avoid seeing the horror unfolding before them.

Wearing is known as an artist who uses the medium of photography as an anthropological tool—not to explore a foreign culture, but to challenge what we think we know about our own culture. Like Wearing, De-Kalo directs her photographic lens at the seemingly familiar in our culture, sharpening the focus on what our culture tries to hide. Mixed Feelings in the maternal experience is the subject of Barbara Almond's book *The Monster Within: The Hidden Side of Motherhood*. She describes contemporary motherhood as following: «Today's expectations for good mothering have become so hard to live with, the standards so draconian, that maternal ambivalence



Fig. 6. Mali De-Kalo, *Relaying*, 2015, still from video.

has increased and at the same time become more unacceptable» (2010, p. xiii). Indeed, a culture that refuses to acknowledge such feelings denies the mothers themselves recognition of conflicting feelings, and the consequences are devastating.

*Eight Lifts*, which conveys this intrinsic difficulty in the maternal experience of our time, also marks the moment when De-Kalo, like Wearing, began introducing actresses into her artistic work. Unlike Wearing, however, De-Kalo chooses as the performing actresses, women with whom she is well acquainted with, women from her professional and social circles.

De-Kalo repeated this two years later, when she created *Relaying* (Figs. 6,7 and 8), a complex video project that explores a deep rift in the maternal experience. *Relaying* is a large-scale, six-track video installation that tells the previously untold story of mothers whose children have severed all contact with them following disintegration of the family unit. It presents monologues by eight such mothers, which are read directly into the camera by other women, who relay a story that is not their own. Thus, as in all of De-Kalo's works, a narrative replication occurs, with a delicate and sensitive expression of the differences, similarities, and seepage between the two accounts—that of the mother and that of the recounter.



Fig. 7. Mali De-Kalo, *Relaying*, 2015, six-channel video installation, 40 min, installation views, Mana Contemporary, Jersey City, New Jersey.

The work reveals the maternal sense of failure of a woman whose children have chosen to break away from her—one of the hardest feelings for a mother to have. With such a fundamental dislocation of a woman's motherhood, her personal and social identity undergoes an almost catastrophic sense of failure, irrespective of her accomplishments in the rest of her life. This is why such *failures* are well hidden and repressed by the mothers themselves.

Having their stories read aloud by other women is a way to break down the wall of silence surrounding this painful issue, bringing it to public awareness while maintaining the privacy of the women who experienced it. De-Kalo says she had a hard time reaching these mothers, as they keep their story under wraps. They bear their stigma in silence, without confiding in others their sense of failure in the mission of motherhood. Most agreed to meet with De-Kalo only when she promised to come without a camera, and

that their faces and identities would not be revealed. The interviews were recorded in audio only, and then edited as short monologues (about five minutes each) in Hebrew, Arabic, or English, which were read by women volunteers, who relayed the accounts in an act of female solidarity. Hence the name of the project: *Relaying*.

As she edited the monologues, De-Kalo recounts that she sought to keep the distinctive language and style of each mother, while preserving her anonymity. The goal was to convey to the world, clearly and distinctly, the subjective experience of a mother who is forced to live without her children. Like the mothers, the women who read out the accounts are diverse in age, marital status, religion, and ethnic origin, but they share one thing in common: They are all filmed reading the accounts in their own living room. Each reader's personal living room thus becomes the host site for another woman's personal story, and the contrast between the two—the domestic living room and the story of a home that has fallen apart—is acute. The deconstruction and reconstruction of the maternal story in De-Kalo's work—through the extreme sense of maternal failure caused by a child's severing of ties with her—makes it possible for the viewer to hear a re-reading of the story. It is a fundamentally universal story, which neutralizes the mother's sense of guilt and presents a problem that many mothers face, but usually keep secret, for fear of being seen as a bad mother.

The transition between silence and reading aloud are done in an intelligent and calculated manner. When presented in 2015 at the Mana Contemporary Center in Jersey City, New Jersey, the work was divided into two spaces. In an inner space, the women were shown reading aloud the mothers' accounts, while in the entrance foyer, the same eight women appear on a large screen, one after the other, sitting in silence, peering directly at the camera, saying nothing, as a kind of prologue to the work as a whole, their deafening silence alluding to the mother's mute feelings of shame and disgrace. Thus, viewers move from the silence of the foyer into the inner space, where the women read the accounts out loud—eight women on five large screens, each reading a different moving testimony of a mother who has lost contact with her children. The screenings are timed so that while one is reading out loud, the others are present but silent. Thus, the flip side of silence is revealed—that of listening—for without listening, there is no



Fig. 8. Mali De-Kalo, *Relaying*, 2015, six-channel video installation, 40 min, Mana Contemporary, Jersey City, New Jersey, installation view room 2.

point in crying out. In this way, a kind of female solidarity is forged, which says, «I hear you, your cry is not falling on deaf ears».

Biographical crises can evoke a heightened awareness of the difficulties in the maternal experience. However, such drama is not necessary to experience a sense of maternal failure, as social expectations of the mother create an ideal of behavior and emotions that is unachievable on a daily basis. The dichotomy and totality that characterize the cultural perceptions of motherhood—the mother as the epitome of perfection or as a predatory monster—create a constant clash between reality and fantasy, and do not allow for partial success or shared responsibility. Deconstruction of the one and only model of the *good mother* into a multi-faceted maternal truth is one of the hallmarks of the past three decades, and mothers themselves are the playwrights this time.

Mothers who write their own narrative are in fact *breaking the silence*. This is the same silence that accompanies Maushart's book, as a decisive



factor in the maternal mask that has been shattered in recent years, in various forms. One of those forms is *mummy bloggers*, who construct their online maternal identities, using them in order to subvert the scripts of their families, cultures, and nations. By reflecting their realities, they make a new and important voice by which to negotiate, reconcile and resist traditional notions of mothering and maternal roles. Rogers, who has researched these blogs, finds them of immense importance, a tool by which to shatter the semblance of serenity and control that allows the maternal experience to pass unnoticed. In her study, she establishes a new category for them, one which she calls «maternal essayists» (Rogers, 2015, p. 259).

Like these mother-bloggers, Mali De-Kalo is also a storyteller. However, in contrast to the personal and sincere stories of the bloggers, she collects, compiles and weaves together multiple narratives, echoing the misrepresentation of the mothers and thus exposing real and diverse maternal experiences. Like the storytellers of prehistoric times, before the invention of writing, she alludes to the collective memory and uses diverse methods to captivate and surprise the audience. But unlike past storytellers, her rhetoric is visual, and her stories are far from amusing. Indeed, they are disturbing and evoke discomfort in the audience.

In his essay «Death of the Author», French literary theorist and semiotician Roland Barthes presents the storyteller in ancient ethnographic societies as fulfilling a function diametrically opposed to that of the modern, individual author, who is perceived as the origin of the work and the sole authority for its interpretation (1977, pp. 142-148). Barthes buries the notion of the author, arguing that a work has no single author or source, but that its power lies precisely in the intermingling—and at times, the clash—of multiple writings, until their endless and renewed gathering by each reader. As he saw it, the integrity of a text lies not in its origins, but in its destination: the reader. De-Kalo's video pieces demonstrate the ways in which the stories are brought together, clash with each other, and are narratively arranged differently by each viewer, especially by the mothers' viewers.

De-Kalo's stories are always accompanied by *witnesses*, ostensibly to corroborate the narrative truth, but in reality, to highlight the disparity between story and fact, between meta-narrative and personal tale. And this is precisely De-Kalo's aim: to expose the meta-narrative that emerged from the

bourgeois Enlightenment, the narrative of a single truth, in its nakedness, falsehood, and immense power to abuse its believers. De-Kalo's video work launches the long process of breaking down this meta-narrative, one that begins with deconstruction of the binary gender order of patriarchal culture and its perception of femininity, particularly motherhood. A matricentric analysis of De-Kalo's work reveals the distinctive artistic tools she uses to represent the maternal-political subject, and her contribution to the story created over the last two decades of maternal discourse in art.

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# TO BE OR NOT TO BE A MOTHER: DOUBTFUL, FRAUGHT, AND DENIED ACCESS TO MOTHERHOOD IN CONTEMPORARY CATALAN THEATRE

## SER O NO SER MADRE EN EL TEATRO CATALÁN CONTEMPORÁNEO: CONFLICTOS, DUDAS Y NEGACIÓN EN EL ACCESO A LA MATERNIDAD

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### Abstract

Like many other regions in Europe, Catalonia has seen significant changes in the demographics of motherhood over recent decades, with decreasing fertility rates and an increase in the average age of women at the birth of the first child. Together with increased social awareness of gender and identity issues such as gestational loss or the sexual and reproductive rights of people with disabilities, this changing landscape seems to have had a noteworthy impact on contemporary Catalan theatre. Indeed, throughout the long 2010s, a significant number of female-authored plays focused on motherhood premiered in Catalan venues, and a significant portion of these addressed doubtful, fraught, and denied access to motherhood. This essay analyses four important works associated with this trend: *Júlia & The Empty Lot* (2018) and *To Be a Mother* (2021) by Clàudia Cedó, *Conversations With My Uterus and Other Interlocutors* (2018) by Núria Planes Lull, and *Stigmas* (2019) by Concha Milla. These plays respectively address the experience of perinatal loss,

the desire of women with disabilities to become mothers, doubts concerning one's maternal desire, and the consequences of infertility and assisted reproductive technology processes. The analysis is based on dramatic and video criticism, accompanied by a study of performance documentation and paratexts. This essay contends that the analysed plays shed light on the tension between hegemonic narratives around motherhood and the actual experiences of contemporary Catalan women in terms of access to motherhood, which can be fraught with social, political, or physiological obstacles, as well as denied to certain subjects who have historically been excluded from womanhood, such as women with disabilities. In so doing, the plays expand the available narratives for what we understand as motherhood while elaborating feminist responses to the lived experiences they bring to the stage.

**Keywords:** Catalan theatre; female playwrights; maternal desire; infertility; perinatal mortality; assisted reproductive technologies; disability; no mothers.

### Resumen

Como otras muchas regiones de Europa, Cataluña ha visto suceder en las últimas décadas cambios importantes en la demografía de la maternidad, como el descenso de la natalidad o el aumento de la edad media de las mujeres en el nacimiento del primer hijo. Junto con el aumento de la visibilidad social de cuestiones identitarias y de género como las pérdidas gestacionales o los derechos sexuales y reproductivos de las personas con discapacidad, este paisaje en transformación ha producido un impacto destacado en el teatro catalán contemporáneo. En efecto, a lo largo de la última década se ha representado en los escenarios catalanes un número significativo de obras centradas en la maternidad, una parte importante de las cuales ha abordado el acceso dubitativo, difícil o negado a la maternidad. Este artículo analiza cuatro piezas importantes dentro de esta tendencia: *Una gossa en un descampat* (2018) y *Mare de sucre* (2021) de Clàudia Cedó, *Converses amb el meu úter i altres interlocutors* (2018) de Núria Planes Lull, y *ESTIGMES* (2019) de Concha Milla. Respectivamente, las obras elegidas tratan la experiencia de la muerte perinatal, el deseo de convertirse en madres de las mujeres con discapacidad intelectual, las dudas sobre el propio deseo materno, y las consecuencias de la infertilidad y el uso de las Tecnologías de Reproducción Asistida. El análisis de las obras se basa en la crítica dramática y videográfica, así como en el estudio de paratextos, como trípticos o vídeos promocionales. El artículo argumenta que las obras analizadas iluminan la tensión entre las narrativas hegemónicas sobre la maternidad y la experiencia efectiva de la población femenina contemporánea en el acceso a esta, que puede estar marcado por obstáculos sociales, políticos y fisiológicos, y puede ser negado a ciertos sujetos excluidos de la categoría 'mujer', como son las que presentan alguna discapacidad. De este modo, las obras estudiadas amplían los imaginarios disponibles para lo que entendemos por

maternidad, al tiempo que elaboran respuestas feministas a las experiencias vividas que trasladan a los escenarios.

**Palabras clave:** teatro catalán; dramaturgas; deseo materno; infertilidad; muerte perinatal; tecnologías de reproducción asistida; discapacidad; no madres.

## 1. INTRODUCTION

Feminism has long denounced the distance between lived experiences of motherhood and the narrative that has historically dominated political, religious, and social discourses, as well as, more recently, publicity, mass media, and mainstream audiovisual content. As María Lozano Estivalis puts it, Western societies have historically treated all women as one, the Woman, who is in turn conflated with the Mother, in a restrictive and monolithic representation of both femaleness and motherhood. These narratives seldom feature first-person female narrators, as patriarchal societies perceive women as «producers of life, agents through which the species reproduces, and bastions [...] of a male-tailored, androcentric tradition» (Lozano Estivalis, 2006, p. 126)<sup>1</sup>. Consequently, a range of topics that contradict this hegemonic narrative—such as the rejection of motherhood, infertility, menopause, the failure to care for one’s children, or the image of mothers as sexual and independent beings—have been made invisible or systematically presented as negative (Lozano Estivalis, 2006, p. 107).

Throughout the 2010s, Catalan audiences have witnessed a growing number of plays that address this issue by attempting to rethink theatrical—and more broadly, cultural—representations of motherhood. Four main characteristics are common to these plays: they focus on motherhood by offering a critical perspective on some of its various aspects, they focus primarily on mothers’ voices and subjectivities, they are often based on (semi)autobiographical experiences or draw on research on women’s biographical experiences, and they address aspects of motherhood that have been omitted from hegemonic narratives. The most significant plays in this group are *Llibert* (2013) by Gemma Brió, *Santa nit, una història de Nadal*

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1. All translations from Catalan and Spanish sources are mine unless indicated otherwise.

(2014) by Cristina Genebat, *Conillet* (2015) by Marta Galán, *La noia de la làmpada* (2017) by Marta Aran, *Fes-me una perduda* (2017) by Mercè Sarrias, *Converses amb el meu úter i altres interlocutors* (2018) by Núria Planes Lull, *Una gossa en un descampat* (2018) by Clàudia Cedó, *ESTIgMES* (2019) by Concha Milla, *Els diners, el desig, els drets* (2019) by Marta Galán, *Part* (2021) by Tanit Plana, *Mare de sucre* (2021) by Clàudia Cedó and *Tocar mare* (2022) by Marta Barceló. These plays explore a wide range of topics, such as obstetric violence, gestational loss, the double burden of women and mothers, social expectations regarding mothers, the penalisation of motherhood in the work market, mothers' exhaustion, and the tension between sexual desire and the monogamic family structure.

This growing number of plays should be understood as reflecting the changes that the normalisation of female playwrights and practitioners in the theatrical field has produced. Unlike other artistic domains, such as narrative and literature, the number of female creators in the field of Catalan theatre only started to significantly increase from the 1990s onward. As María José Ragué Arias argued, this was a remarkable transformation for the field and was directly linked to the changing role of women in the late 20<sup>th</sup> century (Ragué Arias, 1996, pp. 262-263; 2000, pp. 91-92). During the two following decades, these numbers continued to grow; an important development since the increased presence of female creators is a crucial precondition for the normalisation of women in this field. In a context where male dominance still prevails, these changes have gradually allowed women to challenge their traditionally marginalised status, «becoming, thus, authorial models thanks to whom other women can imagine and (re)think themselves as writers» (Pérez Fontdevila, 2019, p. 43). Moreover, these changes have perhaps allowed women greater freedom to address topics perceived as feminine and to explicitly present feminist views; female practitioners have generally avoided addressing such topics and views to avoid their works being received negatively (Goodman, 1993, pp. 28-30; Aston & Harris, 2006, p. 6; Ragué Arias, 2013, p. 18; Garbayo Maeztu, 2016, p. 25-26). In the mid-2010s, another important factor contributed to the growth of the number of female practitioners: in the wake of both a local and global rise in feminist consciousness, Catalan theatre witnessed a rapid increase in the number of feminist claims concerning both gender inequalities in the industry and



the lack of representative justice with regard to women, LGBTI communities, and racialised communities. Among its other effects, this wave led to a striking increase in the number of explicitly feminist messages in plays and female-led performances and greater visibility for female practitioners and companies.

It should be noted that Catalan female playwrights have not unanimously embraced feminist trends and that their creations have been heterogeneous in form as well as in perspectives and interests. However, motherhood is an experience that is of major importance in many women's lives, and the emergence of a number of significant plays that critically engage with this topic attests to a significant desire to change and renew its representation in theatre. Despite some relevant political and legal advances, parenthood still has an undeniably stronger impact on women's lives than on men's. In Catalonia, the government's failure to provide significant resources to support family caregiving has ascribed the widest part of caregiving to families—that is to say, it has negatively impacted women (Flaquer & Brullet, 2000, p. 142). Furthermore, the effects of motherhood on the gender pay gap are drastic (Quinto, Hospido & Sanz, 2017, p. 17), a reality that can be linked to the fact that women continue to spend considerably more time taking care of children than men do (Ajenjo Cosp & García Román, 2011, p. 1002). Motherhood has both psychological and emotional as well as material consequences for women, as femininity is still very much linked to being a mother, and social expectations concerning mothering, such as that women engage in intensive mothering, take renewed forms (see Hays, 1998; Medina Bravo et al., 2014, p. 500; Arciniega Caceres, 2019, Chapter VI.1). The theatre industry is not an exception with regard to this state of affairs, and, given the generally precarious nature of the industry, motherhood has taken a toll on the careers of many practitioners (Gázquez, 2015, Chapter 6) and actresses (Juanico, 2018).

Therefore, the significant number of plays on motherhood staged in Catalonia during the last decade should be understood as reflecting one of the main factors of gender inequality in Catalan and Spanish societies and, thus, as part of a wider and more heterogeneous interest in feminist narratives in contemporary Catalan theatre (see Nicolau Jiménez, 2021; Saumell, 2012, p. 4, 2018; Saumell i Olivella, 2018; Corrons, 2019). This group of plays

may also be understood as representing a gendered engagement with broader contemporary trends in a theatre that is addressing real and contemporary concerns (Batlle, 2011, 2020; Sánchez, 2012). In addition, many of these plays reflect the growth of documentary theatre on Catalan stages (Prieto Nadal, 2020, pp. 33-34). The phenomenon of plays focused on motherhood, however, seems to extend beyond these labels, as plays have addressed subjects that have largely been invisibilised in the Catalan theatrical tradition, and several of these works thus feature significant innovations in themes, motives, and imaginaries<sup>2</sup>. Furthermore, this group of plays appears to contest the traditional division between production and reproduction in terms of the male domain of creation and the female sphere of procreation and domestic care. Using different strategies, these plays reconcile the two in rich and diverse ways that validate the often-silenced subjectivities of women and mothers and serve as a statement on both theatre and society's treatment of the complex, multifaceted, and essential experience of motherhood.

## 2. THE LIMITS OF MOTHERHOOD ON STAGE

Within this context, it is striking to realise that a notable number of plays in this larger group deal with related topics that fall under a broad shared label: the lack of access to motherhood. Plays such as *Libert* (2013) by Gemma Brió, *Blanca desvelada* (2015) by Alejandra Jiménez Cascón, and *Una gossa en un descampat* (2018) by Clàudia Cedó address pregnancy loss or neonatal death. *Només sexe* (2008) by Daniela Feixas depicts a voluntary abortion. *Quebec-Barcelona* (2012) by Mercè Sàrrias features a case of male infertility, while *ESTIGMES* (2019) by Concha Milla reflects on the intersections of infertility and assisted reproductive technology (ART). *Converses amb el meu úter i altres interlocutors* (2018) by Núria Planes Lull is a reflection on the social pressures around maternal desire. *Els diners, el desig i els drets* (2019) by Marta Galán is a verbatim play on surrogacy. Finally, *Mare de sucre* (2012) by Clàudia Cedó is a pioneering work in that it defends the right of women with disabilities to become mothers.

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2. Innovative representations of mothers in Catalan theatre have been sparse and often due to female authorship—we may recall *La Infanticida* (1898) by Víctor Català or *L'huracà* (1935) by Carme Montoriol.

This prevailing attention to difficult, doubtful, or denied access to motherhood reflects the changing demographics of motherhood. In Spain, natality rates have decreased over recent decades, a phenomenon that is mainly due to poor working conditions (Esping-Andersen, 2013, p. 200). Furthermore, Catalonia is one of the world's regions with a higher mean age of women at the birth of the first child (Vallespín, 2018); the reasons for this include a precarious job market, a lack of government funds, high housing prices, the pressure exerted on women by the labour market, and the prioritisation of professional careers. Nevertheless, most women have children throughout their lives—in Catalonia, the percentage of women without children across all ages was 32.2% in 2007 (Idescat, 2007)—and a significant percentage of Spanish women have fewer children than desired (Esping-Andersen 2013, Chapter 1). Concurrently, femaleness and motherhood are still deeply entrenched in the common imagination, some political discourses reproduce the conception of women as «the biological reproducers, the life-givers and nurturers» of Catalan society (Iveson, 2017, p. 61), and traditional ideologies around motherhood are transmitted to young generations (Arciniega et al., 2020, p. 50). In other words, consequential changes in the demographics of motherhood coexist with the traditional idea that women are mothers by default. Thus, those who do not want to or cannot become mothers transgress the male symbolic order:

The lack of a symbolic order of motherhood and infertility is evident since the second concept is articulated as something negative: non-motherhood. In a structure of meaning where motherhood is the norm, the positive, the axis of female sexual identity, any opposition or impossibility is qualified as a dysfunction and evaluated in terms of marginality, rebellion or, at best, disease. (Lozano Estivalis, 2006, p. 109)

Therefore, it seems crucial to consider the influence that hegemonic discourses on motherhood may have on women who are not (yet) mothers, and how this influence translates to the stage. For the purposes of this article, I analyse four plays that focus on lack of access to motherhood and feature as their leading roles characters who have not been mothers: *Una gossa en un descampat* (hereafter *Júlia & The Empty Lot*) by Clàudia Cedó, *Converses amb al meu úter i altres interlocutors* (*Conversations With My Uterus and Other Interlocutors*) by Núria Planes Llull, *ESTIGMES* (*Stigmas*) by Concha Milla,

and *Mare de sucre* (*To Be a Mother*), also by Clàudia Cedó<sup>3</sup>. Only one of these plays has been edited (Cedó, 2018a), and all are written mainly in Catalan, with interpolations of Spanish that range from occasional to an extent where works essentially become bilingual. My predominant methodologies are dramatic and video criticism, as I scrutinise both the textual and the scenic dimensions of these plays. I also analyse performance documentation, such as videos and leaflets, to reflect on the promotion and reception of these works.

In this article, I argue that these four plays create space for the representation of forms of pain and grief that are often invisible—for a lost child, for lost motherhood, for a lost idea of the self—and for the hardship of not being a mother—by choice, due to infertility or pregnancy and labour complications, or because the possibility of motherhood is not even considered. In doing so, I argue that these works make evident the pervasive identification of femininity and motherhood as well as the blame, ostracization, and pain that women endure due to their incapacity or unwillingness to become (good) mothers. In other words, I contend that the analysed plays shed light on the tension between hegemonic narratives around motherhood and the actual experiences of contemporary Catalan women in terms of access to motherhood, which can be fraught with social, political, or physiological obstacles, as well as denied to certain subjects historically excluded from womanhood, such as women with disabilities. As I seek to analyse how these plays pay particular attention to the edges of motherhood, I examine the extent to which they expand the available imaginaries for what we understand as motherhood, as well as the feminist responses they elaborate to the lived experiences they bring to the stage.

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3. The Catalan expression *de sucre* refers to participants who take part in a game but are exempt from losing—a role accorded, for instance, to smaller children. Hillary J. Gardner, translator of Cedó's plays, states that she avoided a literal translation of *Mare de sucre* to forms such as *Sugar mother* or *Sweet mother*, which would have other connotations in English. Instead, she chose *To Be a Mother*, which echoes a comparison that director Sergi Belbel made between *Júlia & The Empty Lot* and *Hamlet* (personal email, 25/05/2022). Besides, the change stands as a significant shift that underlines the broader existential dimension of the access to motherhood implied in this and the other analysed plays.

### 3. AN EPIC OF (LOST) MOTHERHOOD

*Júlia & The Empty Lot* was the result of Clàudia Cedó's residence in Sala Beckett for the 2017–2018 season, and it premiered in the summer of 2018 as part of the Festival Grec, the summer theatre festival of Barcelona<sup>4</sup>. The play explores perinatal death, a subject that Catalan theatre, with the exception of *Llibert*, had not previously addressed. It presents the story of Júlia, a 35-year-old woman who, in the fifth month of her pregnancy, loses her amniotic fluid and must be admitted to hospital. As the days go by, her amniotic sac does not close. Therefore, as the danger of infection increases and the pregnancy becomes increasingly unviable, Júlia must face two decisions: whether to end the pregnancy and whether she wishes to see her child—who will die in childbirth—following his birth. As the playwright explains in the promotional video issued by Sala Beckett (Cedó & Belbel, 2018, 00:34), she based this plot on the experience of perinatal loss that she suffered at the beginning of her residence.

The promotional video for the play also contains declarations by director Sergi Belbel, who praises the work by comparing it to *Hamlet* and states that, given that the play addresses the essential dilemma of «to be or not to be», Cedó has written a female Hamlet. Whether or not one agrees with understanding women's works through male-authored canonical works, it is certain that *Júlia & The Empty Lot* addresses this quandary. The play does so in two ways: first, choosing to end her pregnancy and thus the life of her son would mean that Júlia will *not* become a mother; second, Júlia's decision will directly result in her son *not being* anymore. The play also offers a more tenuous third possibility, namely that Júlia could simultaneously be and not be her own son, whom she imagines and talks to in a nightmare, and thus is and is not someone different, at the same time an otherly being and a construction of her mind.

These dilemmas, together with all Júlia's feelings and questions, are put to the forefront thanks to the doubling of the leading role, which is split into Júlia, a «Pregnant mother who loses her child. A schoolteacher», and Júlia II, an «inner voice» and «invisible friend of Júlia» (Cedó, 2018b, p. 4). They have

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4. All the excerpts from the play are taken from the English translation by H.J. Gardner.

multiple exchanges in an empty lot, a metaphor for Júlia's troubled mind that constitutes the scenography of the play, and in the memories of the days that she spent at the hospital with her partner, Pau. Through the externalisation that the dialogue implies, we see the confrontation between a more resolute and brave side of the heroine and a more fearful and guilt-ridden one. Most importantly, their dialogue makes apparent a direct relationship between fear and guilt and the heroine's lack of knowledge of gestational loss. In the promotional video, Cedó recalls the fear she suffered while in the hospital, and she notes that her experience may have been different had she known what she was faced with. In being incorporated into the play, this issue acquires structuring importance, and the heroine explicitly links it to the practical non-existence of cultural representations of perinatal death and to the social taboo that surrounds it: «I know my Nana lost a baby at nine months. But she never spoke about it. You never hear about it anywhere. Maybe if you saw it in the movies or in books or somewhere...» (Cedó, 2018b, p. 32). Due to her lack of knowledge regarding gestational loss, she experiences extreme guilt and feels that losing a child represents a defeat in the «race» to become a successful mother: «I'm the one who feels like this. At fault. Like dried salt cod. I thought I'd be able to do this. I thought I'd be good at it» (Cedó, 2018b, p. 57).

The feeling of guilt is also partly incarnated in the figure of the Shadow, a personification of the non-born child who still haunts the empty lot and who is simultaneously a mental projection similar to Júlia II and a different being. A metaphor for facing her fears, once Júlia dares to look at her stillborn, the Shadow disappears, and «what could have been will vanish, because he is, and he is real. 270 grams of real» (Cedó, 2018b, p. 71). In the course of the play, Júlia is also surrounded by other characters, who provide her with information (e.g., the hospital psychologist; see Figure 1)—inspire her with courage, and decrease her disorientation and overwhelming sense of guilt. In particular, a nurse who also lost a son tells her, «Whatever happens, this baby of yours will always exist. You'll get to see him, you'll get to meet him. And he'll be your baby. Always» (Cedó, 2018b, p. 55). It is indeed after talking to this nurse—after finding a referent and after learning that she will nevertheless *be* a mother—that Júlia finally finds the courage to face the Shadow in the empty lot and, eventually, end the unviable pregnancy.



Figure 1. Júlia in the hospital with her boyfriend, the hospital psychologist and Júlia 2.

Along with these characters, Júlia also surrounds herself with an imagined collective, the members of which are variously identified with her female ancestors or with a wider spectrum of entities related to the cycle of life—«humanity», «Life», «Earth and its people» (Cedó, 2018b, p. 69). These invisible presences help her face the feelings of isolation and disorientation that she experiences due to the lack of referents:

And I remember how strong I was. I have no idea where I found such strength. [...] As if I was being propelled by the women who died before me, my Nana, my grandma, Pili. All of them there with me. (Cedó, 2018b, p. 12)

Furthermore, these evocations underline Júlia's identification with women as a group, particularly during labour—«A deep, dark scream of extraordinary brilliance carried you away into the arms of all women who had ever been» (Cedó, 2018b, p. 69)—and during faltering moments—«And I thought... if I can't do this, if my baby doesn't survive, they will make it happen. As if we were all experiencing motherhood together, as one» (Cedó, 2018b, p. 23).

These passages may appear problematic because they elevate motherhood to a defining trait for women and conceptualise it as a mission, a perspective that is very close to that of hegemonic narratives. However, these visions are also of a nuanced and complex character and far removed from the stereotyped and dehumanised patriarchal vision of mothers. They also do not serve to define the whole experience of motherhood. On the contrary, they are often vague and transient: «it was just this fleeting thought I had, a frightened little fish that jumped right back into the water and disappeared before I could put it into words» (Cedó, 2018b, p. 23). Therefore, these visions can be seen as an attempt to reproduce perceptions that, in Sonia Kruks' words, exceed «the boundaries of the discursive» (Kruks, 2001, p. 13) but «often significantly inform our commitments and shape our predispositions» (Kruks, 2001, p. 14).

Moreover, these images are part of an attempt at explaining women's subjective perceptions of maternity, an aspect of human experience that has seldom featured in cultural representations and that the Western philosophical tradition has denigrated (Lozano Estivalis, 2006, p. 233). Given this historical background, some authors claim that «the creation of discourses that empower motherhood and restore its management and symbolic prestige onto women's hands should be an essential feminist task» (Merino, 2017, p. 28). In Cedó's play, facing a gestational loss, giving birth, and bidding farewell to a lost infant are depicted as painful but are also imbued with epic tones through the repeated use of heroic and warlike metaphors in the text and the staging directions: for instance, David Bowie's «Heroes» is played during the labour scene. Thus, while she problematises the unity, bodily obliteration, and lack of vulnerability of the androcentric modern subject (Braidotti, 1991, Chapter 3; Grosz, 1994, Introduction; Jones, 1998, Chapter 2), Júlia represents a contemporary heroine who incarnates courage and strength; whose experience is equal to other, more valued human experiences; and who can serve as a model with whom everyone, not just the women in the audience, can identify.

The serene acceptance that Júlia achieves at the end of the play suggests an understanding of courage and grief as processes that do not deny one's fallibility, pain, or loss. In *Júlia*, the question of possible future pregnancies does not arise precisely because the heroine insists on the importance of her



love for this child and implies that giving birth to a dead son also represents a form of motherhood. The process of empowerment she undergoes therefore widens her conception of what motherhood is and transports her from a silent, deserted, and barren place to a populated and more enlightened region, as, at the end of the play, the empty lot is furnished with colourful, illuminated balloons. In the process, Júlia acknowledges women's strength as her own, and the narrative links perinatal loss to other human experiences, such as overcoming grief and searching for existential meaning. In this sense, *Júlia & The Empty Lot* can be interpreted as demanding that women's experiences should be treated as equal to men's in cultural and theatrical works.

#### 4. DOUBTS ABOUT MOTHERHOOD CAN BE SERIOUS FUN

*Conversations With My Uterus and Other Interlocutors* was created as a final degree project at the Institut del Teatre, Catalonia's principal higher education centre for theatre. One year later, the play premiered in the professional circuit at the Antic Teatre, a self-managed leftist fringe venue. The play, a one-woman show, was created and directed by Núria Planes Lull. This work is undoubtedly the most comic of the four considered in this article due to the mix of irony, sarcasm, and black humour it employs in questioning the creator's maternal desires. Although interpreted only by Planes Lull, several characters appear throughout the piece: her mother in voice-over, three personified kinds of gymnastics (one of which she practised as a child), her unconscious mind (which presents itself as necessary to convey the whole story and communicates through subtitles), and the arms of a mannequin, which embraces her while sleeping and may represent the otherwise absent figure of a potential father.

The most significant of these characters is Núria's mother, whom Núria interrogates in various passages that reflect the differences between them. While the daughter engages in radical questioning of society's influences, Núria's mother explains that she became mother without having had a particular desire to and appears surprised that her daughter is so concerned about the matter. Furthermore, she implicitly denies that she was subject to social pressure to become a mother while inadvertently pointing at it—she

states that she played with dolls—and tends to minimise past suffering, such as postpartum depression. As we learn, Núria started questioning her own desire to become a mother after watching *Home*, a documentary about the climate crisis. However, her mother distances herself from ethical concerns around parenthood and implicitly equates motherhood to a kind of mission: «without a mother there would be no humanity» (Planes Lull, 2019, 27:44). Because she reproduces many hegemonic conceptions about motherhood, Núria's mother somewhat incarnates society's voice, which pretends to respect women's free will while pressuring them to choose a normative life: «You have to make the decision. [...] I think you would enjoy [being a mother]. [...] If you don't have children you won't know» (Planes Lull, 2019, 26:54). Concurrently, we may choose to see in the differences between mother and daughter a generational transformation in the conception of motherhood, especially between Catalan women who began their adult lives in the first years of democracy and those who came of age in the 21<sup>st</sup> century.

Together with ecological considerations, another ethical concern contributes to Núria's reluctance to become a mother, namely that she—as, in her imagination, the child she will have will be female—will not decide her own existence. The practitioner opens the play by saying that we did not choose to be born and recalls that, had her mother not had an abortion after her first child, she would not exist. Then, her unconscious mind explains to the public that Núria had an infantile obsession with non-existence and that, whenever she was bored or in pain, she played a game that involved imagining that she did not exist. The evocation of her infantile years subtly combines with her awareness that she constantly thinks about what she will do when she has a daughter, as if she is trying to imagine the thoughts of her child on existence through the ones she knows—her own. Implicitly, she seems to ask whether she would wrong her daughter were she to choose to not have her, or, in having her, would she condemn her to an existence she cannot undo?

Furthermore, the contrast between Núria's juvenile certainty that she wanted to be a mother and her current critical views on the narratives of motherhood materialises in the distance between the two songs she sings. The first song recounts a conversation that she had with a friend when she

was 17. When he asked her what she wanted to be when she grew up, she «was possessed by a force bigger than all women and [she] sang this song»: *When I Grow Up I Want to Be a Mother* (Planes Lull, 2019, 12:42). The lyrics feature ironic images of perfect motherhood that indicate an idealised vision of a straightforward, devoted, and fulfilling experience: «I will be happy, I will be a better person, I will be patient and understanding. Empathetic, funny, and generous, and of course organised» (Planes Lull, 2019, 13:42). Conversely, in the second song, the distance she takes from her desire for motherhood takes the form of black humour:

When someone asks me: why don't you have children? I would love to tell them that nothing would make me happier, that I have been trying for a long time [...] that I am seeing a psy and spending all my savings on in vitro fertilization [...] that I have already suffered three miscarriages [...] that I had a son and he died [...] that the brother of that child survived, and that one, I keep him in the basement to blow off steam with him. (Planes Lull, 2019, 38:47)

The audience responds to the escalating harshness of the answers with amused and shocked laughs: Núria's hypothetical answers reflect taboos of failing, unable, monstrous, and unspeakable motherhood. Simultaneously, however, they suggest that responding with a broadside to the assumption that all women desire motherhood would be an exhilarating experience. The audience may imagine the social awkwardness that individuals receiving such an answer might experience or even consider the possibility that, for some, it would be preferable to continue to believe that women are filled with maternal desire—even should they be incapable of becoming mothers—rather than to acknowledge that, for some women, motherhood might not be a desirable choice.

Notwithstanding her critical views on the social discourses around motherhood, Núria experiences her loss of the certainty that she wishes to become a mother as a critical loss of identity, and, in one of the exchanges with her mother, she mumbles, «well, I don't know, I am nobody anymore» (Planes Lull, 2019, 42:40). The performance of motherhood she enacts at the end of the show is symptomatic of this dislocation between individual desires structural to the self and the awareness that these desires are determined by social narratives. First, a mechanical doll appears walking on all fours at

the back of the stage: it is a grotesque image, one that is very distant from the idealised representations of babies as desirable beings. Then, wearing a leopard maillot and a donkey mask, the practitioner places herself next to the doll in the same position and starts to walk by its side, imitating the slow-paced walk of an animal mother with its offspring, while the audience hears rhythms and sounds from the jungle (Figure 2). The scene alludes to the animal dimension of motherhood and maternal desire, but, in a play that constantly refers to social pressure, it has also an ironic layer, especially because the offspring of this animalistic mother is mechanical, an artificial representation of a baby engineered by society—just like the child Núria continuously imagines in her head.



Figure 2. Planes Lull unsettlingly embodies an animal mother to a mechanical child.

At the end of the scene, Núria removes the donkey mask and faces the public to explain the paradox of Buridan's ass, linking the fatal inability to choose between food and water to her decision regarding whether or not she will become a mother. Although still comic, this ending adds a more serious note to a narrative that proposes critical reflection not so much on maternal desire itself but rather on the social conditions in which it develops. Two paratexts, namely several hashtags included in the description of the play

on the website of the Antic Teatre and the accompany leaflet, reinforce this interpretation and confer a more explicitly political dimension to the piece. The hashtags indicate a much more explicit defence of non-motherhood; the underlying assumption seems to be that for a significant portion of Catalan women, defending the possibility of a fulfilled and complete life without children is more difficult than the alternative; these hashtags include «#nomo», «#withoutchildrenbychoice», and «#withoutchildrenandhappy» (Antic Teatre, 2019). In parallel, the Antic Teatre greets the audience by presenting a leaflet containing a text titled «FUTURE POTENTIAL MOTHERS' MANIFESTO». This manifesto denounces the lack of political consideration of reproductive labour and claims that should the negative and alienating experience around motherhood that most mothers describe today not change, «WE WILL NOT HAVE CHILDREN!». To prevent this outcome, the manifesto demands a «Work and family life balance national plan», which would need to involve both the state and future fathers. Together with its paratexts, *Conversations With My Uterus* reflects the crucial choice that, unlike many women of previous generations, contemporary women may face: whether or not they will become mothers. The narrative only recognises one subject as having standing to make this choice, the potential mother herself, and suggests that the choice to be or not be a mother has to do with striking a difficult compromise between an inner interrogation—a conversation with the self and one's referents, emotions, and body—and the awareness of the social conditions that highly determine the way in which women experience motherhood and maternal desire—including, among others, the extreme taboo of regretted motherhood (see Donath, 2017), which renders the decision of becoming a mother definitive. The closing evocation of the dying Buridan's ass leaves Núria's interrogation open and therefore allows the audience to identify not with a particular life choice but rather the difficulty of making such a decision.

## 5. MOURNING THE UNFULFILLED PROMISES OF ASSISTED REPRODUCTIVE TECHNOLOGY

While Cedó and Planes Lull have careers as practitioners, Concha Milla is an actress who, with *Stigmas*, made the leap to creation to bring her own

experience to the stage.<sup>5</sup> Similarly to Planes Lull in *Conversations With My Uterus*, in this one-woman show, Milla plays herself in the process of overcoming a facet of motherhood that has historically been surrounded by stigma: infertility. The original title, *ESTIGMES*, is a wordplay between the word «stigmas» and the Catalan for «you love». Milla's piece is, without a doubt, the darkest of the four considered in this text—this is also true in a literal sense, as, throughout the 1-hour performance, the stage is never lit with anything other than dim lights, as if to match the generally desolate tone of the text. In addition, the scene is filled with technology, especially in the small venues where it has generally been performed—it premiered at La Gleba in 2018 and was included in the programme for the following year at Sala Flyhard, a space dedicated to contemporary Catalan texts. Milla's body appears surrounded by several screens, microphones, a keyboard, a portable induction plate, and headphones, among others, as though to translate to the stage the highly technified character of ART processes.

The most symbolic of these objects is the induction plate, together with the pot of rice that Milla starts to boil at the beginning of the play. Later in the show, a technician tells the performer that her rice is overcooking: in Spain, when addressed to a woman without a partner or children, this phrase means that one's biological clock is ticking. The pun introduces a protest against all of the disapproval faced by older women who attempt to become pregnant, as was the case for Milla, who started the process at 37. As the audience learns at the end of the play, after several failed insemination attempts, Milla fell pregnant, but the pregnancy was unviable because the embryo positioned itself in one of her fallopian tubes. Due to the risk that both the ectopic pregnancy and her endometriosis entailed, the embryo was removed. The operation caused her a severe peritonitis infection, which led to a new intervention. Together with a strenuous recovery process, these complications annihilated her hopes of ever having a biological child—an important condition, as the genetic reproduction of physical features plays a central role in Milla's desires.

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5. Other Catalan actresses have leapt to creation after traumatic experiences related to motherhood, such as Gemma Brió with *Llibert*. These cases reinforce the idea of an existent desire to bring first-person narratives focused on motherhood to the stages.

However, this chain of events is not made explicit until the end of the play, when the practitioner presents herself to the public and narrates her story in chronological order. The rest of the piece focuses on the process of mourning and recovery—which includes at some points the creation of the piece itself—which is conveyed through a fragmentary patchwork of recorded diary entries, phone calls, Google searches, and explanations addressed to the public. The references to Joan Didion's *The Year of Magical Thinking* and James Rhodes' reflections on the redeeming power of Bach's *Chaconne* mark the narrative as one of grief and recovery. Other aspects of the play that reinforce this tone are the numbering of the diary entries, which emphasise the length of the recovery process, and the announcement at the beginning of the play that Milla «will have decided to close the door to the NOT BEING ABLE» (Milla, 2019, 10:08) once she can dance and sing madly, which she does towards the end of the show. In the dance scene, several explanations based on *Infertilidad y reproducción asistida* by Carmen Moreno Rosset start to appear on the screens while she dances to the sound of «Girls just wanna have fun». The explanations indicate, among other facts, that infertility is a growing issue across Europe and that ART processes are stressful and harsh and often result in the dissolution of otherwise functional romantic relationships. Additionally, these explanations recall that, historically, women have taken the blame for infertility and thus have been legally discriminated against; and signal that the social pressures linked to fertility represent an extreme form of the stress that women experience in their daily lives. The simultaneity of the dance and the passages seems to suggest that Milla's process of recovery has involved a growing awareness of the political dimension of her experience while also underlining that Milla's personal story is representative of many other cases.

In making the consequences of ART in women's lives visible, *Stigmas* reflects a crucial question concerning a feminist approach to (late) motherhood in the 21st century: «if formerly feminism was concerned with contraceptive technology, it now has to address the issue of how, or indeed whether, women can take advantage of the new reproductive technology, without themselves being taken advantage of (emotionally, economically and medically)» (Aston, 2003, pp. 157-158.). Milla's story provides a rather pessimistic answer to this question. Her five-year experience of ART processes

represents a major emotional strain and requires her to forego a more organic and intimate process of conception, as the ART procedures amount to an «absolute and repeated invasion of my privacy: hands, machines, treatments...» (Milla, 2019, 50:15). Moreover, once the ART process has ended without having brought about the much-desired baby, it leaves Milla physically devastated, suffering from acute health complications and having lost several reproductive and digestive organs, as well as the loss of large amounts of money, partly donated by family and friends; a job; her romantic relationship; and almost all her self-esteem. To borrow Dror Harari and Gillit Kroul's words concerning Israeli one-woman shows about infertility, the emphasis of *Stigmas* on the vulnerability and distress that result for Milla «effaces the split between performer and character to the effect that the performer's embodied presence and experience and her vulnerability and discomfort cannot be overlooked» (Harari & Kroul, 2019, p. 128).

While other plays address the opposition between motherhood and non-motherhood in existential terms, *Stigmas* conceptualises access to motherhood in terms of ableness by opposing being and not being able to gestate a child—«pots» and «no pots» mean «you can» and «you cannot» in Catalan (Figure 3). This opposition defines the gap between the narrative of possibilities offered by some medical agents and the failure of many of these processes: «Doctors are not God, they are not, they cannot create when they intend to do it. Neither can you» (Milla, 2019, 26:16). However, most of all, it applies to Milla and her (in)ability to conceive a child, which reveals the «patriarchal association between barrenness and failure [...] that, in the popular imagination, locates infertility as a social stigma and leads to emotional despair» (Komporaly, 2007, p. 113). Milla's position swings between the painful interiorisation of this imaginary and the awareness of its injustice: «Women do not feel completed and fulfilled until we get pregnant and give birth? [...] I wanted to, I assure you. But the torture when you cannot do it is so savage, so ruthless, so animal [...] Is it worth it to suffer that much?» (Milla 2019, 30:39). However, in the closing lines of the play, Milla suddenly reduces her critical distance from the patriarchal discourse:

I have been a mother, yes, I have. I saw the heart of my child bombing inside me. I saw this point of intense light that was the life inside me. I'm clear that I will never be able to get pregnant but there is a certainty that



will accompany me forever: for a month and a half, I COULD. (Milla, 2019, 55:39)



Figure 3. Milla under big neon lights reading «You cannot» in Catalan.

In these final remarks, Milla concludes the narrative around her recovery process by noting that she was able to be a mother for a brief period of time. Therefore, she situates herself on the side of women who have been able to conceive, thus implicitly perpetuating the idea that infertile women are less valid than others. This affirmation may correspond to an intimate truth for the practitioner; nevertheless, it does not challenge the patriarchal notion that women must be able (and should) create life within themselves. As in *Júlia & The Empty Lot*, an unviable pregnancy does not prevent the lead from considering herself a mother. However, in Cedó's play, the heroine's sense of motherhood seems to be more based on the overcoming of guilt and fear, the consequences of the hegemonic discourse on motherhood. Milla's narrative, in contrast, culminates on a note that leaves little space for an empowered overcoming of infertility or a deeper exploration of the broader social causes

that lead Catalan women to become mothers at later ages. Nevertheless, we might wonder whether she chooses these pathetic closing lines as a reminder that, even if feminist consciousness can help, in some cases it still falls short of offering real consolation.

## 6. WHEN MATERNAL DESIRE SPARKS A REVOLUTION

*To Be a Mother* premiered at the Teatre Nacional de Catalunya in 2021, and it is the only public production that I analyse in this essay. While it is very similar to Cedó's previous piece in its dramatic language, it nonetheless features a crucial difference: there are four characters with disabilities in the play, all of whom are played by performers with disabilities. This choice stems from Cedó's long commitment to putting theatre at the service of disability communities and people at risk of social exclusion: in 2006, she founded «Escenaris Especials» (Special Scenes), a social project dedicated to this goal, in Banyoles<sup>6</sup>. Thus, the staging of *To Be a Mother* in the National Theatre of Catalonia is the culmination of many years of efforts outside the institutional focus for a less discriminative treatment of people with disabilities and thus undoubtedly a significant landmark in terms of the inclusion of disability in Catalan theatre. The play allows for a larger analysis of the multiple intersections between theatre and disability (Kuppers, 2017, p. 6); however, in this article, I focus on its treatment of motherhood and the connections it establishes between feminism and disability.

Several interrogations of the representation of female heroines and the renewal of epic tones that appeared in Cedó's previous piece are clearly resumed in *To Be a Mother*. In this play, Cedó succeeds, as playwright and director, at highlighting certain realities linked to disability being under-represented in theatre and that may be unknown to most of the audience—such as how supported housing works or how women with disabilities have their fertility controlled—while conveying claims that overlap with those of different groups, such as feminist or LGBTI communities. In this sense, the play takes *Júlia & The Empty Lot's* demands for new kind of heroines a step further: Cloe, the leading role, is a 27-year-old woman who suffers a 65%

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6. For more information, you can browse Special Scene's site: <https://www.escenaris-especials.com/>.

intellectual disability and wants to become a mother—a desire that Cedó has repeatedly identified among her students (Carmona, 2021). Moreover, Andrea Álvarez, a user of the organisation for people with intellectual disabilities Fundació Ramon Noguera and a theatre student at Special Stages, plays this character. Throughout the play, Cloe's figure problematises the traditional image of the hero to point out that that women with intellectual disabilities have seldom been leading roles, through, for instance, identifying with Antigone—Cloe plays her role in a performance for the Disability Day party, and some of her asides contain intertextual references to Sophocles' text.

The play presents Cloe's maternal desire as the core of a larger desire for autonomy and fighting the limits of the social perceptions of her disability. These perceptions find a voice in her well-intended but overprotective mother, with whom she lives until the introductory scenes of the play; in Albert and Maria, respectively the director of and an educator at the Oak Foundation; and in Marc, Cristina, and Consuelo, Cloe's flatmates at the supported flat tutored by the Foundation. The variety of characters allows for a multifaceted approach to a sensitive issue: can women with intellectual disabilities become mothers? This is a question that, throughout the course of the play, leads to multiple other questions: is it ethical to suppress the fertility of women with disabilities against their wishes, and is it ethical to allow for motherhood that could potentially endanger the life of future children? To what extent are women with disabilities required to assume a greater responsibility than the rest of the population? Are the protocols of supported houses androcentric?

Despite the multiplicity of voices allowing for confrontations between different perspectives on the matter, Cloe's subjectivity is assigned a privileged status through her asides, as she is the only character who has them. Significantly, many of the images that Cloe uses in her monologues to describe her desire to become a mother evoke that which is hidden but cannot be suppressed or ignored—a cat under a car or a volcano exploding in the depths of the sea, for example. Many other plays focused on motherhood deal with the difficulty of translating to words an experience that is invisible in cultural discourses: in contrast, the main point of *To Be a Mother* is that some voices are already being raised but are systematically ignored.

As Cloe exclaims, «I want to be a mother, but it's like I'm not allowed to say that» (Cedó, 2021, p. 27).<sup>7</sup> The narrative underlines that Cloe is not an isolated case through presenting several similar examples, such as that of Consuelo, who was once pregnant and had her reproductive organs removed without her knowledge. These cases remind us that, just as with mandatory motherhood, the historical ban on parenthood for particular populations—through, among other methods, compulsory sterilization of homosexual people, transgender individuals, or indigenous populations—has functioned as a tool with which to reproduce an order exterior to people's, and, more particularly, women's own desires.

Cloe's restricted access to motherhood is an undeniable mark of her exclusion from womanhood, and, because she is repeatedly discouraged to pursue a goal that is considered to define women in patriarchal cultures, she might view motherhood as even more desirable: «Sometimes, I'm not sure why I want so much to be a mother. Maybe it's just because I've seen it on TV. Or because my sister is one. But it feels so real inside of me. Sometimes I think, if I was a mother, I could be normal» (Cedó, 2021, p. 50). This claim is in agreement with Claudia Malacrida's observation that, for mothers with disabilities, «pregnancy and motherhood [are often] ways to lay claim to a full adult sexuality, and to erase their invisibility as gendered beings» (Malacrida, 2009, p. 114). Therefore, Cloe's desires are also a feminist issue, precisely because, despite the overlapping of her demands with some founding feminist issues—as the right over one's own body—women with disabilities rarely appear as the default subject of feminist discourses:

What is a revolution? [...] The woman rebel. What is that exactly? [...] A woman who doesn't follow the expectations of her time. [...] Daughters who don't agree with the expectations of their mothers. [...] To be who they want you to be? Or to be free. To be seen and not heard? Or to make some noise. People prefer that persons with disabilities not say a word. No sudden movements. They like us to be predictable. (Cedó, 2021, p. 15)

Cloe is very aware of the differences between her and women without disabilities, as she makes it clear to Maria when the latter tries to discourage

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7. All the excerpts from *To Be a Mother* are taken from the English translation by H.J. Gardner.

her from attempting to become pregnant speaking «girlfriend to girlfriend»: «Don't say girlfriend to girlfriend. You mean girl-without-a-disability to girl-with-a-disability. You mean social worker to resident. You're up high and you give the orders» (Cedó, 2021, p. 28; Figure 4). These differences in terms of power and social recognition also manifest in the triple-spaced theatre set formed by Cloe's room in the supported flat, the shared kitchen, and the director's bureau at the Foundation, which respectively stand for Cloe's individuality, the disability community, and those who make decisions regarding the members of the disability community.



Figure 4. Cloe (right) arguing with Maria (left) in the kitchen of the tutored flat.

Cloe's revolution consists in breaking her *stillness* by behaving as a subject with full agency and requesting a degree of freedom that both her mother, who thinks of her as an asexual young girl, and Albert, who, although he strives to improve the autonomy of the Foundation's users, had not even considered that some of them might desire to become mothers, do not appear to expect. Cloe goes to extraordinary lengths to achieve her goal despite the

numerous restrictions she faces: she attempts to become a baby-sitter, she demands that her Implanon—a birth control implant— be removed and then secretly avoids taking contraceptive pills, and she manages to maintain sexual relationships with three different men she finds through Tinder. On her third attempt, Cloe becomes pregnant, but she suffers a miscarriage amid severe threats regarding the guardianship of her future child and decides to attempt suicide, an act she perceives as the closest she has ever been to freedom—that is, to full control over decisions regarding her own body.

The final scene, which takes place by a hospital bed, serves as a bitter-sweet epilogue: we learn that Cloe partly obtains the autonomy she desired, as she moves to her own flat and develops a romantic relationship with Marc, but she declares that she will not become a mother because her desire was «A frightened creature. A cat under a car, who in the end, darted out into the sun» (Cedó, 2021, p. 61). Thus, rather than offering an upbeat ending, the play does not gloss over Cloe's pain, which stems from the profound psychological and physiological consequences of not being considered an independent subject with complete autonomy. However, thanks to her, the Foundation takes a necessary step to allow some users to become mothers: it hires a motherhood assistant. The play ends with the whole cast entering the scene to greet Cloe and embrace one another, which serves as a way of softening the tragic end for the heroine, who has contributed to the future wellbeing of others but has not seen the benefits of her protests herself.

## 7. CONCLUSION

This essay has attempted to show that, in the last decade, Catalan female playwrights and practitioners have paid particular attention to the various difficulties and concerns women may encounter when attempting to access motherhood and that, in doing so, they have problematised the hegemonic narratives concerning this experience. As is the case for most Catalan contemporary plays concerning motherhood, plays focused on the lack of access thereto have assigned utmost importance to the subjective experience of the leading roles through recourse to means such as conversations between different parts of the self, diary entries, or interior monologues. Therefore, these plays have been able to place the subjective effects that the normative

and exclusionary nature of the hegemonic motherhood narrative has on women at the forefront of their narratives. Feelings such as guilt, fear, and disorientation are prominent in the four analysed plays, and all the leading roles find that the lack of access to motherhood challenges their inner sense of self. When the project of being a mother fails, a strenuous process of reconstruction begins, amid which an exhausted Milla exclaims, «I want to stop fucking reinventing myself once and for all» (Milla, 2019). At the end of the plays, Cedó's characters have important landmarks to relate to beyond motherhood—such as their male partners—although this might be due to the narrative nature of Cedó's plays, which stands in contrast to the more fragmentary productions by Planes Lull and Milla.

Furthermore, it is significant that in narratives that depict stages prior to motherhood, the hegemonic ideal of the good mother is already present: Júlia and Concha are guilt-ridden; Planes Lull elaborates a list of «Things that my parents did to me that I do not want to do to my kids» (Planes Lull, 2019, 11:59); and Cloe, when she realises she has fallen pregnant while unable to retain the guardianship of her child, exclaims, «It was a stupid idea of mine. I'm already a bad mother» (Cedó, 2021, p. 54). Rather than offering a binary critique of the desire to mother itself, these plays attempt to disentangle the strong effects of hegemonic narratives on inner perceptions, with these efforts varying in terms of critical depth. Júlia points to the lack of referents, and Núria denounces the social pressure to become a mother. Concha Milla denounces the negative sentiment towards older women who want to become mothers, but she does not explore at any point the social conditions that push women to have children at later ages. For her part, Cloe's demands serve to critique her status as a woman with an intellectual disability rather than to question the hegemonic imaginaries of motherhood—an attitude that seems to match the behaviour of mothers with disabilities in real life (Malacrida, 2009, p. 113). Additionally, some passages of the plays also interrogate the strangeness of maternal desire through distancing perspectives, such as Planes Lull's animal scene or this insightful observation by Cloe:

How strange to want what you don't have. The seed and the tree are so different. I wonder, what's it going to be like for me? Like being thirsty and not able to drink. Like loving someone you've never met. (Cedó, 2021, p. 24)

In paying close attention to the subjectivity of the leading roles, the analysed plays also shed light on issues that hegemonic narratives have historically rendered invisible and disparaged and that, in some cases, feminisms have also tended to neglect, such as gestational loss and grief—perhaps due to the closeness of gestational loss to voluntary abortion (Browne, 2016, p. 387)—or the impact of ideal discourses of motherhood on women with disabilities (Malacrida, 2009, p. 114). In most cases, the attention to the subjectivity of the leading roles stems from an autobiographical basis and, in the case of *To Be a Mother*, constitutes a political gesture towards the disability community, which is almost non-existent as a subject in Catalan theatre. However, this tendency towards autoreferentiality does not impede these plays' representative potential: the four works link their first-person narratives to wider communities and extend an implicit or explicit sense of solidarity—for instance, Cloe states that she wants to create a precedent through her demands.

In exploring the fissures between being and not being a mother, these plays prompt reflection on the borders of motherhood, arguing for a wider conception of motherhood that may also include non-motherhood; this is particularly the case in *Júlia* and *Stigmas*. Nevertheless, one might wonder whether the importance assigned to the status of mothers does not somewhat reproduce the patriarchal injunction to mother in a group of plays in which an explicit lack of maternal desire is seldom addressed, as it appears only in the *Conversations With My Uterus* paratexts. In the larger group of plays around motherhood, the absence of maternal desire is also marginal—there is only one play that depicts a voluntary abortion, *Només sexe*. Similarly, the importance assigned to the reproduction of biological traits in *Stigmas* is symptomatic of the fact that most narratives do not challenge biologic and heterocentric representations of motherhood. In this sense, feminist theatrical takes on motherhood could benefit from further exploring *queer* motherhoods, adoption, or alternative forms of mothering.

Notwithstanding the many challenges that Catalan stages still need to overcome in terms of diversity, equality, and subversiveness, several recent plays concerning the lack of access to motherhood have created space for the validation of lived experiences prior to, or in the absence of, effective motherhood by questioning hegemonic narratives and exploring maternal



desire. Given its unique capacity to allow for the affective exploration of ideas, the theatre has proven to be an excellent forum to address current political debates and through which to transmit first-person embodied narratives in an experience-driven manner. Catalan female theatre practitioners, therefore, have made and can continue to make significant contributions to feminist views on this aspect of motherhood, that is, the (lack of) access to it.

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# IMPOSSIBLE MOTHERHOOD: FROM THE *DESIRE FOR MOTHERHOOD* TO NON- MOTHERHOOD<sup>1</sup>

## MATERNIDAD IMPOSIBLE: DEL DESEO DE MATERNIDAD A LA NO-MATERNIDAD

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### Abstract

This article proposes to explore the biographic accounts and everyday experiences of cis-gender women who, for various reasons and biopsychosocial conditions, are not mothers. From a feminist focus and using a qualitative methodology, it looks at the complex nature of the experience for women who felt the desire to be mothers and started out on a quest for motherhood. As a result of the thematic analysis of their accounts, we find that some women have undergone miscarriages and repetition miscarriages, facing infertility problems (structural, relational and social) and medicalisation of their bodies using assisted reproduction technology (ART). It has been seen how biomedicine and reproductive biotechnology boost the search for biological (and medical) solutions to social problems

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related to structural infertility. Furthermore, the importance given to experiencing 'grief for non-motherhood', is emphasised, composed of different processes that are socially denied or disenfranchised —such as gestational grief, genetic grief or institutional grief— and performing small rituals to say goodbye. It is demonstrated that, following a process of acceptance of the non-motherhood and self-knowledge, the women in question redefine their identity in new projects. Finally, the relevance of mutual support groups (MSG) is demonstrated as a way of sharing frames of reference, forging empathy relationships and reciprocity networks. The conclusions highlight how the journey from 'impossible motherhood' to non-motherhood is a subjective process, involving reflection and a physical and emotional life lesson, that makes it possible to challenge, rethink and overthrow the hegemonic representations of motherhood generating new meanings and social practices bound to non-motherhood.

**Keywords:** Motherhood; miscarriage; gestational grief; structural infertility; non-motherhoods; grief for non-motherhood.

## Resumen

Este artículo explora los relatos biográficos de mujeres cisgénero que, por distintas motivaciones y condicionantes biopsicosociales, no son madres. Desde una mirada feminista y a partir de una metodología cualitativa, trata de aproximarse a la complejidad de la experiencia de mujeres que han sentido el deseo de ser madres e inician la búsqueda de la maternidad. Como resultado del análisis temático de sus relatos, encontramos que algunas mujeres han vivido abortos espontáneos y abortos de repetición, enfrentándose a problemas de infertilidad (estructural, relacional y social), así como a la medicalización del cuerpo a través de las tecnologías de reproducción humana asistida (TRHA). Se constata cómo la biomedicina y la biotecnología reproductiva alientan la búsqueda de soluciones biológicas (y médicas) a problemas sociales que se relacionan con la infertilidad estructural. Además, se enfatiza la importancia dada a vivir el «duelo de la no-maternidad» compuesto por distintos procesos que son socialmente denegados o desautorizados —como el duelo gestacional, el duelo genético o el duelo institucional— y realizar pequeños rituales de despedida. Se evidencia que, tras un proceso de aceptación de la no-maternidad y autoconocimiento, las protagonistas redefinen su identidad materializada en nuevos proyectos. Finalmente, se pone de manifiesto la relevancia que adquieren los grupos de ayuda mutua (GAM) para compartir marcos de referencia, forjar relaciones de empatía y redes de reciprocidad. En las conclusiones se destaca cómo el tránsito de la «maternidad imposible» a la no-maternidad es un proceso subjetivo, de reflexión y vivencia corporal y emocional, que permite desafiar, repensar y subvertir las representaciones de la maternidad hegemónica generando nuevas significaciones y prácticas sociales vinculadas a la no-maternidad.

**Palabras clave:** Maternidad; aborto espontáneo; duelo gestacional; infertilidad estructural; no-maternidades; duelo de la no-maternidad.

## 1. INTRODUCTION

Since the 2010s, there has clearly been intense research, writing, editing and outreach work, both in social sciences and in literature, on topics associated with denaturalising or (re)naturalising motherhood in modern societies. In addition to valuable original papers (Álvarez, 2018; Fernández-Pujana, 2014; Imaz, 2010; Llopis, 2015; López-Trujillo, 2019; López-Varela, 2019; Massó, 2015; Merino, 2017; Nanclares, 2017; Olmo, 2013; Trujillo & Abril, 2020; Vivas, 2019), some classic American feminist works have been reprinted such as *Of Woman Born* (Rich, 2019) or the first Spanish translation of *The Mother Knot* (Lazarre, 2018).

All these articles have helped detect how the field of reproduction has been considerably transformed since the late 20th century and particularly in Spain. This has been a process of political and demographic transition, that has taken us from the *baby boom* of 1950-1970 to a 'structural infertility' scenario since 1990 (Álvarez & Marre, 2021). During Franco's rule (1939-1975), this period's discourse on domesticity and the exaltation of motherhood is underpinned by the idea that women are not complete without motherhood (Nash, 1991). In this socio-political context, women were understood as «a one-dimensional being whose essential role was motherhood and who were only acknowledged for their biological aspect» (Roca, 1996, p. 226); «Only motherhood allowed them to reach their real compulsory life purpose and their true status as a person» (Dios Fernández, 2014, p. 37). These ideas demonstrate the cultural pressure on women regarding biological motherhood, which is key to understand lingering representations in hegemonic motherhood. With the arrival of democracy, new horizons opened up in Spain to build on women's reproductive autonomy: contraceptives were legalised in 1978 followed by divorce in 1981, abortion was decriminalised in 1985 and the first laws were approved to regulate adopted and assisted reproduction techniques in 1987 and 1988 (Marre, 2009; San Román, 2020).

Against this backdrop, this paper addresses *impossible motherhood* that begins with the *desire for motherhood* as a key element of *filiation*<sup>2</sup> in modern Euro-American kinship. This chosen and planned filiation not only implies transmitting bodily substances such as gametes, genes and blood, but also passing on memories, relationships with a place and other elements that make up a person's identity (Bestard, 2009). From an anthropological perspective, it is considered relevant to understand biographical accounts from non-mothers in their multiple dimensions: 1) biological dimension: related to the body and (non) reproduction; 2) subjective dimension: associated with emotions and their experience; 3) social dimension: subject to the construction, redefinition and resignification of identity; 4) symbolic dimension: set of ideas, images or metaphors that represent hegemonic motherhood and non-motherhoods; 5) political dimension: public policies focussed on strengthening women's reproductive autonomy (free access to contraceptives, right to an abortion in the public health system, access to human reproduction biotechnologies, adoption process and foster families).

The text is structured into four sections. Firstly, a set of conceptual categories and social metaphors is presented for discussion on hegemonic motherhood and non-motherhoods. Subsequently, quantitative data is provided that indicates the process of demographic change that goes from *exaltation of motherhood* to structural infertility. Thirdly, the qualitative methodology is described, revealing an interpretative reflection. Finally, empirical results are provided, derived from analysing the biographical accounts of the transit process for these women from *desire for motherhood* to non-motherhood.

## 2. METAPHORS FOR MOTHERHOOD AND NON-MOTHERHOODS

Feminist criticism allows us to approach the social metaphors that have historically permeated daily life (Lakoff & Johnson, 1980) and this research focuses on metaphors built around both women who are mothers and women who are not. As mentioned by Díez Mintegui (2000), motherhood remains a metaphor that organises our society, although women's responses differ. It is consequently possible to identify different experiences of hegemonic

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2. Bestard (2009, p. 89) defines *filiation* as the process of transmitting material or immaterial substances between people who are mutually dependent on each other.



motherhood, other motherhoods and non-motherhoods (Bogino, 2020) that help us to understand the social reality from a more complex perspective.

In Western culture, the social worth of motherhood is balanced against panic concerning sterility or infertility: hegemonic discourse still tends to represent fertile women as at-one with nature and, specifically associated with productive soil; while sterile or infertile women represent drought, barren land or death. Different anthropological investigations have revealed that most cultures consider sterility or infertility to be a curse, a punishment or a tragedy. These interpretations penalise the women's body, perceived as a fault, the no-being or the vacuum compared to the unquestionable fulfilment (Tubert, 1991) or the naturalised and untouchable idea of motherhood (Esteban, 2000).

Some metaphors of motherhood fit the simple woman-mother binomial that is culturally constructed as natural and yet, as we know, is pitted with ideologies and power relations (Ávila, 2004). In this context, infertile women are portrayed as going against nature and the exception to the rule; while motherhood symbolises fertility, normality and tradition. In this way, if motherhood is socially constructed as the norm, women who are not mothers are daubed as transgressors, questioning anything that regulates gender relations and the hierarchical order (Tubert, 2010).

Other metaphors reflect moral connotations of non-motherhood, interpreted as the object of suspicion and disdain (Rich, 2019), that is demonstrated in language and the social imaginary referring to these women as unfortunate, failed or deviant (Gillespie, 2003). In patriarchal mythology, they are usually described as exceptional beings —such as the goddesses Athena or Artemis— or as selfish with no desire to fulfil their natural feminine role. In turn, witches might represent this version of *childless women* (Moreno, 2009).

In this case, according to feminist literature, this is an endeavour to recover the non-motherhoods category, in the plural, to address the diversity of experiences and reflections that range from impossible motherhood or unexpected infertility to redefining non-motherhood. In this text, we aim to appropriate the concept of motherhood, due to its symbolic weighting, with the intention of reconceptualising it (Green, 2015).

Letherby and Williams (1999), from an autosociobiographical approach, explore the complex experience of ambivalence and the stereotyped image of *childless* women as desperate and *childfree* women as selfish and liberated. This stereotyped description only represents one caricature of women who experience *unexpected infertility* or *non-motherhood by choice* in modern societies. So then, it is fundamental to distinguish between the biological dimension of infertility and the symbolic dimension of non-motherhood (Letherby, 2002). Insofar as, subtly «we are told that life has no meaning if we are not mothers» (Donath, 2019, p. 29), women who have no desire for motherhood or no capability to have children are considered problematic, not very feminine or unnatural (Letherby, 2002). The social stereotype of a woman who takes on the status of an adult person as a mother remains in force in the hegemonic discourse of medicine and psychology. In this respect, «feminine identity is made to depend on the capacity or desire for fertility» (Moreno & Soto, 1994, p. 107).

In turn, Mexican anthropologist, María Eugenia Olavarría states that infertility has a differential effect depending on the dominant gender construction: masculinity infertility is associated with lack of virility and sexual impotence, while female infertility represents an obstacle to fulfilling their natural vocation of being mothers, setting diagnosed bodies on the lowest rung of the *male/female hierarchy* (Olavarría, 2021, p. 117).

Comparing two ethnographic scenarios, England and Qatar, Kilshaw (2020) analyses the cultural distinctions between infertility and miscarriages in relation to the social, religious and political beliefs in each country. The author identified that, in both ethnographic contexts, women experience suffering and sadness after miscarriages. However, she also detected some differences, such as: in Qatar, the large family model is promoted and, after marrying in young heterosexual couples, women are encouraged to have children throughout their reproductive life. Motherhood is highly valued in Islam, and in this ideological context, women normalise their miscarriage experience as evidence of fertility and health, one possible occurrence among several reproductive difficulties. Furthermore, there are cultural reference frameworks which report knowledge on other experiences by women who have miscarried—alluding to mothers, sisters, sisters-in-law or girlfriends—as a *normal* reproduction process.

On the other hand, in England, *stratified reproduction* is encouraged (Colen, 1995). At the peak of this structure, there are people who are seen as valued, healthy and suitable, depending on their gender, sexual orientation, ethnicity and social class, to reproduce *ideal citizens* (Ginsburg & Rapp, 1995). In this neoliberal context, reproduction is perceived in terms of success or failure, and in most miscarriages, the causes remain medically unknown. In general, women reject the normalisation of miscarriages by focussing on individual suffering; they experience it as a muted event and some of them commemorate it through personalised rituals or tattoos on their body. Their narrations demonstrate feelings of responsibility and guilt. However, over the last few years, changing practices have been observed that no longer consider miscarriages as something individual, breaking the silence through public acts to consider them as something more social and normalised (Kilshaw, 2020).

In Spain, reproductive difficulties in the search for motherhood can become an unexpected experience and, in turn, common among women who decide to «wait» to be mothers in their late thirties or after turning 40 (San Román, 2020). The discourse from these women highlights the feeling of guilt and shock on finding they are infertile that they express as reproductive disappointments (Bennett & de Kok, 2018) because it is impossible to pass on their family line which, according to the classic Euro-American paradigm, is related to genetics<sup>3</sup>. On the other hand, women allude to lack of knowledge regarding fertility issues that worsen as the years go by. Information on infertility and age has appeared recently in Spain in media that advertise a new service: vitrification of oocytes and freezing of ovules. Furthermore, after waiting for motherhood as a rational choice, most of these women do not have access to assisted reproduction technology (ART) because it is too expensive. Their narratives are dominated by the feeling of emptiness or the perception of being incomplete women that is interpreted as an invisible disability (San Román, 2020).

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3. The concept of *reproductive disappointments* includes the meanings that people attribute to their experiences related to the biological dimension due to failing to conceive (primary and secondary infertility), miscarriage, still-birth, neonatal death and the social dimension in failed adoption processes (Bennett & de Kok, 2018).

### 3. FROM EXALTATION OF MOTHERHOOD TO STRUCTURAL INFERTILITY

From a demographic perspective, a chronological process can be highlighted for the journey from the *baby boom*, in a socio-political context of *exaltation of motherhood*, to a *structural infertility* scenario (Álvarez & Marre, 2021). Currently, Spain has one of the lowest fertility levels in Europe and the world, dropping from 2.8 children per woman in 1975 to 2.1 in 1981, progressively falling since to 1.19 in 2020 (Castro-Martín et al., 2021). In turn, this drop in fertility is related to delays in young people becoming financially independent and being able to leave the family home and to the dynamics of couples' relationships that condition the milestone of a first child (Nishikido et al., 2022). Due to a high level of education among women, their growing participation in the job market, and their *wish to travel or enjoy life*, reproductive decisions are postponed to a later age (Álvarez, 2018; Hernández, 2016; San Román, 2020). From 1980 to 2019, the average age for women to have their first baby rose from 25 to 31 years old. In this respect, the transition to motherhood is taking place at an increasingly *later* age from what is considered *ideal* with an average delay of 5 years. In 2019, 32% of first-time births in Spain corresponded to women aged 35 and over and 8% to women aged 40 and over. However, this trend is not only a *women's issue* as the same process is demonstrated in the case of men. Between 1980 and 2018, the average age for first-time fatherhood rose from 30 to 34 years old. In 2019, 49% of first-time fathers were aged 35 years old or more and 19% were over 40 (Castro-Martín et al., 2021).

As we will see, this generalised trend in modern societies eats into fertile years and affects the quality of eggs and sperm (Álvarez, 2008). Preferences for the heterosexual family and two offspring remain the majority among the Spanish population, although the gap between desires and realities reveals the influence of the work market and gender relationships in reproductive decisions (Álvarez, 2018; Castro-Martín et al., 2020). In the last few decades, it has been possible to identify some of the causes that prevent the *desire for motherhood* from happening: 1) lack or discontinuity of the relationship in a couple; 2) costs in terms of money, time and opportunities implied by bringing up children; 3) difficulties to conciliate personal and professional

lives; 4) job insecurity and instability; 5) difficulties to gain access to proper housing; 6) scarce institutional support for child-raising and childcare, and 7) gender inequality in the home (Castro-Martín, 2019; González & Jurado, 2006; Nishikido et al., 2022).

From another perspective, San Román (2020) argues that many women *wait* to become mothers, not due to material limitations but for personal reasons, and when they consider that it is the *right time* for motherhood, they might find that their opportunities for *natural* reproduction have decreased. Consequently, various events help promote the reproductive markets in Spain, which represent a thriving business opportunity, and are mainly boosted by the trend to delay motherhood, the limited cover in the public health system and the flexibility of the legal framework (Rivas & Álvarez, 2020). In 2017, 9% of births were due to ARTs, making demand in Spain one of the highest in Europe. In turn, national or international adoption processes are still difficult to access for people who wish to become mothers or fathers. Over the last few years, there has been a decreasing trend in the number of adoptions, dropping from 6,369 in 2004 to 1,083 in 2018 (Castro-Martín et al., 2021).

In addition, the increase in the proportion of women who end their fertile period with no children is associated with putting off reproductive decisions, another important component which characterises the low (and late) fertility in Spain. The statistical data show that the proportion of women with no children has risen from 13% among women born in the 1940s to 23% for those born in the early 1970s. In this respect, Spain is among the European countries with the highest levels of infertility, alongside Germany, Austria and Switzerland. In the 2018 Fertility Survey, 14% of women between 20 and 40 years old have declared a non-desire for offspring (and 20% of men), while the 2006 Fertility Survey reported only 6% of women. This increase represents a significant change, although the dividing line between voluntary and involuntary infertility is often blurred (Castro-Martín et al., 2021).

It is probable that some women have had to face *unexpected infertility* problems, derived from biological difficulties to conceive or see a pregnancy to term from the age of 35 onwards. Another key factor that emerges when analysing why Spanish women might declare that they do not intend

to be mothers is the perception that motherhood is not compatible with a career (Seiz, 2013). These situations can be framed within what is known as *structural infertility* (Marre, 2009) which is caused by changing working conditions since 1990, accentuated by the economic crisis in 2008 and, even more so today, when we are still feeling the post-pandemic consequences of COVID-19, that has generated more uncertainties in our lives. This concept of *structural infertility* is valid to define infertility which originated in various political, social and economic contexts that constrict and limit a person's decisions and reproductive options. As this type of infertility has no biological basis, similarities can be drawn to the cases of single people or homosexual couples who might require assistance to reproduce. Furthermore, infertility is a *relational* concept that depends on multiple factors such as procreating age, sexual orientation and the absence-presence of a partner (Olavarría, 2018). Finally, this infertility can also be considered *social* which allows us to think that infertility is a matter of political relevance and access to reproductive rights (Bestard et al., 2003). Consequently, we can state that *structural*, *relational* and *social infertility* problems very obviously condition women's reproductive autonomy in Spain.

#### 4. METHODOLOGY

This research was based on a qualitative method used to approach an interpretative reflection and we have used various techniques to collect qualitative data such as biographical accounts (Roca & Martínez, 2006), autosocio-biographical novels (Lammers & Twellmann, 2021) and virtual ethnography (Hine, 2004).

Firstly, we selected biographical accounts by Nuria and Maite, who provide us with a set of events and personal experiences on their search for motherhood such as miscarriages and repeated miscarriages, the shame and guilt concerning a pregnancy that they do not see to term, the suspension of suitability for motherhood by single-parent adoption and the toll of grief. As mentioned by Scott (2001), the respondents' experience is always an interpretation and requires an interpretation of what we want to explain,

questioning the processes for producing and reconfiguring the subjects and their identities.

Secondly, considering the possible epistemological articulation between social sciences and literature to be relevant, we have chosen to include accounts by Ana and Silvia, the main characters of two auto-sociobiographical novels<sup>4</sup> who illustrate their desire to be mothers, the routine of programmed sex, the quest for motherhood through ART, the waiting time, criticism of biomedical expert discourse, the fear of not being a mother and channelling this pain into new projects (Nanclares, 2017; Pardo, 2019).

Thirdly, given the relevance of the Internet and social media in current society, we considered it opportune to study digital contexts, carrying out a *virtual ethnography* (Hine, 2004). We identified several proposals from Mutual Support Groups (MSG) that encourage the respondents to generate spaces for communication, information exchanges and virtual communities.

Finally, the qualitative data were interpreted following a coding process and thematic analysis that makes it possible to identify emerging topics from reading and re-reading the information compiled. The thematic analysis might infer results that bring about appropriate comprehension of the study object (Braun & Clarke, 2006).

## 5. ACCOUNTS OF IMPOSSIBLE MOTHERHOOD

An analysis is presented below of biographical accounts from cisgender women<sup>5</sup> who felt the desire to be mothers and began their quest for motherhood. Some experience miscarriages, repeated miscarriages and disenfranchised grief. After a process of acceptance and self-knowledge, the women in question redefine their identity in new projects.

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4. The term *autosociobiographical* was coined by Annie Ernaux to designate a way of writing that stresses the social and political dimension of intimacy. In this respect, the author argues that her personal life, as the central topic of writing, only interests her to the extent that it is closely linked to the world of others (Lammers & Twellmann, 2021).

5. *Cisgender women* refers to women who use the gender assigned to them at birth by the sex/gender system, meaning the set of arrangements by which a society transforms biological sexuality into products of human activity (Sattel & Reiter, 1976).

### 5.1. Desire for motherhood and miscarriages

Nuria understands that *fertility does not last forever* and, after the age of 35 she wanted to become a mother, so she confessed her *maternal desires* to her heterosexual partner. She became pregnant shortly afterwards and had a miscarriage. In gestation processes, the experience of bleeding can be interpreted—from the emotional dimension—as fear of loss and uncertainty regarding whether this experience is normal or pathological (Canguilhem, 1986). In medicine, a miscarriage is the name given to the involuntary loss of an embryo or foetus weighing less than 500 g and up to 22 weeks of pregnancy<sup>6</sup>. Epidemiological data show that between 10 and 30% of confirmed pregnancies end in miscarriage, although the variability of these figures is due to the high percentage of preclinical miscarriages before women are aware that they are pregnant (around 60%). It is also due to recording these episodes under a wide variety of diagnostic sub-labels such as inevitable miscarriage, missed miscarriage, haemorrhage or curettage (Martínez-Manrique, 2021).

The first loss happened to Nuria in the eighth week of pregnancy—before completing the first trimester—and, in these cases, medicine does not usually study «the cause for the loss due to technical difficulties and for profitability reasons» (Martínez-Manrique, 2021, p. 68). On her quest to become a mother, after two miscarriages, she turned to various assisted reproductive technologies (ART) understanding that «the body as a place of gestation is medicalized» (Tubert, 2001, p. 280). Nuria managed to get pregnant again via artificial insemination but was surprised by another miscarriage that she remembered experiencing alone.

From biomedical discourse, the main causes for miscarriage include genetic anomalies in the foetus, maternal hormonal factors, immunological, infectious or uterine factors. Risk factors include the age of the women, unhealthy lifestyle—obesity, smoking or alcohol—and lack of emotional well-being in the initial phases of pregnancy. Medical care for miscarriages usually combines three modes of intervention: 1) the expectant attitude,

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6. The concepts of *abortion/miscarriage* are easy to distinguish in the English language, showing the difference between the voluntary and involuntary termination of a pregnancy (Martínez-Manrique, 2021).



referring to the waiting time to allow the body to expel the content of the uterus naturally; 2) medical management, that consists of applying a pharmacological treatment (generally misoprostol in the vagina or taken orally) that induces uterine contractions and dilation of the uterus neck to help expel the ‘foetal remains’; and 3) surgical treatment or curettage, that consists of using instruments to empty the uterine cavity. In this respect, the medicalization of miscarriage has implications in both the biological and emotional dimensions for women, and it might become a more or less traumatic experience depending on the type of medical treatment received and the type of relationship established between healthcare professionals and patients (Martínez-Manrique, 2021, p. 69).

Regarding frustrated attempts to get pregnant, the body itself is described as an obstacle. It seems that the fusion of body and desire fades and, in these cases, the body is opposed to the *desire for motherhood*<sup>7</sup>. This unexpected (and astonishing) experience is evoked by another informer: «The losses were dreadful, and the first miscarriage was the worst. [...] Nobody prepares you for something like that and I went to A&E» (Maite, 42 years old).

Medicalization of the body —both in miscarriages and in fertility treatments— generates feelings of unease, strangeness and anxiety in women, that imply a desubjectivation process. From this perspective, women rid themselves of any subjective interpretation where only biomedical knowledge can decipher or resolve the enigma, even though the expected *product* is often not obtained (Tubert, 2001). As Nuria explains, after an egg donation as a final attempt, she managed to get pregnant easily and yet she went through the same process of pregnancy loss, a fourth miscarriage that was very frustrating. In these situations, where at least two consecutive miscarriages have occurred or more than two alternately, the term *recurrent miscarriage* is applied (Vidal, 2001, p. 97). Recurrent miscarriages cause changes to the body, while future hopes and expectations must be reset.

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7. Imaz (2010) inspired by Tubert (1991) reinterprets the *desire for motherhood* category and understands a blurred desire, not objectified, variable and bound to social imaginaries, that does not necessarily seek to be fulfilled (Imaz, 2010, p. 118).

In this respect, motherhood is understood as a *quest process* that, at the same time, represents the search to form a family and the search for social integration. Family still prevails as the axis of integration in society and cultural relations model, that the ART demonstrate (Bestard et al., 2003). As mentioned by Ana, who weeps for all the years she spent on this unfruitful search and lost pregnancies. In some way, she justifies her feelings of anger, misfortune and sadness because she cannot be a mother or give her partner a child, or her parents and mother-in-law a grandchild, a god-child to her friend, a niece to her sisters or a cousin to her nieces and nephews. This means that the desire for motherhood goes beyond the social aspect and in turn, hides «the duty to procreate» (Scheper-Hughes, 1997) or the «duty to provide offspring» (Héritier, 1985) that is inscribed both in parenting relations and in each woman's subjectivity. In this respect, Ana feels the obligation to give a life to the others and, as a consequence, the feeling of anxiety grows more because she cannot pin down her *desire for motherhood* than because she is not following a rule or a gender mandate.

From the biomedical discourse, miscarriage becomes a paradoxical reality, a matter of life and death, considering pregnancy to be a social success and loss to be a personal failure. Therefore, death might be understood by biomedicine as a *system failure* while births represent a social happening, the triumph of life and the continuity of the family tree.

In this context, infertile women enter *endless liminality* via the fertility treatments that make them redefine their roles and their pace of life. So then, the start of a new routine and the disciplining of the body in assisted reproduction processes cause Nuria great «physical, emotional and economic wear and tear». Meanwhile, Ana does not trust medical care because she considers this process too impersonal and distant: «They refer to us as *girls*. We are all *girls*, we are a uterus, a protocol number, that does not feel, or think, nothing!» (Ana, 49 years old). Maite did not feel particularly well-cared for either by healthcare professionals: «You need empathetic people, and I did not get that. I practically lost it all in the hospital bathroom. I had the feeling that I had gone through something really dreadful, and they didn't seem to care» (Maite, 42 years old).

## 5.2. Disenfranchised grief and the acceptance process

In modern Western societies, it has been estimated that there has been a considerable rise in miscarriages due to the progressive delay in the age of women to become mothers and, in fact, due to an increase in the assisted reproduction treatments. Concerning infertility issues, there has been an outstanding boom in the reproductive industry and the development of biotechnology in expanding and diversifying the chances offered to people with difficulties in their search for motherhood and fatherhood (Lafuente-Funes, 2019; Rivas & Álvarez, 2020). One of the consequences of *delaying first babies* in Spain would therefore be the increase in the need to resort to reproductive technology (Hernández, 2016). We should not forget that the success rate of these techniques also drops considerably with age. In 2019, women without a partner or lesbian couples recovered the right to receive these treatments in the public health system (this right had been restricted in 2013). However, long waiting lists and limitations (maximum age of 40 and 3 *in vitro* fertility cycles) meant that many women pay for this treatment themselves in the private sector (Castro-Martín et al., 2020).

In this reproductive context, miscarriage can be classified as an ambiguous loss, as this is not a loss of a tangible or socially recognised being. In other words, these perceptions make it difficult to acknowledge the death and so also the grief. Along this line, *grief* is understood to be a complex process of sorrow that appears after the experience of real or perceived loss of something or someone, awarding different meanings, emotions and practices for saying goodbye.

From this perspective, *gestational grief* is conceived as a little understood and invisible grief because it is implied that without life there can be no death and nor does it lead to rituals and, consequently, it is a *forgotten grief* (Kirkley-Best & Kellner, 1982, as cited in López, 2011, p. 59) or a socially *disenfranchised grief* (Doka, 1989, as cited in Martínez-Manrique, 2021, p. 83). When miscarriages occur in the first trimester of pregnancy, women experience feelings of guilt and failure, considering themselves responsible for this loss. This is how Maite remembers it: «The first years, I didn't expect the shame. [...] As if I were guilty of it». This is a tale of shame and guilt, taking responsibility for the loss, that can be linked to different practices

of daily life (actions or omissions) related to food, leisure or working life. Furthermore, certain thoughts emerge, as Nuria says: «Of course, I thought that I had miscarried because my relationship was unstable». These interpretations can often lead women to doubt their own body and their capability to have children, thus affecting their self-esteem: «I felt bad because I was the only woman in my circle who could not get pregnant. [...] Sometimes, I had even thought: Maybe I don't want it enough? What if I really don't want to become a mother?» (Maite, 42 years old).

Despite the disenfranchisement, the silence and the constriction of social space to express the gestational grief (Cassidy, 2021), women deal with it and allow themselves to carry out small farewell rituals. The importance is highlighted of using the chosen name, because naming leads to recognition of its existence and opens up the possibility of talking about it in public (Felitti & Irrazábal, 2018). Consequently, artist Paula Bonet wrote a journal of two miscarriages and illustrated a book of animals for her daughter Julia who was not born, feeling like she is orphaned from a daughter (2018). She questions the social lack of information, guilty feelings, not knowing your own body and the lack of tools to manage this pain. Furthermore, her drawings claim the right to mourn a pregnancy.

Some women even also go through another type of grief, *genetic grief* that refers to *moral grief* or sadness felt by the impossibility of passing on your genes in egg donation processes, meaning *in vitro fertility* (IVF) with egg donations in *good condition*. Currently, genetic material cannot only be considered important—in the biological sense—due to the continuity of the genealogical chain, but also due to the representation—in the social sense—of genes as the new icons of kinship that are beginning to replace the symbolism of blood (Bestard et al., 2003). Women who attempt biological motherhood, receiving *other eggs* with no genetic relation, experience a loss of identity that makes them feel strange. This loss of identity is demonstrated when transmission of the phenotypic similarity is infeasible and genetic inheritance is thereby broken. Although there is still a genetic relationship with the egg donor—*anonymous* and hidden—protected by Law 14/2006 in Spain<sup>8</sup>.

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8. Law 14/2006, of 26 May, on assisted reproduction techniques (BOE-A-2006-9292).

«Failure» with an egg donation was a milestone in Maite's life, after living with infertility for eight years and four lost pregnancies, she considered it relevant to «set a limit» because «society spurs you on» to continue the search: «You'll see, it'll happen next time. Faced with this perceived social pressure, you have to ask yourself: How long should I carry on trying?» However, the day that she decided with her partner to «stop trying», she felt release: «I had done all I could, and my body could take no more, I had to accept it» (Maite, 42 years old).

In addition, Nuria remembers the miscarriages and the assisted reproduction treatments as a very «tough» time and, when a final attempt using an egg donation failed, she felt «crushed». These women's stories show us that «infertility causes great suffering to women and it is an experience of solitude, lack of understanding and loss of identity» (Fitó, 2010, p. 113).

In the same way, the search for motherhood through single-parent adoption, in Nuria's account, became a path strewn with obstacles, legal uncertainties and certain conjectures from the administration, which denied her suitability to become a mother. In these cases, when there is a break-up before the adoption is legalised, this is known as *disruption* (Barth & Berry, 1988, as cited in García & Grau, 2016), in other words, the bureaucratic process is interrupted and, at that point, Nuria experienced another type of grief, *institutional grief*. She breaks down in tears when she remembers the moment when she was told she was no longer considered suitable. She thinks it is unfair for an expert to classify her as *unsuitable* and she was hurt: «I could have fought it and sued them, taken them to court». However, the shock of the negative assessment led Nuria to decide not to be a mother: «Because I only wanted to be a mother, I don't want a fight» (Nuria, 51 years old).

Ana also understood that her plans for motherhood might not come true and finally she said: «Enough, enough of feeling guilty, to subjecting myself to abuse and pressure, of wanting what I can't have and it's obviously not for me, enough already». In this way, by closing the door to motherhood, she discovered new opportunities that she had never imagined and, little by little, she understood that her worth did not depend on being a mother. However, at times of anxiety, she had her doubts, although she faced the truth: «Even though I'm not a mother, I'm no less of a woman, or human being». Helped

by various therapies, Ana discovered herself: «As a complete woman, perfect in my imperfection». In this way, she managed to set herself free from gender mandates, ideals of motherhood and the obligations of kinship.

In short, in this section, we have analysed the uncertain search for motherhood, pregnancy losses and the transit of denied grief—such as gestational grief, genetic grief or institutional grief—that, finally, became the *grief for non-motherhood*. During the grief and acceptance process, the chances of talking and being listened to, and acknowledgement of the losses have important implications, because the absence of social support is one of the triggers for complications in grief and mental health issues (Cassidy, 2021).

### 5.3. Redefining identity and new projects

In this section, we will see how the *desire for motherhood* is transformed and new projects appear. As previously mentioned, in Western culture, women's subjectivity and supposed guarantee of mental health largely revolves around their desire to be a mother. However, this desire is often questioned by subjecting it to rigorous reflection to allow other desires. This happens, for example, at times of life crisis. In this respect, emergence of the hostile desire, described as a differentiating desire, allows gestation of new desires and an extension of subjectivity (Burin et al., 2000).

In the biographical accounts, we find that, beyond the desire to be a mother, after denied grief and the acceptance process, new concerns arise such as self-knowledge, writing about or socialising the experience. Furthermore, it can be seen that the *desire for motherhood* changes throughout a woman's life and it is affected by biological, emotional and material conditions such as age, socio-affective relationships and different socio-economic resources.

When Nuria was young, her priorities included the importance of «studying» because «it opens up opportunities» and as stated by San Román (2020), she made a rational choice to wait for motherhood. However, as the years went by, when she «wanted to be a mother» she came up against the difficulties of unexpected infertility. After searching for unattainable biological motherhood and, simultaneously, motherhood by single-parent adoption, the respondent talks about frustration as a feeling of dissatisfaction that she

has worked on in therapy. Despite having desired motherhood and attempted various alternatives with ARTs and adoption processes, she accepts that «I couldn't do it, it wasn't for me». Although this was never an obstacle in her life. On the contrary, she considers that it was a wake-up call: «Fine, now you pick yourself up and carry on with his burden. Let it be a lesson for other women, who decide to be mothers later on or not at all. They shouldn't have to sit and cry and feel like their lives are over» (Nuria, 51 years old).

In this respect, the respondent thinks that many women might be «traumatised» because she considers that it is still «taboo, really taboo. In today's society, it's taboo that there are women who have not been able to have children, poor things. Isn't it?» (Nuria, 51 years). So, in the case studies analysed here, it can be seen that sadness is the pain produced or the scar left by absence. However, each woman gives a singular meaning to these losses: loss of pregnancies, lack of control over their ability to reproduce and the biomedical process, loss of self-esteem and redefinition of identity.

In this transit from *impossible motherhood* to non-motherhood, we can see how confusion, fear of the future and uncertainty become an obsession for some women. Silvia understands the biological difficulties to get pregnant, but she needed the certainty, she wanted to know if she could be a mother or not. Her narration highlights significant learning: «Medicine, far from an exact science, is the science of ruling things out» (Silvia, 41 years old).

Despite the frustrated desire for motherhood, new projects are highlighted that are bound to *being your own person* that shape the women's subjectivity. In this process of reinventing desires and reformulating projects, we can see how Mutual Support Groups (MSG) gain special value by providing face-to-face contact with other women who have gone through the same experience. From 2020 onwards, with the unexpected COVID-19 pandemic, virtual encounters have also taken off. In this respect, encounters usually take place informally or organised as mutual support groups among peers. These interactions make it possible to recognise the intersubjectivity and the individuality of the experience, as well as sharing closer frames of reference that normalise their perceptions and help to forge networks of reciprocity. Furthermore, the MSG have an additional value: 1) creating intimate spaces to express emotions; 2) avoiding social isolation; and 3) constructing

empathy relationships and 4) sharing their experience to alleviate physical and emotional pain. In this respect, «coming across so many similar cases reduces the feeling of individual loneliness, guilt, or bad luck» (Martínez-Manrique, 2021, p. 85).

In 2016, a group therapy emerged in Madrid called *Ser mujer y no ser madre* (Being a woman and not a mother) (by Emi de la Llave) in Madrid. This was a place for meeting and exchanging knowledge for women who are not mothers. This space provides a workshop type dynamic through methodologies that connect the body and the personal experience for women who feel pain and conflict because they are not mothers. The idea is to put into words what they are feeling in solitude and begin to focus on the issue, destructure it and take a fresh approach<sup>9</sup>. In Barcelona, *La vida sin hijos* (Life without kids) also emerged (by Gloria Labay) in 2018. This was a place to meet other women who have gone through the same life process and it claims to create a support network, *a tribe* where women feel cared for and understood, to face daily life. This MSG proposes to create meeting forums to freely express all the emotions and feelings aroused by not being able to be a mother<sup>10</sup>. 2020 saw the start of the *Otras Leonas* (Other Lionesses) project (by Betina Wlasiczuk), a space for connection for women without children due to circumstances, that follows the premise of caring for personal histories, respecting intimacy, and the desire to find yourself. In addition, it represents a space for creation and reflection that seeks to strengthen the resources for each woman to travel down the path to non-motherhood and transmute that painful territory<sup>11</sup>. In 2022, a new idea called *Círculos femeninos* (Feminine circles) (by Miriam Aguilar) emerged to support women on a quest for motherhood or in the process of accepting non-motherhood. These are practical and experience-based workshops for women who are trying to get pregnant or who have decided to stop trying, key moments in redefining identity and resignifying motherhood or non-motherhood<sup>12</sup>.

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9. In: <https://nosoymadre.com>

10. In: <https://lavidasinijos.com>

11. In: <https://m.facebook.com/pg/mujersinhijosporcircunstancias/posts/>

12. In: <https://www.miraguilar.com>



## 6. CONCLUSIONS

This paper has explored accounts by cisgender women who are not mothers due to structural infertility, relational and social problems. As discussed by other authors, the experience of motherhood and non-motherhood makes a significant difference in women's lives. Motherhood symbolises fertility and normality. In turn, tradition is appreciated rhetorically although the cultural, political and material acknowledgement is vague in modern societies. Instead, non-motherhood represents barrenness, emptiness and betraying a tradition and in this respect, they see themselves as socially poorer for declining the rules of gender and kinship (Letherby, 2002; Tubert, 1991).

In the biographical accounts, we can appreciate a profound *desire for motherhood* when the respondents, from a certain age considered *late*, amass the affective, emotional and material conditions, meaning the optimal conditions to be a mother. In this sociocultural context, the quest for motherhood becomes a path littered with obstacles: the experience of miscarriages and recurrent miscarriages trigger unease among the women, they feel peculiar and anxious, implying a process of desubjectivation. In their biological haste, they turn to assisted reproduction technology. In this way, the body as a place of gestation is medicalized, caused physical and emotional changes that affect social and kinship relations.

We considered it relevant to address pain management and developing disenfranchised grief. We believe that *grief for non-motherhood* is composed of different griefs that the respondents have been through such as gestational grief, genetic grief or institutional grief, an intense process of affliction that is lacking social and healthcare recognition, and likely to potentially be treated iatrogenically (Martínez-Manrique, 2021). In this respect, biomedicine and reproductive biotechnology encourage the search for biological (and medical) solutions for social problems that, as we mentioned, are related to structural infertility, relational and social issues. So then, uncertainty in the quest for motherhood causes a certain obsession and, in these situations of *endless liminality*, infertility is experienced as something undefined, as it has ambiguous status in western societies and this dislocation or destructuring generates unease among women (Bestard et al., 2003; Burin et al., 2000).

Therefore, *impossible motherhood* is understood as the frustrated desire or the disappointment of not fitting into a hegemonic motherhood model, that is characterised mainly by the reproductive capability of women, in a heterosexual couple and within the institution of marriage, meaning by the compliance embraced with a cultural mandate that thereby ensures legitimate offspring and the continuity of the family (Bogino, 2016).

Following the line of argument of the narratives, after disenfranchised grief, when the women decide to call time on the reproductive biotechnology, they face a process of acceptance and redefinition of their identity. In their accounts, we found that, beyond the desire for motherhood, new concerns are raised related to writing, ways of communicating and socialising their own experience, and the gestation of other desires or yearnings linked to *being your own person*: self-knowledge, self-care and autonomy. In this destructuring and reflection process, the respondents set themselves new projects and mutual support groups become important, allowing them to share frames of reference and forge empathy relationships and networks of reciprocity. In short, the path from *impossible motherhood* to non-motherhood is a subjective process, involving reflection and bodily and emotional experience, that makes it possible to challenge, rethink and subvert the representations of hegemonic motherhood by generating new meanings and social practices bound to non-motherhood.

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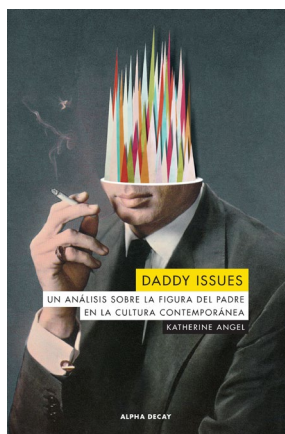
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## **II. Reviews / Reseñas**





Reseña de: Angel, Katherine. *Daddy Issues. Un análisis sobre la figura del padre en la cultura contemporánea*. Barcelona: Alpha Decay, 2020. 73 pp. ISBN: 978-84-121442-2-2

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*Daddy Issues. Un análisis sobre la figura del padre en la cultura contemporánea* es el segundo libro de Katherine Angel, un ensayo sobre la crítica feminista a la figura del padre dentro de la reflexión sobre la estructura de la familia tradicional. Anteriormente, la autora abordó el deseo sexual femenino en una obra de carácter muy personal titulada *Unmastered. A Book on Desire Most Difficult to Tell* (2012), ahora vuelve a sacudirnos con un tema ampliamente presente en nuestra cultura, pero poco abordado –y menos de forma tan explícita y directa– por parte de los feminismos. Nos encontramos ante un libro plagado de preguntas punzantes y oportunas que nos impelen a mirarnos en el espejo e interrogar nuestras relaciones familiares.

El destape de los abusos sexuales sufridos por mujeres a manos de Harvey Weinstein durante años propició, como señala Angel, una apertura general y global de las mujeres a hablar de experiencias de acoso. Muchas se vieron alentadas a contar sus vivencias y en este contexto, la autora se planteó la siguiente cuestión: la mayor parte de estos hombres también son padres, ¿cómo nos enfrentamos a la figura del padre desde el feminismo?

En este contexto, apunta Angel, «cuestionábamos a todos los hombres que habían pasado por nuestras vidas, todas las formas de poder patriarcal, pero raras veces hablábamos de nuestros padres» (p. 11).

A razón de este planteamiento, la autora identifica una vuelta del concepto de patriarcado en el discurso feminista contemporáneo, después de una etapa (posfeminismo) en la que se había dejado a un lado por considerarse demasiado rancio y caduco. El movimiento #Metoo y el incremento en la conciencia social sobre la violencia contra las mujeres ha subrayado de nuevo dicho concepto, y en este momento de la historia del feminismo, Angel reflexiona en concreto sobre el objeto (el padre). A lo largo de esta obra, dicha autora aborda las relaciones familiares y la figura del padre a través de diversas películas y novelas recientes. Más allá de introducirnos en estas obras, la presente reseña pretende ofrecer los puntos clave de reflexión que ofrece la autora sobre la figura del padre en el seno de la cultura contemporánea.

Así pues, el marco de fondo que nos va a acompañar a lo largo de esta obra es la latente relación entre el feminismo y la figura del padre, y lo que la autora considera una ausencia clara de un ideario político en torno a la familia dentro del movimiento feminista. En su análisis cultural, Angel parte de la figura del padre victoriano, del padre opresivo, que frente a la pérdida de la madre, convierte a sus hijas en compañeras de vida, en sustitutas de la esposa ausente. Un padre que se enfrenta a la incursión de sus hijas en la esfera pública y que se sorprende ante sus intenciones de casarse y abandonar la casa familiar, indignado de que prefieran irse con otro hombre. Sentado el punto de partida sobre esta visión decimonónica de la figura del padre, nuestra autora continúa adentrándose en las relaciones que se establecen entre padres e hijas dentro de la cultura contemporánea, y apunta a una división de la niñez «entre las que quieren acostarse con el padre y las que quieren ser el padre» (p. 23), entre aquellas niñas que tratan de agradar y complacer al padre, y aquellas que quieren emularlo.

En esta dinámica, identifica otro proceso digno de ser destacado, esto es, la conversión de las hijas en un objeto, algo que podemos ver a través del ejemplo de la relación que Donald Trump mantiene con su hija Ivanka. Alabando a su hija y declarando que, si no lo fuera, muy probablemente se casaría con ella, Trump nos acerca a un hilo argumental profundamente arraigado en la cultura contemporánea: la asunción de que debe existir una

especie de relación amorosa entre un padre y su hija. Así pues, el concepto *Daddy Issues*, «presupone y a la vez rechaza la idea de que las hijas desean a sus padres» (p. 31). Es decir, la existencia de dicho concepto denota que las relaciones padre-hija tienen un carácter ambivalente y altamente sexualizado, asentado en cierta forma en el deseo. No obstante, nos empeñamos en que el romance entre padre e hija tiene su origen en la segunda, y aquí la autora plantea la siguiente pregunta: ¿Qué pasa con los *Daughter Issues* del padre? (p. 32).

Para reflexionar en torno a esta pregunta, Angel nos retrotrae a algunos conocidos filmes como *El padre de la novia* (1991), donde se nos muestra a un padre obsesionado con la «pérdida» de su hija, que va a casarse. Se retrata, de fondo, el miedo a la energía sexual de la hija y hacia dónde ésta se dirige. Pero ese horror del padre hacia la sexualidad de la hija puede ser un reflejo del miedo a su propio deseo. En este sentido, desde que el matrimonio pasó de ser considerado un mero contrato a convertirse en el intercambio de un objeto de deseo amoroso, la cuestión sobre la propiedad de la hija ha ido adquiriendo un cariz romántico y sexual (p. 35). De este modo, los celos sexuales del padre son una respuesta al miedo a perder su posesión. El padre protege a la hija, protege su valor como objeto de su propiedad que corre el peligro de ser transferido a otro hombre. De hecho, en muchas ocasiones dicha protección está estrechamente ligada con la violencia que sufren las mujeres.

Por otro lado, la autora explora la visión del padre como camino hacia la realidad (p. 41). Basándose en las teorías lacanianas, Angel apunta a la visión del padre como aquél que prohíbe y promueve la separación de los/as hijos/as de la madre. El padre sanciona, censura y se convierte al mismo tiempo en quien posibilita el futuro, la madurez y la inserción en la vida social, al separar a los/as hijos/as de la madre. La autora introduce aquí la importancia de la mirada del otro, el encuentro de la niñez con el progenitor-espejo –tanto padre como madre– que permite generar la autopercepción de los/as niños/as, algo que les otorgue existencia más allá del reflejo a veces distorsionado que es la mirada del padre y la madre. Es decir, la autora nos adentra en una comprensión de las relaciones familiares que explora la construcción de la autonomía, la voluntad y la conciencia del yo de los/as niños/as desligada de la dependencia afectiva de los progenitores. Se subraya la necesidad de

que la niñez no se construya en base a un yo apuntalado únicamente en los padres, algo que puede convertir sus vidas en la búsqueda constante de la relación perdida o insatisfactoria, y en este sentido, nos impele a examinar el origen de nuestra hostilidad y agresividad hacia el objeto (el padre). Señala la necesidad de permitirnos –tanto en la niñez como en la edad adulta– sentir hostilidad y odio hacia el padre, hacia los progenitores, porque «la hostilidad nos permite sentirnos reales» (p. 67). En cierto modo, elabora una mirada integradora de los sentimientos contradictorios que puede despertar la figura del padre, y también la madre, en nuestras vidas.

En resumen, *Daddy Issues. Un análisis sobre la figura del padre en la cultura contemporánea* es una obra sugerente que abre debates clave dentro del feminismo en referencia a la estructura familiar y las relaciones que en su seno establecemos. No obstante, se puede llegar a echar en falta una mirada de corte estructural y social que explique, si no en su totalidad, sí en parte las dinámicas de poder que dan sentido a dichas relaciones. Y es que la propuesta de esta autora se elabora sobre todo desde una mirada que bebe del psicoanálisis y que, desde nuestra perspectiva, resultaría mucho más rica estableciendo un diálogo con otras propuestas que superasen la visión individual e «interior» de dichas relaciones. Aun así, se trata de una aportación de gran valor para la teoría feminista y muy sugerente para repensarnos a nosotras mismas en relación a nuestras familias.



**Review of/ Reseña de: Nussbaum, Martha C. *Ciudadelas de la soberbia. Agresión sexual, responsabilización y reconciliación.* Traducción de Albino Santos Mosquera. Barcelona: Paidós, 2022. 392 pp. ISBN 978-84-493-3932-5**

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El último libro de Martha C. Nussbaum publicado en español se titula *Ciudadelas de la soberbia. Agresión sexual, responsabilización y reconciliación*. Me gustaría destacar el acierto de traducirse *pride* por soberbia, no orgullo. Esta última emoción tiene dos caras, una positiva y otra negativa, y su uso podría dar lugar a una cierta ambigüedad. El aspecto positivo del orgullo es la emoción que se suele manifestar en la reivindicación de derechos de ciertos colectivos, como el LGTBIQ+. La soberbia, una emoción con la que está emparentada, resalta su lado más negativo: el soberbio es altivo, mira a los otros por encima del hombro y se considera superior a los demás. La soberbia es, en definitiva, la emoción que abunda en las ciudadelas que Nussbaum va a explorar.

La autora indica que su obra tiene dos objetivos. El primero es recordar que los avances en la protección de la libertad sexual de las mujeres y en la persecución del acoso y la agresión sexual son el resultado de una labor

de décadas del movimiento feminista. Algunos han considerado que, en los últimos años, el *Me Too* ha sido un divisor de aguas en el tratamiento de las mujeres que han sufrido acoso y agresión sexual. A pesar de la relevancia del movimiento, que Nussbaum reconoce, afirma que el *Me Too* es solo una parte de un camino mucho más largo, pavimentado sobre décadas de trabajo de muchas mujeres profesionales y víctimas de las violencias sexuales. El papel de las celebridades en el *Me Too* no debe ofuscar el trabajo relevante e incansable de las muchas mujeres que las han precedido.

El segundo objetivo es señalar y analizar aquellas áreas en que, pese a los avances legislativos y culturales de los últimos años en cuanto al acoso y la agresión sexual, aún hay muchas resistencias para implementar los cambios alcanzados. Esas áreas son las que Nussbaum llama de ciudadelas de la soberbia.

La autora ha organizado el libro en tres partes. En la primera, «Escenarios de lucha», Nussbaum argumenta que en sociedades patriarcales en que la desigualdad de género predomina en las relaciones sociales, es muy común que los hombres se sientan superiores a las mujeres en muchos ámbitos; que sus intereses se consideren más importantes que los suyos y que ellas deben estar a su disposición. En el ámbito sexual, la soberbia alentada por una cultura machista puede conducir a cosificar a las mujeres: se las trata como si fueran meras cosas cuando no se tiene en cuenta su autonomía sexual y su subjetividad. Cosificarlas es el camino previo a los actos de acoso y agresiones sexuales. Siguiendo la posición que muchas feministas han defendido en las últimas décadas, Nussbaum arguye que estos actos de violencia no son una cuestión de sexo ni de deseo, sino de poder y de su distribución desigual en las sociedades patriarcales. Aunque este es un libro sobre mujeres y violencias sexuales, es especialmente, lo subraya la autora, un libro sobre las jerarquías de poder que mantienen el *statu quo* y facilitan la impunidad de quienes cometen actos de violencia sexual.

En la segunda parte, «La ley empieza a afrontar los problemas», Nussbaum analiza aspectos del desarrollo legal del acoso y la agresión sexual en los Estados Unidos. La autora quiere poner en valor y recordar la labor de varias décadas de muchas mujeres (juristas, políticas y otras activistas y víctimas de violencia sexual) que trabajaron para modificar la legislación y los procedimientos penales sobre esa materia, y que han contribuido a impulsar



un cambio en la cultural legal y social. Aunque Nussbaum centra su mirada en la realidad de su país, esta parte del trabajo permite conocer no solo el tratamiento del tema en un sistema jurídico diferente del español (el *common law*), sino también los argumentos que contribuyeron a los cambios y el contexto jurídico y político del momento.

Nussbaum sitúa el *Me Too* como un paso más en los esfuerzos de décadas para promover mudanzas jurídicas y sociales sobre las violencias sexuales; la visibilidad que el movimiento ha tenido en los últimos años no debería ensombrecer toda la labor y los logros previos. Nussbaum considera que el *Me Too* tiene aspectos positivos y negativos. El movimiento ha contribuido a llamar la atención una vez más a los efectos negativos que esas violencias producen en las vidas de las mujeres, ha exigido la necesaria responsabilización de los agresores, ha impulsado las denuncias y ha fomentado un vínculo de sororidad. Sin embargo, según Nussbaum, su defecto más grave ha sido promover una cultura de la vergüenza pública, en el que señalar, acusar y castigar públicamente parecer tener más peso que el recurso a los procedimientos de un Estado de derecho.

La tercera parte del libro se titula «Ciudadelas recalcitrantes: la judicatura, el arte, el deporte». Estas son las tres áreas que la autora identifica como ciudadelas de la soberbia. Nussbaum las llama así porque son áreas que se resisten a la responsabilización de quienes han cometido actos de violencia sexual. La falta de normas claras sobre el tratamiento de esos delitos, o su ineffectividad, no solo hace posible que esos actos se practiquen con impunidad, sino que permite que sus perpetradores se sientan por encima de todo y de todos. En general, se trata de figuras poderosas e influyentes, o con un talento inusual y una capacidad superior de hacer mucho dinero. La ausencia de responsabilización por sus actos fomenta el sentimiento de soberbia y les da buenas razones para creer que las normas no se aplicarán a sus casos.

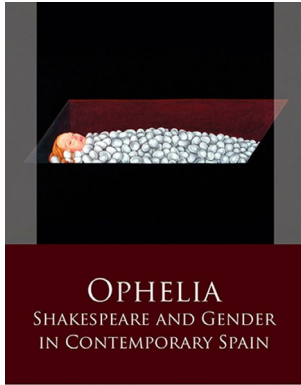
La judicatura, el arte y el deporte son, según Nussbaum, las ciudadelas de la soberbia en los Estados Unidos, pero su análisis permite a los lectores y las lectoras españolas identificar estas u otras áreas como recintos fortificados en que hombres poderosos e influyentes puedan encontrar guarida contra la acción del Derecho en nuestra propia sociedad.

En el libro la autora ofrece varias propuestas concretas para intentar combatir el problema en cada ciudadela. Una de ellas, sin embargo, es

transversal a todas: tener reglas claras y bien definidas y procedimientos que las hagan efectivas, y ofrecer protección contra retaliaciones a las personas que denuncien.

Nussbaum defiende con vigor la necesidad de responsabilizar a los agresores, pero lo hace con la mirada puesta en la búsqueda más amplia de la reconciliación. En su opinión, responsabilización y reconciliación deben ir de la mano. Solo así se fomentan emociones, actitudes y conductas que, en el camino más largo, posibilitan mirar hacia adelante, imaginar soluciones para los problemas y promover una mejor convivencia social fundada en la decencia, el diálogo y el respeto mutuo.

*Ciudadelas de la soberbia* es otra obra razonada y muy creativa que Martha C. Nussbaum nos brinda para ayudarnos a pensar sobre uno de los problemas más acuciantes de los tiempos que corren. El rigor y la claridad se suman a un lenguaje accesible para que este sea un libro leído por un público amplio, sea académico o no.



SHARON KEEFE UGALDE

Review of / Reseña de: Keefe Ugalde, Sharon. *Ophelia: Shakespeare and Gender in Contemporary Spain*. Cardiff: University of Wales Press, 2020, 251 pp. ISBN: 978-1-78683-598-7 e- ISBN: 978-1-78683-599-4

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Como nos indica el título, *Ophelia: Shakespeare and Gender in Contemporary Spain*, el último libro de Sharon Keefe Ugalde, examina el continuo interés en la figura de Ofelia, uno de los personajes de más relevancia entre las figuras de Shakespeare. A partir del siglo XIX, Ofelia ha sido reinterpretada numerosas veces, tanto en la literatura como en las artes visuales, hasta llegar a convertirse en un vehículo para la crítica de los roles de género tradicionalmente impuestos a las mujeres, y no sólo en la ficción, sino también con serias repercusiones en las vidas de mujeres reales. Las reinterpretaciones de la figura de Ofelia constituyen un interés internacional, sin embargo, las reconfiguraciones españolas de esta figura han sido pasadas por alto durante mucho tiempo, situación que este libro remedia. En su introducción, seis capítulos y epílogo, Keefe Ugalde estudia poesía, narrativa, teatro, pintura y fotografía, sin ignorar las obras en gallego o catalán, como la poesía de Xohanna Torres y Marta Dacosta o las obras teatrales de Manuel Molina, con el fin de analizar cómo la debilitante falta de agencia de la Ofelia de Shakespeare se convierte en una invitación para artistas modernos a desafiar

las jerarquías patriarcales y a asignarle nuevos roles. El estudio de Keefe Ugalde subraya la relación entre las reconfiguraciones de Ofelia y las libertades y derechos recuperados por las mujeres en España tras la desaparición de Franco. Ofelia se convierte en un instrumento para el estudio del papel de la mujer en la sociedad a través del tiempo. Las ambigüedades en el *Hamlet* de Shakespeare respecto a su figura hacen de Ofelia un personaje excepcionalmente maleable que ofrece a los artistas un espacio para reescribirlo y recuperar su voz.

La introducción recorre la historia de la trayectoria de Shakespeare, y especialmente de *Hamlet*, en España, comenzando en el siglo XVIII, cuando *Hamlet* se introdujo por primera vez en una traducción a partir de una interpretación neoclásica francesa. Leandro Fernández de Moratín fue el primero en traducir *Hamlet* al español directamente del original en 1798. A diferencia de otros países europeos, Ofelia no fue una figura popular en la España del siglo XIX. O'Keefe postula que tal vez fuera porque España tenía su propia *loca* para fetichizar en Juana la Loca, la reina enferma por un amor excesivo, que encarnaba una compleja red de normas de género. La excepción serían los poetas, desde Bécquer a Lorca, que incluyen imágenes de Ofelia en sus obras.

El primer capítulo, «Breaking Silence: Ophelia in the Lyric Tradition of Spain and the Pioneering Innovations of Blanca de los Ríos,» explora representaciones poéticas españolas de Ofelia con una visión histórica acerca de cómo la figura es romantizada por su falta de agencia en la poesía de los escritores masculinos canónicos de la categoría de Espronceda y Bécquer. Ofelia está predeterminada por una mirada masculina controladora y por una poética en tercera persona que no la autoriza a hablar. Pero la Ofelia de los poetas desciende más de las visiones decimonónicas, como el famosísimo cuadro de Millais, donde se idealiza su figura muerta, flotando en el agua, rodeada de flores, que del personaje original de Shakespeare. La ruptura llega en 1881 con los «Cantos de Ofelia» de Blanca de los Ríos. Por medio de lecturas atentas de sus poemas, Keefe Ugalde examina la obra de De los Ríos que constituye un paso significativo en la conquista del ámbito tabú del deseo sexual femenino al rechazar la fragilidad, la dependencia y la pureza de Ofelia para dar validez al derecho de la mujer y reclamar los placeres

del sexo, además de presentar una afirmación de la estética romántica y la autoridad literaria femenina.

Siguiendo una línea cronológica y de género literario, el siguiente capítulo, «Talking Back: Ophelia in Turn-of-the-Millennium Poetry,» se enfoca en las re-escrituras de Ofelia por mujeres poetas de la Transición hasta principios del presente siglo. La conclusión más frecuente entre el grupo de poetas compuesto por María Victoria Atencia, Xohana Torres, Blanca Andreu, María Beneyto, Aurora de Albornoz y Marta Dacosta, entre otras, es que enamorarse y perder la voluntad propia conduce a la locura y al sufrimiento como en el caso de Ofelia. Entre las poetas que abordan los temas del amor y el sexo, es más frecuente la creación de una Ofelia deseosa, y a veces lujuriosa, cuyos deseos contrastan con el vestido blanco y casto que se le había impuesto. Rechazan y reinscriben la belleza de una Ofelia, que como la de Millais, flota en el agua, adornada con flores, pero enmascarando la ruina psicológica de una persona cuya subjetividad ha sido negada. Entre las poetas mayores, también se establece un paralelismo entre la liberación de Ofelia, que en vida habría sido el ángel del hogar, y la mujer española tras el fin del franquismo.

Inicialmente, la investigadora pensaba limitarse a las obras poéticas, pero al encontrarse con reiteraciones del personaje de Ofelia en otros medios formuló la pregunta: ¿por qué Ofelia?, llegando a la conclusión de que es evidente que en un periodo histórico de rápida transformación en cuestiones de género, las artistas descubrieron en Ofelia una figura que encarna el sometimiento histórico de la mujer y que al mismo tiempo abre espacios para imaginarse identidades alternativas. El tercer capítulo, «The Myth of Ophelia in the Narratives of Clara Janés and Menchu Gutiérrez,» comienza con una indagación sobre el estatus icónico de Ofelia, que a pesar de ser un personaje secundario en *Hamlet*, con el tiempo se ha transformado en un ser mítico que si en el siglo XIX se convirtió en objeto pasivo de deseo de pintores y poetas, a partir de finales del siglo XX atrajo la atención de feministas que utilizan la figura para exponer el impacto del patriarcado y le dan voz a Ofelia. En este capítulo, Keefe Ugalde profundiza en la naturaleza de la autobiografía como género para analizar la novela de Clara Janés *Los caballos del sueño*, sus memorias *Jardín y laberinto* y *La voz de Ofelia*. Tanto Janés como Menchu Gutiérrez, en su novela *Desección de una tormenta*, utilizan

a Ofelia como cómplice en un viaje de autodescubrimiento, haciendo hincapié en la relación de la figura con el orden semiótico. Ambas encuentran que el personaje shakesperiano puede contribuir eficazmente a la expresión de amplios conceptos filosóficos, psicológicos y sociológicos. Sin embargo, mientras Janés encuentra en la historia de Ofelia una figura por medio de la cual incia una exploración gozosa que culmina en una recuperación de la agencia, para Gutiérrez, Ofelia es modelo de la abyección, un estado psicológico sin resolución positiva.

El cuarto capítulo, «Ophelia Takes Center Stage,» analiza a dramaturgos del cambio de milenio que reconsideran el comportamiento de Ofelia y fundamentan las amplias implicaciones de la política de género y la decadencia social veladas en su historia. Al meterse en el «viejo texto» desde nuevas direcciones, Margarita Borja, Eduardo Quiles y Manuel Molins ofrecen perspectivas perspicaces sobre la universalidad de Hamlet, pero consiguen mantener la atención del espectador en Ofelia, que deja de ser personaje secundario. En *Helénica, Poemas para 'El Público'»* Borja traza los ciclos de la vida de Ofelia, que en el primer acto es una adolescente en proceso de auto-exploración, pero que todavía imita sus representaciones decimonónicas. Para el final, una «Ofelia Oscura» vestida de negro, que sale de entre el público, denuncia a la tradición literaria: «El último que dijo que las lágrimas de mujer eran perlas fue imbécil» (124). *Una Ofelia sin Hamlet* de Eduardo Quiles presenta a una Ofelia moderna, esposa de un dentista a quien sospecha de ser infiel, posición social que la retiene atrapada en un ciclo de represión sexual y subordinación —las mismas causas subyacentes que la locura de la Ofelia original. En *Una altra Ofèlia* Manuel Molina invita al público a reconocer las similitudes entre la Ofelia de Shakespeare y el actual maltrato psicológico de las mujeres.

El quinto capítulo, «From Madwoman to Cyborg: Marina Nuñez's Ophelias,» toma como punto de partida la exhibición de Nuñez del 1997 en el Museo Nacional Centro de Arte Reina Sofía, que se enfoca en imágenes de la locura. El uso persistente de vestidos blancos y flores establecen un vínculo no sólo con las Ofelias de la tradición pre-rafaelita pictórica, sino que también desmienten la validez científica de las fotografías documentales de Jean-Martin Charcot tomadas en el hospital psiquiátrico La Salpêtrière de París donde Charcot vestía y posaba a sus *locas* como Ofelias. Las Ofelias de

Nuñez no son objetos hermosos. Tanto en esa serie como en las sirenas de *Sin título (monstruas)*, sus imágenes enfatizan la lucha y el confinamiento de la pasividad y dependencia que tradicionalmente se le han impuesto a Ofelia.

El siguiente capítulo, «Ofelia in Front of the Lens,» revela las numerosas reconfiguraciones de Ofelia en el arte fotográfico desde la Trascición. Eugènia Balcells manipula múltiples fotocopias de la Ofelia de Millais para contrastar las diferencias en la alta cultura y la popular, pero también para denunciar cómo se borró la subjetividad femenina en el régimen patriarcal de Franco. Los fotógrafos no se limitan a explorar el impacto de los límites a la feminidad y también estudian sujetos queer, como en el caso de Alex Francés y sus reconfiguraciones del cuadro de John William Waterhouse y en la serie *Baño de lágrimas* que dismitifian el sufrimiento y el suicidio. Este capítulo muy completo también analiza las obras de Carmen García (con escenas de la naturaleza, celebratorias con figuras femeninas que al contrario de la Ofelia de Shakespeare resucitan en el agua) y los autoretratos de Rocío Verdejo (que transmite un esperanzador estado de renovación al situar sus figuras de Ofelia en la tranquilidad de los entornos naturales) y Leila Amat Ortega (cuya *La Aristócrata Suicida* parece compartir la situación de Ofelia, con la derrota ante las circunstancias abrumadoras).

Por último, Keefe Ugalde termina su libro con el epílogo «Ophelia: Refigurations in the Arts, Reiterations in the Fashion Industry» que une perfectamente sus temas principales, al señalar el contraste entre las obras analizadas que dialogan con la figura icónica de Ofelia y la continuidad de los aspectos más dañinos del uso de las características de esta figura en la industria de la moda. Explica que la palidez, el aspecto demacrado, el aire de vulnerabilidad, la mirada distante y enloquecida y la inmersión en el agua de las Ophelias prerrafaelistas no pasan por un cambio de imagen al entrar en el mundo de la alta costura comercial (209), contribuyendo a la epidemia de trastornos como la anorexia.

*Ophelia: Shakespeare and Gender in Contemporary Spain* de Sharon Keefe Ugalde es un libro impecablemente bien escrito, con un nivel superior de investigación que lleva a un análisis completo de la reconfiguraciones de la figura de Ofelia en las producciones culturales españolas. Pero el libro es mucho más que un estudio sobre Ofelia, ya que por medio de esta figura traza parte de la historia del feminismo ibérico al indagar en las conexiones entre

cómo se representa a Ofelia en ciertos momentos históricos, con la situación de las mujeres reales en España desde el siglo XIX hasta el momento presente. Keefe Ugalde escribe con una extraordinaria habilidad y profundidad de conocimiento. Para apoyar las lecturas a fondo de las obras analizadas, la edición cuenta con treinta y una reproducciones en color que enriquecen la lectura de este libro importante, no solo para el estudio de la literatura peninsular, sino en general para los estudios de género.



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- FEMINISMO/S 35

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- j) a final recommendation: publish | ask for modifications | reject.

## COVERAGE DISSEMINATION AND PRESENCE IN DATABASES

The journal is indexed in ESCI (WOS), DOAJ, REDIB, Gender Watch (Proquest), InDICES-CSIC, ERIH PLUS, MLA, CIRC, MIAR, Latindex, Dialnet, Ulrich's, Dulcinea, Google Scholar, SHERPA/RoMEO, RUA, DICE, REBIUN, RESH, OCLC WorldCat, Copac, SUDOC and ZDB/EZB.

## GENDER EQUALITY POLICIES

*Feminismo/s* offers a platform for expression and critical debate in the fields of gender studies and feminist theory. Therefore, the journal is steadfastly committed to implementing gender policies and promoting equality between women and men in society at all levels:

- The composition of the Editorial Team and the Advisory Board, made up mostly of women, as well as gender representation among manuscript reviewers, are proof of the journal's efforts to encourage women's participation and visibility in academia.
- The journal's contents, objectives and methodologies promote a critical analysis of gender relations in a heteropatriarchal society and seek to shed light on how the power relations underlying gender-based discrimination are organised and manifested in the sociocultural and scientific spheres.
- The Editorial Team of *Feminismo/s* makes sure that all research works avoid gender stereotypes and biases whereby men are regarded as the

universal point of reference, biological differences are exacerbated or socially constructed differences are seen as natural.

- The journal ensures that the sex variable is considered in published research of any kind concerning persons, animals, tissues or cells, which involves:
  - Reflecting and making well-founded decisions on sample composition by sex and providing information about the sex of the subjects analysed.
  - Analysing existing differences within each sex and presenting results disaggregated by sex.

Researchers interested in publishing in this journal should consult the [practical guide for the inclusion of the gender perspective in research contents](#).

- Likewise, the editorial policies of *Feminismo/s* include the requirement to use inclusive language in all articles, in order to take into account the presence and situation of women in society and in accordance with the principle of gender equality. The Editorial Team requires authors to use gender-neutral terms or explanatory phrases rather than masculine terms to refer to classes or groups of individuals, whether male or female, to omit references to the subject or, if none of the above is possible, to make reference to both women and men in the text. For further details and recommendations, researchers interested in publishing in this journal should consult the [University of Alicante's inclusive language guide](#).

## PUBLICATION ETHICS AND MALPRACTICE STATEMENT

The publication of articles in a peer-review journal is a direct reflection of the quality of the work of their authors, and the commitment and qualifications of the researchers who act as reviewers. Therefore *Feminismo/s* is a publication committed to the ethical principles of scientific activity on the following terms:



## 1. Publication and authorship

All manuscripts must include a list of references, and indicate whether they have received financial support. Works must be free of plagiarism or scientific fraud. Illustrative cases\* of plagiarism and scientific fraud can be consulted in a non-exhaustive list below:

- Plagiarism: literal copy without quoting and referencing the source; substantial copying (research materials, processes, tables...); paraphrasing or reproducing ideas without citing the source and/or changing the original meaning; text-recycling (reusing a published own text) without indicating the source, and abusive paraphrasing even quoting the source.
- Scientific fraud: no recognition of all the participating researchers in the study, simultaneous submission to several publications, the division of a work in different parts ('slices') that share the same hypotheses, population and methods, as well as the use of false or unproven data. Finally, the authors should disclose potential conflicts of interest to the journal when a manuscript is sent.

\* Source: <http://www.ethics.elsevier.com/>

## 2. Authors' Responsibility

- The manuscripts submission to *Feminismo/s* involves reading and acceptance of the journal publishing guidelines, including participation in an anonymous peer-review process.
- All authors signing a work must have contributed significantly to its development and must agree both with the end result and with the manuscript submission for evaluation.
- Manuscripts must acknowledge all authors who have participated in their elaboration.
- Data used in the article must be real and authentic
- The authors assume the obligation to retract/correct when possible errors are later detected.
- Articles must be original and cannot be sent simultaneously to any other publication.

### 3. Review Process

All articles submitted to the journal are subjected to a peer review process with the following characteristics:

- The selection of reviewers is done according to rules and principles based on both their qualification and the quality of their scientific production.
- The review process will be totally anonymous both for authors and for reviewers. Manuscripts and reviews will be treated confidentially.
- Reviewers will take into account for their evaluation criteria the respect for the ethical principles that are essential in scientific research.
- The judgments expressed in the reviews should be objective.
- Authors and reviewers should disclose all relationships and funding sources that could generate potential conflicts of interest.

### 4. Editors' Responsibilities

- The editorial board has the responsibility and authority to accept or reject a manuscript based on the peer reviews.
- The editorial board will reveal any relationships or funding sources that could potentially be considered conflicts of interest regarding the rejection or the acceptance of manuscripts.
- The journal only accepts manuscripts when reasonably certain of compliance with editorial standards.
- The editorial team is committed to preserve the anonymity of the reviewers so that they can never be associated with the reviewed manuscripts.

### 5. Publishing ethical Issues

The editorial board is committed to:

- Monitoring and maintaining the publishing ethics.
- Maintaining the integrity of the academic record.
- Avoid publishing plagiarized or fraudulently prepared material.
- Be willing to publish corrections, clarifications, retractions and apologies when needed.

- Provide support in the process of retracting articles.
- Perform all actions required to meet the standards of intellectual and ethical commitment.

## 6. Plagiarism policy

*Feminismo/s* Editorial Board is responsible for checking that the works submitted are original and do not incur plagiarism. The University of Alicante uses a software programme called Turnitin for this purpose. It is a tool that prevents and avoids academic and professional plagiarism by proving the similarities of a document with multiple sources of information (Internet, scientific articles and its internal database) and identifying non-original content translated from English. Additionally, the Editorial Board has a number of free plagiarism detection programs available on the UA website, such as *Copyscape*, *Plagium*, *PlagScan*, *Dupli Checker*, *Plagiarisma*, *Article Checker*, *Viper* and *Antiplagiarist* (<https://biblioteca.ua.es/en/investiga-y-publica/pi/plagiarism.html>)

The Editorial Board reserves the right to withdraw any work received, accepted or already published if plagiarism, falsification or duplicate publication is detected, as well as the various cases of scientific misconduct listed above. Likewise, it promotes the publication of corrections or retractions in the face of detected errors.

## DISCLAIMER

Regarding the provisions in articles 138-143 of the Spanish Law on Intellectual Property, the publication of a work prejudicial to those rights shall be the responsibility of the author. The editorial board of *Feminismo/s* is not responsible, in any case, for the credibility and authenticity of the works. In the same way, the opinions and facts expressed in each article are the sole responsibility of the authors and *Feminismo/s* does not necessarily agree with them.

## COPYRIGHT WARNING

Authors who publish in *Feminismo/s* agree to the following terms:

1. Authors will retain the rights on their work, even if they will be granting *Feminismo/s* a non-exclusive right of use to reproduce, edit, distribute, publicly communicate and show their work. Therefore, authors are free to engage in additional, independent contracts for non-exclusive distribution of the works published in this journal (such as uploading them to an institutional repository or publishing them in a book), as long as the fact that the manuscripts were first published in this journal is acknowledged.
2. Authors assure that *Feminismo/s* is the first medium that publishes their work and guarantee that while it is being assessed for possible publication in our journal, it has not been submitted or will be submitted to other media.
3. Works are published under a 4.0 Creative Commons Attribution license (CC BY 4.0), unless otherwise specified, which means that the material can be shared and adapted as long as it is attributable to the author, the first medium published and a link to the license is provided. Likewise, any modification on the original work must be reported
4. Authors are allowed – and encouraged – to publish their works electronically after publication in *Feminismo/s* (as well as in institutional repositories, on its website...) in order to achieve fruitful exchanges and more citations of the work (See The Effect of Open Access, in English).

## POLÍTICA DE ACCESO ABIERTO

*Feminismo/s* se ofrece a la comunidad investigadora en acceso abierto inmediato a su contenido, sin ningún tipo de periodo de embargo, basado en el principio de que ofrecer al público un acceso libre a las investigaciones ayuda a un mayor intercambio global de conocimiento. En este sentido, *Feminismo/s* sigue la política de acceso abierto definida por la Declaración de Budapest (BOAI, 2002): «disponibilidad gratuita en la Internet pública, para que cualquier usuario la pueda leer, descargar, copiar, distribuir, imprimir, con la posibilidad de buscar o enlazar todos los textos de estos artículos, recorrerlos para indexación exhaustiva, usarlos como datos para software, o utilizarlos para cualquier otro propósito legal, sin barreras financieras, legales o técnicas, distintas de la fundamental de ganar acceso a la propia Internet».

*Feminismo/s* es una revista científica sin ánimo de lucro y por tanto no contempla el abono de ninguna tasa por presentación/envío de manuscritos ni tampoco ninguna cuota por la publicación de artículos.

## CÓMO PRESENTAR UN ORIGINAL

1. Los trabajos serán el resultado de una investigación original y deberán contener conclusiones novedosas apoyadas en una metodología debidamente planteada y justificada. Sólo se admitirán trabajos inéditos que no estén en proceso de evaluación por otras revistas.
2. La extensión de los trabajos presentados no excederá de 9000 palabras, incluidas notas y bibliografía.
3. El número y extensión de las notas al pie se reducirá a lo indispensable.

4. Los autores someterán sus artículos en Word a través del correo electrónico de la revista ([revistafeminismos@ua.es](mailto:revistafeminismos@ua.es)) y deberán aportar **imprescindiblemente**:

- En hoja aparte: nombre del autor o de la autora, institución a la que pertenece, código ORCID, dirección profesional completa y dirección electrónica.
- Archivo del texto en formato Word, **ANONIMADO**, con:
  - El título en español y en inglés.
  - Un resumen de unas 150 palabras en español, y su correcta versión inglesa. Este resumen deberá atenerse al siguiente esquema: objetivos del trabajo, metodología y conclusiones o tesis.
  - Cinco palabras-clave en español, y su correcta versión inglesa.
  - El texto del original.

5. Los trabajos se someterán a un proceso de selección y evaluación anónimo y por pares, según el procedimiento y los criterios hechos públicos por la revista.

## NORMAS EDITORIALES Y DE ESTILO

### Directrices para autoras/es

La revista *Feminismo/s* publica dos tipos de trabajos: artículos de investigación y reseñas de libros. El Consejo de Redacción establece las normas generales que se describen a continuación.

La revista no cobra tasas por envío de trabajos, ni tampoco cuotas por la publicación de sus artículos.

Se aceptan trabajos en inglés o español.

Para poder enviar un artículo las/los autoras/es deben **Iniciar sesión** o **Registrarse** si no lo han hecho con anterioridad.

## ARTÍCULOS DE INVESTIGACIÓN

- Los artículos de investigación, que deberán ser inéditos, tendrán una extensión máxima de 9.000 palabras con las notas y cuadros inclusive (salvo excepciones justificadas, previa autorización del Consejo de Redacción).
- Deberán estar escritos con letra Times New Roman 12. El texto se presentará debidamente justificado y con un interlineado de 1'5. La primera línea de cada párrafo irá sangrada.
- Los diferentes **apartados del texto** se ordenarán siguiendo la numeración arábiga (1, 2, 3,...) y el título de cada uno de ellos irá en letra mayúscula y en negrita. Los subapartados se enumerarán de la siguiente manera: 1.1, 1.2, 1.3, etc. y sus títulos irán en minúscula y en negrita.
- Las **notas al pie**, escritas con letra Times New Roman 10, se reducirán a lo indispensable, se utilizarán solo para información suplementaria y en ningún caso serán bibliográficas. La llamada en el texto irá antes del signo de puntuación.
- Después de las conclusiones, el artículo finalizará con un apartado de **Referencias bibliográficas** en el que se coloquen, siguiendo un criterio alfabético y cronológico (en caso de haber varias obras de una misma autora/ un mismo autor), todos los trabajos que se citan a lo largo del artículo. Es importante que cada referencia bibliográfica acabe con un punto y que se deje un salto de línea en blanco entre las referencias. Ver [Normas de citación y referencias](#).
- **Las fotografías e imágenes** se entregarán en formato digital, separadas del texto, en formato tif, con una calidad de 300 puntos por pulgada. Deben ir identificadas convenientemente según sean citadas en el texto.
- En su primera versión los artículos deberán presentarse de forma anónima (sin autorreferencias que desvelen la autoría, sin menciones a proyectos de investigación en los que se inscriba el artículo y

sin información personal en las propiedades del documento), garantizando de este modo el doble ciego en el proceso de evaluación externa.

- Si el artículo fuera aceptado para su publicación, el texto definitivo deberá ir firmado en la primera página, después del título (alineado a la derecha) y los datos sobre la autoría y la afiliación institucional tendrán que aparecer en este orden:
  - El nombre de la autora/ del autor.
  - La institución a la que pertenece (de forma desarrollada y sin siglas) y la ciudad en la que se encuentra la institución.
  - El correo electrónico de la autora/ del autor.
  - El identificador científico ORCID. Ejemplo: <https://orcid.org/0000-0002-1825-0097>.
- Al inicio de cada artículo, e independientemente del idioma en el que esté redactado, siempre se añadirá el título del trabajo (en español y en inglés) y un resumen con una extensión máxima de 150 palabras (en español y en inglés), en el que se describa la justificación del objeto de estudio, los objetivos, la metodología, los principales resultados y las conclusiones más relevantes. Se deberá incluir también entre 4 y 8 palabras clave (en español y en inglés), separadas por punto y coma.
- Además, en archivo aparte, que se adjuntará en la plataforma OJS («Cargar los archivos complementarios»), se incluirá una breve nota curricular, de una extensión aproximada de unas 10 líneas, sobre la formación académica, situación profesional y labor investigadora de la autora/ del autor.
- El incumplimiento de estos criterios básicos podrá ser motivo de exclusión del proceso de evaluación por pares.
- La corrección de las primeras pruebas correrá a cargo de las/los autoras/es, para lo que dispondrán de un plazo máximo de 10 días.



## RESEÑAS DE LIBROS

- Las reseñas de libros de reciente publicación (de los dos últimos años) tendrán una extensión máxima de 1.500 palabras, especificándose el autor o la autora o editor/a, título, lugar de publicación, editorial, fecha de publicación, ISBN y número de páginas.
- El autor/la autora de la reseña, facilitará su nombre y apellidos, afiliación institucional, dirección de correo electrónico e identificador ORCID.
- Es aconsejable el envío, como un archivo complementario, de una imagen de la cubierta principal de la publicación reseñada.
- El autor/la autora seguirá las instrucciones del apartado [Normas de citación y referencias](#).

### Lista de comprobación para la preparación de envíos

Como parte del proceso de envío, las autoras/los autores están obligadas/os a comprobar que su envío cumpla todos los elementos que se muestran a continuación. Se devolverán a las autoras/ los autores aquellos envíos que no cumplan estas directrices.

1. El envío no ha sido publicado previamente ni se ha sometido a consideración por ninguna otra revista (o se ha proporcionado una explicación al respecto en los Comentarios al editor/a).
2. El archivo de envío está en formato Microsoft Word (.DOCX) u Open Document Format (.ODT).
3. Siempre que sea posible, se proporcionan los identificadores DOI para las referencias.
4. El texto tiene interlineado de 1,5; 12 puntos de tamaño de fuente Times New Roman; se utiliza cursiva en lugar de subrayado (excepto en las direcciones URL); y todas las ilustraciones, figuras y tablas se encuentran colocadas en los lugares del texto apropiados, en vez de al final.
5. El texto se adhiere a los requisitos estilísticos y bibliográficos resumidos en las [Directrices del autor/a](#), que aparecen en Acerca de la revista.

6. Si se envía a una sección evaluada por pares de la revista, deben seguirse las instrucciones en [Asegurar una evaluación anónima](#).
7. Cumple con las normas recogidas en [Normas de citación y referencias](#).

## NORMAS DE CITACIÓN Y REFERENCIAS

La revista se acoge al sistema APA para la citación y referenciación en el texto, así como para la elaboración de la lista final de referencias bibliográficas. No se someterá a evaluación ningún artículo no adaptado a APA.

Las normas están disponibles en <https://apastyle.apa.org/>

## CÓMO PROPONER UN DOSIER MONOGRÁFICO

La propuesta de un dossier monográfico para la revista *Feminismo/s* se hará llegar a la directora de la revista ([Helena.Establier@ua.es](mailto:Helena.Establier@ua.es)) y contendrá la siguiente información:

1. Título provisional del dossier monográfico.
2. Un C.V. completo de la coordinadora/del coordinador (o de las coordinadoras/los coordinadores) del mismo.
3. Una descripción de sus objetivos y una justificación de la oportunidad del tema del dossier (300 palabras).
4. Un listado provisional de participantes en el volumen, acompañado de una breve reseña bio-bibliográfica de cada una/uno de ellas/os, de los títulos de los trabajos previstos y de un breve resumen de cada uno donde se incluyan los objetivos previstos (150 palabras).
5. Las propuestas serán consideradas por el Consejo de Redacción de *Feminismo/s* en el plazo máximo de un mes a partir de la fecha de recepción de las mismas.

## PROCESO DE EVALUACIÓN POR PARES

- 1) Los originales recibidos son valorados, en primera instancia, por el Consejo de Redacción de la revista para decidir sobre su adecuación a las áreas de conocimiento y a los requisitos que la revista ha publicado para los/las autores/as.
- 2) El Consejo de Redacción envía los originales, sin el nombre del autor o de la autora, a dos revisores/as externos/as al Consejo Editorial. Sobre esos dictámenes, el Consejo de Redacción decide rechazar o aceptar el artículo o solicitar modificaciones al autor o a la autora del trabajo. Los/las autores/as reciben una notificación detallada y motivada donde se expone, retocado, el contenido de los informes originales, con indicaciones concretas para la modificación si es el caso. *Feminismo/s* puede enviar a los/las autores/as los informes originales recibidos, íntegros o en parte, siempre de forma anónima.
- 3) El informe emitido por los/las revisores/as incluye:
  - a) una valoración global del artículo y de los resúmenes.
  - b) una valoración cuantitativa de la calidad (buena | aceptable | insuficiente) según estos cinco criterios: originalidad e interés del tema; pertinencia en relación con las investigaciones actuales en el área; rigor metodológico; bibliografía significativa y actualizada; pulcritud formal y articulación expositiva.
  - c) una recomendación final: publicar | solicitar modificaciones | rechazar.

## COBERTURA, DIFUSIÓN Y PRESENCIA EN BASES DE DATOS

La revista está indizada en ESCI (WOS), DOAJ, REDIB, GenderWatch (ProQuest), InDICES-CSIC, ERIH PLUS, MLA, CIRC, MLAR, Latindex, Dialnet, Ulrich's, Dulcinea, Google Scholar, SHERPA/RoMEO, RUA, DICE, REBIUN, RESH, OCLC WorldCat, Copac, SUDOC y ZDB/EZB.

## POLÍTICAS DE IGUALDAD DE GÉNERO

La revista *Feminismo/s* constituye un espacio de expresión y debate crítico en el ámbito de los Estudios de Género y de la Teoría Feminista, y por tanto, su compromiso con las políticas de género y con la igualdad entre mujeres y hombres en nuestra sociedad es incontrovertible a todos los niveles:

- La composición del Equipo Editorial y del Consejo Asesor, integrados en su mayoría por mujeres, así como la nómina de personas evaluadoras, responde al principio de la revista de incentivar la participación y la visibilidad de las mujeres en el ámbito académico.
- Los contenidos, los objetivos y las metodologías de la revista promueven el análisis crítico de las relaciones de género en la sociedad heteropatriarcal, y tratan de revelar cómo las relaciones de poder que subyacen a la discriminación por razones de género se configuran y materializan en el ámbito sociocultural y científico.
- El Equipo Editorial de *Feminismo/s* vela por que todos los trabajos de investigación eviten los estereotipos y los sesgos de género que adoptan lo masculino como referente universal, exacerbando las diferencias biológicas o naturalizan las diferencias socialmente construidas.
- La revista garantiza que cualquier tipo de investigación publicada sobre personas, animales, tejidos o células contemple la variable sexo, es decir:
  - Reflexiona y decide fundamentadamente sobre la composición por sexos de las muestras e informe del sexo de los sujetos investigados.
  - Analiza las diferencias existentes dentro de cada uno de los sexos y presenta los resultados desagregados por sexo.

A este respecto, se recomienda al personal investigador interesado en publicar en la revista la consulta de la [Guía práctica para la inclusión de la perspectiva de género en los contenidos de la investigación](#).

- De la misma manera, entre las políticas editoriales de *Feminismo/s* se encuentra el uso imperativo de un lenguaje inclusivo en todos sus artículos, que tenga en cuenta la presencia y situación de las mujeres

en la sociedad y que sea acorde con el principio de igualdad entre los sexos. A este respecto, el Equipo Editorial vela por la sustitución del masculino genérico para designar a todos los individuos de la clase o el grupo, sean hombres o mujeres, por términos de valor genérico o sintagmas explicativos, por la omisión de referencias al sujeto y, cuando nada de lo anterior es posible, por el uso de fórmulas desdobladas. Para un desarrollo más concreto de alternativas y propuestas de uso, se recomienda al personal investigador interesado en publicar en la revista la consulta de la [Guía para un discurso igualitario en la Universidad de Alicante](#).

## PRINCIPIOS ÉTICOS DE PUBLICACIÓN

La publicación de artículos en una revista con revisión por pares es un reflejo directo de la calidad del trabajo de sus autoras/es, y del compromiso y cualificación de los investigadoras/es que actúan como revisoras/es. Por ello *Feminismo/s* es una publicación comprometida con los principios éticos de la actividad científica en los siguientes términos:

### 1. Publicación y autoría

Todos los artículos deben incluir un listado de referencias, así como indicar si han recibido apoyo económico. Los trabajos deben estar libres de plagio o fraude científico, cuyos supuestos\* se enumeran de manera no exhaustiva a continuación:

- Plagio: copia literal sin entrecomillar y citar la fuente; copia sustancial (materiales de investigación, procesos, tablas...); parafrasear o reproducir ideas sin citar la fuente y/o cambiando el significado original; reutilizar y enviar textos propios ya publicados sin indicar la fuente y el parafraseo abusivo incluso citando la fuente.
- Fraude científico: no reconocimiento de todas/os las/los investigadoras/es participantes en la elaboración del trabajo, el envío simultáneo a varias publicaciones, la división de un trabajo en partes diferentes que comparten las mismas hipótesis, población y métodos, así como

la utilización de datos falsos o no probados. Finalmente, las/los autoras/es deben declarar a la revista los potenciales conflictos de interés cuando envían un trabajo.

\* Fuente: <http://www.ethics.elsevier.com/>

## 2. Responsabilidad de las/los autoras/es

- El envío de trabajos a *Feminismos/s* supone la lectura y aceptación de las normas editoriales y de publicación de la revista, incluida la participación en un proceso anónimo de evaluación por pares.
- Todas/os las/los autoras/es que firman un trabajo deben haber contribuido de manera significativa a su elaboración y deben estar de acuerdo con el resultado final y con el envío del trabajo para su evaluación.
- Los trabajos deben reconocer a todas/os las/los autoras/ que han participado en su elaboración.
- Los datos utilizados en el artículo deben ser reales y auténticos.
- Las/los autoras/es asumen la obligación de corregir y/o retractarse ante posibles errores detectados posteriormente.
- Los artículos han de ser inéditos y no pueden ser enviados simultáneamente a ninguna otra publicación.

## 3. Proceso de revisión

Todos los artículos enviados a la revista se someten a un proceso de revisión por pares con las siguientes características:

- La selección de los revisores se realiza en función de normas y principios previos basados tanto en su cualificación como en la calidad de su producción científica.
- El proceso de revisión será totalmente anónimo tanto para las/ los autoras/es como para las/los revisoras/es. Los artículos y sus revisiones serán tratados confidencialmente.
- Las/los revisoras/es consideran, entre sus criterios de evaluación, el respeto a los principios éticos esenciales en la investigación científica.
- Los juicios expresados en las revisiones deben ser objetivos.

- Tanto autoras/es como revisoras/es deben revelar las relaciones y fuentes de financiación que puedan generar potenciales conflictos de intereses.

#### 4. Responsabilidades de las editoras/editores

- El equipo editorial tiene la responsabilidad y la autoridad para aceptar o rechazar un artículo basándose en las revisiones.
- El equipo editorial revelará en su caso las relaciones o fuentes de financiación que puedan ser potencialmente consideradas como conflictos de intereses respecto a los artículos que rechaza o acepta.
- Sólo se aceptarán los artículos en los que existe una evidencia cierta sobre el cumplimiento de las normas editoriales.
- El equipo editorial se compromete a preservar el anonimato de las/ los revisoras/revisores de manera que nunca puedan asociarse con los artículos revisados.

#### 5. Cuestiones éticas de publicación

El equipo editorial se compromete a:

- Vigilar y preservar los principios éticos de publicación.
- Mantener la integridad del expediente académico.
- Evitar la publicación de material plagiado o elaborado de manera fraudulenta.
- Estar abierto a la publicación de correcciones, clarificaciones, retractaciones y disculpas siempre que sea necesario.
- Ofrecer apoyo en el proceso de retractación de artículos.
- Realizar todas las acciones necesarias para cumplir los estándares de compromiso intelectual y ético.

#### 6. Política anti-plagio

El Consejo de Redacción de *Feminismo/s* es responsable de comprobar que los trabajos presentados sean originales y no incurran en plagio. La Universidad de Alicante cuenta con software específico a tal efecto, como *Turnitin*, una herramienta para prevenir y evitar el plagio académico y profesional que

comprueba las similitudes de un documento con múltiples fuentes de información (Internet, artículos científicos y con su base de datos interna) e identifica el contenido no original traducido del inglés. Adicionalmente, el Consejo de Redacción tiene a su disposición, a través de la página web de la U.A. una serie de programas gratuitos de detección del plagio, tales como *Copyscape*, *Plagium*, *PlagScan*, *Dupli Checker*, *Plagiarisma*, *Article Checker*, *Viper* o *Antiplagiarist* (<https://biblioteca.ua.es/es/investiga-y-publica/pi/plagio.html>)

El Consejo de Redacción se reserva el derecho de retirar cualquier trabajo recibido, aceptado o ya publicado en caso de constatare plagio, falsificación o publicación duplicada, así como los diversos supuestos de fraude científico anteriormente enumerados. Del mismo modo, promueve la publicación de correcciones o retractaciones frente a errores detectados.

## AVISO LEGAL

A efectos de lo estipulado en los artículos 138-143 de la Ley de Propiedad Intelectual, la publicación de un trabajo que atente contra dichos derechos será responsabilidad de la autora o del autor. El equipo editorial de *Feminismo/s* no se hace responsable, en ningún caso, de la credibilidad y autenticidad de los trabajos. Del mismo modo, las opiniones y hechos expresados en cada artículo son de exclusiva responsabilidad de sus autoras/es y *Feminismo/s* no se identifica necesariamente con ellas/os.

## AVISO DE DERECHOS DE AUTOR/A

Las/los autoras/es que publican en *Feminismo/s* están de acuerdo en los siguientes términos:

1. Las/Los autoras/es conservan los derechos sobre sus trabajos, aunque ceden de forma no exclusiva los derechos de explotación (reproducción, edición, distribución, comunicación pública y exhibición) a la revista. Las/los autoras/es son, por tanto, libres de hacer acuerdos contractuales adicionales



independientes para la distribución no exclusiva de la versión de la obra publicada en la revista (por ejemplo, alojarlo en un repositorio institucional o publicarlo en un libro), siempre que medie un reconocimiento de su publicación inicial en esta revista.

2. Las/los autoras/es aseguran que *Feminismo/s* es el primer medio que publica su obra y garantizan que mientras se encuentra en fase de valoración y posible publicación en nuestra revista no se ha enviado ni enviará a otros medios.

3. Los trabajos se publican bajo una licencia de Creative Commons Reconocimiento 4.0 (CC BY 4.0), salvo que se indique lo contrario, lo cual significa que se puede compartir y adaptar el material siempre que medie atribución del autor/a, del primer medio que publica y se proporcione un enlace a la licencia. Igualmente hay que indicar si se han realizado cambios.

4. Se permite y alienta a los/las autores/as a publicar su obra electrónicamente tras su publicación en *Feminismo/s* (como en repositorios institucionales, en su página web...) con el fin de lograr intercambios productivos y conseguir que la obra logre mayor citación (véase *The Effect of Open Access*, en inglés).



## POLÍTICA D'ACCÉS OBERT

*Feminismo/s* s'ofereix a la comunitat investigadora en accés obert immediat al seu contingut, sense cap tipus de període d'embargament, basat en el principi que oferir al públic un accés lliure a les investigacions ajuda a un major intercanvi global de coneixement. En aquest sentit, *Feminismo/s* segueix la política d'accés obert definida per la Declaració de Budapest (BOAI, 2002): «disponibilitat gratuïta en la Internet pública, perquè qualsevol usuari la pugui llegir, descarregar, copiar, distribuir, imprimir, amb la possibilitat de cercar o enllaçar tots els textos d'aquests articles, recórrer-los per a indexació exhaustiva, usar-los com a dades per a programari, o utilitzar-los per a qualsevol altre propòsit legal, sense barreres financeres, legals o tècniques, diferents de la fonamental de guanyar accés a la pròpia Internet»

*Feminismo/s* és una revista científica sense ànim de lucre i per tant no contempla l'abonament de cap taxa per presentació/enviament de manuscrits ni tampoc cap quota per la publicació d'articles.

## COM PRESENTAR UN ORIGINAL

1. Els treballs seran el resultat d'una investigació original i hauran de contenir conclusions noves que tinguin el suport d'una metodologia degudament plantejada i justificada. Només s'admetran treballs inèdits que no estiguen en procés d'avaluació per altres revistes.
2. L'extensió dels treballs presentats no excedirà les 9.000 paraules, incloent-hi notes i bibliografia.
3. El nombre i l'extensió de les notes a peu es reduirà a allò que siga indispensable.

4. Les autores o autors sotmetran els seus articles en Word a través del correu electrònic de la revista ([revistafeminismos@ua.es](mailto:revistafeminismos@ua.es)) i hauran d'aportar **imprescindiblement**:

- En full a part: nom de l'autor o de l'autora, institució a la qual pertany, codi ORCID, adreça professional completa i adreça electrònica.
- Arxiu del text en format Word, ANONIMAT, amb:
  - El títol en espanyol i en anglès.
  - Un resum d'unes 150 paraules en espanyol, i la correcta versió anglesa. Aquest resum haurà d'atenir-se a l'esquema següent: objectius del treball, metodologia i conclusions o tesis.
  - Cinc paraules-clau en espanyol, i la correcta versió anglesa.
  - El text de l'original.

5. Els treballs seran sotmesos a un procés de selecció i avaluació anònim i d'experts, segons el procediment i els criteris fets públics per la revista.

## NORMES EDITORIALS I D'ESTILS

### Directrius per a autores/autors

La revista *Feminismo/s* publica dos tipus de treballs: articles d'investigació i ressenyes de llibres. El Consell de Redacció estableix les normes generals que es descriuen a continuació.

La revista no cobra taxes per enviament de treballs, ni tampoc quotes per la publicació dels articles.

S'accepten treballs en anglès o espanyol.

Per a poder enviar un article les autores o els autors han d'iniciar **sessió** o **registrar-s'hi** si no ho han fet amb anterioritat.

### ARTICLES D'INVESTIGACIÓ

- Els articles d'investigació, que hauran de ser inèdits, tindran una extensió màxima de 9.000 paraules amb les notes i quadres inclusivament (excepte excepcions justificades, amb l'autorització del Consell de Redacció).

- Hauran d'estar escrits amb lletra Times New Roman 12. El text es presentarà degudament justificat i amb un interlineat d'1'5. La primera línia de cada paràgraf estarà sagnada.
- Els diferents **apartats del text** s'ordenaran seguint la numeració àrbiga (1, 2, 3,...) i el títol de cadascun estarà en lletra majúscula i en negreta. Els subapartats s'enumeraran de la manera següent: 1.1, 1.2, 1.3, etc. i els títols estaran en minúscula i en negreta.
- Les **notes al peu**, escrites amb lletra Times New Roman 10, es reduiran a allò indispensable, s'utilitzaran només per a informació suplementària i en cap cas seran bibliogràfiques. La crida en el text anirà abans del signe de puntuació.
- Després de les conclusions, l'article acabarà amb un apartat de Referències **bibliogràfiques** en el qual es col·loquen, seguint un criteri alfabètic i cronològic (en cas d'haver-hi diverses obres d'un/a mateix/a autor/a), tots els treballs que se citen al llarg de l'article. És important que cada referència bibliogràfica acabe amb un punt i que es deixi un salt de línia en blanc entre les referències. Vegeu **Normes de citació i referències**.
- **Les fotografies i imatges** es lliuraran en format digital, separades del text, en format Tif, amb una qualitat de 300 punts per polzada. Han d'estar identificades convenientment segons siguin citades en el text.
- En la primera versió els articles hauran de ser presentats de manera anònima (sense autoreferències que revelen l'autoria, sense esments a projectes d'investigació en els quals s'inscriu l'article i sense informació personal en les propietats del document), fet que garanteix el doble cec en el procés d'avaluació externa.
- Si l'article fóra acceptat per a la publicació, el text definitiu haurà d'estar signat en la primera pàgina, després del títol (alineat a la dreta) i les dades sobre l'autoria i l'afiliació institucional hauran d'aparèixer en aquest ordre:

- El nom de l'autora/autor.
- La institució a la qual pertany (de forma desenvolupada i sense sigles) i la ciutat en la qual es troba la institució.
- El correu electrònic de l'autora/autor.
- El número d'identificació científica ORCID. Exemple: <https://orcid.org/0000-0002-1825-0097>.
- A l'inici de cada article, i independentment de l'idioma en què estiga redactat, sempre s'afegirà el títol del treball (en espanyol i en anglès) i un resum amb una extensió màxima de 150 paraules (en espanyol i en anglès), en el qual es descriga la justificació de l'objecte d'estudi, els objectius, la metodologia, els principals resultats i les conclusions més rellevants. S'haurà d'incloure també entre 4 i 8 paraules clau (en espanyol i en anglès), separades per punt i coma.
- A més, en un arxiu a part, que s'adjuntarà en la plataforma OJS («Carregueu els arxius complementaris»), s'inclourà una breu nota curricular, d'una extensió aproximada d'unes 10 línies, sobre la formació acadèmica, la situació professional i la tasca investigadora de l'autora/autor.
- L'incompliment d'aquests criteris bàsics podrà ser motiu d'exclusió del procés d'avaluació per experts.
- La correcció de les primeres proves serà a càrrec de les/dels autores/autors, per a la qual cosa disposaran d'un termini màxim de 10 dies.

## RESSENYES DE LLIBRES

- Les ressenyes de llibres de recent publicació (dels dos últims anys) tindran una extensió màxima de 1.500 paraules, i s'hi especificarà l'autor/a o l'editor/a, el títol, el lloc de publicació, l'editorial, la data de publicació, l'ISBN i el nombre de pàgines.
- L'autora o l'autor de la ressenya, facilitarà el seu nom i cognoms, l'afiliació institucional, l'adreça de correu electrònic i l'identificador ORCID.

- És aconsellable l'enviament, com un arxiu complementari, d'una imatge de la coberta principal de la publicació ressenyada.
- L'autora o l'autor seguirà les instruccions de l'apartat **Normes de citació i referències**.

### Llista de comprovació per a la preparació de trameses

Com a part del procés de la tramesa, els/les autor/autores estan obligats/des a comprovar que la tramesa complisca tots els elements que es mostren a continuació. Se'ls retomaran aquells enviaments que no complisquen aquestes directrius.

1. L'enviament no ha sigut publicat prèviament ni s'ha sotmès a consideració per cap altra revista (o s'ha proporcionat una explicació sobre aquest tema en els Comentaris a l'editor/a).
2. L'arxiu d'enviament està en format Microsoft Word (.DOCX) o Open Document Format (.ODT).
3. Sempre que siga possible, es proporcionen els identificadors DOI per a les referències.
4. El text té interlineat d'1,5; 12 punts de grandària de font Times New Roman; s'utilitza cursiva en comptes de subratllat (excepte en les direccions URL); i totes les il·lustracions, figures i taules es troben col·locades en els llocs del text apropiats, i no al final.
5. El text s'adhereix als requisits estilístics i bibliogràfics resumits en les **Directrius de l'autor/a**, que apareixen en l'apartat Sobre la revista.
6. Si s'envia a una secció avaluada per experts de la revista, cal seguir les instruccions de l'apartat Assegurar **una avaluació anònima**.
7. Compleix amb les normes arrellegades en **Normes de citació i referències**.

### NORMES DE CITACIÓ I REFERÈNCIES

La revista s'acull al sistema APA per a la citació i referenciació en el text (7a edició), així com per a l'elaboració de la llista final de referències bibliogràfiques. No se sotmetrà a avaluació cap article no adaptat a APA.

Les normes estan disponibles en <https://apastyle.apa.org/>

## COM PROPOSAR UN DOSSIER MONOGRÀFIC

La proposta d'un dossier monogràfic per a la revista *Feminismo/s* es farà arribar a la directora de la revista ([Helena.establier@ua.es](mailto:Helena.establier@ua.es)) i contindrà la informació següent:

1. Títol provisional del dossier monogràfic.
2. Un CV complet de la coordinadora o del coordinador (o de les coordinadores o coordinadors) del monogràfic.
3. Una descripció dels objectius i una justificació de l'oportunitat del tema del dossier (tres-centes paraules).
4. Una llista provisional de participants en el volum, acompanyada d'una breu ressenya biobibliogràfica de cadascun o cadascuna dels o les participants, dels títols dels treballs previstos i d'un breu resum de cadascun en el qual s'incloguen els objectius previstos (cent cinquanta paraules).
5. Les propostes seran considerades pel Consell de Redacció de *Feminismo/s* en el termini màxim d'un mes a partir de la data de recepció.

## PROCÉS D'AVUACIÓ PER EXPERTES/EXPERTS

- 1) Els originals rebuts són valorats, en primera instància, pel Consell de Redacció de la revista per a decidir sobre l'adequació a les àrees de coneixement i als requisits que la revista ha publicat per als autors o les autores.
- 2) El Consell de Redacció envia els originals, sense el nom de l'autor o de l'autora, a dos revisors/es externs/es al Consell Editorial. Sobre eixos dictàmens, el Consell de Redacció decideix rebutjar o acceptar l'article o sol·licitar modificacions a l'autor o a l'autora del treball. Els/les autors/as reben una notificació detallada i motivada en què s'exposa, retocat, el contingut dels informes originals, amb indicacions concretes per a la modificació, si escau. *Feminismo/s* pot enviar als/a les autors/es els informes originals rebuts, íntegres o en part, sempre de forma anònima.



3) L'informe emès pels/per les revisors/es inclou:

- a) una valoració global de l'article i dels resums.
- b) una valoració quantitativa de la qualitat (bona | acceptable | insuficient) segons aquests cinc criteris: originalitat i interès del tema; pertinència pel que fa a les investigacions actuals en l'àrea; rigor metodològic; bibliografia significativa i actualitzada; netedat formal i articulació expositiva.
- c) una recomanació final: publicar | sol·licitar modificacions | rebutjar.

## COBERTURA, DIFUSIÓ I PRESENCIA EN BASES DE DADES

La revista està indexada en ESCI (WOS), DOAJ, REDIB, Gender Watch (Proquest), InDICES-CSIC, ERIH PLUS, MLA, CIRC, MIAR, Latindex, Dialnet, Ulrich's, Dulcinea, Google Scholar, SHERPA/RoMEO, RUA, DICE, REBIUN, RESH, OCLC WorldCat, Copac, SUDOC i ZDB/EZB.

## POLÍTiques D'IGUALTAT DE GÈNERE

La revista *Feminismo/s* constitueix un espai d'expressió i debat crític en l'àmbit dels estudis de gènere i de la teoria feminista i, per tant, el seu compromís amb les polítiques de gènere i amb la igualtat entre dones i homes en la nostra societat és incontrovertible a tots els nivells:

- La composició de l'Equip Editorial i del Consell Assessor, integrats majoritàriament per dones, així com la nòmina de persones avaluadores, respon al principi de la revista d'incentivar la participació i la visibilitat de les dones en l'àmbit acadèmic.
- Els continguts, els objectius i les metodologies de la revista promouen l'anàlisi crítica de les relacions de gènere en la societat heteropatriarcal, i intenten revelar com les relacions de poder que són a la base de la discriminació per raons de gènere es configuren i es materialitzen en l'àmbit sociocultural i científic.

- L'Equip Editorial de *Feminismo/s* vetla perquè tots els treballs de recerca eviten els estereotips i els biaixos de gènere que adopten el masculí com a referent universal, exacerben les diferències biològiques o naturalitzen les diferències construïdes socialment.
- La revista garanteix que qualsevol tipus d'investigació publicada sobre persones, animals, teixits o cèl·lules té en compte la variable sexe, és a dir:
  - Reflexiona i decideix fonamentalment sobre la composició per sexes de les mostres i informa del sexe dels subjectes investigats.
  - Analitza les diferències existents dins de cadascun dels sexes i presenta els resultats desagregats per sexe.

En relació amb tot això recomanem al personal investigador interessat a publicar en la revista la consulta de la [Guía práctica para la inclusión de la perspectiva de género en los contenidos de la investigación](#).

- De la mateixa manera, entre les polítiques editorials de *Feminismo/s* hi ha l'ús imperatiu d'un llenguatge inclusiu en tots els articles, que tinga en compte la presència i situació de les dones en la societat i que estiga d'acord amb el principi d'igualtat entre els sexes. En aquest sentit, l'Equip Editorial vetla per la substitució del masculí genèric per a designar tots els individus de la classe o el grup, siguen homes o dones, per termes de valor genèric o sintagmes explicatius, per l'omissió de referències al subjecte i, quan això no és possible, per l'ús de fórmules desdoblades. Per a un desenvolupament més concret d'alternatives i propostes d'ús, recomanem al personal investigador interessat a publicar en la revista la consulta de la [Guia per a un discurs igualitari en la Universitat d'Alacant](#).

## PRINCIPIES ÈTICS DE PUBLICACIÓ

La publicació d'articles en una revista amb avaluació d'experts és un reflex directe de la qualitat del treball dels/de les autors/es i del compromís i la qualificació dels/de les investigadors/es que actuen com a revisors/es. Per

això *Feminismo/s* és una publicació compromesa amb els principis ètics de l'activitat científica en els termes següents:

### 1. Publicació i autoria

Tots els articles han d'incloure una llista de referències, com també indicar si han rebut suport econòmic. Els treballs han d'estar lliures de plagi o frau científic. Els supòsits\* de plagi i frau científic són els esmentats a continuació:

- Plagi: còpia literal sense usar les cometes i citar la font; còpia substancial (materials d'investigació, processos, taules...); parafrasejar o reproduir idees sense citar la font o canviant el significat original; reutilitzar i enviar textos propis ja publicats sense indicar la font i parafrasejar de manera abusiva fins i tot citant la font.
- Fraus científics: no reconeixement de tots/es els/les investigadors/es que participen en l'elaboració del treball; l'enviament simultani a diverses publicacions; la divisió d'un treball en parts diferents que comparteixen les mateixes hipòtesis, població i mètodes, com també la utilització de dades falses o no provades. Finalment, els/les autors/es han de declarar a la revista els potencials conflictes d'interès quan envien un treball.

\* Font: <http://www.ethics.elsevier.com/>

### 2. Responsabilitat dels/de les autors/es

- L'enviament de treballs a *Feminismo/s* implica la lectura i l'acceptació de les normes editorials i de publicació de la revista, incloent-hi la participació en un procés anònim d'avaluació d'experts.
- Tots/es els/les autors/es que signen un treball han d'haver contribuït de manera significativa en l'elaboració i han d'estar d'acord amb el resultat final i amb l'enviament del treball perquè siga avaluat.
- Els treballs han de reconèixer a tots/es els/les autors/es que hi han participat.
- Les dades utilitzades en l'article han de ser reals i autèntiques.
- Els/les autors/es assumeixen l'obligació de corregir o retractar-se davant possibles errors detectats posteriorment.

- Els articles han de ser inèdits i no poden ser enviats simultàniament a cap altra publicació.

### 3. Procés de revisió

Tots els articles enviats a la revista se sotmeten a un procés d'avaluació d'experts amb les característiques següents:

- La selecció dels/de les revisors/es es fa d'acord amb les normes i els principis previs basats tant en la seua qualificació com en la qualitat de la seua producció científica.
- El procés de revisió serà totalment anònim tant pels/per els autors/es com pels/per les revisors/es. Els articles i les revisions seran tractats confidencialment.
- Els/les revisors/es consideren, entre els criteris d'avaluació, el respecte als principis ètics essencials en la investigació científica.
- Els judicis expressats en les revisions han de ser objectius.
- Tant autors/es com revisors/es han de revelar les relacions i les fonts de finançament que puguen generar potencials conflictes d'interessos.

### 4. Responsabilitats dels/de les editors/es

- L'equip editorial té la responsabilitat i autoritat per a acceptar o rebutjar un article basant-se en les revisions.
- L'equip editorial revelarà, si escau, les relacions o les fonts de finançament que puguen ser potencialment considerades com a conflictes d'interessos pel que fa a l'acceptació o el rebuig dels treballs.
- Només s'acceptaran els articles en els quals hi ha una evidència certa sobre el compliment de les normes editorials.
- L'equip editorial es compromet a preservar l'anonimat dels/de les revisors/es de manera que mai puguen ser associats/des amb els articles revisats.

### 5. Qüestions ètiques de publicació

L'equip editorial es compromet a:

- Vigilar i preservar els principis ètics de publicació.

- Mantenir la integritat de l'expedient acadèmic.
- Evitar la publicació de material plagiat o elaborat de manera fraudulenta.
- Estar obert a la publicació de correccions, aclariments, retractacions i disculpes sempre que siga necessari.
- Oferir suport en el procés de retractació d'articles.
- Fer totes les accions necessàries per a complir els estàndards de compromís intel·lectual i ètic.

## 6. Política antiplagi

El Consell de Redacció de *Feminismo/s* és responsable de comprovar que els treballs presentats siguen originals i no incorreguen en plagi. La Universitat d'Alacant compta amb programari específic a l'efecte, com Turnitin, una eina per a prevenir i evitar el plagi acadèmic i professional que comprova les similituds d'un document amb múltiples fonts d'informació (Internet, articles científics i la seua base de dades interna) i n'identifica el contingut no original traduït de l'anglès. Addicionalment, el Consell de Redacció té a la seua disposició, a través de la pàgina web de la UA, una sèrie de programes gratuïts de detecció del plagi, tals com Copyscape, Plagium, PlagScan, Dupli Checker, Plagiarisma, Article Checker, Viper o Antiplagiarist (<https://biblioteca.ua.es/va/investiga-i-publica/pi/plagi.html>).

El Consell de Redacció es reserva el dret de retirar qualsevol treball rebut, acceptat o ja publicat en cas de constatar-s'hi plagi, falsificació o publicació duplicada, així com els diversos supòsits de frau científic enumerats anteriorment. De la mateixa manera, promou la publicació de correccions o retractacions dels errors detectats.

## AVÍS LEGAL

A l'efecte de l'estipulat en els articles 138-143 de la Llei de Propietat Intel·lectual, la publicació d'un treball que atempte contra aquests drets serà responsabilitat de l'autora o de l'autor. L'equip editorial de *Feminismo/s* no es fa responsable, en cap cas, de la credibilitat i autenticitat dels treballs. De

la mateixa manera, les opinions i fets expressats en cada article són d'exclusiva responsabilitat de les seues autores/autors i *Feminismo/s* no s'identifica necessàriament amb elles/ells.

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Les/els autores/autors que publiquen en *Feminismo/s* estan d'acord en els termes següents:

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