

Cross-Cultural Queer Encounters: Women, Nation and Queer Culture in Contemporary Spanish
Narrative and Film

By

Megan Sheldon

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Dr. Jorge Pérez, chairperson

Dr. Yajaira Padilla

Dr. Margot Versteeg

Dr. Verónica Garibotto

Dr. Marta Vicente

Date Defended: April 30, 2015

The Dissertation Committee for Megan Sheldon
certifies that this is the approved version of the following dissertation:

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Dr. Jorge Pérez, chairperson

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Abstract

This dissertation focuses on queer representations of female immigration and travel to and from Spain in contemporary Spanish literature and film from the late 1990s to the present. Through an intersectional analysis that considers race, class, gender and sexuality, I build on the work of scholars who explore the representation of lesbian identity and experiences in contemporary Spanish cultural production. It is my goal to demonstrate the various ways migration and sexuality transverse in more recent works and are intrinsically connected to constructions of Spanish national identity. To this end, I analyze the work of a diverse group of writers and directors, ranging from self-identified lesbian authors such as Mabel Galán, Libertad Morán and Illy Nes to critically acclaimed male directors such as Julio Medem and Fernando León de Aranoa. I examine how these works closely engage with the officially celebrated modernization process in Spain from the early 1990s onward as well as the country's integration into Europe. As a whole, I argue that these cultural productions reveal the socio-economic and racial hierarchies still at play in Spain's celebrated "rainbow society." Additionally, I propose that these works provide a means for questioning globalizing discourses of sexuality and expressions of LGBT liberation across lines of race and ethnicity. Through my analysis, I aim to situate these works within the broader socio-political changes and developments in contemporary Spain as well as question the assumption that cultural, national and sexual identity are fixed entities.

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Introduction

Framing Gender and Migration in Contemporary Spanish Queer Cultural Production

In 1991, Teresa de Lauretis coined the term “queer” as a social process that resists political systems in order to represent identities camouflaged by earlier labels, such as “homosexual,” which carries pathological undertones, and “gay” which was predominately associated with a white, middle-class male community (iii-iv). In 1993, Annamarie Jagose published an introduction to “queer theory,” outlining the development of queer studies in relation to the parallel appearance of lesbian and gay studies in universities in the 1990s. Describing “queer” as a term that focuses on “mismatches of sex, gender and desire,” Jagose accents what she terms the “elastic” and “mobile” character of queer studies that enable it as a critical approach to call attention to instabilities in seemingly unproblematic notions of gender and sexuality (1-3). More recently, the term has fallen under scrutiny as a result of its engagement with mainstream culture and politics as both threaten to appropriate it. David Eng effectively explains this shift in the meaning of “queer,” arguing that its close association with lesbian and gay identity politics have consequently transformed the term from a position of critique and resistance into part of a struggle for inclusion into accepted social models— for example access to marriage (xi). As a response, Eng along with contemporary queer scholars such as José Esteban Muñoz and Judith Halberstam, among others, have looked to broaden the term’s scope, particularly exploring the intersections of queer theories with theories of race, migration and globalization. Drawing from this query, the objective of this dissertation is to explore how queer theory may lend itself not only to understanding the implications of recent publications from within Spain’s LGBT presses but also alternative readings of contemporary cultural productions in Spain, all of which pose questions concerning traditional notions of gender, ethnicity and nationality.

The role of queer theoretical and political postures in Spain is of particular importance granted the country's position as what Spanish scholar Raquel Osborne terms "un laboratorio de cambio social en temas LGTB" in recent years (86). The movement for and passing of Law 13/2005 in 2005 that modifies the Spanish Civil Code to permit same-sex marriage along with Law 3/2007 in 2007 that allows individuals to legally change their name and sex without surgically altering their appearance has made the country a focal point for social change in issues related to the LGBT community. In particular, Law 13/2005 not only expands the concept of marriage but also has consequences when considering adoption rights, residency and inheritance among other factors ("Los efectos" 677). Furthermore, as a result of these legal advances, the LGBT community in Spain has experienced an increased level of visibility within the socio-political arena that has also extended to cultural productions associated with this community ("Pensamiento" 141).

This dissertation seeks to explore the growing number of cultural productions—primarily narrative and film— within the aforementioned body of work that incorporate queer cross-cultural experiences. In particular, the works I analyze demonstrate how race, class, nationality and gender are ingrained in the meaning and understanding of sexuality and reveal the term's inherent connection to broader processes of self-identification. I specifically analyze queer representations of female migrations in and out of Spain in contemporary cultural production— by both men and women— from the late 1990s to the present. This approach allows me to focus on a diverse group of writers and directors, ranging from self-identified lesbian authors such as Mabel Galán, Libertad Morán and Illy Nes to critically acclaimed male directors such as Julio Medem and Fernando León de Aranoa. In each work, I examine the creation of a narrative that weaves together the social, economic and cultural changes in Spain—particularly, but not limited to, advances in sex and gender rights— in relation to its growing contact with other cultures

through immigration and travel. How, this study will ask, do these queer cross-cultural representations engage with the construction of the modern day Spanish nation-state as articulated through recent socio-political advances, such as the approval of same-sex marriage in 2005? It is my goal to demonstrate that these narratives provide a cultural space to gauge contemporary notions of ethnicity and nationality in Spain and, in some cases, create alternative communities that extend beyond national borders.

My use of the term “queer” in this dissertation not only refers to the aforementioned scholarly debates surrounding the theoretical and political postures brought forth by queer studies, but also draws on Michael Warner’s analysis of queer as a “resistance to regimes of the normal” (xxvi). More specifically, I seek to engage the oppositional edge Warner emphasizes in academic, political and cultural expressions of queer desires, practices and subjectivities that challenge established categories of identity. Similar observations are also elaborated in a special issue of the United States based journal *Social Text* published in 2005 and edited by David Eng, Judith Halberstam and José Esteban Muñoz. These authors call for a reevaluation of the term “queer” to return it to its original links with intersectionality and difference and as a political posture with no fixed referent. They also seek to confront what they call “the mainstreaming of gay and lesbian identity” that manifests itself in the form of a white, western and male queer subject that ultimately fails to recognize the diversity of queer experiences, particularly in an age of migration and globalization (1). As a whole the special issue proposes to broaden and revive the scope of queer epistemology to consider issues of diaspora and immigration, globalization, theories of race, and alternative notions of kinship among other concerns. Although the special issue does not specifically address the socio-political or cultural context of Spain, its recognition of the multiple categories that influence identity and serve to problematize a uniform construction of national belonging is applicable to Europe. The narrative and filmic texts I study

illustrate the impact and intersection of notions of race, ethnicity, class, gender and sexuality on individual bodies as well as processes of self-identification in Spain. Rather than solely representative of sexual identity, the queer experiences found in these works engage in broader concepts identity, nationality and culture at work in Spanish society as it faces economic and political changes.

The appearance of queer cultural production in Spain that engages in cross-cultural experiences may be explained by three principle factors: 1) the process of modernization after solidifying democracy in the country that, in turn, led to a higher level of contact with other nations and cultures; 2) the increasing number of immigrants in Spain since the 1980s; and 3) the emergence of Spanish LGBT presses, such as Editorial EGALES in 1995 and Editorial Odisea in 1999. This is all the more important when considering that the same year the country passed Law 13/2005 approving same-sex marriage, it also modified Law 4/2000 which concerns the rights and integration of foreigners in the country in a way that, instead of focusing on prevention, favors regularization and assimilation of migrants.¹ With the onset of the economic crisis in 2008, however, the Spanish government began more frequently policing and detaining illegal immigrants.² In 2009, the Ley de Extranjería was again modified and made more rigorous, restricting the regrouping of families and lengthening the maximum amount of time illegal immigrants can be detained in the Centros de Internamiento de Extranjeros (CIE).³ This same year, Spain also modified Law 12/2009, the Ley de Asilo (Law of Asylum), which names persecution based on gender, including transgender men and women, and lesbians, gays or bisexuals victimized on account of their sexuality as eligible for asylum in Spain.⁴ Taken together, these events present a complex situation in which we find that sexual identities may not be dislodged from other axis of identity. Consequently, an analysis of queer cultural production in Spain becomes a cogent site to address the impact and outcome of these socio-political and

cultural transformations in the country as well as an example of how contemporary Spanish writers and filmmakers choose to narrate their experiences.

With this in mind, it is not surprising that in recent years there has been an increased interest among Hispanic scholars concerning the significance of contemporary cultural representations of Spain's LGBT community, most recently with particular attention to those portraying women. Much of the scholarship on authors such as Isabel Franc, Mabel Galán, Libertad Morán, Illy Nes and films portraying cross-cultural desire between women—such as *A mi madre le gustan las mujeres* (2002) and *Habitación en Roma* (2010)—approaches these works as a means for making desire between women visible.⁵ In her extensive study, *Crossing Through Chueca: Lesbian Literary Culture in Queer Madrid* (2011), Jill Robbins specifically analyzes the place of lesbian literature in relation to the development of the Spanish LGBT book industry and the socio-political as well as cultural campaign for lesbian visibility in recent years, an endeavor made most evident by the 2008 slogan of Madrid's Pride festivities, “Por la visibilidad lésbica.” Robbins' study acknowledges the socio-political value of such novels and effectively argues for the ties to mainstream culture present in these works as a sign of social acceptance of non-heterosexual relationships, but it also indicates that these narratives at times follow conventional models of the family and relationships that allow them gain acceptance in a mainstream market dominated by heterosexual bourgeois readers (*Crossing* 57).

In addition to recognizing these works as a critical means for visibility in more mainstream venues as well as signaling some of the short-comings that arise through incorporation into more dominant spheres of cultural production, it is my intention to explore the representations of immigration and travel within this recent corpus of Spanish cultural production that demonstrate the various ways migration and sexuality intersect to reflect processes of self-identification in regards to race, class, gender and sexuality as they are

intrinsically connected to constructions of Spanish national identity. While in certain instances, these works may closely intertwine themselves, both favorably and critically, with the officially celebrated modernization process in Spain from the early 1990s onward as well as the country's integration into Europe—for example *Desde la otra orilla* (1999), *A mi madre le gustan las mujeres* (2002), and Inés Nuñez's "Como decíamos ayer..." (2002) — they also appear to bolster racial and ethnic stereotypes of non-Western queer subjects that consequently marginalize queer immigrants or queer communities from other countries while affording visibility to the Spanish LGBT population. Additionally, in certain works—particularly those produced after the 2005 approval of same-sex marriage such as Julio Medem's critically acclaimed *Habitación en Roma* (2010) and the short story collection *El espejo de los deseos* (2007)—the representation of queer cross-cultural encounters that incorporates non-Western queer subjects provides a means for questioning globalizing discourses of sexuality and expressions of LGBT liberation across lines of race and ethnicity. As these queer cross-cultural representations accent the multiple and intersecting forms of self-identification in regards to race, gender, nationality and sexuality, they bring into view the constant cultural and political changes and developments that question the assumption that cultural, national as well as sexual identity are fixed entities. In what follows, I examine the depiction of relationships between women found in these literary and cinematic narratives as indicative of social, political and cultural changes in contemporary Spain as well as the drawbacks of its development. While certain social and political values advance, others remain the same and reveal that as some power relations and hierarchies are done away with, others are either maintained or even new ones created.

Queer Culture and Politics in Contemporary Spain

Without a doubt the development of the Chueca district in Madrid has been one of the greatest contributors towards the promotion of several visible cultural venues for the Spanish LGBT community. Following in the footsteps of overseas communities formed in the late 1970s and 1980s (New York and San Francisco), Chueca flourished and created a hub for travel agencies, clothing stores, restaurants, cafés and bookstores all geared towards the LGBT community that began to emerge (Mira 605). Catalan scholar and writer Alberto Mira explains that in contemporary capitalist culture Chueca is a mark of visibility that presents new possibilities to guarantee the existence of cultural productions that focus themselves on perspectives from within the LGBT community (Mira 607). Similar to Mira's comments, Spanish scholar Fernando Villaamil in his study of the development of LGBT identity in Spain, *La transformación de la identidad gay en España* (2004), indicates the broader meaning of what he calls the "fenómeno Chueca" (67). Villaamil describes Chueca, and by extension the LGBT market it cultivates, as "una presencia imposible de ignorar para otros sectores, que de una u otra manera, han de relacionarse con él" (69). The "fenómeno Chueca" did not limit itself to the construction of an LGBT friendly neighbourhood in Madrid, but rather through the circulation and sale of cultural images (magazines, tour guides and literature), it contributed to the diffusion and growth of images representative of the LGBT community throughout the country.⁶

Jill Robbins provides an indepth analysis of the history and importance of the Chueca district as a symbolic site that in many ways serves as a point of reference for the modernization of Spain. Tracing the district as a space whose history coincides with that of the urban working class and intersects with questions of the church and state in the country, Robbins illustrates how, with the recent recognition of specific civil rights, the district has emerged as "the symbol of a new, tolerant Spain"(Crossing 1). Robbins, however, also indicates the changes produced through the

emergence of Chueca as an internationally recognized queer space, transformed into what she calls a “postutopian magnet for young, hip, well-to-do consumers” (*Crossing* 9). Along with the development and gradual gentrification of the Chueca district, in the mid 1990s the capital changed from a revindicated model for the annual LGBT march, to one that commercialized the Pride parade. As a result, the celebration has become increasingly more capitalistic and, according to the alternative queer collective Bloque Orgullo Crítico, is defined as “un mero espacio de consumismo, donde sólo cuentan los varones, blancos, con papeles y una estupenda profesión liberal” (Montilla, “El Orgullo” 63). Along these lines, when attending the 2011 Madrid Pride festivities, I noticed that even the McDonald’s located on the parade’s traditional route down Gran Vía was adorned with rainbow flags.

Spanish journalist and queer activist David Montilla addresses the change in the city’s march since adopting a commercial model:

la Federación Estatal de Lesbianas, Gays, Transexuales y Bisexuales (FELGTB), de carácter oficialista y ligada al PSOE, quien elige y cobra a las empresas que desean tener una carroza en el desfile comercial, quien invisibiliza los contenidos y consignas críticas durante su realización, disciplina y expulsa a los elementos críticos de sus asociaciones federadas y cede en exclusiva la gestión del espacio público del barrio de Chueca a una asociación empresarial durante las fiestas del Orgullo. (“Cabalgatas empresariales” 50)

The “Chueca model” described by Montilla has been openly criticized by queer collectives such as Maribolheras Precarias, Las Lilas and Collectiu Gai de Barcelona which distance themselves from the happenings in Chueca believing that visibility should be attained through other means than entering into mass media (“De la peseta” 58-60). These groups not only criticize the capitalist spirit of such a model, but also point out that only one portion of the movement is made visible through it (“De la peseta” 58-60).

While specifically referring to the socio-political and cultural climate of Chueca, these observations point to broader debates in Spain as well as abroad within the LGBT community. These debates in Spain and other countries include criticisms of appeals to this kind of consumerist model as well as the advocacy of same-sex marriage, both of which have been argued to conform to a heteronormative agenda in society. United States queer theorists Lauren Berlant and Michael Warner explain that heteronormativity encompasses more than the silent presumption of heterosexuality. According to these scholars, heteronormativity more extensively refers to “powerful norms supporting that privilege-including the project of normalization that has made heterosexuality hegemonic-as well as those material practices that, though not explicitly sexual, are implicated” (Berlant and Warner 548). Viewed from this theoretical perspective, marriage and consumption as well as race, class and gender norms are central to upholding heteronormativity. Drawing on Berlant and Warner’s observations, Lisa Duggan relates this turn in the LGBT movement as a product of the influences of neoliberalism since the 1980s, which produced what she calls the “new homonormativity” (50). Neoliberalism, as she explains, is characterized by the support of equality politics, superficial “multiculturalism” and a pro-corporate, “free market” stance (Duggan 44). Under this framework, “homonormativity” emerges as a politics that does not contest dominant institutions and structures, but rather participates in them and demobilizes the LGBT community by anchoring it in domesticity and consumption (Duggan 50).

David Eng argues that the term “queer” has also come to represent neoliberal interests through its affiliation with the mainstream initiatives of the gay and lesbian movement such as access to marriage, adoption or military service, a transformation he terms “queer liberalism” (xi). Taking these observations a step further, Eng also emphasizes the inherent link between queer liberalism and a colorblind discourse that, similar to Duggan’s portrayal of superficial multiculturalism, fails to give

attention to racial inequalities. Examining the U.S. Supreme Court's decision in the case *Lawrence v. Texas* in 2003 which overturned state laws against sodomy in the United States, Eng notes that much of the response to the decision has overlooked that the plaintiffs in the case were a mixed race couple. The police were called not to investigate sexual activity, but rather to look into an unidentified black man on the property (Eng 36). Proceeding to analyze the significance of the decision as well as public response, Eng highlights the case as an example of queer liberalism's obscuring of racial issues that uphold the growing visibility of queerness in a neoliberal society.

In Spain these concerns are particularly relevant, especially after the national LGBT organization, FELGTB, decided to abandon their campaign for a domestic partnership law in 2000 and focus on legalizing same-sex marriage. When same-sex marriage was approved in 2005 after the election of the Partido Socialista Obrero Español (PSOE) candidate José Luis Rodríguez Zapatero, former president of the FELGTB Beatriz Gimeno described the importance of this event as one that is based on “los presupuestos de la modernidad, en la igualdad y el derecho de la ciudadanía” (36). LGBT and political activist Pedro Zerolo describes these reforms as representative of the new “Sociedad del arco iris” in Spain, one that is “plural y diversa donde todas y todos debemos coexistir [...] con independencia de nuestro sexo, creencia, raza, orientación sexual o cualquier otra condición social” (43). While Gimeno and Zerolo's words reflect a strong sense of accomplishment towards the push for and passing of Law 13/2005, presenting it as the final necessary push towards equal citizenship, the law has also been criticized for its lack of true structural reform.⁷

Raquel Platero provides a detailed analysis of the various forms of equality reform Spain has undergone since the beginning of Zapatero's administration. Platero's analysis of Law 13/2005 reveals that while the law put Spain in the international spotlight, it is pertinent and beneficial to a specific sector of the population that is male, middle class and white (“Entre” 2). Paco Vidarte echoes Platero's criticisms, portraying these changes as the country's full

transformation into “Disgayland,” sarcastically describing the country as suddenly free of discrimination and aggression and more realistically pointing to the exclusion of those that do not represent the lifestyle associated with neoliberal consumers and that cannot afford to exhibit a high level of economic freedom, indicating LGBT immigrants who fall outside the legal and political parameters of this community among those excluded (21-22).

This situation is further emphasized by Ecuadorean transfeminist, sociologist and activist Leticia Rojas Miranda, who analyzes the experience queer Ecuadorean immigrants in Spain. Limiting her research to activist groups in Madrid, Rojas Miranda’s thorough investigation reveals the differing positions among LGBT and queer activist groups in reference to Spain’s immigration policies. While state-sponsored groups— such as Federación Estatal de Lesbianas, Gay, Transexuales y Bisexuales (FELGTB), Colectivo de Lesbianas, Gays, Transexuales y Bisexuales (COGAM) and Fundación Triangulo take no official political position with regards to changes in Spain’s immigration policy, groups that form part of the Bloque Crítico (also called Bloque Alternativo) such as Eskalera Karakola, La Acera del Frente, Migrantes Transgresorxs take a political stance against the aforementioned harsh reforms to the Ley de Extranjería in 2009 and vocalize the right of individuals to seek asylum due to prejudices experienced for their sexual and gender orientation in their home country. These concerns led to the organization of the 2009 “Orgullo Migrante” under the slogan “Con fronteras no hay Orgullo, lesbianas, gay, trans, bisex, queer y hetero: contra la ley de extranjería y las represión a lxs migrantes” (Rojas Miranda 1). The objective of the protest was to denounce the higher frequency of police detainment of immigrants as well as homophobia and transphobia in the CIE buildings.

Parallel developments and concerns mark the growing body of queer cultural production in Spain. Perhaps one of the most significant contributions within this emerging corpus of queer cultural production in Spain is the publication *El eje del mal es heterosexual: figuraciones*,

movimientos y prácticas feministas queer (2005) edited by the Madrid based activist collective Grupo de Trabajo Queer. The study includes essays by academics as well as self-identified queer activists, feminists and transsexuals. The introduction to the volume outlines the intrinsic connection between the essays included in the study and the queer activist community in Spain as demonstrated through the volume's title, a reference to the chant used by queer activist groups in demonstrations against Spain's participation in the controversial Iraq War (2003-2011). More generally, the introduction situates the authors included in the volume as rejecting "las fronteras de occidente" and calling attention to the broader structural problems implicated with neoliberal political agendas depicted as the "discurso triunfante de libertad y de justicia occidental" that "subyacen las formas más refinadas, pero no por ello menos acres y atroces de homofobia, transfobia, sexismo y racismo" (Grupo de Trabajo Queer 17). Without a doubt, the volume is a fundamental contribution for understanding more recent events in Spain in relation to the LGBT and queer communities, particularly the growing attention given to the inherent links between sexuality, gender, race, ethnicity and nationality.

Two articles included in this collection are particularly relevant when considering the multiple and intersecting forms of identity existing in Spain within mainstream culture as well as articulated by queer activist collectives and scholarship. The first is Gracia Trujillo Barbadillo's "Desde los márgenes: Prácticas y representaciones de los grupos *queer* en el Estado español" in which the author refers to an alternative design for the Documento Nacional de Identidad (DNI) produced by the collective Grupo de Trabajo Queer as part of the 2004 Pride March in Madrid. Instead of a face, the card features a photograph of a person's buttocks as well as lists "S/M" under "sexo" and "en transito" under "localidad" (images included in García Barbadillo 40-1). The appropriation and transformation of the DNI is a blatant act of resistance that demonstrates the multiple and varying aspects of identity formation taken into account, considered and

contested within queer activism and scholarship in Spain. Another important contribution included in the volume is Esther Ortega's article, "Reflexiones sobre la negritud y el lesbianismo" in which she narrates her experience as a self-identified black, lesbian feminist activist in Madrid after the approval of same-sex marriage and the subsequent Pride celebration. According to Ortega, the law does not offer any substantial change to broader structural problems observing that while some celebrate same-sex marriage "[e]l resto seguiremos siendo inaceptables, *desviadas*, o peor aún, *no siendo* [...] aunque nuestro DNI dice que somos españolas, pasamos por no serlo, por ser *otras*" (69-70). This call for an intersectional analysis that takes into consideration the many aspects that influence queer identity is not limited to this volume and can also be found in more recent scholarly works such as *Intersecciones: cuerpos y sexualidades en la encrucijada* (2012) edited by Raquel Platero and *Transfeminismos: epistemes, fricciones y flujos* (2013) edited by Miriam Solá and Elena Urko.

Taken together, the narratives and films that inform this study, demonstrate the palpable influence and significance of these queer theoretical and political postures in relation to broader forms of cultural production. In all of these works women appear as the central characters and their perspective provides a crucial component to the creation of the narrative or cinematic aesthetic as well as its ideological framework. Thus, one of the main arguments I purpose in this study is that the portrayals of women in recent Spanish queer cultural production— and more specifically those depicting cross-cultural relationships— do more than challenge normative understandings of sexuality, but also point to the need for an intersectional analysis that takes into account the representation of race, class and gender in the articulation of the contemporary Spanish nation-state. The representations of women found in these works intertwined with the complex socio-political and cultural situation of contemporary Spain—for example the aforementioned legalization of same-sex marriage as well as changes in immigration policies—

demonstrate the complex process and, often times, conflicts surrounding the negotiation of sexual, gender, ethnic and migrant identities.

Women and Queer Cultural Production in Spain

In her introduction to *Tortilleras: Hispanic and US Latina Lesbian Expression* (2003) Loudres Torres comments on the emergence of the study of “queer” narratives by Spanish and Latin American authors towards the end of the twentieth century.⁸ These studies responded to a comparative dearth in the scholarly material produced about Hispanic queer cultural production in contrast to critical attention given to these studies in the United States and Britain. Although Torres points to the scholarly contributions of these volumes, she also notes the limited attention given to lesbians within these volumes and this new field of study in general, citing that only about one-quarter of the articles feature female same-sex desire (2). Jill Robbins specifically observes the muted presence of lesbians in recent cultural studies and literary anthologies published in Spain which while amply exploring the cultural contributions of gay men, offer little if no attention to lesbians (“Crossing” 8).⁹ Robbins and Torres’ observations unfortunately demonstrate that although the emergence of queer Hispanic studies promised consideration of a previously muffled voice as well as its inclusion in an ever growing field of study, once again women were placed in a secondary or practically non-existent position. In Spain not until recently with the publication of literary and sociological studies has this void of critical attention given to female same-sex desire begun to be filled.

The integration of queer theories in Spain had particular significance for lesbians participating in larger political groups since queer politics opened a space for them to negotiate their own identity(ies) and position(s) within both the context of the LGBT movement but also as a part of the broader Spanish socio-political and cultural network. The publication of the

sociological study *Lesbianas: discursos y representaciones* (2008) serves as a benchmark towards not only undoing the silence that has traditionally characterized lesbianism in Spain. Coordinated by Spanish LGBT activist and scholar Raquel Platero, *Lesbianas* proves an imperative contribution to LGBT scholarship produced in Spain in that it questions restrictive notions of sexual identity and advocates for the rights of women in a way that envisions a life outside of traditional notions of gender, the family and partnership within recognizable cultural venues. As a whole, the volume rejects any single discourse as wholly representative of lesbian identity, rather observing the representation of what Platero terms a “sujeto multiforme y poliédrico” within the context of Spanish culture and history (“La construcción” 20). The volume, therefore, directly confronts negative and derogatory representations of lesbian sexuality, in fact placing them directly on the cover. Portraying small sketches marked with pejorative labels associated with lesbianism common in Spanish vocabulary such as “bollera”, “perversa”, “tortillera” and “invertida”, invokes the strategies of queer resistance to perform an act of resignification to displace such terms’ original meaning.¹⁰

While the first study entirely dedicated to the lesbian community in Spain is Olga Viñuales’ *Identidades lésbicas: discursos y prácticas* (2000), her work considers lesbian sexuality from a tentative distance that outlines different hypotheses and develops a detailed methodology for analyzing the participants she has “la oportunidad de examinar” (19-20, 22, 24). The study in its language and approach treats lesbian sexuality as if it were a complicated and difficult to understand science for which she has obtained “datos pero no los datos suficientes” (24) to comprehend. *Lesbianas* starkly contrasts to Viñuales’ study by offering diverse representations of lesbian identity from within the LGBT community and tracing their presence in Spanish activist communities as well as the nation’s broader system of mass culture and communication. The volume includes articles that address representations of lesbians in

literature, television, propaganda, advertisement, art, the internet, queer politics as well as offering first-hand accounts from lesbian activist that participated in the Spanish LGBT movement from the 1970s onward. The study, in this way, moves away from subcultural representations of lesbianism, pointing not only to activist groups promoting LGBT rights but also to everyday cultural representations of women desiring other women, although often from a critical standpoint.

Pertaining to this context, Spanish queer scholar and political activist Raquel Platero views cultural production as offering “unas lentes que generan un imaginario que nos ayuda a interpretar el mundo a través de lo ya conocido, aunque sea en una pantalla o en las páginas de una revista” (“Las lesbianas” 311). As subjects that have traditionally existed outside of conventional societal structures, works portraying lesbian sexuality become a means for expressing a questioning of traditional national paradigms and a shift in political outlook that is geared towards diversity. For instance, *Sígueme* (2005) by Olga Martí and *Secretos compartidos* (2007) by Mado Martínez rely on a highly erotic and explicit aesthetic that juxtaposes itself to the metaphorical language often used to portray sex between women. *No me llames cariño* (2004) by Isabel Franc, *72 horas* (2004) by Lais Arcos and *Curvas peligrosas* (2010) by Susana Hernández employ a different narrative technique by drawing on the style and form of detective fiction to weave tales of suspense and mystery that are also fused with stories of romance between women. Novels such as *Amores prohibidos* by Marta Fagés, *Dos madres: la historia de una familia casi feliz* (2006) by Muriel Villanueva Perarnau and *Métetelo en la cabeza* (2008) by Carmen Nestares adopt a more serious tone to focus more on social issues such as structural homophobia, adoption and domestic violence and its causes in same-sex relationships. Additionally, in film Juan Carlos Claver’s *Electroshock* (2006), a made for TV movie produced in Spain, traces the love between two women and the psychiatric treatment imposed on

homosexuals during the years of the Franco dictatorship, while Daniela Féjerman and Inés París's *A mi madre le gustan las mujeres* (2002) draws from the effects of humor, parody and irony to question conventional formulas of romance generally geared towards a female audience. In this sense, these works as a whole offer more than a new approach for combating stereotypes and negative projections of lesbian sexuality, rather they also complicate images used to confine and restrict it.

The portrayals of women that characterize the cross-cultural queer encounters in the narratives and films I examine present gender and sexuality as a central part of their narratives and, more importantly, they incorporate these pivotal themes into a broader socio-political landscape. Furthermore, the presence of more recent cultural productions that portray cross-cultural relationships between women is noteworthy granted similar representations of gender, ethnicity and sexuality in earlier more canonical literary and cinematic works. For example, Esther Tusquets' critically acclaimed novel *El mismo mar de todos los veranos* (1978) portrays a white, bourgeois Spanish woman involved with a young female Colombian immigrant, Marta Balletbó-Coll's film *Costa Brava* (1995) centers on the relationship between a Spanish woman and a Jewish-American immigrant and Lucía Etxebarria's novel *Beatriz y los cuerpos celestes* (1998) depicts a Spanish girl's relationship with a British woman during her stay in Edinburgh. The more contemporary literary and filmic narratives I analyze consider similar topics but under the context of recent issues affecting the country through their examination of new notions of the family, the shifting position of women in the work place and Spain's engagement with other nations and cultures through processes of globalization and immigration. These works not only bring to the forefront a voice and form of self-identification previously subdued—that of lesbian sexuality, but also provide a perspective in Spanish cultural production that more broadly offers

the potential to analyze the complex framework of the Spanish nation-state through a lenses that consists of several distinct identities.

Representing Women and Cross-Cultural Queer Desire

The Spanish narratives and films included here that depict cross-cultural queer encounters emphasize the ways in which sexual identities may intersect with other categories of identity to complicate notions of citizenship and national belonging. The contemporary writers and filmmakers I analyze directly engage with the present socio-political and cultural situation of Spain by way of incorporating topics such as migration, race, domestic violence, sexual identity and, in some cases, the use of popular culture aesthetics. The selection of works examined in this study is divided into four chapters and chronologically follows the emergence of queer cultural production since the late 1990s.

My first chapter analyzes the incorporation of topics such as immigration and gay marriage in Mabel Galán's novel *Desde la otra orilla* (1999), Inés París and Daniela Fejérman's film *A mi madre le gustan las mujeres* (2002) and Libertad Morán's novel *A por todas* (2005). In this chapter, I examine the continued presence of racial hierarchies in representations of Madrid's LGBT community found in narrative and film from the years leading up to the approval of same-sex marriage in 2005. While *Desde la otra orilla* and *A mi madre le gustan las mujeres* contain representations of queer immigrants, *A por todas* makes critical reference to contemporary socio-political scene, particularly public policy in Spain directed at the LGBT community concerning the approval of same-sex marriage. Drawing on each of the works' use of more mainstream, popular cultural aesthetics— or what I specifically refer to as “chick cultural productions,” the chapter explores the capacity of such forms of LGBT cultural production to afford visibility to a certain sector of the Spanish LGBT community while at the

same time replicating social constructions of race, ethnicity and class, an aspect that becomes particularly evident through a close analysis of the representation of queer immigrants in these works. By placing an emphasis on diversity and inclusion, but continuing to depend on traditional models of the family and relationships as well as projecting negative stereotypes on the immigrant community, these works serve as means for assessing the way not all social groups benefit from the intended advantages achieved through LGBT visibility in mainstream culture in Spain.

The second chapter centers on travel narratives that compel a consideration of how Spain's LGBT community negotiates its position as a part of Europe through racial and ethnic differences from other parts of the world. I analyze Inés Nuñez's short story "Cómo decíamos ayer..." (2002) and Illy Nes's novel *El lago rosa* (2004) to expose the insertion of the LGBT community into representations of European superiority to non-Western countries. The queer encounters depicted in these narratives not only demonstrate the power dynamics between Spain and former European colonies—in this case Tunisia and Senegal, but also speak to Spain's negotiation of its integration into and place within the European Union. A fitting extension of the dynamics found in the "chick cultural productions" analyzed in Chapter 1 in that they similarly project seemingly progressive images of Spain's LGBT community; however, in this case, the narratives more directly draw parallels to Spain's broader socio-political position in Europe. While published in 2002, Nuñez's narrative situates itself against the backdrop of Spain's socio-economic modernization in the 1990s and exhibits a strong sense of disappointment with the perceived political and cultural advancement brought about through this process, in particular the country's incorporation into Europe since the 1980s. Nes' narrative explores similar sentiments of disillusionment with Spain's process of modernization—an aspect made most evident through the tumultuous relationship between the Spanish protagonist and her

boyfriend in the novel— but developed under a more contemporary socio-political setting. In each of the narratives travel outside of Spain becomes a means for the Spanish female protagonists to navigate their state of disillusionment as well as becomes a space to project their own queer desires through their involvement with women in Tunisia and Senegal, respectively. As a result, it is my contention that each of these narratives connects with the socio-political and economic development of Spain since the 1990s, and consequently brings to light questions regarding the involvement of Spain's LGBT community within the country's development, modernization and integration into Europe.

The third chapter examines the close friendship between Spanish women and female immigrants in two recent Spanish films: Pedro Pérez Rosado's *Agua con sal* (2005) and Fernando León de Aranoa's *Princesas* (2005). My analysis of *Princesas* and *Agua con sal* aims to recognize the way each of these films produce inconsistencies with strictly heteronormative paradigms of kinship and expressions of eroticism, as seen in earlier films such as Iciar Bollain's *Flores de otro mundo* (1999), Manuel Gutiérrez Aragón's *Cosas que dejé en la Habana* (1997) and Alfonso Albacete and David Menkes' *I Love You Baby* (2001). I examine the insubstantial portrayal of accepted models of kinship—such as the nuclear family and marriage— that, consequently, intensifies the perceived emotional attachment between women in each film and calls attention to the demand for other forms of desire to provide the love and support sought by each of the protagonists. Additionally, I approach both films in relation to Adrienne Rich's notion of the “lesbian continuum” to call attention to the emotional and erotic bonds created between the female protagonists that are so crucial to the representation of transcultural solidarity in the film.

The final chapter examines Julio Medem's *Habitación en Roma* (2010) and Cristina Cuesta's short story “Zoe y Haydee” (2007) to explore queer cross-cultural exchanges with non-

Western queer subjects that interrogate globalizing discourses of sexuality and expressions of LGBT liberation across lines of race and ethnicity. In contrast to the travel narratives examined in Chapter 2, these works offer more than a reiteration of the asymmetrical relationships and simple binary oppositions between Spanish lesbians (representative of Western superiority) versus queers of color (representative of non-Western inferiority). Rather, they provide a framework for thinking beyond and complicating the construction of social and political categories of identity, particularly regarding nationality and sexuality. While these works present differences of opinion and cultural backgrounds that lead to tensions between the protagonists—especially in terms of their individual sexualities—they do not attempt to resolve them. In this sense, these works question a cross-cultural representation of a collective global gay identity. Instead they focus on the misunderstandings that complicate such a representation and offer the opportunity to consider queer identities beyond Euro-American models of sexual subjectivity.

When placed within the broader context of the political and cultural changes in Spain in relation to gender and sexual identities as well as migration, these narratives and films call attention to the capacity of the nation-state to incorporate certain individuals into its concepts of citizenship, the exclusionary stance that may develop towards those labeled as foreigners through this process as well as the possibility to think beyond restrictive social and political constructions of identity. By no means does my analysis answer all of the questions raised by this emerging body of cultural production in Spain. The complicated portrait of cross-cultural queer encounters between women I explore in this dissertation thus serves as a contribution to understanding the structure of the contemporary Spanish nation-state by affording attention to interwoven notions of gender, sexuality, nationality and cultural representation that encompass it.

Chapter 1

Girl Seeks Girl: Mainstream Culture and the Effects of Visibility in Spanish Lesbian Chick Cultural Production

The purpose of this chapter is to study how the ties to mainstream culture found in representations of popular lesbian cultural production, or more specifically “chick culture,” also carry significance when considered through an intersectional analysis of differences of race, class and gender that indicate the omission or marginalization of more peripheral queer subjects. Through an analysis of Mabel Galán’s novel *Desde la otra orilla* (1999), Inés Paris and Daniela Fejérman’s film *A mi madre le gustan las mujeres* (2002) and Libertad Morán’s novel *A por todas* (2005), I propose to explore chick cultural production as a productive means to evaluate the way not all social groups receive the same access, advantages or equality afforded by visibility through mainstream culture in Spain during the years leading up to the passing of Law 13/2005 approving same-sex marriage.¹¹ *Desde la otra orilla* and *A mi madre le gustan las mujeres* incorporate immigrant characters in their representation of Madrid’s LGBT community, but they are afforded little agency and their integration into Spanish society is portrayed in a way that places them in an inferior social and economic position to their Spanish love interests. While *A por todas* does not include immigrant characters, its reference to mainstream LGBT political causes— specifically gay marriage— and its use of the chick lit aesthetic make it a cogent representation of the more visible Spanish LGBT community. By openly advocating for diversity and inclusion, particularly for lesbians, but at the same time relying on conventional models of the family and relationships that do not cater to those that fall outside this image of society, the narrative provokes questions about the exclusive character of mainstream causes and cultural production.

I consider these works within the context of debates surrounding chick culture since the

publication of Helen Fielding's *Bridget Jones' Diary* (1996) that question the positive effects of mainstream representations of women who are independent, work and are active consumers in society due to the fact that these forms of cultural production also possess racial and class exclusions made evident in their tendency to focus on white, middle to upper class women (Mazza, "Who's Laughing"; Tasker and Negra). The emergence of a large amount of Spanish lesbian chick cultural production coincides with the national campaign for gay marriage as well as the development of Madrid's internationally recognized LGBT district, Chueca, all of which has led to an increased level of visibility for the LGBT community in Spain within both socio-political and cultural arena. Jill Robbins argues that, lesbian chick cultural productions fit easily into this model and may serve as a means for tracking the movement for equal rights by Spanish LGBT collectives (*Crossing* 103). At the same time, queer scholars and activists in Spain have begun to question the advantages of gay marriage and the growth of the Chueca district as well as the activities affiliated with it—the annual Pride festivities being the prime example— and argue that these causes and events only benefit and represent a limited part of Spain's LGBT community, mainly affluent gay male consumers and merchants (Corcuera; Platero, "Entre;" Platero, "Limits;" Preciado, "Multitudes;" Vidarte). Spanish queer theorist Beatriz Preciado emphasizes the importance of "sujetos abyectos" in the queer movement—defined by differences in race, age, class, sexual practices or disabilities— that do not form part of the mainstream LGBT image and possess the potential to create "lugares de resistencia al punto de vista 'universal,' a la historia blanca, colonial y hetero de lo 'humano'" ("Multitudes"). Along these lines, Spanish queer scholar and activist Raquel Platero notes the dearth of critical attention within Spain's LGBT community afforded to more peripheral queer subjects and, more significantly, calls attention to the need for analysis that consider the many differences of

sexuality, race, ethnicity or physical ability that may impact individuals in a transverse, complex way (“Introducción” 16).

While several studies that celebrate the visibility afforded particularly to lesbians through popular forms of LGBT cultural production have been published in recent years (Castrejón; Norandi; Pertusa and Stewart; Simonis), analysis exploring the intersection of race and ethnicity with gender and sexuality in these works is limited. In her study, *Crossing Through Chueca: Lesbian Literary Culture in Queer Madrid* (2011), Jill Robbins comments on the presence of intercultural relationships that possess neo-imperial undertones and immigrant characters cast as the exotic others in novels such as *Donde comienza tu nombre* (2004) by Mabel Galán and *Cenicienta en Chueca* (2003) by María Felicitas Jaime (*Crossing* 67-8; 93). Gema Pérez Sánchez analyzes the films *A mi madre le gustan las mujeres* and the adaptation of Eduardo Mendicutti’s 1993 novel *Los amantes búlgaros* (2003) as incorporating gay and lesbian Eastern European immigrants in an effort to emphasize new representations of the family that modern, global society has brought to Spain without truly proposing any type of social or political transgression (72; 75). This type of cultural production, I believe also reveals the way these works, in spite of calling attention to certain socio-political advances, display the continued presence of socio-economic and racial hierarchies that underscore the prejudices that accompany visibility in the mainstream market.

Desde la otra orilla, *A mi madre le gustan las mujeres* and *A por todas* provide a means to evaluate the complicated socio-political and cultural situation in Spain due to their incorporation of topics such as immigration and gay marriage that pose questions concerning the position of more marginalized groups— such as LGBT immigrants— in the endeavor by Spain’s LGBT community for legal rights and visibility in mainstream media and society. In their use of a popular genre, chick culture, these works serve as a site to gauge the consequential inclusions

and exclusions that accompany integrating the LGBT community into more mainstream venues in society.

Spanish Chick Culture in Context

María Castrejón has called recent publications by contemporary Spanish lesbian authors a form of “chick lit” for their portrayal of glamorous, successful women situated in an urban climate and involved in mass media and cultural production (159).¹² The term chick lit was originally used by Cris Mazza and Jeffrey DeShell as the title for two successive collections of stories by women authors in the United States, *Chick-Lit: Postfeminist Fiction* (1995) and *Chick Lit 2: No Chick Vics* (1996). As Mazza, an American novelist and short fiction writer herself, explains in her introduction to the first instalment of the collections, the writing found within these pages is far from the frivolous and trivial aesthetic that has come to be associated with the label in contemporary cultural currents. As she explains, chick lit, as seen in the aforementioned short story collections, was first used to describe a writing style and form that is eccentric, clever, ironic and possesses significance and power in its representation of the diversity and depth of women writers (*Chick-Lit* 9). In 2005, Mazza published an article reflecting on what chick lit had come to mean ten years after she and DeShell first used the term in which she describes the distortion of the term’s original meaning, after it was adopted by the commercial press and linked to superficial books by women about “career girls looking for love” (“Who’s Laughing” 21).

As Mazza laments, the label chick lit was quickly robbed of its sarcastic edge, and reinvented as a narrative style that usually portrays a group of twenty or thirty something year old women and consists of heroine-centered plots that focus on the problems and dilemmas of its protagonists (“Who’s Laughing” 24). Under these terms, chick lit has often been criticized for a

lack of sophistication and also for reinforcing patriarchal models in which women's problems always center on their relationships with men. It has also been judged for its lack of political awareness and unserious tone, criticisms typical of any and all writing by or marketed towards women. Suzanne Ferris and Mallory Young describe chick lit as part of a broader chick culture emerging in the mid-1990s in the United States and Britain that includes novels, film ("chick flicks"), magazines and music (*Chick Flicks 2*). While the authors describe the appearance of this type of cultural production as a result of a generational shift among women, it also, as Hilary Radner points out, directly coincides with the consumerist and, more specifically, capitalist agenda associated with neoliberalism (9).

Although Radner praises this turn to what she calls "neo-feminism," seeing it as the continuation of feminism, the volume *Interrogating Postfeminism: Gender and the Politics of Popular Culture* (2007) takes a more critical position towards this phenomenon calling it rather an expression of a "postfeminist culture" and pointing to its inherent limitations (3; 1).

Analyzing chick cultural productions as part of postfeminist culture, Yvonne Tasker and Diane Negra explain that such texts commodify feminism and do not offer a plausible account of contemporary gender and power structures. Angela McRobbie describes postfeminist cultural production as portraying a "double entanglement," or a combination of neoconservative values in reference to gender, sexuality and the family with a more liberal stance in regards to choice and diversity in domestic, sexual and kinship relationships (28). Chick cultural production, then, may be heavily criticized for projecting images that assume full economic freedom for women as well as physical and, especially, sexual empowerment. More specifically, Tasker and Negra identify cultural productions possessing this type of postfeminist edge as tending to presume universally attainable values, lifestyles and economic freedoms for all women. Under this premise, chick culture is not only anchored in consumption, but also possesses a limited vision of

equality that exhibits both racial and class exclusions made evident in the majority of chick culture texts that portray white and middle class characters.

In spite of these criticisms, productions labelled as part of chick culture have mainstream success and, consequently, are a very lucrative genre for publishers (Mazza *Chick Lit* 2). Perhaps the most internationally well-known and cited example of chick culture is British author Helen Fielding's *Bridget Jones' Diary* (1996). The book is credited as the piece of literature that founded contemporary understandings of "chick lit" and, by extension, the many other forms of "chick" cultural productions, as made evident in 2001 with the novel's adaption to film. By August 1997, the paperback edition of the novel had reached number one on the United Kingdom's best-seller list and had been translated into thirty-three languages, and by 2012 it sold 15 million copies world-wide (Whelehan 14; Mañana). The film adaptation was also a box office success, and according the IMDb it grossed 136,611,886 dollars in the United States and Great Britain combined and by August 2001 roughly 13,000,000 in countries such as Spain and Italy respectively that same year ("Bridget Jones' Diary"). The mass appeal and international success of Fielding's novel as well as the subsequent success of the film, demonstrates chick culture as part of a global phenomenon.

A year after the publication of *Bridget Jones's Diary*, the Madrid based LGBT publishing house, EGALES, published *Con Pedigree: un culebrón lésbico por entregas* (1997), the first in a trilogy by Isabel Franc under the pen-name Lola Van Guardia as a part of the "Salida del armario" collection.¹³ Mili Hernández, founder of the editorial that publishes the collection, EGALES, believes that the point of the books published as part of this collection is to provoke interest from a wider audience (cited in Alas 112). Franc was not new to the literary scene, having been nominated for the prestigious Sonrisa Vertical award for her first book, *Entre todas las mujeres* (1992), a novel that queers religious discourses through a parody of the eroticism and

excess characteristic of mystic writing. Set in contemporary Barcelona, *Con pedigree* describes the day to day life of a group of lesbian women and centers on their friendships and relationship to the Spanish cultural and political scene. Of particular importance to the scope of this chapter, the novel invokes several of the characteristics associated with the new aforementioned brand of chick culture in the United States and Great Britain: sentimental themes, an emphasis on femininity and sexuality, a focus on media-driven popular culture, a substantial amount of humour and irony and a focus on predominantly white, middle to upper class characters.

Con pedigree is not alone in its appropriation of the chick lit aesthetic in Spain. Other acclaimed Spanish authors have also employed aspects of the chick lit genre in their writing. Lucía Etxebarría is well known for her incorporation of pop culture references (music, television, movies) as well as a high emphasis on consumption in novels such as *Amor, curiosidad, prozac y dudas* (1997) and *Beatriz y los cuerpos celestes* (1998). In *Veo Veo* (1996) Gabriela Bustelo references internationally recognized brand names and global pop music icons, a technique also present in her second novel *Planeta hembra* (2001). Silvia Grijalba, a music journalist for *El Mundo* turned novelist, makes consumption a central element in *Alivio rápido* (2003), calling upon themes of fashion and music in the development of the novel's main character, Alba. Christine Henseler and Randolph Pope explain that these novels are more commonly known as part of another label borrowed from the United States and Britain, Generation X, used to describe authors born following Spain's transition to democracy (xii). Still, their fusion of pop culture references and heavy emphasis on the presence of consumption with a focus on personal relationships also places them under the chick culture label. Recent films such as Bigas Luna's *Yo soy la Juani* (2006) and *Di Di Hollywood* (2010) also fall into this category due to their representation of female characters that exhibit a process of becoming and consumption as well as incorporate romantic themes and a fairy tale framework.

In Franc's novel, the commercial value and mass appeal of sentimental, love stories visible in the aforementioned novels is presented extravagantly and may be considered a useful venue to insert LGBT stories into mainstream trends. This tactic has earned the novel much praise, advertised on the website of one of Spain's leading LGBT bookstores, Berkana, as piece of literature written with "sarcasmo y ternura a partes iguales sobre unos seres que podrían pulular por una película de Woody Allen aunque tengan un pie siempre puesto en una de Almodóvar" ("Con pedigree"). In an interview with Gracia Trujillo, Mili Hernández, owner of the Berkana bookstore, comments on the importance of novels such as *Con pedigree* that afford visibility to the Spanish LGBT community by forging their own image within mass culture:

Sin visibilidad no íbamos a hacer absolutamente nada [...] teníamos la ley de parejas de hecho en mente pero yo lo que dije es aquí lo que hay que trabajar es con el gay y la lesbiana, el día a día del gay y la lesbiana. Si no, cómo vamos a decir al Gobierno que queremos una ley de parejas de hecho si somos cuatro, como nos dijeron (cited in Trujillo *Deseo* 189)

Hernández's words come after the 1995 march in Madrid under the slogan "Por nuestros derechos," in which only twelve hundred people participated (*Deseo* 189). They also reflect the inherent link between cultural production and political action in the push for legal reforms such as the recognition of domestic partnership between same-sex couples mentioned by Hernández. It is not surprising, then, that Franc is not alone in her use of this type of narrative aesthetic, but rather part of a wider trend from Spanish editorials in the new millennium such as *EGALES* and *Odisea* that specialize in LGBT literature.

In the case of the three examples explored in this chapter, my analysis of chick cultural productions concerning the Spanish LGBT community will focus on the incorporation of more marginalized groups—such as LGBT immigrants—into a mainstream genre with commercial

and mass appeal. By considering more mainstream LGBT cultural productions such as *Desde la otra orilla*, *A mi madre le gustan las mujeres*, and *A por todas*, we find that groups that fall outside of the more visible model of chick culture—white, middle to upper class women—are often incorporated in an asymmetrical fashion that affords them little agency and relies strongly on racial and ethnic stereotypes that place them in an inferior position.

Representations of Race and Ethnicity in *Desde la otra orilla*

Published on the cusp of the new millennium, Mabel Galán's first novel, *Desde la otra orilla* (1999), depicts a simple love story infused with racial and ethnic stereotypes. The plot centers on Alicia, a Spanish woman living in Madrid, who begins to receive anonymous love letters. Unable to ascertain the identity of the letter writer, she seeks advice from her friends and her neighbor, Eloisa, a Cuban immigrant. Alicia initially suspects her ex-boyfriend, Juan, and an old friend, Arturo, but the end of the novel reveals that the letters have been sent by Andrea, a Brazilian immigrant and the owner of the café she frequents. The novel closes as Andrea reveals herself to Alicia, and the two women decide to be together.

A key element in the development of the novel is its setting in Madrid's Lavapiés district, recently dubbed by an article in *El País* as “el nuevo barrio rosa” due to an increased presence of LGBT establishments such as stores, bars and restaurants (Hervás). Unlike Chueca, which is known for its commercial subculture as well as being increasingly expensive and, consequently, more elitist, Lavapiés' appeal is attributed to its reputation as a more affordable LGBT friendly space. It is also commonly known for housing a large part of Madrid's immigrant population due to its more affordable rental market.¹⁴ But, in spite of side stepping Chueca in favor of Lavapiés as the central setting for the plot as well as openly criticizing Chueca for its increasingly commercial character, Galán's novel still participates in a broader discussion of the

problematic blurring of racial issues that bolster LGBT visibility in mainstream society. This is particularly evident in the narrative through what I contend can be read as token gestures of inclusion, seen in the incorporation of immigrant characters and even mentioning one character's travels through Latin America, but at the same time limiting these representations to stereotypical depictions such as the provocative, sensual, primitive or underdeveloped "other." It is my intention to call attention to the way that the narrative, in spite of its openness towards sexuality and gender, still represents Madrid's immigrant population as lingering in the background, lacking any real agency and at many points serving as nothing more than a means for reaffirming Spain's image as a modern, developed nation-state.

Throughout the narrative Alicia tries to discover the identity of the author of the letters she has been receiving. Alicia initially believes that the letters are from her ex-boyfriend Juan, who left her to travel through Latin America. The characterization of Juan and his travels through Latin America are a prime example of the international image of Spain projected in the novel. Juan and Alicia met as students, he was a fervent member of the communist party and involved in several student protests in the mid 1970s. His belief that "la libertad y la igualdad se consideraban el alma y el motor del mundo" carried him to Nicaragua, El Salvador and Chiapas to participate in the revolts and volunteer for non-governmental organizations (Galán 21). In the second half of the novel, Juan returns to Spain after being arrested in Mexico and deported, and his portrayal of his experience abroad emphasizes the corruption and instability found outside of Spain: "La policía es un cuerpo represor en cualquier parte del mundo, pero antes de quejarnos de la nuestra habría que conocer la de otros países [...] Es tan fácil para ellos cargarse a cualquiera y abandonarlo alegremente" (Galán 115). The critical way in which Juan expresses his experience not only portrays Latin America as underdeveloped and dangerous, but also

reaffirms the strength and security of his own country, Spain, as he concludes after all his travels he would prefer to settle down and make a life for himself in Madrid.

The novel's tendency to make a clear distinction between Spain and other countries carries through in its representation of Madrid's immigrant population, and particularly through its depiction of Lavapiés. In Lavapiés, the influence of the immigrant population is not only apparent in the district's rental market, but also in its businesses and shops (locutorios, carnicerías, hair salons, etc) that cater to the immigrant community (Díaz Orueta 183). Examining the integration of different immigrant groups in Madrid, a study released by the Ministro de Trabajo y Asuntos Sociales indicated that the increasing number of immigrants in areas such as Lavapiés was perceived by Spaniards as a principle factor contributing to the declining status of the neighborhood (González Enríquez and Álvarez-Miranda 22). In this regard, in spite of their growing presence in the district, immigrants still face problems integrating into the community. Taken under this context, Galán's narrative echoes many of the debates facing Lavapiés since the late 1990s both through its representation of the multiethnic population and also in its portrayal of the district's development coming into the new millennium.

The narrative's portrait of the district becomes rather sordid as Alicia is portrayed as highly critical of how the district has transformed over the years, calling it a dump and emphasizing an increase in crime in the neighborhood during the twenty years she has lived there (Galán 16). The central district has traditionally been known as a neglected part of Madrid. In 1997, Lavapiés was declared an Area de Rehabilitación Preferente (ARP), and the then governing Partido Popular delegated 14,000 euros to the gentrification of the Lavapiés district (Aguirre). The plan was not intended to renovate the entire district, only a certain sector that received funding to update buildings in decay. The rehabilitation efforts made by the Partido

Popular have been criticized, particularly by the PSOE, for not having made real improvements throughout the district (Francés). The plan also did nothing to improve the marginalized position of the district's immigrant population, offering no social programs such as schools for the children of immigrants to learn Spanish or a community health program (Aguirre).

Lavapiés' significance as the narrative's central location is indicated by the inclusion of an international mix of characters, including immigrants from Brazil, Cuba and Chile. One of the novel's main subplots revolves around Alicia's friendship with her neighbor Eloísa. Eloísa is explained to have arrived in Spain following a man, Néstor, who promised her life outside of Cuba was better, but never contacting her once she had arrived to Spain (Galán 34).

Understanding the significance of the representation of Eloísa in the narrative requires a basic grasp of the function of stereotypes in cultural production. Drawing on the work of Orrin E. Klapp, Richard Dyer posits that representations of characters are divided between "social types" and "stereotypes," social types representing those who "belong" to a society and stereotypes representing those who fall outside of the parameters of the expected social and cultural conventions of a specific group ("The Role" 248). Social types, then, possess a more flexible character while stereotypes always carry within them an implicit narrative, a distinction apparent in Galán's novel as Alicia transforms throughout the narrative, eventually falling in love with Andrea, while Eloísa's character does not develop and remains in the background ("The Role" 249). As Dyer further explains, the most important function of the stereotype is "to maintain sharp boundary definitions, to define clearly where the pale ends and thus who is clearly within and who clearly beyond it" ("The Role" 249). In this context, the repeated articulation of Eloísa's racial and ethnic difference from Alicia serve to reaffirm social categories that privilege a sophisticated representation of a white European subject.

Eloísa lives near Alicia, allowing the two women to become good friends. She is described as exceptionally beautiful and devotedly religious. Throughout the novel Alicia consults Eloísa about her future and, in particular, her love life—Eloísa even describes herself as Alicia’s fairy godmother on several occasions. In this respect, through her close friendship with Alicia throughout the novel, Eloísa resembles what Isabel Santaolalla has called “el otro familiar” when analyzing the representation of Latin American immigrants in Spanish cinema (169). Although placed within the context of Spanish filmic production, Santaolalla’s observations point to the way that this community, unlike other immigrant groups, is granted a certain level of cultural (and legal) acceptance due to their shared history and language with Spain (171). Santaolalla attributes these special circumstances to the politics surrounding the 1992 commemoration of the five hundredth anniversary of Colón’s journey to the Americas and, consequently, an increased interest in Spanish cultural production to portray its ties to Latin America, while at the same time emphasizing its position as the “Madre Patria” (171). Taken in this context, the depiction of Eloísa appears fairly positive, presenting her as Alicia’s ally and spiritual protector and their friendship as reaffirming the bonds between Spain and Latin America.

Still, in spite of the women’s close relationship, the narrative marks the explicit difference between them: “No tenían nada en común; diferente raza, diferente cultura, distinta edad, costumbres que no compartían en absoluto...” (Galán 12). The narrative often underscores Eloísa’s race and ethnicity by frequently referring to her as “la mulata” and “la cubana,” a narrative component that signals the inequalities between her and Alicia given that Alicia’s whiteness and Spanish ethnicity are never discussed. Eloísa’s appearance, in contrast, is described in great detail: “la cubana bien entrada en carnes, de rostro resplandeciente y ojos grandísimos, que aseguraba tener dotes adivinatorias, heredadas, según decía ella, de un

antepasado africano que llegó esclavo a la isla caribeña, para no volver nunca más a pisar su tierra” (Galán 12). The narrative also points to her inferior position to Alicia, portraying her as impoverished, living in a small apartment and condescendingly describing the “*empatía especial*” Alicia feels towards Eloísa (Galán 12). In this sense, while the novel appears to favor inclusion and the recognition of minority groups, it actually delivers, whether meaning to or not, a stereotypical description of immigrants, particularly their exotic character and inferior socio-economic position.

Apart from directly calling attention to Eloísa’s race and ethnicity, the narrative also spatially constructs her “otherness” from Alicia. Eloísa’s apartment is described as decorated with photographs of witches, African spiritualists and amulets—a detail that not only further accentuates her difference, but also presents her as somewhat primitive in comparison to Alicia (Galán 32). Eloísa’s methods are portrayed as a mesh of contemporary Christianity and archaic rituals, and one visit between her and Alicia is even described as resembling a “ritual como de iniciación,” as Eloísa is described raising her hands, closing her eyes and reciting “unas ininteligibles salmodias” all the while repeating the names Xangô, Ogum, Barà and Ossanha associated with the Yoruba religion, or in Cuba what has become commonly known as Santería, a merging of this religious practice with Roman Catholicism (Galán 111). This portrayal of Eloísa and the space she resides in contrast with the narrative’s description of an urban, modern Madrid as well as create a symbolic boundary between her and Alicia since her difference is stereotypically marked and seems to stand for the “primitive” and anti-modern by comparison to Alicia.

In contrast to the detail with which the narrative describes Eloísa’s background, home and customs, the narrative provides relatively little information about Alicia. Even though Alicia’s race and ethnicity are understood throughout the narrative, they are not made as

explicitly visible as in the case of Eloísa. Apart from a brief reference to her place of work, described as “un bufete de abogados especializado en separaciones y divorcios,” the novel provides few details about Alicia’s life, her physical appearance or, aside from its location in Lavapiés, the apartment she lives in. Instead, her more dominant position in the narrative leads to her not being represented in terms of her race or her ethnicity, but rather through her crisis in sexual identity. Consequently, while the representation of Alicia’s Spanish identity may not reside in a certain set of stereotypes, it is found more in narrative structural positions and rhetorical tropes. Framing one of the narrative’s main story lines in this asymmetrical fashion consequently reflects the tendency of the novel to place its non-Spanish characters in an inferior position to the Spanish population.

This representation of Eloísa coincides with the broader representation of immigrants in Spain in contemporary cultural production. In her aforementioned study, Isabel Santaolalla notes that the year 1996 marked a point of inflection in which cultural production—particularly film—began to reflect the effects of integration politics concerning immigrants such as the Plan para la Integración Social de los Inmigrantes in 1994 and the Observatorio Permanente de la Inmigración and the Foro para la Inmigración in 1995. While this demonstrates an increased interest in mainstream Spanish culture in stories that center on different ethnic communities, many of these films contain a fairly rigid, stereotypical and, at times, xenophobic view of immigrants that is also present in other forms of cultural production such as narrative and popular music.¹⁵ Daniela Flesler has commented on the increased presence and awareness of Spain’s immigrant population due to the country’s intensive economic development, especially after its entrance into the European Economic Community in 1986 (2). Specifically focusing on Moroccan immigrants, Flesler argues that the response to the influx of immigrant populations in

Spain resulted in a rhetoric of difference and stereotype building in order to distinguish between different immigrant groups and also to ensure Spain's place as part of developed Europe (10).

The novel's disproportionate portrayal of its non-Spanish characters becomes all the more apparent when analyzing the representation of Alicia's love interest, Andrea, a Brazilian immigrant and owner of the café she frequents. Since Andrea is revealed to be the author of the anonymous love letters sent to Alicia at the end of the novel, for the majority of the narrative she consequently remains a fairly peripheral figure in order to heighten the novel's romantic suspense surrounding the identity of the letter writer. Andrea briefly appears in the prologue, narrated in the first person by Alicia, who uses an exceedingly visual language to describe Andrea's dark body reclined across from her on the couch and briefly recount their first meeting before the narrative temporally shifts in the next chapter to before the two women met (Galán 7). Until the end of the novel Andrea is primarily portrayed as the waitress at the café Alicia frequents with her friends, A Braisilera, only described once in passing as "una bonita muchacha de piel oscura, ojos verdes y cabello corto" (Galán 28).

The narrative's portrayal of Andrea is easily overlooked since these brief references to her body provide the main information given about her character throughout the majority of the narrative. As a lesbian who has emigrated from Brazil to Spain and established herself in Lavapiés, Andrea presents the multiple and intersecting characteristics (and oppressions) that come together to frame her identity. A closer analysis of the underdeveloped representation of Andrea's character—and in a more a general sense, that of queer immigrants in Spain— in comparison with the narrative's representation of Alicia or other immigrant characters such as Eloísa also reveals the novel's preference to call attention to only one aspect of individual identity, such as Alicia's sexuality or Eloísa's ethnicity, instead of emphasizing the many axis (race, class, gender, sexuality) that may influence identity, particularly in a space such as

Lavapiés. Andrea represents what Beatriz Preciado in reference to the transgressive potential of queer bodies describes as the “transversalidad de las relaciones de poder” that put into question “no sólo los regimens de representación política sino también los sistemas de producción de saber científico de los ‘normales’” (“Multitudes”). In this sense, the limited representation of Andrea coincides with a disposition in the narrative towards more stable and normative categories of identity upheld through stereotypes and strategies of differentiation that reveal prejudices and, ultimately, uphold fixed notions of national belonging.

Within this construction of the Spanish LGBT community, women such as Eloísa and Andrea can only exist as second class citizens with limited participatory roles. In Andrea’s case, her limited presence and involvement in the portrayal of Madrid’s Lavapiés district is another example of how immigrants’ participation and roles are narrowly defined and how queer immigrants’ experiences are easily dismissed in favor of the less troublesome portrayal of mainstream gay and lesbian characters. Despite the narrative’s open criticism of the commercial character of Madrid’s more well-known LGBT district, Chueca, the representation of the LGBT community being produced is imbued by a homonormative social order that reaffirms racial hierarchies.

Heteronormative Subtexts in *A mi madre le gustan las mujeres*

Like *Desde la otra orilla*, the film *A mi madre le gustan las mujeres* (2002) directed by Daniela Féjerman and Inés París, adopts the chick culture aesthetic as well as incorporates the immigrant community in supporting roles. Set in Madrid, the film portrays the reaction of three daughters, Gimena (María Pujalte), Elvira (Leonor Watling) and Sol (Silvia Abascal), when their mother, Sofia (Rosa María Sardà), informs them that she has fallen in love with a much younger woman from Prague, Eliska (Eliska Sirová). Apart from their initial shock, her daughters begin

to resent Eliska seeing her as a threat to their importance in Sofia's life as well as suspecting that Eliska is only using Sofia for money to pay back the fellowship she was granted by Czech government to study in Spain. Sofia's daughters hatch a plan to break up the couple, and they ultimately succeed as Sofia believes that Eliska has betrayed her when she doesn't return home after a night out with Elvira. Eliska returns to the Czech Republic, and Sofia's daughters, realizing the error in their ways, travel to Prague to try and convince Eliska to return, but it is ultimately Sofia who travels to Prague to bring Eliska back to Spain. After returning to Spain, Eliska's visa expires and the film ends with her marriage to Elvira's boyfriend, Miguel (Chisco Amado), in order to permanently stay in the country.

Produced by Fernando Colomo, the director credited with inaugurating the "comedia madrileña" with his film *Tigres de papel* (1977), it is not surprising that *A mi madre le gustan las mujeres* uses many of the comedia's well-known techniques: a focus on emotional problems (marriage, children, relationship difficulties) and on younger character(s), and the use of humor to explore the issues of ordinary people (Jordan and Morgan-Tamosunas 69). The film was released in 2002 during the Aznar administration (1996-2004), which continually opposed passing a law recognizing domestic partnership between same-sex couples. Under this context, the film's use of the comedy genre to portray a happy ending for a "modern" Spanish family, that apart from its recognition of same-sex couples also includes multiple nationalities, may be read as a sharp criticism of a socio-political system that refused to acknowledge the rights of such individuals. Even though the film may instill a sense of critical agency to characters usually ignored in mainstream cultural production, in my analysis it is my intention to show how the film ultimately affirms heteronormative objectives in its portrayal of lesbian sexuality, immigrants, consumer culture, and the family.

The first scenes of the film introduce Sofia's daughters, scuffling through stores to find a gift for their mother's birthday. The film opens with Gimena's hands caressing a red scarf, quickly shifting to Sol dabbling her finger in a drink and Elvira, whose crisis in sexual identity forms the core of the film's plot, indecisively looking through an assortment of picture frames. The film's use of a fast pace technique to rapidly introduce the characters by focusing on the gifts they choose for their mother quickly locates each of the women as part of mainstream, middle class, consumer society. The scene then shifts as Elvira frames a picture of her with her mother and sisters gathered around a piano, now at her mother's home to celebrate her birthday with her sisters.

As the scene evolves, Eliska arrives and Sofia introduces her as her girlfriend to her daughters. While Gimena and Elvira are left in shock and attempt to reconcile their own sentiments in regards to their mother's coming out, Sol, the youngest daughter, finds her mother's relationship with Eliska rather hip and, as we later see, marketable. Sol is the lead singer in a pop rock band and decides to debut a new song, "A mi madre le gustan las mujeres," at a concert she invites her entire family to attend and dedicates the song to her mother before the performance. Placed to a catchy rhythm and melody, the song is a hit and the crowd—excluding her family—cheers and dances along. The song, however, also demonstrates an exploitative attitude towards the gay community within the contemporary neoliberal market that appropriates anything that sells. While allowing for a heightened level of visibility, it does not necessarily result in any kind of radical socio-political change. Rather than serving as an expression of LGBT empowerment and cultural strength, neither Sofia nor Eliska are presented as gaining any type of agency through Sol's performance, they are merely the object of inspiration for a marketable song.

After the performance, the scene shifts showing Sofia scolding her daughter for creating a public spectacle of her sexuality and her private life for her own professional means. Sofia firmly defends the privacy of her relationship with Eliska. The only moment in the film in which Sofia and Eliska's physical relationship is hinted at is during a conversation between Sofia and Elvira at her home. As Elvira gathers the self-confidence to ask her mother for financial support to quit her job and dedicate herself to writing, Sofia takes the opportunity to try and explain how her relationship with Eliska began. The moment she begins to describe the physical turn in their relationship, however, Elvira awkwardly interrupts her and Sofia never finishes her story. These scenes demonstrate that despite the fact that Sofia and Eliska's relationship is not necessarily "closeted" in the film, it is also never allowed to become completely public and ultimately transgress the boundaries of domestic space. In my opinion, this is all the more apparent in the film when considering the sexual and intimate scenes afforded to Elvira and her love interest, Miguel, in the film. Noteworthy in this regard is the predominance of sequences of close up shots between Elvira and Miguel that increase the sense of intimacy between the two characters throughout the film in contrast to the more reserved representation of the relationship between Sofia and Eliska, which is pushed to the background of Elvira's crisis in sexual identity.

Such a portrayal of Sofia and Eliska's relationship recalls queer theorists' Lauren Berlant and Michael Warner's discussion about the vulnerability of queer public spaces, or queer counterpublics, which constitute "an indefinitely accessible world conscious of its subordinate relation" that allows for "the development of kinds of intimacy that bear no necessary relation to domestic space, to kinship, to the couple form, to property, or to the nation" (Berlant and Warner 558). Berlant and Warner argue that creating a queer counterpublic must go beyond building a safe zone for queer sex—or in the case of this film the image of a monogamous same-sex female couple—and offer "changed possibilities of identity, intelligibility, publics, culture and sex"

(548). Understood in this regard, the underdeveloped representation of the cross-generational and cross-cultural romance between Sofia and Eliska reveals what Gema Pérez Sánchez in her analysis of *A mi madre le gustan las mujeres* and *Los amantes búlgaros* identifies as an internalized homophobia that places non-normative queers—that is, those that do not participate in a traditional, domesticated family model—in the position of secondary citizens in Spain (84). Pérez Sánchez argues that Sofia and Eliska’s relationship is “nothing more than an excuse for the filmmakers to carry out a comic, safely contained exploration of current anxieties attendant upon the new configurations of families that a postmodern globalized society has brought about in traditionally Catholic Spain” (75). This projection of a diverse and progressive family found in the film, I would add, also serves to reaffirm the obscuring of racial issues characteristic of queer liberalism through its inclusion of a queer Eastern European immigrant with a supporting role in the film.

To a certain extent, Eliska’s peripheral role in the film is similar to the representation of the immigrant characters found in *Desde la otra orilla*. Eliska is introduced to Sofia’s daughters and viewers within the first scenes of the movie; however, similar to the representation of Andrea and Eloísa in Galán’s novel, her Spanish carries a heavy accent and when finally offering her gift to Sofia, her three daughters exchange a critical glance at her mispronunciation of the word “regalo.” Eliska quickly disappears in the scene as the film focuses more on the reaction of Sofia’s three daughters to the news, particularly through a sequence of close up shots that draws in on each of their staggering faces as piano music performed by Sofia and Eliska plays in the background. Apart from a short scene in which Eliska offers Elvira part of a typical Czech dish she has prepared, bads, her ethnicity is not fully addressed or developed in the film until the final scenes when Jimena, Elvira and Sol travel to Prague to ask her to return. These scenes, however, project a superficial gaze on the city since, apart from Eliska’s home, the film features

shots of well known tourist sites such as Prague Castle and Charles Bridge. Additionally, Eliska's home is presented as crowded, living with her aunt, brother, nieces and nephews. Even though in her profession Eliska is the equal of Sofia, she is presented as unequal to her in terms of financial ability and independence—a dynamic that reaffirms latent Cold War sentiments by presenting a less advanced Eastern European depending on the progressive, more able West.

Isabel Santaolalla explains that from the perspective of Western Europe, Eastern Europe is placed in an inferior position due to its ties to communism, economic underdevelopment and many civil wars (153). However, Santaolalla also notes that in comparison to other immigrant groups, particularly those of African and Asian descent, “su físico no les marca en principio como diferentes a la comunidad nativa. Así pues, el inmigrante de la Europa del este es similar pero diferente” (153). These observations become all the more significant when considering the representation of Eliska in the film since, while not Spanish, she is a white European woman. I believe this detail represents an important distinction between Eliska and the mulata immigrant characters in *Desde la otra orilla* who, in contrast to Eliska, are primarily exoticized through a “primitive” representation of their ethnicity or a hyper-sexual representation of their bodies. In this sense, even though Eliska is placed in an inferior position, portrayed as poor and not as modern as Sofia and her family, unlike the representation of the Caribbean or Brazilian immigrant “other” that serves as the focal point for immigrant characters found in *Desde la otra orilla*, her character is afforded a certain amount of sophistication and class, particularly at the end of the film when it is revealed that she is a famous artist in her own country independent of Sofia and seen giving a flawless piano performance as Sofia and her daughters watch. Eliska's status as a valued artist starkly contrasts to Eloisa's fortune reading tactics and Andrea's coffee shop in Galán's novel. By calling attention to this difference in the representation of LGBT immigrants in these texts, it is my aim to demonstrate the continued presence racial and ethnic

hierarchies within Spanish LGBT cultural production that, by following models found in mainstream culture, continue to label certain groups as “desirable” and others as “outsiders.”

I would contend that this difference is most apparent in the final scenes of *A mi madre le gustan las mujeres*, which depicts the happy (white) national family maintained through Eliska’s “fake marriage” to Miguel to stay in the country. Eliska and Miguel’s marriage at first may appear to be a parody given that at the time the film was released Eliska and Sofia could not have been legally married in Spain. The sequence in which Eliska and Miguel are married opens by framing a sustained close up shot of the pair from the point of view of the magistrate and cuts back and forth between the perspective of the priest and that of Eliska and Miguel facing the altar. These shots emphasize the restrictive understanding of marriage by framing the ceremony through a series of shots from the perspective of civic authority that only engages Eliska, Miguel, and the magistrate in the ceremony. As the magistrate announces that the bride and groom may kiss, the sequence cuts to a wider angled shot of the altar that includes Elvira and Sofia as Eliska and Miguel each reach for their actual partner, and the frame slowly widens to include the entire family as they congratulate the happy couples.

Still, in spite of its critical potential, I believe that this union as a parody of the traditional vision of marriage is problematic. In *A Theory of Parody*, Linda Hutcheon argues that beyond implying ridicule, parody can also be understood as possessing both subversive and reaffirming effects since it implies a “repetition with difference” (32). While parody offers a serious criticism through its difference (or distance) from the original signaled through irony, it also through its imitation consequently “inscribes the mocked conventions of the original onto itself, thereby guaranteeing their continued existence” (Hutcheon 75). Understood in this light, it is my contention that the parody offered by the film simultaneously critiques and endorses the institution of marriage as well as the traditional social values it represents. Even though the

film's parody is capable of calling into question the exclusion of certain groups from specific rights granted by the state, through its representation of marriage as the only solution to *all* of Eliska's problems, it at the same time upholds the institution(s) it intends to question and critique.

The final scenes of the film portray the new family celebrating after the wedding: viewers see Eliska pulling Sofia in to dance with her while the others form a circle around them, and Sofia eventually reaches for her daughters and Eliska moves to the outer circle with Sofia's daughters' heterosexual partners and their father. The image of the "happy family" presented in *A mi madre le gustan las mujeres*, however, is one that carries problematic assumptions of social progress and a narrow view of lesbian sexuality and the contribution of immigrants to Spain. In its reliance on the depiction of a less advanced "other," Eliska, in order to emphasize the image of a developed, modern Spanish nation, the film ultimately incorporates new characters but under traditional schemes.

¿Una sociedad arco iris?: Monochromatic Tendencies in Libertad Morán's *A por todas*

Libertad Moran's best seller, *A por todas* (2005), centers on the experiences of Spain's thirty-something Madrid based LGBT community- a theme that extends throughout the subsequent novels that make up this literary trilogy, *Mujeres estupendas* (2006) and *Una noche más* (2007). The novel narrates a year in the life of Ruth who has just had her heartbroken by her long term girlfriend, Eva. Ruth is guarded in her feelings and quickly moves between relationships without commitment or deep emotional attachment. Like *A mi madre le gustan las mujeres*, the novel also references legal reforms favoring the LGBT community, specifically the legalization of same-sex marriage. Exceedingly humorous, the writer's depiction of contemporary LGBT culture in Spain includes an array of topics- ranging from the amorous

adventures among a select group of friends (primarily focusing on the novel's protagonist, Ruth), to political scandal in the revealing of a financial scam hatched by the leading male members of the novel's principal LGBT collectives. Many of these accounts demonstrate a heightened connection to images found in mainstream popular culture and, in particular, an attempt to appropriate such figures as applicable to the LGBT community. In the novel, this focus can be attributed to a self-proclaimed attempt by the narrator to combat the universality strictly assigned to heterosexual relationships in mainstream culture, in particular chick culture texts such as *Bridget Jones' Diary* (Morán 16). Tied to this light-hearted representation of relationships between women, however, is not only a comical rendition of traditional romantic structures, but also a deeper inquest into the ramifications of the use of such schemes to represent more marginalized communities, in this case, lesbians.

The first chapter of *A por todas* opens as a group of friends gather at a local coffee shop in Madrid to catch up after the summer. Narrated in the first person by the novel's protagonist, Ruth, the novel relates her romantic and sexual happenings and includes comic anecdotes concerning outings with her group of friends. According to the narrator, lesbian relationships do not greatly differ from those of any man or woman- heterosexual, homosexual or bisexual. They suffer the same frustrations, awkwardness and obstacles in dating as anyone else (Morán 15). To make this connection explicit, the narrator appeals to well-known literary and cinematic figures Bridget Jones and Rob Fleming, both of whom are the topic of several pages in the novel's "Preambulo" (Morán 16-8). The narrator recalls these figures as symbols of "el universo masculino y femenino respectivamente de lo que ha sido el *fin de siècle* y lo que está siendo el inicio del nuevo milenio" (Morán 17). Despite these figures clearly heterosexual identity, the narrator argues that the complications and problems these characters encounter in their romantic escapades is also applicable to the LGBT community, in this novel specifically the lesbian

community. Through an appeal to mainstream pop culture icons, the narrator insists on the “normality” behind lesbian relationships and at the same time invokes the self-deprecating humor and consumer based aesthetic that characterizes mainstream, or chick culture, novels.

Of note in *A por todas* are the numerous references to popular music and, particularly, the narrator’s reference to the American TV series *Friends* (1994-2004). In the novel’s fifth chapter, the narrator introduces her latest love interest, Carmen. Carmen is recently divorced from a long term marriage to Roberto, with whom she has a son. Ruth describes Carmen’s situation as “typical,” a woman marrying a man in spite of having other interests (Morán 148). When introducing Carmen to her friend Alicia, Ruth comically compares Carmen’s situation to that of the American series’ character Ross when his wife leaves him for another woman. The comparison is met with laughs as Carmen explains that this was actually one of their favorite series. While on the one hand, the reference to the American sitcom makes for a humorous anecdote that, in its identification with mainstream pop culture, serves to undermine the “normality” strictly assigned to heterosexual stories, on the other, the characters’ ability to feel interpolated, in Althusserian terms, by the characters on the American series also demonstrates their identification with a world that, beyond sexuality, lacks recognition of other forms of diversity, such as race and class. In as much as the narrator’s portrayal appears to parody normative standards, it also serves to reaffirm them in its representation of characters that follow the model of mainstream white heterosexual culture. This likeness is made all the more clear in the narrator’s depiction of Carmen’s family with her ex-husband, particularly their son, Robertito, whose happiness is depicted by growing up, going to school, meeting a girl and eventually getting married (Morán 153). Interestingly, in spite of Carmen’s own experience, she is portrayed as imagining not only a “normal” upbringing for her son, but more specifically his having a heteronormative future.

Adding weight to this problematic portrayal of “normality” in the novel is the narrator’s depiction of her own family during a visit to her parents’ house. Ruth’s family lives in Madrid’s prestigious Barrio de Salamanca, one of the wealthiest parts of the city. She describes her parents as “progres” (the Spanish equivalent of “liberal”), projecting a liberal outlook and attitude concerning politics and culture in spite of their position in one of the more conservative parts of the city. According to the narrator, her family was grateful to have a lesbian daughter, since her “alternative” sexuality only served to further position them as open-minded and liberal, explaining:

Mis padres siempre han ido de progres. Se han enorgullecido de haber sido miembros del partido comunista en su juventud y de no ser bien vistos por sus convicciones políticas en un ambiente tan tradicional y conservador como el que se respira en el barrio de Salamanca. Una hija lesbiana tan solo les hubiera servido para consolidar su imagen de liberales de cara a la galería. Y yo no estaba dispuesta a darles tan retorcida satisfacción (Morán 126).

Contained within these seemingly passing comments about the protagonist’s family and childhood is a hint of what Jill Robbins in her assessment of lesbian fiction, specifically Lucía Etxebarría’s *Beatriz y los cuerpos celestes*, describes as “the illusion of transgressing societal norms without questioning their epistemological bases” (124).

Without a doubt, the novel presents Ruth’s home as more progressive, depicting an awkward dinner conversation in which Ruth is revealed to have slept with her brother’s girlfriend who he has brought home for dinner. Nonetheless, as much as the narrator’s description of her own family serves to reflect the advancement seen in the country in regards to individual rights, it also acts as means for reflecting on peripheral figures that remain excluded in more mainstream cultural representations. The narrator’s characterization of herself as someone

who has advocated for “diversity” and who feels most comfortable in a space in which there are women, men, gay, straight, black and white, appears somewhat ironic considering that none of the spaces represented in the novel conforms to such a model (Morán 218). I would contend that the narrator’s words also reflect the blurring of racial issues within mainstream LGBT identity politics associated with queer liberalism through its projection of progress and “diversity” without giving attention to the structural inequalities inherent in society—in this case the absence of voices that may serve as examples of the diverse space described by the protagonist in spite of the narrative’s setting in Madrid, one of Spain’s largest and most ethnically diverse cities.

While the majority of the novel is dedicated to a quotidian depiction of Ruth’s love life, the novel also directly engages with lesbian and gay political issues, at the center of which is a campaign for lesbian visibility as well as the celebration of the approval of same-sex marriage at the end of the novel. Even though they criticize the objectives and philosophy of LGBT organizations, Ruth and her friends are involved in the collectives GYLA (Gays and Lesbians in Action) and GYLIS (Gays and Lesbians for Social Equality) as volunteers, which may be read as humorous references to the famous Spanish comedian Miguel Gila and to the slang term “gilipollas” (idiot). It is revealed that the collectives have received a grant from the IFI (Independent Feminist Institute) to sponsor a campaign for lesbian visibility. While the campaign only serves as a backdrop to the novel’s central focus on Ruth’s romantic adventures, it does bring to light the problematic political make up of Madrid’s LGBT collectives. Jill Robbins notes that the novel’s representation of these collectives alludes to the two major LGBT collectives associated with Madrid, FELGTB and COGAM, which have both been heavily criticized for their integration of “pink businesses” and support of the general commercialization of the movement as a political tool (*Crossing* 149). Robbins also explains that in the novel these groups are portrayed as being more oriented towards gay men in the events they sponsor since

they view activities oriented towards the lesbian community as less lucrative causes (*Crossing* 113).

During one of the novel's "interludios," Ruth talks with her friend, Juan, who with his partner, Diego, is working for the collectives passing out flyers not only to promote the visibility campaign but also for the prevention of HIV. Apart from commenting on the large quantity of money the collectives obtained for the campaign, Juan casually tells Ruth the long hours Diego has been working and how little he is paid. Though the exchange is easy to overlook since the topic is quickly abandoned as the friends begin planning an outing, it becomes an important anecdote when later in the novel it is revealed that the collectives' leaders have been stealing money from the campaign to build an all male gay retreat on an island in Latin America. Ruth and her friends uncover the scandal and release the evidence to the press before the city's Pride festivities to celebrate gay and lesbian marriage. While the novel is critical of the corruption that can occur in organizations that exert excessive financial and symbolic power in a community, there is also no real change made to correct the system that allowed such transgressions to occur.

In its portrait of Madrid's Pride festivities, the novel demonstrates the traditional celebratory nature of Pride, but also makes reference to the incorporation of several public and private businesses in the celebration (Morán 316). David Montilla notes that one of the principle criticisms of Chueca's Pride celebrations over the course of several years has been the creation of a "laboratorio político-empresarial" that has placed emphasis on "pink businesses" and trivialized the celebration's ties to a historical struggle in the movement for sexual liberation ("Cabalgatas empresariales" 50). Consequently, even though one problem was exposed and amended, the narrative still demonstrates the predominance of an economic system based on mass consumerism and a network of businesses and organizations that sustain a capitalist mold

and also makes invisible individuals and activist groups that do not conform or are critical of this model.

Even though Morán's fiction attempts to question what it terms the "halo de universalidad" strictly assigned to heterosexual stories as well as advocate for the visibility of lesbians in prominent activist groups, no broad scale change or criticism is imagined (Morán 18). In its focus on the more visible LGBT activist scene, the narrative demonstrates the dominant hold of consumerism on mainstream cultural forms, and also offers a one-dimensional understanding of queer experiences that does not take into account queer subjectivities that do not fit this model.

Conclusion

The work of Mabel Galán, Inés París, Daniela Féjerman and Libertad Morán offers a thorough depiction not only of the changing socio-political and cultural make-up of queer Madrid but also the consequences of the incorporation of Spain's LGBT community into more visible mainstream cultural forms. This development in cultural production is particularly significant when taken as part of a broader movement in Spain for legal advances, particularly the push for legal recognition of same-sex unions begun in the 1990s. The world portrayed in these works is one defined by an adherence to conventional standards and predominantly blurs racial as well as ethnic issues in its representation of queer life in Spain. It is not surprising, then, that each of these works generates a more critical reading to examine more than the visibility attained through them, but also the structural positions and rhetorical strategies employed that bring to light questions concerning the consequences of assimilation to mainstream cultural and political spheres.

Desde la otra orilla lends itself to an analysis of the marginalization and stereotypical representation of immigrants and Latin America in general. By allocating certain groups to a peripheral existence under a neoliberal model, the novel secures Spain's image as a part of developed, Western Europe as well as ensures traditional hierarchies within different social groups. Like *A por todas* and *A mi madre le gustan las mujeres*, the novel essentially conforms to expected social roles. *A mi madre le gustan las mujeres* places an intercultural lesbian relationship at the heart of the film's plot since it motivates Elvira's crisis in sexual identity, but it ultimately restricts the representation of the relationship between these women by placing it in the background instead of making it the film's focal point. *A por todas* places the LGBT community at the core of its plot and advocates for diversity, but with its concentration on the more visible Madrid LGBT activist scene the novel leaves no room for perspectives that may fall outside these models.

Through their conformity to a conventional, mainstream understanding of social structures, these works underscore that not all social groups receive the same access or advantages afforded by visibility. Moreover, in their privileging of white, middle to upper class subjects, and in some cases the integration of immigrant characters, they draw attention to the negative effects of appealing to a heteronormative model and to those individuals who are often marginalized or that go unrecognized in dominant cultural venues— in this case, chick cultural production. In spite of altering the standard “girl meets boy” formula for the less conventional “girl meets girl,” the representation of Spain, and more specifically Madrid, in all of these works conforms to a model of national identity still defined by hierarchies in which certain groups and minorities struggle to receive the benefits of socio-political changes in the country, if able to at all. Consequently, even though these works offer a necessary and critical perspective concerning the visibility of the lesbian community within the LGBT movement, they also

simultaneously solicit a more serious analysis of the mainstream cultural trends they appropriate to achieve this goal.

Chapter 2
On Fantasy, Exoticism and Otherness in Contemporary Spanish Lesbian Travel
Narratives

By analyzing literary and cinematic texts that explore the presence of LGBT migrants in the country in the previous chapter, we have seen the ability of Spanish queer cultural productions to initiate discussions of inclusion and exclusion within the context of contemporary Spanish national identity and citizenship. This chapter also examines notions of inclusion and belonging in Spanish queer cultural production, but shifts its focus from queer migrations into the country to narratives by Spanish lesbian authors in which the characters travel abroad and become involved in cross-cultural queer relationships. Such texts include Illy Nes' *Morbo* (1999), Carmen Nestares' *Venus en Buenos Aires* (2001), María Felicitas Jaime's short story "Ejecutivas" (2003), Asia Lillo's *Diario de un aupair bollo en USA* (2006) and Cristina Cuesta's short story "Zoe y Haydee" (2007). In this chapter, I will specifically focus on Spanish LGBT narratives that portray travels to Africa, specifically Tunisia in Inés Nuñez's "Como decíamos ayer..." (2002) and Senegal in Illy Nes' *El lago rosa* (2004). It is my aim to explore the way these texts draw on the fantasy of the "Other" and call attention to cross-cultural relationships that insert the LGBT community into representations of European superiority to non-Western countries. Taking into account the tangential representation of queers of color noted in the previous chapter, their incorporation and more prominent presence in queer travel narratives deserves attention. Through an analysis of "Como decíamos ayer..." and *El lago rosa*, I will examine the representation of queer subjects within these texts that are exoticized for the sexual pleasure of Spanish queer travelers. Furthermore, the presence of queer "Others" in these narratives compels a consideration of how Spain's LGBT community negotiates its position as a

part of Europe in economic, political and cultural terms through racial and ethnic differences from other parts of the world.

Nuñez and Nes' narratives employ some of the traditional characteristics associated with European travel narrative through their use of exoticism and asymmetrical power relations. Mary Louise Pratt thoroughly explains the connection between travel and writing as well as the power relations that arise within the cross-cultural encounters portrayed in European travel narratives beginning in the seventeenth century in *Imperial Eyes*. Pratt examines the many forms of European travel writing—scientific, heroic, romantic—and explores the way it tends to project an image of European dominance over a foreign, exotic “Other.” These interactions take place in what Pratt terms a “contact zone,” a social space of “highly asymmetrical relations of domination and subordination—such as colonialism and slavery, or their aftermaths as they are lived out across the globe today” (7). Interestingly, rather than drawing on Spain's own colonial past, “Como decíamos ayer...” and *El lago rosa* draw on France's colonial legacy and are set in former French colonies— Senegal and Tunisia. Here I address this approach to the representation of international presence within these narratives that focuses more broadly on Europe's neo-colonial relationship with Africa as better understood as an assertion of Spain's position in the European geopolitical landscape, especially considering its increased participation in international affairs after its integration in the European Union in 1986.

Spain's integration into the European Union was widely supported since it promised improved economic welfare and the opportunity for the country to position itself among other member states such as France, Germany and Britain (Farrell 5-6). During the 1990s, the celebration of the Olympic Games in Barcelona in 1992— dubbed the “Año de España”— along with the hosting of the World Fair in Sevilla and Madrid's designation as the European City of Culture demonstrated Spain's growing global presence. Helen Graham and Antonio Sánchez

emphasize that these events mark “Spain’s coming of age as a modern, democratic European nation-state” and as the “completion of an economic, political and social process initiated in the 1970s” (406). Spain was also seen as participating and taking a central role in world affairs, hosting the Middle East Peace Conference in 1992 and, in 1995, the Barcelona Euro-Mediterranean Conference that sought to strengthen relations between Europe and countries from the Mashriq and Maghreb regions. After a strong recovery from the economic recession of the early 1990s, Spain was able to become one of the first countries to adopt and launch the euro in 2002, the official currency of countries belonging to the European Union.

Placed within this context, “Como decíamos ayer...” and *El lago rosa* not only portray the growing awareness of Spain’s position in the world and the manner in which Spaniards imagine that position in relation to other countries, but when taken together also depict Spain’s process of modernization and integration into the European community. Central to the representation in these narratives of Spain’s contemporary socio-political image is the inclusion of European, middle to upper class queer citizens as protagonists set against the depiction of racially and ethnically different queer “Others” from Africa. Such a dynamic evokes Jasbir Puar’s understanding of “homonationalism,” a particular form that homosexual identities and discourses about homosexuality have taken in the global north, predominantly the United States and western European countries. Homonationalism operates as “a regulatory script not only of normative gayness, queerness, or homosexuality, but also of the racial and national norms that reinforce those sexual subjects” (*Terrorist 2*). In other words, homonationalism refers to the incorporation of homosexual identities and relationships as congruent with modern, democratic forms of citizenship. Moreover, their integration is seen as a testament to a country’s commitment to progress and a democratic system. Furthermore, as Puar points out, part of this process of inclusion is the creation of foreign racial and sexual others—typically Middle Eastern,

South Asian or African— from countries portrayed as homophobic, underdeveloped, uncivilized and dangerous primarily by the United States and western European countries.

In what follows I discuss the cross-cultural queer relationships found in the work of Inés Nuñez and Illy Nes that, while focused on the queer encounters of Spanish travelers to Africa, also offer an incisive look at the position of the Spanish LGBT community within contemporary Europe and, more generally, Western culture. “Como decíamos ayer...” and *El lago rosa* depict Spaniards who identify with the extended European community by upholding an exotic and inferior portrayal of former colonial regions, therefore also presenting themselves as an integral part of Spain’s national image rather than as opposed to or excluded from it. Each of these narratives engages with the socio-political and economic development of Spain since the 1990s, and consequently raises questions concerning the participation and inclusion of the LGBT community within Spain’s growth, modernization and incorporation into Europe. Moreover, they do so through literary representations of cross-cultural queer encounters experienced by Spanish travelers to Africa that bring to light issues concerning racial hierarchies and divides within the broader queer community.

Exoticism and Otherness in Inés Nuñez’s “Como decíamos ayer...”

Inés Nuñez’s story, “Como decíamos ayer...,” was originally published in 2002 by editorial EGALES in the short story collection *Otras voces*, the first compilation of stories in Spain of narratives written by women who self identify as lesbians and incorporate issues related to non-normative desire. It was later translated to French in 2004 and a revised version was published as part of the author’s own short story collection, *Amor im...perfecto*, in 2007. “Como decíamos ayer...” develops under a dual temporal framework that juxtaposes the narrative voice of the adult Carmen in 1990s headed by the administration of Felipe González (1982-96) of the

PSOE party with her memories of her adolescence in the 1950s still under the control of the Franco dictatorship. Narrated from the perspective of an adult Carmen—a successful, bourgeois Spanish woman—the story depicts the relationship between her and a French-Arabic woman, Salwa Maurois, while growing up in Morocco during the 1950s, during which time the country was still a Spanish protectorate until 1956. Set in 1992, Carmen and Salwa’s relationship is brought to life through Carmen’s memories and centers on her own crisis in sexual identity that ultimately leads her to travel to Tunisia in search of Salwa. While “Como decíamos ayer…” is a story about memory, it also provides a critical representation of Spain’s modernization and integration into Europe as a democracy. Carmen’s position on the board of the prestigious Reina Sofia Art Museum makes her the embodiment of the independence and culture associated with modernity as well as representative of the country’s economic and political transition, and the plot centers on the sense of disillusionment felt by the protagonist within the context of the country’s accelerated period of modernization. Her only relief is found when she notices Salwa’s name on a list of up and coming artists she has been asked to review, and she impulsively leaves Madrid, taking the first flight to Tunisia to meet Salwa.

In spite of her discontent with “modern life” in Spain, Carmen exemplifies the white, urban, leisure-class her. Her ability to discover her sexual identity ultimately hinges on a neo-colonial discourse that sexually objectifies her non-European love interest. In many ways, Carmen exemplifies contemporary notions of lesbian and gay cosmopolitan tourists, particularly through her fetishization of Salwa as the queer “Other” and her longing to escape from sexual repression through a primitive vision of a pre-modern Africa. In her article on queer mobility, Jasbir Puar explores the link between travel and lesbian and gay identity, noting that travel is often associated with a narrative of “coming out” (“Queer Times” 102-4). Placing particular emphasis on tourism, she cites Thomas Roth, a marketing strategist whose surveys are used by

the gay and lesbian tourism industry: “Many [tourists] are closeted, or come from repressive families, communities or societies. At least during our vacations, we should be free to be ourselves in a welcoming environment” (cited in “Queer Times” 102). Puar also indicates the marginalized position of queers of color within an industry that primarily caters to white, middle to upper class gay men, explaining that “queers of color are often not represented in the industry but, rather, are invoked through the specter of the native, the other, the “Third World”; in other words, they are the bodies most displaced by these emerging forms of queer global capital and consumption” (“Queer Times” 113).

“Como decíamos ayer...” participates in a narrative of “coming out” through travel as well as oftentimes exoticizes Salwa, a queer woman of color living in Africa, in order to cater to Carmen’s fantasy and desire to break away from the restrictions of respectable middle-class life in Europe. The focus on Carmen’s perspective almost exclusively throughout the story underscores the exploitation of Tunisia and its inhabitants—principally Salwa—for enjoyment, leisure time and self-discovery. Furthermore, in spite of referring to Salwa’s French heritage—specifically her ability to speak flawless French and her schooling in France—the narrative favors a one-dimensional representation of her ethnicity that emphasizes her racial difference for the pleasure of Carmen. It gives little attention to her French heritage and leaves her Arabic background undeveloped. Considering these observations, Nuñez’s narrative follows the conventions of European travel writing that exoticize non-European cultures, places and peoples and, consequently, demonstrates the ways that representations of European gay and lesbian identity can reaffirm certain prejudices through the consumption of the exotic that ultimately contributes to a discourse of European cultural superiority and homonationalism.

As the story begins Carmen mocks the designation of Madrid as the “European Capital of Culture,” ridiculing what she calls the “política cultural” of Madrid that has replaced the culture

she more accurately associates with rural provinces such as Soria, Cáceres or Murcia (122-23).¹⁶ The 1990s in Spain mark a moment of significant change in the country's character that may be best understood as a response to the development of the nation-state since the death of Francisco Franco in 1975. As previously mentioned, the culmination of this process was realized in 1992 with the celebration of the Olympic Games in Barcelona and the designation of Madrid as the European City of Culture among other events. While these events underscore the triumphant and celebratory tone in Spain as it achieves its place as a modern nation-state, the sentiment did not last as economic recession, a high rate of unemployment, increased national debt and numerous cases of corruption brought against Felipe Gonzalez's administration caused a lapse back into socio-political disappointment.

In "Como decíamos ayer..." the sense of disillusionment within the country is emphasized through the protagonists' restless nature— within the first pages she continuously expresses an intense boredom with her life— and a general apathy towards the country's development (121-22). While Carmen's coworkers exult over the city's accomplishment, she appears to only lament the news and reflects on the pride with which years earlier she had originally taken her job before the innovative ideas and talented artists began to more closely resemble an accumulation of products on supermarket shelves (123). Similar to the invasive entrepreneurial effects so closely tied to modernity, her coworkers invade her house to celebrate and leave her meticulously organized and stylish apartment in ruins, leaving her in a state of unease and, in the version published as part of the *Otras voces* collection, resulting to a mixture of Valium and vodka to calm her nerves (128).

Carmen's only comfort is found when she notices Salwa's name on a list of artists and the narrative shifts to a flashback of their relationship while she lived in Morocco as a young girl. Having sent several military expeditions into Morocco since 1859—particularly after the

country's defeat in the Spanish-American War in 1898, in the early twentieth century Spain came to consider Morocco as an apt site for expansion and to maintain its place as a European colonial power. In 1912 Morocco was split between France and Spain, but the full defeat of Moroccan nationalist forces under Abd-el-Krim was not achieved until 1926 by a combination of French and Spanish forces. Northern Morocco remained a protectorate of Spain under the Franco regime until 1956 when, following the independence of French Morocco, Spain surrendered the territory to the newly independent country of Morocco while retaining possession of other parts of the region, such as Ceuta, Melilla and the Western Sahara (given to Morocco in 1975). In Nuñez's narrative, it is during this historical period that Carmen's father, a member of the Spanish military, was transferred to Morocco, and Carmen and her family moved there with him to a small, isolated Spanish style town. Here she met Salwa at school, developed an immediate attraction for her and the two girls became involved. While Salwa is explained to be the daughter of a French diplomat living in Morocco, her name also indicates the Arabic roots and influences on her identity. Carmen explains that when their parents became aware of their relationship, Salwa was sent to Paris to live with family and study art, and the girls never saw one and other again.

Under Franco, the 1950s were characterized by the strict gender politics of the dictatorship in which women, in particular, were targeted and defined by their projected roles as passive mothers and wives. In Spain, women did not have legal access to contraceptives until 1977 and divorce was not legal until 1981. Jill Robbins reflects on the existence of lesbian sexuality under this model, explaining that it remained an unimaginable possibility for women ("Invisible" 109). Growing up under the harsh gender and behavioral codes of Francoism as well as her parents' reaction to her lesbianism may explain Carmen's troubled and uneasy relationship with her own body throughout the narrative. It may also explain the title of Nuñez's

narrative, which appropriates the infamous words uttered by Fray Luis de León in his celebrated return to teach at the University of Salamanca after being incarcerated by the Inquisition for five years for his work as a Scripture scholar involved in revising Biblical texts (Jones 15). By invoking the words of de León, the narrative draws a parallel between the oppressive politics that led to the scholar's imprisonment and the regimes harsh prejudice against individuals that stray from its definitions of acceptable behaviors, as demonstrated by the addition of "acts of homosexuality" to the Spanish Penal Code in 1970 as part of the Law of Social Danger and Rehabilitation Act (Ley de Peligrosidad y Rehabilitación, LPRS). While Carmen is never subject to legal consequences for becoming involved with Salwa, her experience as a young girl being taught to abandon, ignore and silence her developing erotic impulses is no doubt emblematic of her own confinement. In this respect, apart from evoking a sense of nostalgia, the title's intertextual reference also connotes a sense of emancipation, specifically from the sexually repressive politics of the dictatorship.

In my opinion, it is also significant that in order to reconnect with her body Carmen chooses to distance herself from Madrid and travel to a new, foreign environment, impulsively leaving Madrid and taking the first flight to meet Salwa in Tunisia. Carmen's arrival in Tunisia and her description of Tunis reveals the imprint of colonialism and development on the country. In the story, Tunisia appears as a touristic extension of Europe complete with copies of Spain's ABC newspaper, tour guides and books at Carmen's immediate disposal when she gets off the plane. Carmen calls attention to the perception of Africa held by Europeans and the mark development has left on the continent:

África siempre fue un continente muy atractivo para los europeos: la aventura, los viajes, el ideal de muchos hombres y mujeres que buscaban una experiencia única e iniciática, que buscaban encontrar en esas tierras desconocidas la esencia de estar vivos, sentir que

todo lo que se hacía era por primera vez, que nadie antes había pisado esas tierras. Un ideal romántico, para espíritus aventureros, incapaces de acomodarse en los despachos de los ministerios [...] hoy en día es perderte por alguna de sus calles y darte de bruces contra un McDonald's. (133-34)

While critical of the appearance of corporations such as McDonald's in the country, Carmen's comments still retain an imperialistic slant in that she still only describes Africa in terms of exoticism and diversion from Europe. She indulges in what she perceives as the "encanto de tiempos pasados" in her hotel, fantasizing about being "una bella esclava que espera a su señor, limpia y perfumada, para entregarse a él" (134). Consequently, she ironically ends up reaffirming a superficial image of Africa that ultimately maintains a superior image of Europe in regards to its growth and advancement which has been used to perpetuate their dominance over former colonial regions. Furthermore, I would argue that while Carmen's travel to Africa is, on the one hand, representative of her discontent with the adverse effects of modernity in her own country, on the other hand what is implicit in her journey—though she does not appear conscious of it—is her own compliance with Western development, a point made all the more apparent as she enjoys what she describes as "todas las ventajas que los europeos trajeron a estas tierras, como es el aire acondicionado y el servicio de habitaciones" (134). Carmen fits into the same scheme of development that she critiques since she praises the perks of development, for example, air conditioning and room service.

Carmen's description of Tunisia in several aspects is similar to that of northern European travelers to Spain during the nineteenth century. Luis Fernández Cifuentes analyzes nineteenth century travelogues and tourist travel guides written by foreign travelers to Andalucía and their influence on the broader construction of Spanish national identity. When Spain had been envisioned as an empire, Spaniards were perceived as serious, orderly and powerful; however, as

Spain's influence yielded and it became a minor European power, the people of Spain were increasingly seen as passionate, brutish and disorganized (Torrecilla 3-4). Fernández Cifuentes notes the romanticized depiction of Andalucía as primitive and exotic in foreign travel narratives that is translated to a depiction of "genuine" Spanish cultural identity within the broader European community. Placing particular emphasis on Andalucía, these travelers considered Spain as a country where modernization and its discontents had not yet arrived and considered Spaniards to be romanticized "others". According to the author, central to this touristic and alluring portrayal of Spain was its direct association with the Orient, and more concretely the country's perceived ties to Africa (Fernández Cifuentes 137-39). In his extensive study *España exótica*, Jesús Torrecilla addresses the same issues, but argues that the identification of Spanishness with "exotic" elements such as gypsies and bullfighting, among other aspects, as authentically Spanish can be seen as a resistance on the part of the Spanish upper classes in the nineteenth century to the power and influence of France rather than as a condescending image imposed by foreigners.

When taken together, these studies demonstrate how Spain has been presented both internally and externally as different from Europe for centuries. It is particularly significant, then, that in Nuñez's narrative this same rhetoric is deployed to describe Tunisia as a mechanism for securing the protagonist's position as a part of Europe as distinguished from Africa. In this sense, it is not enough to recognize Carmen's comments as solely reflective of the "asymmetrical power relations" between Europe and a former colonial region since they are also indicative of Spain's own tumultuous relationship with Europe. This point is perhaps made most evident when taking into account the protagonist's name, Carmen. Rather than a coincidence, I would like to suggest that, when placed within this broader cultural context, the protagonist's name becomes symbolic of a larger struggle for cultural identity. In addition to various nineteenth

century travel narratives, cultural productions from abroad such as Prosper Mérimée's French novella *Carmen* (1845) which was later adapted by Georges Bizet into the famous opera in 1875 solidified the image of Spanish women as exotic and passionate Gypsies. José Colmeiro notes that the novel and its operatic adaptation are both examples of Spain's representation in Romantic works as "an internal other to European modern identity" ("Exorcising" 129). In his analysis, Colmeiro describes *Carmen* as representing the Romantic allure towards the marginal, bohemian, exotic, and premodern ("Exorcising" 128). What's more, in a subsequent article, the author observes the redeployment and what he describes as the "rehispanicization" of the "Carmen myth" during the twentieth century, specifically in the films *Carmen, la de Triana* (1938) by Florián Rey, Tulio Demicheli's *Carmen, la de Ronda* (1959) and Carlos Saura's *Carmen* (1983). Colmeiro acutely portrays the ambiguity surrounding the "Carmen myth" displayed in these films as resulting from its position as "forever entangled in a European/Spanish, Gypsy/*payo*, self/other battle for cultural definition" and therefore serving as an apt instrument in Spanish cultural production ("Rehispanizing" 92).

While unlike the films addressed in Colmeiro's study, Nuñez's narrative does not adapt or follow the plot of Mérimée's French novella, it does participate in the dichotomy in Spanish cultural identity between being European and a position of "otherness." As I have been arguing, *Carmen* criticizes indications of Spain's socio-political and cultural modernity—which are synonymous with the country's integration into Europe—while also describing Tunisia as premodern, exotic and alluring, an act that consequently safely positions her within this same scheme of Western European development. In this sense, in Nuñez's narrative *Carmen* exemplifies the same struggle between difference and assimilation found in previous representations of the "Carmen myth" during the twentieth century. Considered within this framework, my reading aims to suggest that Nuñez's narrative also participates in the attempt to

“rehispanicize” the figure of Carmen, in this case under the socio-political and cultural context of Spain in 1992 as fully transitioned into a democratic nation-state that is embraced by and integrated into Europe. Under this context, the “rehispanicization” of the “Carmen myth” in Nuñez’s narrative is accomplished not by drawing on Gypsy culture as representative of Spanish authenticity as seen in earlier works from the twentieth century, but rather by displacing the “otherness” historically attributed to Spaniards onto North Africa, specifically Tunisia and the narrative depiction of Salwa.

Carmen panders to her fantasies of the “exotic” in order to appease her own identity crisis. This is perhaps most evident in the narrative’s portrayal of her reunification with Salwa. Carmen’s first encounter with Salwa is purely visual. As Salwa enters the room, her presence is perceived entirely through Carmen’s gaze:

La veo. Atraviesa la puerta del salón restaurante y casi me muero de envidia. Todas las miradas se giran hacia ella [...] Es la mujer más hermosa que he visto en mi vida. Todo en ella es armonía; nada resalta por encima de la perfección de todos sus gestos, rasgos y perfiles [...] Todo el almuerzo me siento vulgar. Mis ojos no pueden dejar de observar (138).

The narrator visually devours Salwa, and she is represented as an “Other” in Orientalist terms, as defined by Edward Said. The sensual image of Salwa conjured through Carmen’s eyes is a reflection of a European discourse of domination and power over its former colonies (Said 5). Apart from the eroticized and objectified image of Salwa evoked in this passage—and throughout the narrative in general—her body also appears to serve as a catalyst for Carmen to confront her own frustrations and general disappointment with her life in Spain. This becomes all the more apparent as Carmen reflects on her internal struggle with her sexuality after seeing Salwa: “Me siento extraña [...] Necesito mirarme de nuevo en los ojos de Salwa para ver qué ha

quedado en mí de mis sueños y recuperar los únicos besos para los que he nacido” (140). It seems that in the narrator’s mind, Salwa is the key to reconnecting with an idealized past, and more than described as a former “lover,” she is more precisely depicted as the erotic object through which Carmen can channel her own repressed sexual fantasies.

Carmen’s comments seem to reveal that travelling to Africa and searching for Salwa appeal to her as a means to absolve herself of the restrictions of her upbringing and disillusionment with her present life. In the narrative, this becomes evident as Carmen returns to her room and reflects on her encounter with Salwa, considering her own coming of age and development:

Aparté de mi todo recuerdo de Salwa, pero está visto que no basta con tener cuidado y evitar todas las situaciones de peligro, como he hecho hasta ahora. No es debilidad lo que me ha llevado a emprender este viaje. Es la aceptación de unos sentimientos que siempre han estado ahí. (140)

For Carmen, reviving her relationship with Salwa seems similar to what bell hooks describes in her essay “Eating the Other,” which examines the ways in which desire for the racialized Other can be exploited to reaffirm power relations. The notion of “eating the Other” is characterized by a transformation of colonial discourse in regards to racial bodies and consumer society in which discontent with the social and political circumstances of modern, Western society results in the “commodification of Otherness” (hooks 366). Within this context, white subjects are lured by “a romantic fantasy of the ‘primitive’” and view sexual encounters with the Other as a means to distance themselves from a sense of disillusionment with modern society (hooks 370). In this sense, being with Salwa becomes transgressive and an act of becoming that allows Carmen to enjoy the privilege of being able to appropriate and exploit another culture without actually experiencing what it is to be a member of it.

Considering Salwa's aforementioned French background, the narrative appears to shy away from a more complex representation of their relationship in favor of a more traditional binary encounter between a Spanish-European woman and Arabic woman of color. It is not explained how long Salwa remained in France, when she returned to Africa or under what circumstances. No information regarding the origins of her mother and father is provided, and her identity primarily hinges on what can be drawn from her name, Carmen's memories and the description of Salwa provided by Carmen. Given the significant lack of information provided about Salwa, it is not surprising that in spite of being sent to France by her parents to finish her studies under the care of relatives living in Paris as well as the narrator's observation that Salwa "habla francés a la perfección," Salwa is still cast principally in the role of erotic, Oriental "Other"—a point made glaringly clear by the narrator's portrayal of her as "una de estas morenas fuertes cuya piel brilla en una mezcla de sudor y crema hidratante" (138; 144). Rather than providing a complex intersubjectivity between the two characters that would more closely call attention to the problematic process of representation of raced and gendered subjects—especially a raced, lesbian subject—the narrative focuses only on what Carmen presently sees and can recall of Salwa, which is mostly sexual. This type of portrayal of Salwa caters to a more general representation of Tunisia that completely ignores development within the region and solidifies not only its inferior position to Europe, but also its continued colonial reality as a tourist destination for Europeans in spite of its efforts towards modernization and development.¹⁷

Salwa and Carmen finally meet under the pretext that Carmen has come to offer her the opportunity to participate in an exhibition in Madrid, and they walk back to Salwa's studio where they ultimately arouse old desires. The narrative then becomes a passionate dialogue between the two women. Eroticism in this exchange mixes the symbolic imagery used to describe the female body ("cueva", "mar", "herida abierta") with overt and salacious language that portrays

both women's physical desire. The use of semantic codes replicates aesthetic techniques employed in the narratives of Spanish authors Esther Tusquets, Ana María Moix and Carme Riera among others, all of whom have been linked to the influences of French feminists such as Julia Kristeva, Hélène Cixous and Luce Irigaray that sought to elude patriarchal influences on language and culture through a language more directly connected with the female body (Jones; Tsuchiya).¹⁸

The exchange also employs a succession of abject imagery that references “las entrañas” “el nectar cálido,” “pequeños y potentes estrangulamientos” and emphasizes the integrity of the female body and the interdependence of its parts (76-77). Here the female body is also portrayed in a type of violent excess, overcome by such intense pleasure that causes “el escalofrío de la muerte” (76). By calling attention to the use of this aesthetic in the text, I mean to address the way it evokes similar narrative techniques to those seen in Monique Wittig's *The Lesbian Body* (1973), in which the narrator and protagonist portray a fictional Sapphic island inhabited solely by women and celebrate the form and contents of the lesbian body. Wittig's acclaimed novel creates what Elaine Marks, in her analysis of lesbian intertextuality in French literature, has called a portrayal of the “undomesticated” female body through a succession of challenging counter-images that from the first pages are crude, passionate and verbally violent in their depiction of the external and internal beauty of her lover's body (372-73). In Nuñez's narrative, we find a similar aesthetic in Salwa's impassioned description of Carmen's body:

Amo tu vagina cuando se abre a mí. Amo su tacto, su profundo secreto, su cavernoso silencio, su húmedo contacto. Amo su hambre, que podría tragarme entera. Amo sus labios resbaladizos y carnosos, que me ofrecen un beso de mar, un beso que agota el alma y se ofrecen como copa a tu dulce néctar. Amo tu avergonzado clítoris, que vive en las

profundidades de su Cueva y al que hay que llamar a golpe de precisión, golpe seco y profundo que responde con la alegría de su cascabel. (148)

Carmen also employs similar descriptive techniques when referring to Salwa's body, declaring in one moment: "Amo tu piel, el sudor y el vello, el contacto caliente y fuerte de tus músculos contra mí [...] Amo tus pequeñas manos [...] Amo su caricia y cómo me descubren, cómo me violentan y me hacen sonrojar" (148). In this sense, Carmen and Salwa's exchange also displays a type of counter-imagery that, like Wittig's adept depiction of the lesbian body, contests conventional representations and discourses concerning women's bodies.

It is my intention to not only call attention to the similarities between French feminism and Nuñez's narrative, but also to question the problems related to conjuring this type of aesthetic to represent both women's bodies. Although roping Salwa into Western feminist codes of language may be intended to liberate her (and her body) from semantic forms of oppression, we can also question whether this kind of rhetoric can be effectively used as means for wholly expressing her sexual subjectivity. Diana Fuss calls attention to Monique Wittig's tendency to homogenize lesbians into a single group by calling lesbianism an "international culture" that as a collective possesses a common language, fashion, literature and music among other elements (43). While Nuñez's narrative never specifically employs the term "lesbian," the narrative's use of etymological strategies that carry the influence of French feminism to portray both women's bodies results in the assumption of a universally understood expression of sexuality and sexual liberation that favors Western ideals and fails to take into account Salwa's bicultural background.

As a bicultural woman living in Tunisia, Salwa's ability to speak French like a native and her schooling in France enable her to easily integrate into European forms of subjectivity, creating a bridge between the two women and common terms for expressing their sexual liberation. Salwa is integrated into European forms of subjectivity, but it is also significant that

this only forms part of her identity. The narrative never develops what Arabic culture means to Salwa, and instead relies on a familiar set of myths and stereotypes for representing her Arabic heritage that mainly exoticize her race, and presents her as the “Other” through sexual, sensual images. In this sense, only portraying Salwa using European codes of language to express her sexuality—or more precisely, her sexual liberation— discards part of her cultural heritage and essentially whitewashes her by depicting her solely through a European language. It also appeals to an image of European dominance and superiority that portrays Salwa as able to dialogue with Carmen, but only by adopting European cultural codes. I would also add that this detail serves as an example of the “homonormative ethic” Jasbir Puar closely associates with homonationalism by offering the appearance of diversity, but accomplishing this by portraying Salwa as a subject orienting herself “through [her] disassociation or disidentification from others disenfranchised in similar ways in favor of consolidation with axes of privilege” (*Terrorist* 28). In this case, Salwa is portrayed as “disassociated” from her Arabic heritage in an effort to wholly integrate her into European understandings of sexual liberation.

While in the original publication, the story ends with Carmen and Salwa’s exchange, the version Nuñez adapted for publication as part of her short story collection *Amor im...perfecto* includes an alternate ending in which Carmen abandons her job in Madrid to be with Salwa in Tunisia. Even though this twist may appear to complicate a narrative of European superiority, Salwa is still unable to be fully integrated into Europe and it is Carmen who is able to choose to move to Tunisia. “Como decíamos ayer...” ultimately recurs to a racialized or sexualized projection of the protagonist’s non-Spanish love interest, providing her with little agency and only drawing on her French background to incorporate her into European perceptions of sexual liberation. Nuñez’s narrative, therefore, may be critical of modernization in Spain, but ultimately

integrates its Spanish lesbian protagonist into a favorable representation of Europe and fails to push past stereotypes of Africa as an exotic “Other.”

Narrating Race, Sexuality and Colonialism in *El lago rosa*

In her work, Illy Nes often portrays economically or romantically frustrated women who overcome a set of personal obstacles to be together. While Nes’ novels have received less critical attention than other more well-known Spanish lesbian authors such as Isabel Franc and Mabel Galán, her name is often referenced in studies of Hispanic queer fiction.¹⁹ In 2000, Nes won the Bigayles prize from the Asociación de Gais i Lesbianes de L’Hospitalet for best lesbian narrative for her first novel, *Morbo* (1999), and her third novel *El lago rosa* (2004) has been praised by Jacky Collins in her analysis of Spanish lesbian literature as a novel that contributes to the visibility of Spanish lesbian authors and, more generally, lesbianism in Spain (176-77). Each of Nes’ novels (*Morbo*, *Ámame* (2002) and *El lago rosa*) incorporates travel and cross-cultural encounters to narrate a “coming out” experience for Spanish women who come in contact with non-Spanish women and other cultures. Here I will specifically focus on her third novel, *El lago rosa*, which narrates the transformation of Susanna, a young photographer, who is offered the opportunity to travel to Senegal for a month as the photographer for an article about a famous model. While in Senegal, she meets Amira Hiwe, a self-identified lesbian, who left her career in Europe to dedicate herself to bettering the condition of women in Senegal as well as founding hospitals and schools for those who need them. The two women become involved and the narrative centers on the development of their relationship.

El lago rosa begins as Susanna, the main character and narrator, gathers her things to leave for Senegal. Susanna sees the trip as a professional opportunity, but her boyfriend, Marcos opposes the trip. Marcos would prefer that Susanna quit her job, stay in Madrid and take care of

him. In this sense, her trip represents more than a professional opportunity, but also a personal one that will allow her—as Marcos fears—to go beyond her life and relationship with him and, in her own words, “cambiar el completo curso de mi vida” (10). While on the one hand this can be seen as her desire to find liberation in a new environment, in my opinion, it is also significant that in *El lago rosa*—as in Nes’ other narratives—the change desired by the protagonist is instigated through contact with another culture. In this case, even before leaving Spain, Susanna imagines travelling to Africa as an enriching experience that promises her professional advancement upon her return to Spain.

Susanna arrives in Senegal accompanied by her friend and colleague, Leo, and the narrative uses traditional tropes to portray the country that are associated with European travel narratives—exoticism, hypersexualized imagery, barbarianism—and that cast Africa as inferior to modern, developed Europe. The narrative paints a corrupt portrait of Senegal from the moment Susanna and Leo enter the country. Susanna notes the heavily armed guards at the airport, as well as the sexist and homophobic attitude of one of the guards who comments that “una mujer no debe viajar sola” and instructs her to make sure that Leo, her co-worker who is an openly gay man, “mantenga su polla en los pantalones” and then shouts “¡Aquí no somos maricones!” (22). Shortly after this incident, they are then introduced to their guide, Bikai, who explains to them the conflict with the independent guerrillera movement near the border with Guinea-Bissau that is causing tensions throughout the country. Bikai takes Susanna and Leo on a tour of Senegal’s capital, Dakar. Similar to the portrayal of Tunisia in Nuñez’s “Como decíamos ayer...,” the narrative ultimately praises the beauty and allure of European influences on the city. They visit the central part of the city, taking pictures of the Presidential Palace, the Kermel Market and the Avenue Pompidou among other sites. Much of Dakar’s architecture mentioned in the narrative is a reminder of the city’s colonial legacy: the Catholic Cathedral, the

Presidential Palace built in 1907 and the former residence of a French Governor, the Place de l'Indépendance (Independence square) created by the French on the site of an old French fort and the Victorian style Kermel market. Even though Senegal is an independent nation-state, the narrative locates its identity in icons built in the French colonial period. In Nes' narrative, this is perhaps most apparent in the depiction of the Presidential Palace described as “un majestuoso edificio de principios del siglo” and the Kermel Market portrayed in similar terms as “este maravilloso rincón de África” (29).

Leaving Dakar, Bikai takes Susanna and Leo to a village outside of the city where Amira's shelter is located. In contrast to its portrayal of Dakar, the narrative does not offer a detailed depiction of the village. The narrative references the poor economic conditions and socio-political marginalization of the village, and Amira explains it is often referred to as “la escoria” of Senegal (45). After filming general shots of the village for their report, Amira invites Susanna and Leo to Goree Island for the afternoon. Goree Island was originally a holding point for slaves before they were boarded to ships and sent to the Americas. Now it is Senegal's most famous tourist destination and possesses evident traces of colonialism having belonged to the Portuguese, Dutch, French and British. Among the island's most popular tourist sites are its three museums, including the Maison des Esclaves (Slave House) that was built in 1775 as a trader's house and a holding facility for slaves. Tourists can walk through dark cells where slaves were held before being taken aboard ships and sent overseas. Susanna comments on the picturesque setting as well as the presence of colonialism on the island:

Esta pequeña maravillosa isla y su Maison des Esclaves han sido consideradas Patrimonio de la Humanidad por la UNESCO, especialmente debido a que fue uno de los principales asentamientos de la esclavitud. Afortunadamente, en la actualidad este hecho no es más que un desagradable pasado y la belleza de cuanto rodea la isla Gorée embarga

al vistante desde el momento en que pone un pie en su suave y cálida arena.

Ensimismada, contemplé la pintoresca Gorée, la serenidad de la gente, los vivos colores de sus atuendos y, por un segundo, me pareció estar soñando. (88)

While Susanna's comments recognize the historical importance of the island, particularly the Maison de Esclaves for its role in the slave trade, her comments are more centered on its tourist appeal. Susanna glazes over the island's direct link to slavery as no more than "un desagradable pasado," an act that enables her to see it as "paradise."

This emphasis on—and praise for—the remaining colonial presence in Senegal throughout the novel found in architectural references and sites of historical significance is especially significant when considering the representation of the Senegalese people within this setting which brings to light existing prejudices within Susanna and Leo's comments. For example, while touring Dakar with Bikai, Susanna observes a young man in a bar and comments that "[s]iempre me he preguntado por qué la gente de color tienen los dientes tan blancos... Es sorprendente" (31). Leo responds, "No tienen los dientes más blancos, lo que ocurre es que su piel es más negra, cariño, por lo tanto, resaltan más [...] Mmmmm, está muy bueno" (31). Susanna and Leo comments eroticize and objectify the Senegalese population as well as reinforce a one-dimensional representation of the local population since they do not look beyond the bodies of the people they see.

In some respects, the representation of the protagonist's love interest, Amira, resembles this kind of racial and hypersexualized representation of the "Other," particularly when first seen by Susanna and described as a "hermosa diosa de ébano se deslizaba envuelta en un aura de sensualidad y elegancia difícil de describir con palabras" (39). Amira is, however, also granted a certain amount of agency within the novel in that her background and circumstances are explained and developed. Apart from learning that she is attracted to women, readers also learn

that Amira is a former model who moved to Paris and had an extremely successful career. She then gave up her career in modeling to return to Senegal, and it is not until the end of the narrative that readers learn that this is because she is dying of cancer. Still, like the representation of Salwa in Nuñez's narrative, Susanna's portrayal of Amira centers on her beauty and her own sexual attraction towards Amira. During their first meeting, as Amira shows Susanna her quarters, she begins to reflect on her time living in Paris. The narrative shifts at this moment from a dialogue between the two women to center on Susanna's inner thoughts as Amira reminisces about Paris. Susanna's thoughts are completely focused on Amira's appearance:

Amira permanecía allí, derrochando sensualidad a raudales, no podía dejar de pensar en los numerosos hombres y mujeres que me considerarían una privilegiada en ese momento, a solas con Amira Hiwe [...] No podía dejar de observarla, totalmente encandilada por su belleza. (47)

Noteworthy in this passage is the interruption and consequent erasure of Amira's thoughts (and words) since the narrative is entirely dedicated to Susanna's perception of Amira, one that is wholly focused on her body. The narrative contains her character within a traditional representation of erotic "Other." Considering that the narrative is presented from the perspective of Susanna, who has come from Spain, escaping a relationship with a controlling and emotionally abusive man, Amira appears to be exploited for her "Otherness" in order to meet the needs of the European protagonist who must escape from her problems in her own country.

While the details surrounding Amira's life and the reason she has devoted herself to creating a refuge for victims of violence and poverty in Senegal are not revealed until the end of the novel, they carry particular importance for interpreting the representation of her character throughout the majority of the novel. Amira is an orphan and moved to Paris to be a model. She

was successful, rich and famous. Even Susanna's Spanish gay co-worker, Leo, often comments on her beauty and how he idolizes her. Amira did not return to Senegal until she was diagnosed with terminal cancer and found herself unsatisfied and lonely with her life in Europe. Amira's story reveals her incorporation into Europe, becoming an icon within Western culture.

Furthermore, her statement for Susanna and Leo's report is specifically directed at a European audience and aimed towards calling attention to hygienic needs in the country and, even more emphatically, to the abuses suffered by women (for example, genital mutilation and forced marriages).

The complexity of Amira's life experience and her time in Paris as a model are only briefly mentioned and not afforded as much detail or attention as the portrayal of her physical appearance. Providing a predominantly erotic representation of Amira undermines the representation of her character as an empowered and successful Senegalese woman who is capable of serving as a role model within her own country and abroad, particularly within the LGBT community. This type of representation of Amira becomes particularly problematic when considering that the only other specific reference to a Senegalese woman in the narrative is to Bikai's mother, who was raped, forced to prostitute herself for her and her son and eventually died of AIDS (45-46). The description of Bikai's mother portrays her as powerless and a victim of male violence and poverty. She is contained within what Chandra Talpade Mohanty describes as the "object status" delegated to Third World women in the eyes of Western feminism in that she has no agency and is defined primarily in terms of being "affected or not affected by certain institutions and systems" (23). While, unlike Bikai's mother, Amira does not fit within this model of what Mohanty refers to as Western feminism's depiction of the "average Third World woman" (sexually contained, impoverished, abused victim), the narrative still limits her agency by focusing on a hypersexual portrayal of her character. The narrative does not develop the story

surrounding Amira's work in Senegal until the end of the novel and shortly after, she collapses, succumbs to cancer and dies (23). Taking the representation of these women together, it appears that Senegalese women in the narrative never quite rise above an object status.

The asymmetrical portrayal of the relationship between Susanna and Amira is perhaps most apparent in the novel after the initial sexual encounter between them. Never having been with a woman, Susanna is confused by her attraction to Amira and, ultimately, scared by it and pulls away. While within the narrative, this reaction is attributed to her difficulty overcoming her own internalized homophobia, it also has implications when taking into account the hostility she describes feeling towards Amira. Susanna becomes frustrated and angry with Amira when after noticing Susanna's hesitation she walks away from her. Susanna even expresses her feelings in terms of physical aggression:

Tuve ganas de abofetearla cuando llegué a su lado. No obstante, me alejé de ella sin mediar palabra, dolida por su brusquedad y por mi cobardía. ¡La deseaba [...] ¡Estaba cabreadísima! No entendía por qué Amira había retrocedido con tanta facilidad dejándome en una situación tan comprometida: desnuda, avergonzada y sola en las majestuosas aguas del lago Retba. (70)

Susanna attempts to assert her own dominant position over Amira in the narrative in an explicit fashion in that she expresses the same violence towards Amira that she suffered from her boyfriend. It seems that, like her boyfriend, she sees violence as means for gaining a power she may not have.

Interestingly, the narrative also uses violence to seemingly bond the two women together in a scene towards the close of the novel when Susanna's ex-boyfriend, Marcos, appears drunk and angry outside her hut when they return from Goree Island. Marcos grabs Susanna and insists that she leave with him to return to Spain and threatens to beat her if she does not. When she

refuses to return, he slaps her across the face, and as Amira attempts to intervene she is also thrown to the ground by Marcos. After Amira is hit, Bikai intervenes, knocks Marcos to the ground unconscious and they resolve to take his documentation and leave him at the police station where he would be sent back to Spain immediately. The scene appears as a bonding moment between the two women, who are able to make amends following the incident and shortly after sleep together. The incident seems to portray Susanna and Amira as equally oppressed by the same patriarchal forces embodied by Marcos, a white Spanish man, but I would argue that this representation may be problematic when considering the immense differences between the two women. While it is not my intention to allocate these characters to a particular side of a binary divide, I also believe that considering their distinct backgrounds and racial heritages exposes the different degrees of patriarchal oppression each of them come into contact with— some of which as women they share, but some of which they do not. This is perhaps most apparent when considering that in addition to physically assaulting Amira, Marcos also refers to her using a racial slur— “Jodida negra de mierda” (94).

Even though the novel appears to celebrate sexual liberation, particularly for its Spanish protagonist, it does so through an inferior representation of Senegal as displayed through its representation of country, its people and, in particular, Amira. Dismissing Amira’s success and popularity in Europe in favor of emphasizing her exotic sexual appeal allows the novel to ensure the dominance of its European protagonist—a position further secured by Amira’s death at the end of the novel. Furthermore, even though the narrative appears to attempt to bring to the forefront humanitarian causes, it does so in a way that reaffirms European dominance over a country that is incapable of taking care of itself. Much like the colonial depiction of the Dakar and Goree Island, the story Amira sets out to make public with Susanna and Leo presents Senegal as marked by European intervention. This representation of her plea for help from

Europe to assist the impoverished Senegalese people, and more specifically women, to a certain extent reinforces a colonial discourse that portrays the country as incapable of caring for itself and in need of the more developed and able Europe. The depiction of a cross-cultural queer experience in the novel, then, reinforces a socio-political and racial hierarchy that portrays Europe as superior to underdeveloped Africa.

Conclusion

When read in dialogue with one and other, Inés Nuñez and Illy Nes' texts raise issues concerning the participation and inclusion of the LGBT community in Spain's modernization and integration into Europe. These literary depictions of LGBT incorporation into this process hinge on a notion of homonationalism through which the LGBT community, at times, has attempted to establish its loyalty to and inherent position within the nation-state in spite of having been often unrecognized or represented as opposed to it. "Como decíamos ayer..." and *El lago rosa* present the insertion of LGBT characters into a narrative of European prestige by way of racial and ethnic hierarchies that align the Spanish protagonists with a discourse of European neo-colonialism and superiority. In these texts, a first person narrative places the Spanish protagonist in constant command of the narrative perspective. Furthermore, the narratives' setting in former French colonies emphasizes the affiliation of the Spanish characters with a broader network of European imperialism. Africa is presented as exotic or barbaric—as well as homophobic—even as the Spanish characters intimately connect with women in Africa.

In these texts, the queer Spanish protagonists are included in a demonstration of European culture and economic strength that is underscored in the narratives through the reproduction of racial, class and cultural lines that also consequently suppress the representation of queer alliances across different cultures and ethnicities. In fact, in these narratives the cross-

cultural exchanges seem to be either neo-colonial or asymmetrical amorous relationships that bind the characters together. Their depictions of cross-cultural queer encounters bring to the surface the incorporation of Spain's LGBT community into cultural representations of European superiority and the appearance of homonationalism in Spanish LGBT literature. It is also worth noting the considerable difference in the depiction of a Western nation-state found in Asia Lillo's *Diario de una aupair bollo en USA* (2006), a travel narrative that was adapted from her online blog. In this case, the protagonist travels to the United States. More importantly, the book does not employ the exoticism and neo-colonial mindset that are commonly displayed towards non-Western countries, as seen in the narratives analyzed in this chapter.

While Lillo's narrative also uses a first person narrator and negative cultural stereotypes to portray the United States, her narrative does not engage in an expression of European dominance and authority evident in Nuñez and Nes' narratives. To begin with, *Diario de una aupair bollo en USA* portrays a Spaniard travelling to the United States, not as a tourist, but to take a low paying job as an aupair for a wealthy family. Upon meeting the family she will be living with, the narrator immediately notes the socio-economic gap between her and her United States host family by commenting on the luxurious house the family lives in, the expensive cell-phone they give her and her large room complete with several amenities (television, DVD, wireless phone, etc). It is also noteworthy that in the narrative the Spanish protagonist often identifies with the broader immigrant community, attending a training course with other aupairs from outside the United States and befriending other immigrants from Uruguay, El Salvador and Brazil.

At points the narrator of Lillo's text indicates her own cultural difference from other immigrant groups in a way that resembles the racial and ethnic lines present in Nuñez and Nes' respective narratives, especially when she exoticizes women from South Africa, Brazil and

Uruguay and describes her Peruvian roommate as speaking “un dialecto” when referring to Quechua. In Lillo’s narrative, however, this is counterbalanced by the narrator’s own position as an “exotic other” displayed in her performance of a “taconeo” that she tells others is flamenco and when her host mother takes her to a Spanish restaurant featuring bulerías, sevillanas and “un espectáculo flamenco”(91). In contrast to Nuñez and Nes’ texts, an analysis of Lillo’s narrative presents Spain not as a dominant, powerful global presence, but as maintaining a marginal position to more powerful nation-states, such as the United States. Lillo’s blog simultaneously sets the narrator apart from immigrants from Brazil and Uruguay through exoticism while at the same time emphasizing her lower economic standing and cultural difference in comparison to the United States.

By taking into account *Diario de una aupair bollo en USA* in relation to Nuñez and Nes’ narratives, I mean to indicate the contrast between the representation Western and non-Western countries in Spanish LGBT literature that maintains a condescending attitude towards non-Western nations and cultures. Even though the narrative also disapproves—sometimes hypocritically—of certain forms of United States culture as well as casts a narrow view onto United States lifestyle that is focused on a right-wing, upper-class family, the narrator’s comments do not display the same victimization or lack of agency displayed in regards to non-Western subjects and countries found in Nuñez and Nes’ narratives. That said, when taken alongside Lillo’s text, the representation of non-Western queer subjects in Nuñez and Nes’ narratives appears to strategically position the Spanish protagonists within a rhetoric of European dominance over former colonial regions and, therefore, secure the country’s place beside nation-states with more advanced economies such as France, Germany and Britain. Hence, while these texts participate in a broader representation of the position of the Spanish LGBT community in Europe, they also offer insight into the lack of queer alliances made across lines of race, class

and ethnicity. In this sense, a reading of Nuñez and Nes' narratives opens our understanding of how subjects previously marginalized for their queer gender and sexuality may incorporate themselves into projections of modern Spanish national identity.

Chapter 3

Queer Narratives of Eroticism and Kinship in *Princesas* and *Agua con sal*

The Spanish protagonist of Fernando Leon de Aranoa's critically acclaimed film, *Princesas* (2005), often expresses feelings of solitude while fantasizing about love and companionship.²⁰ Throughout the film, Caye (Candela Peña) struggles with her loneliness, verbalizing her own inability to feel nostalgia since she has never experienced anything worth remembering. Even though the film depicts multiple scenes of Caye with her family and briefly involved with a computer technician, these scenes often carry a hint of frustration or discomfort for the protagonist as she conceals a central part of her life—her work as a prostitute. It is only through her friendship with an illegal Dominican immigrant, Zulema (Micaela Nevárez), that Caye is able to overcome her solitude and take pleasure in a sense of companionship.

Companionship between two women in Pedro Pérez Rosado's award-winning film, *Agua con sal* (2005), conjures feelings of warmth, security and compassion.²¹ The two protagonists—a Spanish woman, Mari Jo (Leire Berrocal), and an illegal Cuban immigrant, Olga (Yoima Valdés)—live in the same run-down building and are both undocumented workers at a local furniture factory. Mari Jo and Olga cross paths at home and at work, finally becoming friends when Olga takes Mari Jo a bowl of “agua con sal” to help heal her hands which have been injured from extensive manual labor in the factory. In this film, the intimacy that develops between the two women is key to their individual transformation and growth throughout the film. As in *Princesas*, friendship in this film offers a mutual system of support and companionship, but more importantly it forces viewers to consider alternative forms of kinship and notions of family through the intense bonds formed between the protagonists.

These films not only displace the traditional kinship models and emphasize a profound connection between women, but also convey a social reality defined by abuse and violence that

the characters experience as a part of daily life. These images are interwoven into a broader socio-political and cultural context that characterizes contemporary Spain, especially in relation to immigration. According to a study published in 2003 by Carlota Solé and Sònia Parella, migratory flows into Spain since the mid-1980s have become increasingly female, representing 48.2 percent of all migrants by 1998 (61). In reference to immigration from Latin America, only women from the Dominican Republic and Peru are included in the top five groups of immigrant women (Solé and Parella 61). A later study published in 2013 by Elena Vidal-Cosa and Pau Miret-Gamundi, shows that the number of immigrant women employed in Spain has continued to grow in more recent years, increasing from 226,639 to 1,530,926 between 1999 and 2008 (337). According to the study, Latin American women continue to be the largest collective of immigrant women in Spain, representing 10 percent of total female employment in 2008 (Vidal Cosa and Miret-Gamundi 344).

Approaching these demographic changes, in their study Solé and Parella describe the three-fold discrimination experienced by female immigrants in Spain given the interrelationship between the categories of race, class and gender that results in their socio-political marginalization (64). The authors also emphasize that female migrants are predominantly employed in domestic service and take a gendered perspective to analyze their integration into the Spanish labor market as a result of the massive incorporation of Spanish women into the work place, resulting in the need for assistance with domestic chores (62). These observations display how female migrants serve as way to maintain traditional household structures in the face of modernization as they take on the domestic responsibilities of urban, middle-class Spanish women. Drawing from this image of female immigrants, *Princesas* and *Agua con sal* reflect the high degree of marginalization experienced by immigrant women. Additionally, in both films it is their social marginalization that functions as a common ground between them and Spanish

women, since Caye, like Zulema, is a prostitute and Mari Jo is not represented as Olga's boss, but as another undocumented worker ("El cine" 109).

My analysis of *Princesas* and *Agua con sal* focuses on the breakdown of the conventional heterosexual Spanish family model in both films, as seen in familial problems experienced by Caye and Mari Jo and the distance that separates Zulema and Olga from their families after moving to Spain. I also consider the slippage of female friendship (or homosociality) in these films to queer moments that may be analyzed as representations of female homoeroticism. The films are saturated with images of profound love and friendship between women in traditional spaces of female homosociality, such as the home and the beauty salon. Scholars have in particular focused on the positive portrayal of Caye and Zulema's friendship in *Princesas* in comparison to other films that depict immigrants in Spain ("El cine"; Carty; Van Liew). Jorge Pérez analyzes what he describes as the representation of "una ética de solidaridad transcultural" in *Princesas* that he notes also surfaces in the films *Agua con sal* and *Sobreviviré* (1999) ("El cine" 106). Focusing on *Princesas*, Pérez articulates the crossing of cultural boundaries seen in the film through Zulema and Caye's friendship displayed through expressions of mutual caring and the developing bond between the two women as they cross into each other's personal and professional spaces, share personal information as well as beauty tips. Pérez argues that the film questions notions of "otherness" in Spanish cinema through its positive portrayal of Zulema and Caye's friendship. Following the line of inquiry initiated by Pérez, I propose to expand the analysis of female friendship in *Princesas* and *Agua con sal* to show how these films, despite not depicting characters that self-identify as "gay" or "lesbian," may appeal to queer viewers. More than asking how these films reconsider notions of "otherness," I aim to analyze how the central focus on intimacy between women found in each of these films allows numerous opportunities

for female friendship to translate to queer desire and, more specifically, portrays the development of an erotic relationship between the protagonists.

The emphasis on a deep-seated and intense sense of affection between women in *Princesas* and *Agua con sal* is evinced through the copious amount of time the female protagonists spend together as well as their expression of mutual caring and strong emotional attachment. In her thorough study of Spanish literature, Rosalía Cornejo Parriego traces the erotic implications found in literary representations of female friendship throughout the twentieth century. Cornejo Parriego analyzes the work of pioneer women writers Carmen Laforet, Rosa Chacel, Ana María Moix, Esther Tusquets and Marina Mayoral among others that, while in some cases do not contain an overt expression of sexual desire between women, give priority to relationships between women in a way that effectively questions the traditional prevalence of heterosexual relationships in Spanish literature. In her analysis of various works, the author notes not only the erotic undertones in several passages describing interactions between women, but also observes the frequent depiction of women in these works as both the subjects and objects of desire.²² While Cornejo Parriego's observations establish an eminent link between female friendship and desire between women specifically within the trajectory of Spanish literature, her comments provide insights when placing the intimate representation of female friendship found in *Princesas* and *Agua con sal* within a broader corpus of cultural production in Spain. Like Cornejo Parriego has explored in Spanish literature, I wish to suggest that these films also offer an alternative to a narrative of heterosexual romance through their significant portrayal of a marked level of intimacy between the protagonists. Similar to the novels analyzed in Cornejo Parriego's study, each of these films present narrative and visual queer elements that evoke a range of non-heterosexual ideas, such as a greater degree of emotional attachment

expressed between the female protagonists than in their relationships with men and, particularly in *Princesas*, the projection of women as both the subject and object of the female gaze.²³

Under this framework, I would like to approach *Princesas* and *Agua con sal* in relation to Adrienne Rich's notion of the "lesbian continuum" to call attention to the emotional and erotic bonds created between the female protagonists that are also crucial to the representation of transcultural solidarity in the film. Women in these films offer each other a form of social stability that parallels what Rich analyzes as "women-identified experiences" that do not conform to models of heterosexuality and instead represent "forms of primary intensity between and among women, including the sharing of a rich inner life, the bonding against male tyranny, the giving and receiving of practical and political support" (648-49). The author attributes the invisibility of such bonds to a system of "compulsory heterosexuality" that limits and labels these experiences as merely the result of being embittered towards men (632). Her comments point towards potential ways to mend the fractured relationship between the emotional and the erotic to trace instances of female bonding that provide a means for broadening the range of what we define as lesbian existence and, by extension, queer desire.

As I aim to demonstrate, the woman-centered feelings of intimacy, partnership and mutual affection described by Rich permeate in many of the scenes between Caye and Zulema as well as Olga and Mari Jo. While my queer reading of these films does not attempt to show that the major characters in the films are closeted lesbians, my approach does aim to recognize the way each of these films produce inconsistencies with strictly heteronormative paradigms of kinship and expressions of eroticism. Drawing on the pioneering observations of Alexander Doty, my reading of these films aims to acknowledge the queerness found in these narratives as more than merely "*sub-textual, sub-cultural, alternative* readings, or pathetic and delusional attempts to see something that isn't there" (*Making* xii). Filmic texts that are primarily

conceived in heterosexual terms can contain queer elements and produce queer moments within the film for the audience. Thus, following Doty's claims, the queer traces in *Princesas* and *Agua con sal* I propose to explore exist "simultaneously beside and within that created by heterosexual and straight positions" (*Making* 15). Understood in this manner, reading these films as queer does not operate as an attempt to "co-opt" aspects of queer culture in more mainstream Spanish cultural productions, but rather functions to recognize them as inherently queer flexible spaces that possess destabilizing effects with regards to sexuality.

It is worth noting the considerable differences found when comparing *Princesas* and *Agua con sal* with previous films that portray immigration. Of particular interest in these films is the predominance of the heteronormative family and heterosexual romance. For example, the representation of a cross-cultural family in Icíar Bollain's film *Flores de otro mundo* (1999) produces what Isolina Ballesteros describes as a "potential center for interracial negotiation" (7). Rosi Song specifically comments on the problematic representation of the "happy" heterosexual family in *Flores de otro mundo* as well as Manuel Gutiérrez Aragón's *Cosas que dejé en la Habana* (1997) and Alfonso Albacete and David Menkes' *I Love You Baby* (2001) that results in a "troubling form of assimilation" that reproduces colonial discourses as well as upholds racial stereotypes (45). Song also notes the problematic use of the conventional heterosexual narrative in the films *I Love You Baby* and *Cosas que dejé en la Habana* that feature Spanish men who are "converted" to heterosexuality by Caribbean women (55). The author observes that the prevalence of a heterosexual social order in these films may be attributed to the shift in the socio-political milieu of the country in the mid-1990s, when the Partido Popular (PP) came to office in 1996 under the conservative leadership of José María Aznar. Between 1996 and 2004, in spite of the approval of some same-sex partnership rights in certain regions of the country, the PP

government was successful in blocking numerous attempts to pass a Civil Partnership Law at a national level.

However, while in the previous films differences between couples from distinct ethnic, racial and/or economic origins is overcome through marriage and procreation, marriage and sexual reproduction is not seen as a solution in either *Princesas* or *Agua con sal*. Rather, what we do see are characters that engage in non-conventional relations that destabilize mainstream family units and erotic behavior. In this sense, an exploration of the representation of queer moments and alternative kinship models in both films brings to the forefront both a call for social tolerance and a better understanding of human differences as well as interrogates traditional perceptions of familial bonds and relationships through a focus on the developing mutual attachment between the protagonists.

Cinematic Narratives of Queer Kinship

Queer interventions in kinship offer modes of social organization that do not adhere to prevailing models of sexuality and procreation as well as pose questions regarding which forms of desire are enabled through privileging the image of heterosexual marriage and the family. In her study of queer kinship ideologies within the United States emerging in the 1980s and 90s, Kath Weston analyzes what she terms “chosen families” as a substitute for blood bonds in kinship models (63). Weston notes the tendency within traditional kinship discourses to favor relationships grounded in longevity and permanence, understood as family ties and marriage (59). In favoring this model, however, other relationships are rendered less meaningful in spite of their intensity and the personal impact and significance they may hold for an individual. Analyzing the development of kinship studies as well as critiques of procreative ideologies of kinship within the field of anthropology, Weston notes:

Whereas friendships and other ‘non-familial’ relationships marked by enduring solidarity could be terminated at will, a person was saddled with relatives for life, whether she despised them or eagerly anticipated the next family gathering [...] In the long shadow cast by the critique of kinship, *all* kinship ties (indeed), all social ties could be characterized as fictive. No justification remained for privileging biogenetic connection as a presocial ‘fact of life’ that ordained certain relationships to be of central importance to social organization. (58-9)

These observations contest the distinction often made between supposedly “valid” forms of kinship—determined by procreation—and non-familial ties that might also display a form of enduring solidarity and love.

In line with Weston’s observations, both *Princesas* and *Agua con sal* serve as an example of the ability to overturn traditional understandings of kinship through their depiction of friendship as the most consistent and stable network of emotional support for the protagonists. While in what follows I will focus on the displacement of the traditional family in both films, this point is further emphasized by the failed heterosexual relationships experienced by the Spanish protagonists in both films—an aspect which I will return to in the subsequent section of my analysis. Instead, both films chronicle the protagonists’ creation of a system of emotional support outside of conventional models which results in a strong emphasis on primary relationships between women and allows queer models of kinship to take shape.

Not only does the traditional family take a back seat to depicting the developing relationship between two women in *Princesas* and *Agua con sal*, but in each film it is also portrayed as dysfunctional in the case of the two Spanish women (Caye and Mari Jo) or as almost completely absent after having immigrated from their home countries for Zulema and Olga. In this respect, *Princesas* and *Agua con sal* resemble Spanish films such as Icíar Bollaín’s

Hola, ¿estás sola? (1995) and Pedro Almodovar's *Todo sobre mi madre* (1999) which provide models for alternative kinship based on emotional, rather than biological, ties. By not allowing the nuclear family to dominate the cinematic narrative, these films recognize the multiple and complicated systems of relation that exist outside of blood bonds and marriage. Also, similar to film's such as Benito Zambrano's *Solas* (1999) and Icíar Bollaín's *Te doy mis ojos* (2003), both films emphasize the abuse and unhappiness that may underlie traditional households that uphold patriarchal structures. While in *Princesas* Caye explains to Zulema that her mother and father fought all the time and were unhappy in their marriage, in *Agua con sal* Mari Jo reveals that her father was abusive, leading her sister to finally take action against him and ultimately kill him—which is the reason she is in jail. Considering that each of the protagonists come from troubled families, it is not surprising that they create systems of emotional support that operate as an alternative to traditional models of kinship.

In *Princesas* the majority of the plot centers on the relationship between Zulema and Caye, but the film also incorporates scenes of Caye with her family at her mother's home for lunch. The work of Fernando Leon de Aranoa often makes reference to the nuclear family. For example, *Barrio* (1998) portrays three young boys coming of age in disadvantageous working class families in Madrid and *Los lunes al sol* (2002) depicts the effects of unemployment on the workers as well as their families and loved ones. *Princesas* is no exception to this trait in Aranoa's cinema and, like his other films, presents a critical representation of the nuclear family. In contrast to the support and intimacy seen between Caye and Zulema throughout the film, scenes depicting Caye's family present them as physically inhabiting the same space but emotionally detached from one and other. This is made evident in several key moments during one of the first scenes of the film in which Caye is shown at her mother's apartment with her family for their weekly lunch. Caye congratulates her sister-in-law for receiving a promotion at

work only to find out that she was awarded the position two years earlier. Caye also omits any reference to her personal life and work when with her family, a point made glaringly evident as she allows her pink cell phone to continue ringing—incessantly receiving calls from potential clients—on the table next to her throughout the meal and offering no explanation to her mother who obsessively asks about it.

In spite of the intimate setting, the family does not engage each other or emotionally bond at all in this scene or subsequent scenes portraying them together at the table. As Jorge Pérez has pointed out, this representation of familial interaction from Caye's point of view within the film may be due to social barriers caused by the social stigma surrounding her work as a prostitute, thus instigating her to compartmentalize and separate significant aspects of her life ("El cine" 110). Apart from Caye's persistent silence regarding her own life with her family, I would add that *Princesas* presents the instability in her family as also due to the denial of Caye's mother, Pilar, of her father's death three years earlier. This same scene opens as the camera zooms out from a shot of a bouquet of flowers her mother has received that she imagines has been sent to her by Caye's father when, in actuality, it is later revealed by Caye in a later scene that she sends them to herself. While sending herself flowers and chocolates is reflective of Pilar's overwhelming sense of loneliness (a trait Caye also possesses), it is additionally a projection of a fantasy life and marriage her mother never experienced. This is made all the more evident in the subsequent scene in which Caye invites Zulema to join her family for lunch that, similar to the first scene, opens with a shallow focus shot on a bouquet of flowers with the family at the table in the background. As the scene develops, Pilar gathers the dishes and moves away from the table towards the kitchen, lingering at the window to once more ponder who could be sending the flowers. While she concludes that it probably is not Caye's father who sends them, she still does not recognize his death commenting, "Igual está en Santo Domingo." Reacting to

her mother's refusal to recognize the reality of her father's death, Caye explains the truth to Zulema. Caye describes her mother's marriage to her father as extremely unhappy and filled with conflict. This scene not only portrays Caye chipping away at her mother's illusion of a warm, loving marriage, but also exposing the reality of her mother's situation and, consequently, brings to light the failure of marriage and the nuclear family in the film as able to satisfy multiple human needs for love, sex, friendship and caring.

Zulema also endures an estranged relationship with her family; however, in her case, this is predominantly seen as a consequence of her decision to leave the Dominican Republic and look for work in Spain. Like Caye, she hides the way she earns a living and sends photos home of herself pretending to work at a bar. It is also noteworthy that while Zulema refers to her mother and son, she makes no mention of her own father or that of her son. While the details surrounding Zulema's family are never developed in the film, this omission suggests the absence of a fatherly figure from her life as well as that of her child. Similar to Caye's family, this portrayal of the nuclear family centers on its shortcomings, which is arguably the root of Zulema's problems throughout the film since it is the reason she has travelled to Spain—to earn money and provide for her son as a single mother. It is not surprising that this portrayal of Zulema's family when placed alongside a comparable depiction of Caye's family only serves to increase the sense of intimacy perceived between both women when they are shown together.

Agua con sal presents a similar depiction of the problems afflicting the functionality of the family for both Mari Jo and Olga. The first scenes of the film that introduce Mari Jo portray her trip to a prison to visit her sister. Not only does the scene's setting in the prison's visitors room immediately signal that her family has experienced some form of crisis, but the interaction between Mari Jo and her sister in the scene also conveys a heightened level of tension between the two. The first shot as the two women sit down together at the table is an extreme close up shot

of both women's hands as Mari Jo reaches across the table to take her sister's hand. While her sister does not tug away from her, she makes no effort to embrace Mari Jo either, ultimately leading Mari Jo to timidly retract her own hand. The reason behind her sister's incarceration is revealed in a subsequent scene in which Olga discovers a newspaper clipping Mari Jo has pasted on a bookshelf in her apartment from her sister's arrest. An extreme close up shot of the clipping alongside Olga's face as she reads the headline, "Se tomó la justicia por su cuenta," along with the caption to a photo of Mari Jo's sister visually discloses to viewers that she killed her father for the many abuses he inflicted on her mother. The display of the article in a central part of the apartment suggests that Mari Jo takes pride in her sister's actions. Another noteworthy aspect in this scene is the family photographs also included on the bookcase. When Mari Jo approaches, the camera positioning directs viewer's attention towards a photograph of her father and mother in which she has ripped her father's head out of the picture.

Even though several scenes in the film portray Mari Jo's visiting her sister and the two vaguely refer to the reason for her sister's imprisonment, this scene is the only moment in the film that explicitly speaks to what occurred in her family. As she picks up, kisses and hugs the torn framed photograph of her mother and father, she briefly tells Olga: "Mi madre. Si que era tonta. Toda su puta vida fregando suelos. Y ya ves como se terminó. Pobrecita." The absence of her mother in the film and the violence she describes in her family's past infers to viewers that her mother died at the hands of her abusive husband. By calling attention to the violence that characterizes Mari Jo's upbringing and the death of her mother, the film reflects a major social problem occurring in domestic households in Spain—the invisibility of gender violence. A fact made all the more relevant given the passing of the Organic Law 1/2004 on Comprehensive Protection Measures against Gender Violence by the Zapatero administration a year before the film's release. The law explicitly addresses violence within partnerships and ex-partnerships—

an aspect considered a limitation in its implementation—and defines violence against women as the result of patriarchal structures.²⁴ Within the context of my analysis of *Agua con sal*, the inclusion of this element in the film weakens the image of the Spanish nuclear family as a stable social structure.

The depiction of Olga's family also stresses detachment from the nuclear family, in this case due to social and economic needs that—similar to Zulema in *Princesas*—drive her to migrate to Spain in search of employment. The scenes that portray Olga speaking with her family are brief and dismally display her in a rundown phone booth on a hectic street. Also, like Zulema, Olga lies to her family about her employment situation and sends them false photographs. The distance that characterizes her relationship with her family is made particularly apparent when comparing these scenes with those portraying Olga and Mari Jo together, especially those set in Mari Jo's apartment and on the bus which show the two women sharing their problems and offering each other a significant amount of mutual support they are not able to receive elsewhere. The significance of their friendship for Olga is made evident in the film on more than one occasion. Not only does she excitedly tell her mother that she has found a friend that is helping her, she also includes Mari Jo in her prayers for her family.

To this end, a particularly telling scene in Olga's apartment shows her placing pictures of her and Mari Jo alongside those of her family on the wall next to her bed. While the film shows photographs of other members of both Mari Jo and Olga's respective families, the scene's composition along with the previous scene featuring the framed photographs in Mari Jo's apartment together demonstrate the waning dominance of the traditional family model and expressed through various family photographs. Yeon-Soo Kim has studied the significance of what she terms "the family album" in contemporary Spanish cultural production, referring to the visual construction of the family. Regarding the family as important pillar in Spanish history and

culture, Kim analyzes the way it has been constructed and reshaped through the inclusion of photographs within contemporary Spanish narrative and film. She acutely argues that:

The act of looking at the family album or arranging it represents moments of disruption that beg for either a nostalgic confirmation or a reinterpretation of the existing family image [...] The organizer of the album has the authority to manipulate, accentuate, or erase certain memories. In other words, through these narrative and structural maneuvering, one can contest the official historical vision shaped by dominant political and cultural force. (21)

Kim's observations indicate the ability visual of the family album, or photographs, to visually move beyond a universal understanding of the family.

Drawing on Kim's comments, in *Agua con sal*, we can analyze the significance of the "beheading" of Mari Jo's father in the photograph of her parents in the previous scene combined with the comparable absence of any male figures in Olga's photos as visually disengaging viewers from more traditional constructions of family or kinship since nowhere in either of these scenes do we see an image of the conventional heterosexual family or a complete image of a heterosexual couple. Additionally, these images of the family are diametrically opposed to a patriarchal model of the family. Rather, almost all of the photographs in the film—with the exception of those of Olga's son—feature women and the enduring bonds between them. In this sense, the visual emphasis on family photographs in the film that either literally tear apart conventional patriarchal familial structures or simply omit them creates a visual component in the film that directly rejects the traditional composition of the family and, furthermore, presents it as a declining model.

This aspect in the film is perhaps more evident when considering the photographic portrayal of the family in these films starkly contrasts to the use of family photographs Kim

notes in Icíar Bollaín's earlier film *Flores de otro mundo*, which also depicts immigration to Spain. The author argues that the use of family photographs at the end of the film, which incorporate immigrant women into traditional Spanish familial structures through their marriage to lonely Spanish men, serves to promote a problematic portrayal of multiculturalism and the resulting erasure of significant images of cultural diversity (173). Similarly, one of the principle critical claims Rosi Song makes in her analysis of immigration films from the late 1990s and the first part of the new millennium—including *Flores de otro mundo*—concerns these problematic concluding images that portray the easy integration of immigrant characters through marriage (58). Song indicates that women in these films are “successful” as long as they maintain “certain attributes that identify them as ideal cohorts in a heterosexual partnership within the dominant society” (54).

Taking into account these observations concerning the representation of the conventional family model as well as the sanctioning of heterosexual social organization at the end of earlier films, I wish to demonstrate the conflict with this model found in *Princesas* and *Agua con sal*. As I have been arguing, both films destabilize conventional portrayals of the family, bringing to the forefront cracks and crevices in the heteronormative social structure that, in my opinion, make way for the queer edge in both films to emerge. Instead of presenting trivial representations of the integration and assimilation of immigrants into Spanish society, both films employ the traditional family model to create a powerful criticism of an oppressive sex/gender system. These films favor failure over conformity in their representation of the nuclear family as well as heterosexual romance. Ironically, failure is not necessarily presented as a flaw in the narrative structure of *Princesas* and *Agua con sal* given that its presence in both films asks us to think outside of normative models of sexuality and kinship, and, I would argue, in dialogue with the negative turn in recent queer theory.

Failure, for Judith Halberstam, presents a significant form of resistance within mainstream culture and, consequently, offers an invaluable tool for queer scholars. Building on the theoretical work of queer scholars Leo Bersani and Lee Edelman who envision the queer subject as one bound to negativity and anti-production, Halberstam draws on the idea that failure is seen as especially negative and unappealing within mainstream culture.²⁵ Halberstam demonstrates the potential failure possesses when configured within cultural production as an instrument for undoing narratives of success and progress and as a means for producing preferable alternatives to conformist lifestyles (2). Asking “[w]hat kinds of reward can failure offer us?”, Halberstam explains that it “allows us to escape the punishing norms that discipline behavior and manage human development with the goal of delivering us from unruly childhoods to predictable adulthoods” (3). The queer art of failure, as theorized by Halberstam, offers a position of resistance to heteronormative social order and seeks to imagine “other goals for life, for love, for art, and for being” by opening a space for new futures not tied to traditional social structures (88). The author links failure as a practice to queerness through an understanding of queerness as a failure to conform. Of particular significance to this study, the author analyzes the influence of narratives that de-emphasize the family or reject it all together as a central form of social organization through a process of “forgetfulness” she directly links to failure. In reference to traditional kinship models, Halberstam perceptively notes the benefits of “forgetting the family” as an opportunity to “exploit some potential for a *difference in form* that lies dormant in queer collectivity not as an essential attribute of sexual otherness but as a possibility embedded in the break from heterosexual life narratives” (70).

This epistemological framework of failure and forgetting is useful for engaging in a discussion of *Princesas* and *Agua con sal* and the significance of their displacement of the nuclear family model. While in these films the family is not completely “forgotten,” by

presenting the family as a broken or failed model, these films similarly open the possibility for the protagonists to grow outside of a narrative geared towards preserving this model. Although the women portrayed in these films are not necessarily “losers,” they do form a part of society’s underbelly through their work as prostitutes and undocumented laborers who are able to develop a support system among themselves that undermines dominant modes of kinship, love and relationships. In *Princesas*, we see images of Caye taking Zulema to the hospital and caring for her after she suffers extreme physical abuse from a Spanish man promising her papers as well as taking her into her home after the most extreme of these incidents. In *Agua con sal* the two women offer each other a system of mutual support that enables each of them to escape their personal solitude and grow into who they are as individuals. It is Olga who talks to Mari Jo after finding out that she is pregnant and pushes her to talk with Johnny—Mari Jo’s lover— as well as frequently lectures her on maintaining her sense of self worth. In this sense, the failure of the family in both *Princesas* and *Agua con sal* is substituted by other alliances and its failure in both films prevents the erasure of other modes of kinship, specifically the immense bond forged between women in both films. By hindering the association between the traditional family and personal well-being and security, these films open the way for queer readings of love and companionship.

Even though both films conclude with Zulema and Olga returning to their countries of origin, this ending does not necessarily undermine the intense relationship developed between the female protagonists throughout both films. This is made evident in key moments at the end of both films that stress the enduring bonds created between them. In *Princesas*, one of the final scenes portrays Caye taking Zulema to the airport. Not only do we see the emotional effect of Zulema’s departure on both women, the scenes also demonstrate the lasting impact of their relationship which is more subtly seen in Caye’s choice of clothing since she is wearing one of

Zulema's shirts that she had admired and asked to borrow. Additionally, in a previous scene Caye gives Zulema the money she had been saving for her own cosmetic surgery, in this way offering both her and her family a temporary form of financial support.

In *Agua con sal*, this lasting emotional impact is perhaps most apparent in the way the two women change their approach to their bodies at the film's close. While Olga is shown coloring her hair and frequently transforming her appearance in an attempt to change her luck throughout the film, in the final sequence she pauses in front of the mirror and decides not to change her appearance, an act which symbolizes her own acceptance of herself. This shot cuts to a shot of Mari Jo sensually dressed and standing in the street with her hair colored bright pink, a shot which director Pedro Pérez Rosado in an interview included with the DVD release, describes as the moment in the film when Mari Jo "más bella sale" since it is in this instant that "adquiere la conciencia de la dignidad [...] se arregla de verdad para estar de acuerdo consigo misma y ser bella consigo misma y aceptar su condición consigo misma." The final scenes of the film demonstrate the effect of their relationship on both women, and it is as if their interaction—operating as the metaphorical "agua con sal"—has healed each of them and served as a substitute for the emotional support they lacked from their families throughout the film. Additionally, the closing scenes of *Agua con sal* feature a ballad by Cuban singer Carlos Varela, "Foto de familia," which plays as the film cuts back forth between shots of Olga and Mari Jo through a parallel editing sequence. The words of the song stand out alongside the images of Olga and Mari Jo, especially the verse "detrás de la separación, detrás de todos los gobiernos, de las fronteras y la religión hay una foto de familia," which is sonorously brought to forefront in these scenes. The music serves to reinforce the bond created between the two women and speaks directly to the ability to overcome elements that may separate them and their connection as a family. In this way, while both *Princesas* and *Agua con sal* end with the separation of the two

women, they do not necessarily close the door on the relationships developed between the female protagonists.

Princesas and *Agua con sal* depict the traditional family as exceptionally frail which affords the possibility to construct queer means of relating, belonging and caring. In fact, the ties between women in these films appear stronger than bonds of marriage or blood relationship in spite of not being woven into a procreative model of kinship. Ultimately, these films portray the family and traditional formulas of heterosexual romance as unable to cater to the deep emotional needs of the protagonists. This insubstantial portrayal of accepted models of kinship consequently intensifies the perceived emotional attachment between women in each film and calls attention to the demand for other forms of desire to provide the love and support sought by each of the protagonists.

Traces of Eroticism in *Princesas* and *Agua con sal*

According to Alexander Doty, movie goers often fall prey to “heterocentric traps” that predisposition viewers into “assuming that all characters in a film are straight unless labeled, coded, or otherwise obviously proven to be queer” (*Flaming* 2-3). Reflecting on his own experience watching the *Blair Witch Project*, Doty asks why he—and the general audience—would automatically assume the heterosexuality of all the characters in the film, concluding that “[it] is arrogant to insist that all non–blatantly queer-coded characters must be read as straight—especially in cases like *The Blair Witch Project* where all we have is narrative silence on the subject of certain characters’ sexuality” (*Flaming* 3). Doty’s comments are particularly pertinent when considering the intimacy between the Spanish and immigrant female protagonists of *Princesas* and *Agua con sal*. While these films do not exhibit a “narrative silence” in reference to sexuality, this does not eliminate the queer connotations budding in the representation of the

relationship between both films' protagonists. In what follows, it is my contention that to a certain extent these films do demonstrate a level of queer desire that permeates in the interactions between the protagonists, an aspect that I argue demonstrates the erotic potential of their relationship in both films. I will first explain the factors enabling the development of a strong bond between the female protagonists in both films, such as their comparable socio-economic positions and the resulting development of their friendship. Then, I will analyze how the representation of female bonding in *Princesas* and *Agua con sal* pushes past a simple portrayal of friendship and explore the emerging eroticism within these films that exposes inconsistencies with presumed articulations of desire that are obscured by a heterocentric framework.

Both *Princesas* and *Agua con sal* portray characters who—apart from Zulema and Olga's undocumented, immigrant status—share similar socio-economic positions. Not only do the protagonists occupy the same professions in each film, but they also live in the same buildings. This aspect is perhaps more emphasized in *Agua con sal* as Olga and Mari Jo are not only shown living in the same building, but also both holding undocumented positions at the same factory and using the same modes of transportation. In contrast to *Princesas*, the parallels between the two women's lives in socio-economic terms are established from the onset of the film. The film's first scenes use parallel editing to create a cinematic proximity between Olga and Mari Jo by cutting back and forth between the two women before arriving at their apartment building, and finally meeting in a subsequent scene at the cafe where Olga has found work. While these scenes place the two characters in relation to one and other, their initial meeting also marks the differences existing between them, principally Olga's immigrant status. Noteworthy during this scene are various moments in which the camera shifts from the interaction among the characters to a television showing a program covering a story about immigrants who have died trying to enter Spain that Olga is intently watching as she works.

Within this setting, it is significant that Olga distinguishes herself from the numerous nameless victims shown in the media by standing up to Mari Jo who taunts her decision to move to the small town. In doing so, Olga firmly establishes her own subjectivity as a woman working to earn a living and provide for herself rather than be labeled as a victim of her circumstances. Furthermore, Olga appears to earn Mari Jo's respect—who shows little consideration for anyone—given that she also introduces herself to Olga, even if she does so abrasively, and in a later scene defends Olga at the factory to their supervisor, Johnny, a man who immigrated from Puerto Rico by marrying the factory's owner. While Mari Jo is not an immigrant, she is also an undocumented worker who is subject to the authority of the factory's owner, an older Spanish woman. Of note in this regard is the first sequence in the factory in which Mari Jo looks up and notices the owner watching the workroom floor and, more specifically, monitoring her husband's interactions with the other female employees. This scene cuts between a shot of the factory's main floor to a shot of the owner's gaze through the office blinds down onto the factory floor below and the workers. Even though the owner's gaze is directed at her husband as he closely speaks with Olga, Mari Jo's attentiveness to the owner's observing eye in the periphery of these shots calls attention to the power dynamic between these two Spanish women. In these shots, Mari Jo is visually more closely aligned with her immigrant coworkers on the factory floor than with a fellow Spanish woman. This dynamic brings to the surface a number of broader hierarchies that exist in the film—such as gender, race and class—that ultimately characterize the friendship between Olga and Mari Jo and demonstrates both the manner in which they are equally subordinated in terms of social class, while divided in terms of their ethnic and racial identities.

By contrast, in *Princesas* the beginning of the film aligns itself almost exclusively with Caye's point of view. It is through her gaze that Zulema first appears in the film, initially

identified by Caye through her “Sexy Girl 69” t-shirt. Additionally, Caye’s voice prevails in the film through numerous extended monologues. As the film progresses, however, Zulema’s narrative point of view gains greater prominence and increasing emphasis is placed on the friendship between her and Caye. The prevalent focus on the friendship between these two women creates what Maria Van Liew identifies as a kind of “reciprocal protagonism” in the film that develops through the trust and communication exhibited between Caye and Zulema (453). Furthermore, for various scholars the considerable attention given to the development of Caye and Zulema’s friendship speaks to the crossing of various boundaries throughout the film (for example geographic, spatial and ethnic) (“El cine”; Van Liew). As Jorge Pérez notes, the film not only demonstrates how both women share similar experiences through their social marginalization and the abuses each of them suffer, but also calls attention to numerous scenes that portray Zulema sharing her clothes with Caye, introducing her to new foods and colloquial expressions. Zulema gives Caye access to parts of Madrid previously unknown to her, such as the Latin market and cafe, that additionally allows her to interact with and be influenced by a different cultural community. As a result, Zulema is also able to integrate herself into the group of Spanish women at the salon Caye frequents. Pérez explains that, in this respect, the film opens up a transnational space that interrogates “esta cualidad permeable de las fronteras, como espacios de negociación y, simultáneamente, de contestación” (“El cine” 114). Much like *Agua con sal*, the film displays the many ways the two women’s lives intersect while at the same time emphasizing the greater obstacles Zulema must overcome as an immigrant, which is perhaps made most evident through her departure from the country after having suffered extreme physical abuse from a man promising to get her papers and, what viewers may assume, is a doctor’s appointment in which she is informed that she has contracted HIV.

I would like to contribute to the discussion of female friendship in both of these films by exploring their queer potential. The relationship between these female characters has been perceived as non-sexual (“El cine” 116), but this does not deprive them of their erotic potential or portraying a rupture with heteronormative social order or sexual identity. I want to suggest that both *Agua con sal* and *Princesas*, while not presenting an explicitly sexual bond between the female characters, do carry erotic undertones. Audre Lorde seeks to reclaim eroticism as an empowering force for women that exemplifies a deep physical, emotional and spiritual connection and distinguishes itself from “proscribed erotic comings-together” under a Euro-American, male dominated tradition which typically delegates erotic sensations to explicit modes of sexual stimulation, which Lorde refers to as “pornographic” (59; 54). While pornography for Lorde produces a “superficially erotic” encounter characterized as “sensation without feeling” that is defined by external influences on feeling and pleasures, eroticism presents numerous possibilities for pleasure experienced by both the mind and body that is guided by personal needs and desires (53; 54). Adrienne Rich draws on Lorde’s understanding of the erotic to highlight the intrinsic link between female friendship, comradeship and eroticism that is embedded in her understanding of the “lesbian continuum.” For Rich, understanding eroticism between women in these terms allows women to envision erotic acts as “unconfined to any single part of the body or solely to the body itself,” but rather as omnipresent energy in experiences shared between women (650). Taking into account Lorde and Rich’s powerful and incisive observations regarding the nature of erotic behavior, I believe that the Spanish films *Agua con sal* and *Princesas* present an erotic bond between the female characters that results in the representation of a non-heterosexual coupling.

In the case of *Princesas*, this is particularly evident in scenes in which Zulema and Caye go shopping and give each other help and advice with their hair and make-up. Like other

scholars, in my opinion these scenes represent a form of transnational solidarity that reaffirms a strong bond between both women and allows them overcome cultural differences (“El cine” 116-17; Van Liew 454). But I also believe that in recognizing what Jorge Pérez so acutely refers to as the “conexión matrilineal” between these two women, we can infer a level of queer desire in these scenes that is in fact erotic, especially when examined under the framework proposed by Lorde and Rich (“El cine” 116). For instance, Caye compliments Zulema’s body—specifically her large breasts— and her clothes in addition to the use of extreme close up shots showing the two women touching each other while walking down the street, dancing or talking at the café. While these scenes do not necessarily carry an explicitly sexual connotation, they do suggest an extreme sense of intimacy between these women that evokes feelings of intense pleasure when they are together. Furthermore, as Pérez notes, several of the scenes between the two women play with visual conventions commonly found in romantic sequences, such as the shot reverse shot technique to emphasize to dramatic impact and emotion of the scene (“El cine” 116). Within this framework, we can also consider the scene in which Zulema braids Caye’s hair as demonstrating a kind of emotional and physical pleasure between the two women, even if subdued in the film by Caye’s reference at the end of the scene to her date with Manuel, a computer specialist she met out alone one night in Madrid.

Spanish queer scholar and activist Beatriz Preciado comments on the role women play in caring for the body in her pioneering study *Testo yonqui* as well as the implications of this role within the broader frameworks of sexuality and gender. The work includes various personal anecdotes about Preciado’s own experience taking testosterone as well as the development of her relationship with Virginie Despentes, a French writer and filmmaker who in the narrative has begun to identify as a lesbian. In one of these many anecdotes, the author describes the “políticas de cuidado” s/he observes during a trip to a spa with Despentes (*Testo* 224). In this

section of the text, Preciado compares the erotic pleasure s/he experiences while receiving a manicure to that of a man receiving a blowjob, noting—almost sarcastically— “la diferencia es que ellos lo pueden llamar sexo y las mujeres lo llaman estética” (*Testo* 226). Preciado refers to the broader system of sex and gender that—for reproductive and political objectives— labels certain acts of pleasure as sexual while marking others as platonic in spite of their sensual nature.

Taking into account Preciado’s comments in relation to Lorde’s aforementioned definition of eroticism, I aim to call attention to the erotic potential of the bond between Caye and Zulema found within these scenes. Preciado’s understanding of the sexual pleasure that arises for women in beauty treatments evokes Lorde’s notion of the erotic in that s/he recognizes what Lorde refers to as an “erotic demand” found in “vital areas of our lives other than sex” (55). Interestingly, taking Preciado’s remarks in conjunction with Lorde’s characterization of the erotic situates eroticism alongside sexual desire rather than opposed to it. Preciado poignantly observes the double standard for women in expressions of eroticism and sexual pleasure:

[L]a clave en este sistema heterosexual es que en este cuidado que las mujeres se aportan unas a otras [...] se ha excluido de manera escrupulosa la producción del placer sexual. Por el contrario, cuando las mujeres se ocupan de los hombres todo cuidado es potencialmente sexualizable. Tal vez, el número de mujeres que va a hacerse manicuras se acerca al número de hombres que va a salas de masajes a hacerse tocar la polla” (*Testo* 227).

When contextualized through Preciado’s remarks, these scenes—while not containing an overt representation of sexual desire between Caye and Zulema— may be interpreted as presenting the embryonic beginnings of an erotic connection between the two women. This connection is made all the more possible throughout the film as Caye’s desire for a conventional relationship with a man is portrayed as difficult to achieve and a central component to her melancholic state, as

articulated in several of her extended monologues. In one sequence, the use of a voice over monologue narrates what Caye describes as “un día que es la ostia” while a series of touching scenes portraying Caye and Zulema together causes spectators to contemplate the profound bond between these women. In her monologue Caye describes a day filled with people you love, good food, your favorite music—a day she explains only comes once in a lifetime that is “un desvío” after which “se puede elegir por donde va a seguir todo”. It is telling that in spite of Caye’s constant longing throughout the film for a relationship with a man that will change her life, the images used to illustrate her description of what would hypothetically be the happiest day of her life are those of her relationship with Zulema, and not Manuel. Additionally, the following sequence depicts a day the two women spend together shopping, dancing and enjoying life in a way that evokes the feelings of extreme happiness described by Caye in her monologue. By calling attention to these moments in the film, it is my aim to demonstrate how, in spite of Zulema and Caye’s relationships with men, the dynamic between these women may be read in some ways as inherently queer as well as erotic.

In a similar fashion, *Agua con sal* portrays the rapport formed between Olga and Mari Jo that takes precedence in the film over their relationships with men. As already mentioned, Olga and Mari Jo become friends when Olga brings Mari Jo a bowl of “agua con sal” to help heal her hands which have been hurt from extensive labor at the factory. The scene portrays the two women getting to know one other—Mari Jo tells Olga about the problems her family has experienced as Olga also talks about her family as well as gives a few cultural anecdotes about Cuba, specifically related to her religious beliefs. While the scene does not allude to the possibility of a romantic relationship, it does point towards the forging of a rich emotional bond which is reinforced in subsequent scenes that depict the two women caring for one and other. Olga advises Mari Jo to behave more sensibly—specifically to stop sleeping with the factory

owner's husband (Johnny), and Mari Jo offers Olga support at work. It is also worth noting the use of several close up shots in various scenes between the two women which heightens the sense of intimacy between them. These scenes starkly contrast to scenes between Mari Jo and Johnny—her supposed “love interest”— which depict a sexual relationship between the two, but still do not create the same level of intimacy perceived in scenes between Olga and Mari Jo. Particularly noteworthy is a scene in which Mari Jo approaches Olga to sit with her after work and, looking at the orchards and the mountains in the distance, begins to imagine life outside the factory. Similar to Caye in *Princesas*, Mari Jo describes to Olga what she imagines as the ideal life—going to Valencia once a week to shop, eating a hamburger and going out dancing on the weekends. A tightly framed close up shot of both women's faces during the scene emphasizes the emotional bond forged as the two women confide in one and other and share secrets. While I am not arguing that the depiction of Olga and Mari Jo's developing friendship is an overt lesbian love story, in recognizing the central importance placed on their friendship in the film I want to call attention to the erotic potential of their relationship as contextualized through the lens of Rich's continuum and Lorde's notion of eroticism.

These films—whether meaning to or not— emphasize the tensions and pleasures derived from the intimate interaction between women that generates a space of queer desire. Drawing attention to the inherent connection between the representation of female bonding and eroticism brings to the surface the queer pleasure found in the tender and dynamic relationship between Caye and Zulema as well as Olga and Mari Jo. My reading of these films is intended to recognize the depiction of female eroticism present within them that deepens the ability of the characters to communicate across cultural lines and barriers. In this sense, while *Princesas* and *Agua con sal* both portray the inherent ethnic difference between the female protagonists as well as the harsh social reality and prejudices experienced by immigrants to Spain, they also

extensively depict the intimate bonds developed between women—in spite of cultural differences— through mutual support, advice and expressions of affection. It is my contention that these bonds express a relationship between the protagonists in both films that pushes past a simple portrayal of female friendship to serve as an example of the more ample definition of eroticism and desire that bring to the surface the queer possibilities within both films.

Conclusion

The films that I have examined in this chapter display the queer potential existing within Spanish cinema addressing the growing impact of female immigration in the country. Although *Princesas* and *Agua con sal* conclude with the departure of both Zulema and Olga to their countries of origin, they also create new communities defined by bonds of kinship and a sense of enduring affection that reaffirm the representation of transnational solidarity present in the films. This relationship is enhanced in both films through the depiction of a shared socio-economic position reflected in the shared spaces occupied by the protagonists, particularly their neighborhoods and occupations. While this does not—nor should it— result in the erasure of the racial and ethnic differences between the protagonists, I do believe that in both films it is their differences that ironically present an abundance of dialogue between these women that ultimately results in their increased attachment to one and other. In *Princesas*, Caye frequently speaks of her desire to deeply connect with another person. While sitting in a coffee shop with Zulema, she comments “No tengo nostalgia de nada porque nunca me ha pasado nada tan bueno para echarlo de menos.” Certainly, her relationship with Zulema is presented throughout the film, especially in the final scenes, as one through which she may finally experience the kind of nostalgia she describes. For Zulema, it is through Caye that she is able develop a support network that she is unable to receive from her family while in Spain. In *Agua con sal*, the

relationship between Olga and Mari Jo demonstrates a similar network of emotional and professional support to that seen in *Princesas*. In this film, the time the protagonists spend together appears to enable each of them to personally overcome the numerous obstacles and disadvantages they face. While Olga labors to maintain her emotional stability as she works to save money to send back to her family in Cuba, Mari Jo struggles to push past the emotional and physical abuse she suffered at the hands of her father. In both films, it is the depiction of a profound attachment and reciprocal emotional support between the protagonists that is brought to the forefront and serves as means through which they not only lay the framework for a form of transnational camaraderie, but also individually grow and develop an expanded sense of self.

My analysis of *Princesas* and *Agua con sal* emphasizes that within this portrayal of companionship and solidarity exist forms of desire, kinship and sexual identity which, while not necessarily deliberately incorporated by the directors, offer spectators points of queer self-identification. While it has not been my intention to argue that *Princesas* and *Agua con sal* serve as a political expression for Spain's LGBT population or for queer immigrants, it is my contention that these films do indicate the ways viewers may negotiate queer identity within more dominant forms of cultural production concerning immigration and cross-cultural encounters. By calling attention to the erotic potential within several scenes of the films, I mean to indicate the conflict with the traditional structures of heteronormative society found in both films, specifically heterosexual romance. While not explicitly sexual, these films do include moments of intensity and pleasure—both physical and emotional—experienced between women that speak to broader expressions of eroticism. Additionally, both films display the failure of the nuclear family which marks a rupture with traditional and accepted models of kinship and, consequently, forms of desire and relationships. This ultimately produces the opportunity for viewers to pay attention to queer forms of desire as well as new modes of belonging present in

Princesas and *Agua con sal*. In this sense, in recognizing the erotic potential of the relationship between the protagonists, both films offer an alternative to heterosexual romance and reproducing the family not only as a means for presenting a form of transnational solidarity, but also as a way of completely reimagining traditional images of the family, forms of desire and, consequently, the broader cultural and national ideals intrinsically linked to them.

Chapter 4

Loving Strangers: Representations of Gay Globality in Spanish Cultural Production

In 1996, scholar and gay rights activist Dennis Altman published a much discussed article on gay global identity, entitled “On Global Queering”. In the article, Altman addresses broader debates on cultural globalization in relation to representations of sexual identity. In subsequent articles, Altman has continued to engage the intersection of globalization and sexuality, posing the question: “Is there, in other words, a universal gay identity linked to modernity? This is not to argue for a transhistorical or essentialist position [...] but rather to question the extent to which the forces of globalization (both economic and cultural) can be said to produce a common consciousness and identity based on homosexuality” (“Rupture” 22). Although he refers to the problems that arise when Western LGBT activists and scholars posit universal constructions of sexual identity, Altman also claims the use of a Western rhetoric by Asian men to express themselves. For Altman, in spite of clear differences between LGBT communities transnationally, there exist important similarities that are the result of the urbanization and modernization associated with consumer societies. The resistance to a universal gay identity, or what Altman terms “common consciousness,” argues that this approach replicates a colonial narrative of development that judges “other” sexual cultures against a model of Euro-American sexual identity. Arnaldo Cruz-Malavé and Martin F. Manalansan IV explain that “the emergence, visibility, and legibility of [sexual differences] are often predictated in globalizing discourses on a developmental narrative in which [...] non-Euro-American queerness must consciously assume the burdens of representing itself and others as “gay” (5-6). In addition, these authors also stress that globalizing discourses of sexuality are often understood in unidirectional terms that only recognize the influence of Western cultures on other parts of the world without examining the impact of non-Western cultures within this exchange.

This debate illustrates the central focus of this chapter: conflicts surrounding expressions of sexual identity in queer cross-cultural exchanges. In a collection of essays on the impact of queer theory in Spain published in 2005, Spanish queer theorist David Córdoba García explains the use of the term “queer” by the contributors as a way to “[p]riorizar las conexiones con las comunidades gays y lesbianas allí donde se han desarrollado con más fuerza, por encima de las especificidades nacionales” which “ha sido y es una práctica necesaria para gays y lesbianas” (21).²⁶ While Córdoba García’s comments, as well as other essays in the collection, suggest the strong bonds between Anglophone and Francophone queer theory and activism among Spain’s LGBTQ community, my concern in this chapter centers on literary and cinematic representations of cross-cultural queer relationships in which the incorporation of non-Western queer subjects serve as the basis for critiques of Western Euro-Americanism with regards to expressions of sexual identity. Here, I will focus on two works that present queer cross-cultural exchanges that incorporate non-Western queer subjects: Cristina Cuestas’ short story “Zoe y Haydee” from the collection *El espejo de los deseos* (2007) and Julio Medem’s most recent film *Habitación en Roma* (2010). In this chapter, it is my intention to analyze how these works not only demonstrate the way national and personal relationships are co-determined, but also provide a means for questioning globalizing discourses of sexuality and expressions of LGBT liberation across lines of race and ethnicity.

In addition to their depiction of sexuality and sexual identity within cross-cultural encounters, these works also demonstrate a more critical representation of Europe. My discussion of Cristina Cuesta’s short story, “Zoe y Haydee,” explores the expression of cultural differences—in this case Spanish and Indian—between the two women in the story, particularly with regards to expressions of sexual identity. Even though the story gives preference to the Spanish protagonist, Zoe, the use of a third person narrator in the narrative allows for the text to

alternate between both women's perspectives. More specifically, the narrative displays the explicit objection of the Indian protagonist, Haydee, to falling victim to European stereotypes, prejudices and labels concerning both her ethnicity and her sexuality. This is most apparent in Haydee's expression of her sexual identity, one which challenges dominant Euro-American gay and lesbian narratives of visibility through Haydee's articulation of her sexual subjectivity without publicly declaring her sexuality. I then turn my attention to an analysis of Julio Medem's *Habitación en Roma*, a film that also centers on the negotiation of cultural differences that are reflected in discussions concerning ethnicity and sexuality. The majority of the film builds on the considerable divide between a Spanish woman, Alba, and a Russian woman, Natasha, in terms of language, sexual identity and culture. This division is also spatially represented in the first scenes of the film through the presence of an empty flagpole on the balcony of Alba's hotel room that serves as a visual barrier between the two women. My analysis, however, also examines the re-appropriation of this space at the end of the film as Alba and Natasha hang their own flag from balcony, an act that allows the two women to self-construct an alternative to dominant social scripts of sexual, national and, more specifically, European identity present throughout the film, particularly the lurking presence of the flag of the European Union.

While these works may not completely dislodge themselves from cultural stereotypes and the rhetoric of Western superiority, this does not mean that they fail to call these narratives into question. Instead, this analysis considers the tensions and conflicts that arise from the differences in cultural background and national origin found in these works as a productive means for contesting Euro-American cultural and political dominance, particularly in reference to expressions of sexual identity. In this sense, an analysis of these works presents a notable change from the narratives examined in Chapter 2 in that it calls attention to the representation of non-Western queer subjects in cross-cultural encounters that center on a process of cultural

negotiation instead of bolstering strong divides or feature subtle expressions of resistance. Thus, these literary and cinematic works present a turn away from a representation of European superiority and, in this way, signal a small but significant shift in perspectives on sexual identity and cultural stereotypes.

Female Agency, Subjectivity and Sexual Identity in Cristina Cuesta's "Zoe y Haydee"

El espejo de los deseos is a short story collection published by Editorial LesRain in 2007 that donates ten percent of its earnings to the international fight against sex tourism. While the stories found in *El espejo de los deseos* are more generally focused on representations of female same-sex desire, it also includes a prelude that portrays a seven year old girl from Cambodia, Huyn, sold into sex tourism by her father for three hundred dollars after the death of her mother. She is then prostituted to a Western man paying only fifty dollars to take her virginity, an experience that results in her collapse and death. The prologue's close not only emphasizes Huyn's brutal death, but also the thousands of other young girls that suffer at the hands of sexual exploitation. The narrative also lashes out at Western men that indulge their fantasies at the cost of these women and then return to their "primer mundo, satisfecho de su triunfo" (9).

The collection's prelude places a strong emphasis on essential human rights as well as inequalities that surface in cross-cultural exchanges between Western and non-Western countries, an aspect also found in other stories from the collection. My analysis of the first story in the collection, Cristina Cuesta's "Zoe y Haydee," focuses on the literary representation of interactions between Western and non-Western cultures that specifically highlights issues related to the globalization of the LGBT movement. The story centers on the relationship that develops between two women after meeting through an online dating site. Zoe is a Spanish woman who immediately travels to India to meet Haydee after speaking with her online, and the two women

become briefly involved before Zoe returns to Spain. More than examining Zoe and Haydee's relationship as an example of the power imbalance between Western and non-Western countries, it is my aim to emphasize the importance of the use of a third person narrator in the text that contributes to the construction of a dialogue between the two women centered on differing expressions of female subjectivity, agency and sexual desire.

Even though the narrative at times portrays Haydee and her home country, India, through tropes of exoticism or underdevelopment, the use of a third person narrator within the text also calls attention to Haydee's own thoughts and perception of Zoe. In so doing, the narrative demonstrates a dialogue between the two women that suggests an alternative to representing cultural differences as resulting in the creation of oppositional entities, one either taking over or absorbing the other. Furthermore, the story emphasizes Zoe's push into a state of disillusionment about her own lack of cultural awareness after speaking with Haydee, a feeling that ultimately causes her to travel to India. While the narrative concludes with Zoe's return to Spain as Haydee remains in India, their time together in the narrative not only reveals their attraction to each other, but also a negotiation and reflection of their cultural differences. As a result, the narrative provides an opportunity to contest what Arnaldo Cruz-Maláve and Martin Manalansan have called "a universally legible" representation of the LGBT community, one that they explain originated in Europe and the United States and is oriented toward political goals such as gay marriage and public visibility (14).

Before entering into an analysis of Cuesta's story, it is useful to provide a brief outline of events related to the promotion of sexual minority rights in India. The 2009 ruling by the Delhi High Court to decriminalize homosexuality was seen as a landmark for LBGT rights in the country. However, the LGBT community still faces discrimination, and in December 2013 the court reintroduced Section 377 of the penal code to recriminalize homosexuality. Section 377 is

an anti-sodomy statute established during the British Empire in 1886 and declared unconstitutional and repealed in 2009. Section 377 also demonstrates the conceptual invisibility of lesbians in India through its phallogentric framework. While no women have been convicted thus far, the statute has been used to intimidate women wanting to live with their long-term lovers or friends (Bhaskaran 106). Apart from the recent reinstatement of Section 377, perhaps the most internationally recognizable conflict regarding representations of same-sex desire in India was the release of Deepa Mehta's 1996 film *Fire*, a co-production between India and Canada. The film tells the story of Sita and Radha who live together in New Delhi with their husbands, Jatin and Ashok, who are also brothers. Due to the emotional neglect they receive from their husbands, they turn to each other and begin a secret affair. The release of the film in India in 1998 caused riots, and theatres showing the film were attacked by activists from the Shiv Sena, a Hindu right-wing organization that stormed the theatres and tore posters from the walls and burned them (Dave 141).

Apart from the backlash from right-wing Hindu groups, *Fire* also drew critical scholarly attention, particularly for the film's use of English and Sita's comments in reference to the lack of a discourse for same-sex love in India. Queer scholars Gayatri Gopinath and Ruth Vanita have responded both to the film's representation of female same-sex desire as well as to audience reception. In her introduction to the volume *Queering India*, Vanita criticizes the film's use of a "one-sided representation of Hindu tradition and practice as almost entirely repressive of individual desire and pleasure" and argues for the need to trace etymological examples of same-sex desire in cultural production in India (2). In a similar vein, Gopinath illustrates the connections between Mehta's film and Ismat Chugta's 1941 story *Lihaf* (*The Quilt*). Unlike Vanita, Gopinath does not draw on ties between the works to find a discernible linguistic expression for female same-sex desire in Indian culture. Rather, she argues that these works

“interrogate the teleological Euro-American narrative according to which lesbian sexuality must emerge from a private, domestic sphere into a public, visible subjectivity” (“Local” 155). While these scholars present different approaches and viewpoints concerning the film, they both take issue with the predominance of the Euro-American academy in lesbian and gay studies, particularly in relation to India.

Cuesta’s narrative also responds to this situation in its portrayal of the conversations between Zoe and Haydee that highlight conflicting understandings of sexuality across different cultures, particularly in reference to the expression of a visible (or public) sexual subjectivity. The story opens as Zoe and Haydee meet online and begin to correspond through email. As demonstrated in the narrative, the internet is a space where global and local identities are able to engage with one and other. In his study of the connections between sexuality, the nation and globalization, Jon Binnie describes the internet as “a means of experimenting with sexual identity and searching for community [...] Cyberspace collapses spatial scales—it is where the global is most appropriate, most intimate” (42). The internet is a medium found in several texts by Spanish lesbian authors, including Mabel Galán’s *Desde la otra orilla* (1999), Carmen Nestares’ *Venus en Buenos Aires* (2001), María Felicitas Jaime’s *Cenicienta en Chueca* (2005), and Asia Lillo *Diario de aupair bollo en USA* (2006). Of particular interest to this analysis, a number of these texts also portray cross-cultural internet encounters between women from Spain and countries such as Argentina, Uruguay and Brazil, among others. These texts demonstrate the increase of cross-cultural encounters as a result of processes of globalization and modernization that have intensified systems of communication (internet, TV, radio, etc). Jill Robbins has specifically commented on the representation of internet sex chats in her thorough analysis of María Felicitas Jaime’s *Cenicienta en Chueca* that underscores the impact of globalization and lingering neocolonial relations between Spain and Latin America. Examining the exchange

between South American and Spanish women in Felicitas Jaime's work, Robbins observes the manner in which these stories ultimately reaffirm the Spanish protagonist's position of power in economic and linguistic terms. While Zoe and Haydee's cyber encounter also carries similar traces of power asymmetries and at times a rhetoric of Western superiority, my reading aims to explore the means by which the narrative also challenges this representation through the portrayal of Haydee's responses to Zoe's questions regarding her life and sexuality.

The discussion of sexual identity is an integral part of depicting the cross-cultural encounter between these two women in the narrative and at many points is linked to discussions of cultural differences and nationality. Of note in their correspondence is Zoe's response when learning that Haydee intends to marry a man after finishing her studies at the university, "¿Pero tú no eres lesbiana?" (15). Haydee immediately responds to her question by not only asking what Zoe means to imply but also explaining her own circumstances within her family and home country, India: she will marry a man after finishing her studies, regardless of the fact that—like Zoe— she self-identifies as a lesbian, since this is the accepted custom. Her comments reveal less emphasis on her visibility as an "out" lesbian woman, as she places more importance on her own personal process of self-identification. Contemplating the information Haydee has shared with her, Zoe reflects on the implications of the national and cultural differences imbedded within their discussion of sexuality:

No había pensado que el hecho de vivir donde vivía y pertenecer al mundo al que pertenecía le otorgaba unas facilidades que muchos otros ni siquiera entreveían, rodeados de aquellas normas y formas de vida tan ajenas a ella, tan desconocidas. ¿Acaso una mujer de la India tiene menos derecho a amar a mujeres que una española? ¿Tal vez no haya lesbianas en el mundo islámico? ¿Tampoco en África? Se sintió avergonzada de lo reducido de su universo y de su visión, de dar por sentado tantas cosas y ni siquiera tener

la vergüenza de, por lo menos, valorarlas y darles la importancia que tenían en realidad (15).

In many ways, Zoe's thoughts reflect her own position as a self-identified Spanish lesbian woman. Zoe's understanding of female same-sex desire appears to a great extent to be connected to a politics of visibility in Western LGBT movements, particularly in Spain with the approval of same-sex marriage in 2005 as well as the focus on lesbian visibility in Madrid's 2008 Pride. This emphasis on visibility is also apparent in topics addressed in subsequent years at Madrid's Pride, for example "Escuelas sin armarios" (2009), "Por la igualdad trans" (2010) and "Nos manifestamos por quienes no pueden" (2012). Zoe's comments are also indicative of the importance Western cultures place on "coming out" and imply that a failure to do so is the result of underdevelopment and archaic traditions that may hinder and harm individual forms of self-expression and self-identification.

This perspective is apparent upon the moment Zoe arrives in India and the two women initially meet. The narrative underscores Haydee's discomfort in regards to publicly discussing her sexuality. Additionally, Zoe's comments that "lo que para ella era normalidad y tema de conversación en cualquier lugar, allí era un tema tabú y solo se podía hablar a solas, escondidas" present Haydee's desire not to call public attention to her sexual identity as evidence of her sexual oppression as experienced in India and, consequently, emphasize the supposedly more advanced position of Europe with regards to sexuality as directly linked to a politics of visibility (18). In the case of Cuesta's narrative, it is also noteworthy that the text simultaneously calls into question the authority of Zoe's observations concerning Haydee's expression of her sexual identity by emphasizing her limited knowledge and experience with cultural and political circumstances beyond the borders of Europe. This is made explicit in the narrative when Zoe, in order to clarify why she felt uncontrollably compelled to travel such a distance to meet Haydee,

explains the impact their conversation has had on her: “me he dado cuenta de lo corta y pobre que es mi percepción sobre ciertas cosas [...] hay más situaciones además de la mía, más experiencias, más problemas y luchas que no tienen nada que ver conmigo ni con el país en el que vivo” (18). Even though the narrative continues to reflect Zoe’s predisposition towards Western understandings of gender and sexuality throughout the story, her admission of her own limited knowledge of other cultures and societies presents her less as a bearer of knowledge or a cultural authority, but rather as an inexperienced traveler—a point further emphasized when revealing that Zoe has never lived outside of Spain.

Zoe continues to question Haydee’s sexual subjectivity, particularly what she regards as a more “closeted” representation of her sexuality. As a partial response to Zoe’s questions, Haydee explains her family practices the Bahá’í faith, which does not recognize homosexuality, and that, due to her father’s professional contacts and influence in India, she would not be able to support herself if she decided to go against his wishes in any way, including her marriage. While under these circumstances, it is easy to cast Haydee under a framework of victimization, it is significant that within the narrative she also asserts her own agency by vocalizing her personal choice to remain in India and build a life for herself within the cultural norms of her country. Haydee’s assertion that it is her choice to stay in India complicates an understanding of her position as a complete victim of her culture and her family, especially as she emphasizes the unbreakable connection she has to her country: “La India es mi país y lo amo igual que he amado a algunas mujeres que se han cruzado en mi vida. Jamás podría abandonarlo [...] Irme significaría abandonar no sólo a mi familia, sino a toda esa gente que siento como parte de mí” (23). In this sense, Haydee’s subjectivity is presented as part of a more complex nexus that includes but also expands beyond her sexuality. This is further demonstrated as we discover that

Haydee is wealthy, successful and completing her university studies to become a college professor.

Under this framework, Haydee's subjectivity demonstrates multiple axes of both privilege and subordination. It is my contention that from this complicated, tangled and ambiguous position Haydee not only calls attention to the immense cultural differences between her and Zoe, but also affirms her own agency, particularly when considered in relation to expressions of sexuality within the international LGBT community. In proclaiming her choice to remain in India, Haydee's actions fall under what Gayatri Gopinath describes as "alternative strategies" for representing non-normative desires that "suggest a mode of reading and 'seeing' same-sex eroticism that challenges modern epistemologies of visibility, revelation and sexual subjectivity" (*Impossible* 12). Specifically, in the case of Cuesta's narrative, Haydee's claim to her right and personal desire to remain in her home country displays an act of agency that, while running counter to Western feminist notions of sexual liberation and resistance, ultimately reflect her own subjectivity as a lesbian woman. Understood in these terms, Haydee's refusal to leave India may not only be seen as an alternative to Western feminist and intellectual forms of agency, but also as a rebellion against cultural norms and traditions in India that typically place queer subjects such as herself outside of prevailing heteronormative constructions of national identity.

This assertion of her own sexual identity and subjectivity is made all the more explicit as Haydee makes clear that she is conscious of her decisions as well as describes herself as part of a broader community of lesbian women living in India:

Escucha solo una cosa más, Zoe. Sé que esto te parece lo peor que puede pasar a nadie.

Tú eres una persona libre y puedes amar a quien deseas. Yo también lo soy gracias a que he comprendido que la elección de quedarme aquí y afrontar la vida que deseo es mía

[...] cuando ya haya sido madre y mi hijos empiecen a valerse por sí mismos, cuando mi marido esté demasiado ocupado en su trabajo, sus contactos, haya perdido todo interés de mí y yo pueda dedicarme a ayudar a las personas que me necesitan, también seré libre de establecer una relación con quien me plazca, mientras sigo manteniendo la farsa de mi feliz matrimonio. Es la opción que han elegido muchas de las lesbianas que conozco y que pertenecen a familias de clase alta. No se trata de renuncia, sólo de una postergación (24).

Even though Haydee describes her hypothetical future marriage as a farce, she explains that her choice is not a renunciation of her sexuality. Rather, she articulates a form of subjectivity that does not include an explicit public declaration of her sexuality—an action perceived by Zoe throughout the majority of the narrative as crucial for Haydee in regards to her personal growth, development and happiness.

Haydee's objection to being labeled a victim of her culture reflects issues addressed in recent work on the globalization of queer culture and, more specifically, the emergence of queer communities in Asia. Arnaldo Cruz-Malavé and Martin F. Manalansan IV describe the benefits and drawbacks of what they term "queer globalizations." On the one hand, the increased global visibility of queer concerns has given rise to "an expanded terrain for intervention" demonstrated by transnational LGBT political organizations such as the International Lesbian and Gay Association (ILGA) and the International Gay and Lesbian Human Rights Commission (IGLHRC) that integrate sexual and gender rights into arguments against violations of human rights (Cruz-Malavé 2). In this way globalization has proven a site of agency and empowerment (Cruz-Malavé 2). On the other hand, these global flows within the queer community have resulted in concerns related to issues of homogenization and commodification. For example, Cruz-Malavé and Manalansan point to neocolonial undertones in the promotion of universal or

modern gay and lesbian identities (Cruz-Malavé 4). Additionally, the promotion of queer visibility predominantly focuses on attaining a globally identifiable queer lifestyle and, consequently, often ignores local expressions of sexual difference. Taken within this context, Haydee's comments throughout the narrative challenge global initiatives to promote conformity among local LGBT communities through a uniform expression of same-sex desire. Furthermore, her words illustrate the pressure placed on non-Western queers to publicly present themselves as "gay" or "lesbian" to attain recognition of their subjectivity from the West.

With this in mind, the subjectivity asserted by Haydee, in my opinion, in some respects parallels what José Quiroga in his study *Tropics of Desire* (2000)—an analysis of queer subjects within the Latino American context—describes as "melancholic subjects" (19). Quiroga opens his study with a description of the participation of masked participants in the 1993 Gay Pride March in Buenos Aires, Argentina. The author offers these masked participants as prime examples of the melancholic subjects he seeks to examine that in his words "choose to mask [sexuality], while at the same time showing us the mask" (19). For Quiroga, this play on (in)visibility that calls public attention to homosexuality without requiring individuals to assert an openly gay identity, represents a manner of coding oneself that constitutes a form of social, political and aesthetic praxis. By coding their identity and subsequently inserting themselves into the broader public sphere, these subjects call into question the "unproblematized visibility" Quiroga specifically associates with gay and lesbian identity narratives from the United States. As I have been arguing, this emphasis on visibility as described by Quiroga is also present in LGBT narratives from Europe and, in particular, narratives from Spain. For Quiroga, coding oneself presents another form of subjectivity and visibility that is not strictly tied to a public affirmation of sexual identity. In many ways Haydee codes her identity in the manner described by Quiroga as well as participates in a similar form of public intervention enabled through her

deployment of “strategic silences” (Quiroga 19). In this sense, while Haydee is not “out,” her comments throughout the narrative reveal her perception of her actions as form of praxis, particularly her refusal to leave India and her candid expression of her love, loyalty and place within her home country.

In spite of moments in the text that offer an alternative to Western formulations of sexual subjectivity, the story ultimately concludes emphasizing the importance of progress and development in relation to the promotion of human rights and LGBT visibility. This becomes evident as Zoe and Haydee’s time together draws to an end. After extensively discussing their cultural differences, Haydee and Zoe ultimately succumb to one another. When Zoe still appears confused and distressed about their differences, Haydee suggests that Zoe visit a place that holds a personal significance to her, the Yamuna River. She asks Zoe to go there and carefully observe the people and place around her hoping that the experience will allow her to understand to an extent her decision to stay in India. Zoe’s arrival at the river underscores an impoverished representation of India that focuses on the malnourishment of the men and children around her. Specifically looking at the children and noting what she describes as the “sombra de la preocupación” and “sufrimiento” in their faces, Zoe is described as coming to an understanding of Haydee’s choice to remain in India:

Entendió entonces, todo lo que Haydee había querido decirle desde el principio. Era algo bueno, correcto, necesario, que la humanidad, el resto del mundo fuera de la India, los países supuestamente desarrollados y no tercermundistas, ayudaran a esas personas; pero toda esa ayuda no serviría de nada si los propios indios, las personas que pertenecían a aquel lugar, no luchaban por su supervivencia y mejora. Lo fácil, como bien había intentado explicarle, era irse y ser libre de vivir su vida como se le antojara y presentara. Lo complicado, pero necesario, era quedarse y supeditar ciertas cosas propias a favor de

otras. No era ni más ni menos legítimo, ni menos correcto, pero era la elección de Haydee. (29)

Even though Zoe recognizes Haydee's preference to remain in India, her acknowledgment of this choice is presented in a condescending manner that justifies Haydee's decision to stay as part of an overarching scheme for development and progress in India. Moreover, Zoe's departure when realizing that she will not be able to convince Haydee to take a more public stance in regards to her sexuality hints at a her underlying disapproval of Haydee's choice, especially as she describes her own inability to remain "atrapada en aquella ciudad" (30).

In spite of Zoe's closing comments, the narrative as a whole demonstrates a negotiation between Western and non-Western understandings of sexuality. In many ways the narrative reflects the imposition of Western constructions of sexuality on non-Western cultures through Zoe's travel to India and her effort to rescue Haydee from what she perceives as an oppressive culture and lifestyle. However, the narrative incorporates Haydee into its representation of a cross-cultural queer encounter as a sexual subject that exercises her own agency through her vocalization of her superseding religious affiliation as well as her national loyalty. Both characters negotiate with cultural, social and ethnic affiliations that engage them in an encounter between their own heritage and new influences.

While the narrative ultimately concludes by stressing the importance of progress and modernization for India, it also raises questions in regards to more diverse concepts of sexual subjectivity and cultural values. This is most apparent in Haydee's decision to remain in India, an act which speaks to broader discourses of human rights that, for Haydee, include and expand beyond the expression of her sexual subjectivity. In this regard, the narrative offers the possibility to consider LGBT struggles as linked to human rights not just in terms of equality and visibility, but also in terms of other concerns such as class, poverty, racial and ethnic oppression

or even sexual exploitation—as expressed in the Prologue to the collection—all within the same community. These notions of human rights are ones that often seem ignored or downplayed in Western LGBT movements comprised and spearheaded by white, middle and upper class citizens. Taken under this context, it is my aim to emphasize how we may consider the manner in which Cuesta’s narrative asks readers to also consider what notions of “rights” and “personal responsibility” the story affords that challenge those of Western liberal subjects of means, such as Zoe, who do not seem capable of understanding Haydee’s choice to remain in India or the manner in which she exerts her sexuality or her sexual agency. Indeed, Haydee is also of means, yet seems to have a social consciousness about broader human struggles that Zoe lacks. Ultimately, it is these tensions that are created through these women’s dynamic relationship that allows the narrative to engage in a representation of queer identities in the text that enable for the emergence of a dialogue between the two women that ultimately destabilizes uniform constructions of identity, in this case specifically with regards to sexuality.

Sex, Culture and Identity in Julio Medem’s *Habitación en Roma*

Although Julio Medem’s *Habitacion en Roma* also demonstrates the influence of predominant Euro-American constructions of sexuality and ethnic stereotypes, it also productively draws on the tensions created by two women that openly discuss differences in cultural background, national origin and sexual orientation. Medem’s films have been recognized by scholars such as Isabel Santaolalla, Núria Triana Torbio and Rob Stone for their transnational character and their appeal to audiences outside of Spain, particularly Europe. From his highly praised first film *Vacas* (1991), in which he explores the intertwined story of two Basque families across three generations, to his subsequent films (*La ardilla roja* (1993), *Tierra* (1995), *Los amantes de círculo polar* (1998) and *Lucía y el sexo* (2001)), Medem incorporates

themes such as geographic roots, travel, eroticism and memory among others with subjective camerawork and meticulous cinematic design and composition. As Isabel Santaolalla has noted, Medem's films also predominantly incorporate travel as a motif to underscore characters' grappling with their own identity in terms of nationality, gender and sex among other factors ("Julio" 311). In *Habitación en Roma* (2010), Medem remakes Chilean director Matías Bize's acclaimed 2005 film *En la cama*. *Habitación en Roma* incorporates the sense of intimacy and mystery of Bize's original work about a night of sex and conversation between strangers, adapting the film to a contemporary European context that Chris Perriam in his recent comprehensive study, *Spanish Queer Cinema*, has called "visually luxurious" (95). In this film, Medem continues to incorporate travel as a means for questioning nationality and subjectivity, portraying the meeting and erotic romance that emerges between a Spanish woman, Alba (Elena Anaya), and a Russian woman, Natasha (Natasha Yarovenko), for a night in Rome.

A critical look at Medem's *Habitación en Roma* should consider how the film speaks to the existing socio-political tensions between Western Europe and Russia through its depiction of the encounter between Alba and Natasha, which emphasizes their numerous cultural differences. While there are examples of elite and official statements by Russian President Vladimir Putin claiming Russia's position as an integral part of Europe, the country's relationship with the European Union has experienced considerable strain. Kristi Raik, a researcher at the Finnish Institute of International Affairs who specializes the Eastern neighborhood policy of the European Union, notes that these tensions have increased as the European Union has expanded to include former Soviet Republics such as Latvia, Estonia and Lithuania in 2004 ("A Europe" 216-220). Most recently, this strained relationship has been pulled into the international spotlight with the celebration of 2014 Olympics in Russia—most notably in regards to the highly disputed Russian law approved in July 2013 that prohibits any form of propaganda for "non-

traditional sexual relations” among minors in the country as well as the large-scale protests in Kiev, Ukraine since December 2013 after the Ukrainian President chose to take a 15 billion dollar loan from Russia over developing a trade deal with the Europe Union.

Habitación en Roma speaks to these tensions as the representation of Alba and Natasha’s relationship often makes reference to the overwrought relationship between Europe and Russia through the conflicts that arise between the two women as they become more intimate. For the most part these discussions center on the women’s past and present sexual relationships; however, they also engage in broader cultural differences between Alba and Natasha, with a particular emphasis on language and sexual identity as well as references to race and ethnicity. My analysis sets out to show how Alba and Natasha navigate these differences as well as address the broader implications within the context of current socio-political tensions between Europe and Russia as well as with respect to the movement for LGBT rights and expressions of sexual identity.

It is worth noting that in contrast to Medem’s other films *Habitación en Roma* develops entirely in an interior space. While Rome has often been featured in Hollywood cinema as a picturesque background for romantically themed films, in Medem’s film Rome for the most part remains absent, evident only through the Dome of St. Peter’s Basilica in the background of the first and final sequences on the balcony in Alba’s hotel room. Furthermore, with the exception of the opening and closing scenes shot on site in Italy, the scenic representation of Rome from Alba’s balcony in the majority of the film is composed of computer generated images inserted into the background of key scenes shot on set in Madrid. Although the limited use of filmic space places an emphasis on drama and dialogue over context, several scenes also call attention to the influence of the outside world through internet searches on Alba’s computer and cultural differences expressed by Alba and Natasha as they interact together. The hotel room itself is a

space embedded with historical significance. Situated in the very heart of Rome, the room sits on top of the remains of the Theatre of Pompey and is adorned with two large paintings, one of the Agora in Athens and the other of a gathering held by one of the most power families in Italy during the fifteenth century, the House of Medici, and depicts Leon Battista Alberti giving a discourse on the Greeks. In his comments on the making the film, Medem remarks on the dialogue that exists between the two paintings as well as women staying in the room:

[Hay] un lenguaje entre las dos paredes extremas de la habitación que tiene veinte siglos de tiempo. Pues a mí me parecía que esto una emoción especial. Teniendo en cuenta además de que dentro están dos personajes que comprenden la historia, que son sensibles a la historia [...] son dos personajes que van a entender muy bien esta habitación. Es como a esta habitación no podían llegar dos personajes más adecuados para hacerse con ella y habitarla mejor que estas dos mujeres.

As described by Medem, the room presents itself as a kind of alternative to reality for the two women. However, as I will discuss in what follows, even though within this space both women's identities are nebulously defined, the allusions to outside societal influences on the space they presently inhabit—artwork, the internet, maps-- all point towards their position in the outside world within a broader European context.

In approaching the broader context of Alba and Natasha's night together, it is important to take into account the predominance of the Roman and European Union flags in the first scenes in Alba's hotel room. In addition to offering a symbol of cultural or political unity and interdependence, flags also demarcate social and political boundaries as demonstrated by many national borders marked by differing flags on both sides. Apart from building on the already mounting sexual tension, what is most striking about this scene is its composition, which places Alba and Natasha between the European Union and Roman flags, but simultaneously separated

by a large empty flagpole. The flags of Rome and the European Union indicate the temporal and spatial parameters presently occupied by Natasha and Alba, both on a local level (Rome) and also corresponding to a broader global context (Europe). Even though the two women are geographically positioned in the same place, these scenes signal the larger distances existing between them. Given the previously mentioned tensions between Russia and Europe, it is plausible to analyze the spatial division between Alba and Natasha in the scene as more than just coincidental. Taken under this context, the composition of the scene appears to make reference to latent Cold War sentiments between Western Europe and Russia, and the positioning of the empty flagpole between the two women appears analogous to Russia's position outside of the cultural and political borders of the European Union. Noteworthy in this sequence is a scene in which Natasha pushes Alba to the other side of the divided frame followed by a series of close up shots of the two flags and empty flagpole as a strong breeze interrupts Alba and Natasha's conversation. These shots cut back and forth between Alba and Natasha's individual perspectives as Alba gazes at the flag of the European Union and ultimately lingers in an extended shot that adopts Natasha's point of view and gazes at the empty flagpole that divides the two women. Natasha's prolonged gaze at the empty flagpole contrasts with Alba's gaze at the flag of the European Union and suggests her own sense of displacement and "otherness" in regards to her surroundings as she does not identify with any particular symbol but rather the lack of a relevant cultural marker.

The scene then shifts to a shot that adopts Alba's point of view and desiring gaze at Natasha's body before shifting back to a neutral shot of the two women on the balcony—still visually segregated—before they enter the room to remove their clothes. While no particular national symbol stands between them in these scenes, the flagpole itself presents a visual barrier between the two women throughout the scene which accents the cultural and social distances

between them. Furthermore, these scenes draw parallels between the flags as cultural symbols and other cultural markers, specifically the women's clothes. In addition to Alba's passing comment in the film's opening scene that Natasha use her dress to replace the missing flag, the sequence on the balcony of Alba's room cuts from an extended shot of the empty flagpole to a shot of Natasha's dress moving in the breeze. More than just a fetishizing gaze onto Natasha's body, the editing in this scene brings together the multiple obstacles that exist between the two women, some of which divide them culturally and others physically, but all of which suggest a metaphorical distance between them. By cutting from a shot of the empty flagpole to a shot of Natasha's dress, the film calls attention to the significance of the women's clothes which, like flags, are textiles that serve as cultural artifacts and carry special meaning in regards to gender, class, ethnicity and, more broadly, national identity. In *Adorned in Dreams*, Elizabeth Wilson describes the symbolic, communicative and aesthetic role of clothes that directly link the body to the social world and possess an "unspeakable meaning" that interpellates the wearer into a specific cultural identity (3). When taken under this context, it is noteworthy that the sequence ends as Natasha asks Alba if she would like to see her naked to which Alba fervently responds that she would. If, as Wilson argues, clothes are embedded with cultural meaning, then Natasha's question as well as Alba's response not only signals an erotic impulse but also an attempt to deviate from imposed social and cultural norms.

While discarding their clothes may be representative of Alba and Natasha's desire to forget who they are outside of the confines of their room in Rome, this act does not entirely do away with the cultural differences that divide the two. On more than one occasion, the film emphasizes the obstacles between Alba and Natasha by juxtaposing intimate scenes between them with a dialogue that underscores their immense cultural differences. In one scene, as the two women caress, kiss and comfort each other, the camera closes in on an extreme close up of

their faces. The scene emphasizes the contrast between the physical intimacy experienced by Alba and Natasha and the obstacles that stand between them, in this case linguistically. Natasha speaks to Alba in Russian and Alba responds in Spanish. Although the two women speak to each other in English for the majority of the film, their individual preferences to revert back to their native languages at such an intimate juncture in the film places a certain distance between them. While their comments are confessions of the feelings they are experiencing for one and other, they are also indicative of their conflictive relationship as they are communicating in different languages under the assumption that the other cannot understand their words. Furthermore, the two women describe simultaneously feeling an immense amount of attraction and interest as well as fear.

The sentiment of fear described by both women is underscored throughout the film by the use of a visual style that incorporates certain techniques associated with classic film noir meant to unsettle spectators and create a sense of despair. Andrew Spicer identifies some of the central characteristics of film noir as claustrophobic settings, high contrast lighting, hidden and threatening spaces, unstable compositions and first-person voice-overs among other elements, all of which create an environment where “individuals are trapped through fear and paranoia, or overwhelmed by the power of sexual desire” (Spicer 4). While the film does not employ the voice-over technique common to film noir, Medem’s film certainly exhibits aspects of the genre as it draws on its esoteric narrative style through Alba and Natasha’s recounting of their lives and their past in combination with the use of high contrast lighting to create several shadows, a score that moves between romance and mystery and the sense of a claustrophobic interior setting that all contribute to presenting both women as paradoxical for spectators. Ultimately, Alba and Natasha’s encounter is imbued in trepidation as both resist confiding in the other, resulting in a relationship that is both erotically charged as well as evasive.

What's more, the uneasiness the two women feel towards each other is directly linked to racial differences in a subsequent scene in which Alba describes the fear she feels towards Natasha while making direct reference to various parts of her body. While Natasha's body remains whole within the scene's composition, it is taken apart verbally by Alba into individual parts of Natasha's eyes, mouth, smile, voice, smell, breath, all culminating in her skin. Particularly noteworthy in this scene, is a close up shot of Alba's hand as it runs along and caresses Natasha's back coupled with her observation: "Your skin is like the Russian Steppe, that's very scary". With her words, Alba not only guides the gaze of the spectator onto Natasha's body as an object spectacle that provokes both a sense of arousal and fear, but also explicitly associates her apprehension towards Natasha's body with her Russian heritage, specifically through the color of her skin. Natasha responds in kind, commenting that she is more scared by the color of Alba's skin. Even though they are both white, Alba and Natasha's mutual perception of a difference in skin color provides a visual, corporal marker for their larger cultural differences. Under this context, the fear expressed by both in regards to their individual bodies may stem from the deep-seeded social and political tension between Russia and Europe over many years resulting in a number of beliefs and biases associated with racial and ethnic differences.

Along these lines, it is significant that throughout the film Natasha is consistently presented as the post-communist, Eastern "other." This kind of portrayal of Natasha also presents Alba as more progressive, sexually liberated and modern in contrast to Natasha, allowing the film to reaffirm Spain's position as a part of paradigmatic models of Western social and political development in contrast to a lesser advanced post-Soviet Russia. In spite of her sophisticated understanding of Renaissance art and her upper-class upbringing, Natasha is more overtly presented as sexually repressed and suffering from internalized homophobia. She

continuously asserts her preference for men and rejects the thought that there is more to her time with Alba than sex. Natasha's comments are no doubt a reflection of past and present treatment of homosexuals in Russia which in large part has restricted expressions of same-sex desire strictly to the private realm and secured their invisibility within the Russian state.²⁷ This culminates as their time together draws to an end and ultimately these stereotypes are intensified as Natasha becomes almost cruel, pulls away from Alba as she reaches for her and violently screams at her to stay away. Even though Natasha eventually comes to intimately embrace Alba again before the two part, she continues to insist on their separation. Alba in contrast is consistently shown reaffirming her sexuality as well as her desire to continue seeing Natasha. She declares herself a "lesbian from birth," shows Natasha video images of her family with her partner in Spain as well as uses her own sexual vigor to overcome Natasha's hesitation. Understood in these terms, Alba appears to be attempting to sexually liberate Natasha. In this sense, the oppositional construction of the two women throughout the film associates Alba, a Western European woman, to a modern construction of sexuality and gender based on more public sexual identity while Natasha, a Russian woman, is presented as sexually restraining and repressing herself.

Although to a large extent the film develops around the ethnic and racial differences that divide Alba and Natasha, the film's close presents another significant dimension to the configuration of their relationship. In an effort to ensure that their relationship together exist beyond their memory of a single night together, they hang the bed sheet from the empty flagpole alongside the European and Roman flags. Considering the predominant presence of the empty flagpole in the composition of the first scenes of the film, its reappearance at the end of the film as a symbol of Alba and Natasha's collective sentiments holds significance. As I have been arguing, the film presents a portrait of the long-standing opposition between East and West, and

more specifically Western Europe and Russia. Yet by hanging the sheet as a flag over the balcony Alba and Natasha challenge this oppositional scheme that divides them linguistically and culturally. The blank white of the sheet stands in sharp contrast to the design, color and symbols of the other flags meant to indicate a shared historical, political and cultural narrative. That said, it is worth noting the prevalence the color white takes towards the film's end. The bathroom, a predominant space in the film's final scenes, is a completely white space and stands out against the dark colors that adorn the rest of the room. Additionally, Alba and Natasha dress themselves in white robes and stand before the mirror enacting a kind of mock wedding ceremony between them. With this setting in mind, the white flag hung from the balcony serves to further accentuate the predominance of the color within the film's final scenes. While the white flag is more commonly interpreted as a sign of surrender, it is also a symbol of negotiation. Taken under this context, more than innocently serving as a personal reminder for both Alba and Natasha, hanging the sheet alongside other relevant political markers instills it with a broader cultural meaning that expands the way the two women are able to self-identify by positioning themselves together beyond prevailing national parameters.

The collective sense of failed identification with presiding cultural markers experienced by Alba and Natasha suggests a detachment from broader forms of community and, by extension, the ability to imagine their own queer world. Given that the placement of the sheet on the balcony alongside the other flags suggests a common point of identification between the two women that does not conform to dominant expressions of citizenship and belonging, I believe the scene in certain respects resembles the process of "disidentification" described by José Esteban Muñoz. Muñoz describes disidentification as a strategy of resistance or survival for queers of color and other minority subjects. For the author, a "disidentificatory subject" is one who "simultaneously works on, with and against a cultural form" and possesses the ability to expand

and problematize identity and identification in order to restructure patterns within dominant cultural representations (Muñoz 12, 29). Like the spatial appropriation of the balcony in Alba's room enacted through the creation of their own flag, what Muñoz describes as disidentification exhibits a rebellion against predetermined forms of ethnic and cultural identification:

The process of disidentification scrambles and reconstructs the encoded message of a cultural text in a fashion that both exposes the encoded message's universalizing and exclusionary machinations and recircuits its workings to account for, include, and empower minority identities and identifications. Thus, disidentification is a step further than cracking open the code of the majority; it proceeds to use this code a raw material for representing a disempowered politics or positionality that has been rendered unthinkable by the dominant culture (Muñoz 31).

Contextualized through the lens of Muñoz's process of disidentification, I mean to suggest that Alba and Natasha's design of their own flag activates a form of self-identification that challenges dominant national symbols found in the scene's composition, specifically the visual presence of the flag of the European Union.

Understood in this manner, even though the majority of the film emphasizes the immense differences between the two women, the film's close optimistically suggests a mutual space for them beyond predetermined cultural formations that may ethnically define them or even sexually label them. Although the film is a love story between two women, it is also a reflection of the lingering socio-political tensions between Russia and Western Europe. My analysis proposes the film is also about the possibility of finding an alternative to the traditionally upheld opposition between Russia and Western Europe as the film demonstrates a process of negotiation between Alba and Natasha and ambiguously concludes with the two women together on the plaza outside the hotel. Since the film offers no definitive conclusion, its ending remains auspiciously open to

interpretation about the future of Alba and Natasha's relationship. More importantly, the film's final image, a satellite shot of the white flag hung on the balcony between the flags of Rome and the European Union, signals the creation of a symbol that is independent of the predetermined signs of cultural and political identity.

By calling attention to the sense of defiance underlying Alba and Natasha's behavior, it is my intention to indicate the way their actions correspond to the ambiguity and oppositional edge that have been linked to queer theory and politics. Michael Warner explains that the term "queer" corresponds to a rejection of "a minoritizing logic of toleration or simple political interest-representation in favor of a more thorough resistance to regimes of the normal" (Warner xxvi). "Queer," however, is not necessarily a uniquely sexual position of self-identification given that, under the terms outlined by Warner, both within and outside of academic studies, "queer" defines itself "against the normal rather than the heterosexual" (Warner xxvi). Following Warner's observations, rather than analyze the flag created by Alba and Natasha as a united symbol of LGBT liberation across lines of racial and ethnic difference, my contention here is that their actions indicate a broader form of social reflection that contests what is deemed "normal" or "accepted" on multiple levels ranging from nationality to intimate life.

Habitación en Roma, then, presents multiple forms and processes of self-identification in regards to race, nationality and sexuality. The film often underscores the tension between Alba and Natasha not only through cultural differences but also through their contrasting viewpoints and expressions of sexuality and sexual identity. However, the film's conclusion also offers a common point of identification between the two women through their creation of their own flag. It is not my aim to suggest that this action erases the different ethnicities of the two women to produce a cross-cultural representation of a collective global gay identity. Rather, I want to call attention to their actions as an adverse response to social scripts of identity forged around

dominant representations of ethnicity and sexuality among other factors. Thus, the film responds to and puts into view fixed notions of identity through its depiction of Alba, Natasha and their relationship, and the film's final scenes bring to the forefront the potential for alternative approaches that may destabilize traditional boundaries that define nationality, ethnicity and even sexuality.

Conclusion

Cuesta and Moreno's short stories and Medem's film reveal the potential of literary and cinematic representations of queer cross-cultural relationships to offer alternatives to prevailing expressions of subjectivity and sexual identity. Cuesta's portrayal of Zoe and Haydee's interaction produces a means to contest universal representations of sexuality based on a Euro-American model of sexual subjectivity. While the story privileges the perspective of the Spanish protagonist, it also at several moments calls attention to Haydee's responses to Zoe's assumptions about her life that often go into great detail about her specific cultural background as well as her own attachment to her home country, culture and her family. Rather than depict Haydee as a victim, she is portrayed as a woman in command of her own life as the narrative emphasizes her decision to remain in India. Even though the story's close puts an emphasis on Zoe's negative perception of Indian culture, the majority of the narrative draws attention to discussions of cultural differences which are directly linked to understandings of sexual identity and liberation. *Habitación en Roma* also speaks to the differences in cultural and sexual identity between its protagonists through the film's focus on personal anecdotes and meaningful uses of space and composition to elicit a discussion of the many existing differences between the two women. In the end, the protagonists exercise their subjectivity independent of the various cultural markers found within their room in Rome by creating their own flag—a sheet they hang

over the balcony. While, in Alba's words, the sheet/flag is meant to be a reminder of their night together, when placed alongside the other flags—particularly that of the European Union— it takes on a deeper meaning that expresses a common sense of displacement experienced by both women that questions fixed notions of identity.

Even though these works do not completely do away with the influence of predominant Euro-American constructions of sexuality and ethnic stereotypes, they do offer alternative approaches to representations of sexual subjectivity across cultures. Rather than resolve differences of opinion and conflicts that arise in these cross-cultural queer encounters into a representation of global gay identity, these works—whether meaning to or not— demonstrate arguments and misunderstandings that complicate endeavors to project the global appeal of Western constructions of sexual identity as well as cultural stereotypes often associated with them. Furthermore, considering the frequent incorporation of Anglophone and Francophone queer theory and activism in Spanish queer scholarly works and activist groups, these works engage readers and viewers in some of the various queer possibilities beyond those most visible in the mainstream and easily accessible due to processes of globalization. My analysis of these works, while recognizing their release and distribution predominantly in Western Europe and the United States, also emphasizes the way in which they offer the opportunity to consider alternative modes of identification to negotiate queer identity on multiple levels. In this sense, these works broaden perspectives on representations of queer identity in Spain, particularly when shown in contact with other cultures.

Conclusion

Taking Action: Intersections of Cultural Production, Queer Theory and Praxis in Spain

In 2009, Spanish queer activist groups *Acera del Frente* and *Eskalera Karakola* organized the *Orgullo Migrante* in Madrid. The central topic of the event, “Con fronteras no hay orgullo,” was debated in roundtable discussions focused on the lives of LGBT migrants as well as the theme of a public demonstration from the Plaza Jacinto Benavente to Atocha. The organization of these events was intended to raise awareness about the poor treatment of immigrants—especially those who self-identify as LGBT—detained in the *Centros de Internamiento de Extranjeros* (CIES), but also about the many different and intersecting “borders” that mark day to day interactions, specifically those that denote gender, social class and race. This focus is most clearly indicated by the poster for the events which features drawings of individuals carrying signs labeling the many overlapping components of their identity, for example “Indocumentada, lesbiana y precaria” and “Transexual, latina y orgullosa.” This topic was also of central importance the following year during the organization of the *Orgullo Crítico* by *Bloque Orgullo Crítico*. The poster for the event featured a rainbow flag pierced and cut across with barbwire, a symbol of division between separate territories but also of enclosure used to imprison and confine. It is not difficult to assume that the poster signals the hindered movement of individuals whose sexual, gender or national identity does not comply with that dictated by the Spanish state.

The continued emphasis by Spanish queer activist groups on the “borders” that delineate the many inclusions and exclusions experienced on a daily basis demonstrates the way in which “visibility” has become a privilege not afforded to all social groups. In large part, these demonstrations endeavor to draw public attention to the problems still facing the Spanish LGBT community in spite of having achieved certain socio-political advances, such as the approval of same-sex marriage in 2005 or the approval of the Gender Identity Law in 2007 that allows

individuals to legally change their gender without surgically altering their appearance. In contrast to celebratory tone as well as the consumerism that drives the more “official” state-sponsored Pride events, the activities organized as part of the *Orgullo Migrante* and the *Orgullo Crítico* the following year are meant to stress the personal experiences and prejudices still encountered and experienced daily on the street as well as through mass media that fail to wholly portray the diversity of Spanish society in its many forms.

The issues raised by the 2009 and 2010 demonstrations organized by Spanish queer activist groups are in many ways similar to the questions and concerns explored in my analysis of literary and cinematic portrayals of cross-cultural queer encounters. As I mentioned in the introduction, in recent years queer scholars—both in Spain and abroad—have attempted to call attention to the need for intersectional analysis that takes into account the inherent link between sexuality and gender with other axis of identity such as race, ethnicity and nationality. Following this incentive, in this study I have proposed the importance of queer theory to better understand the social, political and cultural organization of contemporary Spain, particularly in relation to globalization and international migration. As I have argued, literary and cinematic depictions of cross-cultural queer encounters provide a lens through which one may observe both the advances and limitations brought forth by Spain’s recent socio-political changes as well as the country’s integration into Europe. As a whole these cultural productions reveal the socio-economic and racial hierarchies still at play in Spain’s celebrated “rainbow society.” By considering these works through an intersectional lens that takes into account gender, sexuality, nationality and ethnicity it is possible to push beyond a call for “visibility” in broader public social spheres to contemplate those factors that influence or enable the visibility of certain subjects over others.

In this regard, it is important to recognize the continued presence of cross-cultural queer encounters in recent publications such as *Dos orillas: voces en la narrativa lésbica* (2008), a short story collection comprised of narratives by authors from both Spain and Latin America that depict stories of migration and desire among other topics, *A la luna de Valencia* (2014), a novel by Gemma Jordán Vives depicting the experience of an exchange student from Greece in Valencia, and *Sansamba* (2014), a graphic novel by acclaimed self-identified Spanish lesbian author Isabel Franc and graphic artist Susanna Martín that portrays the friendship that emerges between a Spanish woman who travels to Senegal and a Senegalese man looking for work. Additionally, the Valencia based activist group Col.lectiu Lambda helped publish a short story collection in 2012 entitled *Afrodita ha llenado mi corazón: relatos de vida de mujeres migrantes lesbianas y bisexuales*. Even though the work attempts to give “visibility” to the experiences of queer immigrants living in Spain, the fact that the women whose lives and experiences serve as the foundation for the stories found in the collection participate only as “co-contributors” and “collaborators” in a larger group of Spanish authors is problematic in that their voices are filtered through a series of other (Spanish) voices that ultimately hinder the authenticity of their narrative. That said, while these works, like those analyzed within this study, continue to demonstrate the changing social fabric of contemporary Spain in relation to its contact with other cultures, it is also significant to note the lack of cultural productions—literary, filmic or critical theory—produced by queer immigrants living in Spain or Spanish queer scholars and writers of color.

Cross-cultural queer narratives in Spain, then, present a means for exploring the reconfiguration of Spain in terms of sexuality, gender, race, ethnicity and citizenship, but there exists a considerable dearth in Spanish queer cultural production that addresses this experience from the perspective of queer immigrants arriving in Spain or second and third generation

members of the Spanish immigrant families who self-identify with the LGBT community and have gained access to means of cultural production. When considering the scarcity of queer immigrant voices within contemporary Spanish queer scholarship and cultural production, we may attribute part of the reason for the absence of this critical voice to the “undocumented” status of several queer immigrants that arrive in Spain. This is acutely illustrated by the project “Basura y Tensión” developed by the Madrid based queer activist group Toxic Lesbian in 2010 and 2011 which consists of a series of interviews posted on Youtube with queer immigrants from Africa seeking asylum in Spain. In various cases, those being interviewed requested to remain anonymous due the potential legal repercussions if their identity be revealed. In this sense, a logical conclusion is that if queer immigrants are able to become more active participants in Spanish LGBT cultural production, they may offer viewpoints that allow for a more in depth understanding of contemporary Spanish society.

The fact that all of the literary and filmic narratives I analyze focus on cross-cultural queer encounters between women serves to further emphasize the broad socio-political and cultural transformations found in Spain entering into the new millennium. As subjects that have traditionally experienced a peripheral existence in societal structures, cultural productions portraying lesbian sexuality provide a means to call in to question conventional national paradigms as well as signal a shift in political outlook that is more concerned with diversity. This is not only demonstrated by the various narratives and films I have explored in this study, but also most apparent in the continuous attention given to the effects of migration and diaspora by Spanish lesbian activist groups such as Toxic Lesbian and raised in several panels at the 2009 Jornadas Feministas Estatales in Granada.²⁸ While in this study I have primarily focused on the significance of narrative and filmic forms of Spanish queer cultural production, the actions and contributions of queer and lesbian activist groups in Spain to promote social justice—particularly

in relation to queer immigrants—merits a more in depth discussion that has yet to be extensively addressed.

All of these issues will become more pertinent as the Spanish nation-state continues to change. The election in 2011 of Mariano Rajoy of Spain's right-wing political party, the Partido Popular, marked a return more conservative political agenda. In 2005, Rajoy's filed an appeal against the law allowing same-sex marriages. This appeal was rejected in 2012 by Spain's Constitutional Court. Since taking office, Rajoy's government has issued a series of cutbacks in health, education, labor and financial reforms in an attempt to salvage the economy and avoid a bailout. These measures triggered an increase in street protests and led to the draft of legislation to muzzle the protests, instituting fines of up to 30,000 euros for offenses such as burning the national flag, insulting the state or the police. The so-called "Gag Law" was approved by the Spanish Senate on March 10, 2015 and could have a significant impact on Spain's LGBTQ activist community whose members have actively participated in protests for immigrant rights and social justice throughout the country. It is still, however, too early to gauge the full impact of these socio-political measures on Spain's LGBTQ community.

As this study has attempted to demonstrate, queer scholarship offers new insight concerning questions of sex and gender by asking us to consider sexuality as part of a broader socio-political and cultural system that exerts control over individuals. With this in mind, it has been my goal to show that an analysis of cultural production in Spain that considers the contributions of queer activism and scholarship may broaden our understanding of the differing approaches for representing gender and sexuality, especially considering the manner in which these aspects of individual identity intersect with larger social structures. However, even though these works enact aesthetic strategies that in certain respects scrutinize established societal standards, they also at the same time conform to others. Regardless, with their endeavor, these

cultural products offer perspectives that can help inform our understanding of systems of representation, both within and beyond the context of Spain.

NOTES

¹ In February of 2005 the Spanish government under the Jose Luis Rodríguez Zapatero administration approved amnesty for over 500,000 immigrants who could demonstrate that they had lived in Spain for six months, had no criminal record and possessed a contract for work (“Hitos”).

² This was especially in Madrid and Barcelona. Soeren Kern explains that the Spanish government introduced a plan to pay unemployed migrant workers to return to their country of origin and points out that the plan “offers documented migrants who have lost their jobs two lump sums, one before they leave Spain and the other once they have returned home. In exchange, immigrants are required to hand over their residence visas and work permits and agree not to return to Spain for at least three years.” So far only a small percentage of the immigrant population (4,000 people) have taken advantage of the plan (Kern).

³ Within the LGBT community, a report completed in 2009 by Ferrocarril Clandestino, Médicos del Mundo Madrid and SOS Racismo Madrid— Madrid based organizations that advocate for immigrant rights— gave accounts of the treatment of immigrants in the Centros de Internamiento de Extranjeros (CIE) as well as specifically revealed the additional abuses suffered by LGBT immigrants placed in the centers. The CIE are closed centers where undocumented immigrants are taken and held before they are deported. Not everyone in the CIE is deported, with legal assistance some are released (Herrero 234). The report provides testimony from immigrants held in the CIE of the beatings and verbal abuse LGBT immigrants detained in the centers experience (*Voces* 101-102).

⁴ In December of 2009, a thirty-six year-old Iranian gay man was the first person to receive asylum under the law with the help of the Comisión Española de Ayuda al Refugiado (CEAR)

and COLEGA Málaga, a non-profit organization that works for the rights of the LGBT community (“Un homosexual”). One of the principle problems with Law 12/2009 for LGBT immigrants is that it does not take into account social forms of discrimination or cultural homophobia in other countries as prime reasons for asylum (*La situación* 87). This makes it difficult for individuals that do not have a public presence in their home country, such as LGBT activists, to make grounds for asylum in Spain (*La situación* 87).

⁵In recent years, studies such as *La salida del armario* (2005) by Inmaculada Pertusa, ...*Que me estoy muriendo del agua* (2008) by María Castrejón and *Yo no soy ésa que tú imaginas* (2009) by Angie Simonis have emerged meticulously searching the trajectory of Spanish literature to trace representations of women desiring other women and afford visibility to the representation of lesbian sexuality in Spanish cultural production. Additionally, a special edition of the journal *Letras Femeninas* published in 2010 contains a collection of essays specifically responding to the 2009 slogan of Madrid’s Pride festivities, “Por la visibilidad lésbica.” Most recently, the volume *Lesbian Realities/Lesbian Fictions in Contemporary Spain* (2011) edited by Nancy Vosburg and Jacky Collins outlines the representation of women desiring women across different forms of cultural production in Spain.

⁶ Perhaps the most important link between political events and cultural production in the formation of the Chueca district are the bookstores—Berkana and A Different Life being two of the most prominent LGBT bookstore in the district— that play host to many political and cultural gatherings and carry a wide range of merchandise, all of which have led their designation by Robbins as “the glue that binds the neighborhood” together (*Crossing* 17). It is worth noting that due to the economic crisis Berkana has been forced to significantly downsize, moving to an adjacent, but much smaller locale, on Calle Hortaleza.

⁷ Jorge Pérez offers a thorough analysis of the discussions surrounding the passing of Law 13/2005 in Spain by examining not only the direct impact of the law on adoption rights, inheritance and immigration, but also the debates generated in reference to the construction of the law that linguistically discriminates against lesbians, generates an ultra-modern image of Spain to Europe, Latin America and Northern Africa and provokes criticisms of marriage as an institution of privilege (“Los efectos” 685-86)

⁸ Among the studies indicated by Torres are *¿Entiendes?: Queer Readings, Hispanic Writings* (1995), *Hispanisms and Homosexualities* (1998), *Queer Iberia: Crossing Cultures, Crossing Sexualities* (1999), *Reading and Writing the Ambiente: Queer Sexualities in Latino, Latin American, and Spanish Culture* (2000), and *Lesbianism and Homosexuality in Spanish Golden Age Literature and Society* (2000) (2).

⁹ Robbins specifically comments on the exclusion of Spanish women in Julia Cela’s anthology *Galería de retratos: Personajes homosexuales de la cultura contemporánea* (1998) or the inclusion of only three women out of the 126 poets included in Luis Antonio de Villena’s *Amores iguales: Antología de la poesía gay y lesbica* (2002) (“Crossing” 8). She also criticizes Alberto Mira’s highly praised publications *Para entendernos: Diccionario de cultura homosexual, gay y lesbica* (2002) and *De Sodoma a Chueca: Una historia cultural de la homosexualidad en España en el siglo XX* (2004) for, in spite of the broad range of subjects covered, giving little attention to lesbians.

¹⁰ In an interview with Itziar Fayos in 2009, Platero explains that the cover was designed by an interdisciplinary group, O.R.G.I.A. (Organización Reversible de Géneros Intermedios y Artísticos). Platero explains that she originally envisioned a more classic design, but the group convinced her to opt for a more contemporary design related to the content of the volume.

O.R.G.I.A. was established in 2001 and is devoted to artistic production and investigation in the theory and practice of sexual politics.

¹¹ This aesthetic is also apparent in subsequent novels from Morán—*Mujeres estupendas* (2006) and *Una noche más* (2007)—that form part of the trilogy in this series. Additionally, more recent novels such as Aída Argüelles' *Dime que me amas* (2008), Carmen Nestares' *Metételo en la cabeza* (2008) and Paz Quintero's *Un vuelo a escalas* (2011) also employ the “chick culture” aesthetic. Films such as Manuel Gómez Pereira's *Reinas* (2005) and Nacho Velilla's *Fuera de carta* (2008) also adopt a similar aesthetic to that found in chick cultural productions as well as incorporate queer immigrant characters, but focus on the lives of gay men.

¹² Castrejón more accurately adapts the term “chick lit” to “chick-chick lit” to reflect Franc's use of the genre under the context of lesbian sexuality (159).

¹³ The “Salida del armario” collection consists of books by both Spanish authors and translations of foreign authors that display a pedagogical function to portray members of the LGBT community facing everyday issues.

¹⁴ This is reflected in the article's brief reference to the Bangladeshi and Indian men staring at two girls kissing on one of the district's main streets (Hervás).

¹⁵ Silvia Bermúdez offers an informative analysis of the place of immigration in popular Spanish music since the 1980s, observing that the first references to Spain's growing immigrant population are found in this form of cultural production.

¹⁶ Unless otherwise specified, all quotations in this chapter are from the 2002 version of Nuñez's story published as part of the *Otras voces* collection.

¹⁷ In 1956, shortly after receiving its independence, Tunisia's first prime minister, Habib Bourguiba—a Sahelian lawyer educated in Paris, instituted a series of gender reforms as part of

his plan for socioeconomic advancement for the country. Bourguiba instigated the *Code du Statut Personnel* (CSP), or Personal Status Code, which led to the transformation of women's legal rights in the country and, more specifically, in reference to the nuclear the family. The CSP abolished forced marriages, polygamy, established legal conditions for marriage and divorce and set a minimum age for marriage (Alexander 37). State laws that accompanied these new laws were directed at giving women access to education and political involvement. In economic terms, Tunisia has been largely dependent on European and American aid to maintain its economy in spite of efforts to industrialize (Alexander 69-70).

¹⁸ French feminist and theorists Hélène Cixous, Luce Irigaray and Julia Kristeva are credited for pushing the notion of *écriture féminine* to the forefront of international feminist scholarship in the 1970s. *Écriture féminine* explores the relationship between the feminine, sexuality, language and textual production in an effort to critique male dominance in writing and language in general. In Spain, perhaps Tusquets' *El mismo mar de todos los veranos* (1978) stands out as the narrative that most engages with this type of aesthetic due to the representation of female sexuality in the narrative through a carefully crafted symbolic language that hides the female body in images such as the "húmeda boca de la gruta" or "el hueco tibio" (139). See Margaret Jones ("Different Wor(l)ds") and Akiko Tsuchiya ("Theorizing the Feminine") for a more detailed analysis of this aspect within Tusquets' fiction.

¹⁹ In her superb study of sexuality across borders, Margaret Frohlich refers to Nes as one of several authors that portray international ties and border crossings (30). Nes has also been mentioned in comprehensive studies from Spain and the United States, such as María Castrejón's *...Que me estoy muriendo de agua* (2008) and the volume *Latina Lesbian Authors and Artists* (2011) edited by María Dolores Costa.

²⁰ *Princesas* was nominated for six Goya Awards and won three for Best Actress (Candela Peña), Best New Actress (Micaela Nevárez) and Best Original Song (Manu Chao, “Me llaman calle”). The film was also awarded the Grand Jury Prize for World Cinema at the Sundance Film Festival.

²¹ *Agua con sal* won Best Actress (Yoima Valdés) and was nominated for Best Director at the Huelva Latin American Film Awards in 2006. Pedro Pérez Rosado was awarded Best Director at the Turia Awards in 2006.

²² Cornejo Parriego specifically notes the subversion of visual subject-object binary that traditionally allocates men as subjects and women as objects of a desiring gaze in Carmen Laforet’s *Nada* (1944) and Ana María Moix’s “Las virtudes peligrosas” (1985). She also observes the erotic connotations in passages of Rosa Chacel’s *Memorias de Leticia Valle* (1945) that describe the protagonist’s sensual reaction to a light kiss on the cheek received from her female music teacher as well as the attention paid to her mother’s body coupled with the lack of interaction with her father (71, 76).

²³ Mary Van Liew has analyzed the depiction of the female gaze in Aranoa’s film. While Van Liew does not explore the erotic potential of the female gaze in *Princesas*, she acutely observes the socio-economic implications of the scenes in which the Spanish women look at and comment on the bodies of immigrant women noting the inherent power dynamics operating in these scenes in relation to differences of nationality and race (452).

²⁴ The Organic Law 1/2004 was considered pioneering for overcoming the previous framing of gender violence as “domestic violence” which did not recognize the gender power hierarchies that provide a privileged situation for men over women. Despite its advances, the law has been criticized for recognizing a limited definition of “gender violence” that did not include sexual harassment, rape, trafficking in women and sexual violence outside of partnerships (Lombardo

8). Migrant women who are victim to this kind of violence—such as Zulema in *Princesas*—have greater difficulty in receiving protection from the law, although some protection is offered to migrant women whose residency depends on their spouse (Lombardo 9).

²⁵ In *Homos* (1995), Leo Bersani encourages individuals that self-identify as queer to abandon the impulse towards normativity present in society and prevalent and gay and lesbian activism and advocates for non-reproductive pleasure. Bersani's comments mark the beginnings of what is more recently referred to as the “anti-social position” among queer scholars. Lee Edelman has advanced Bersani's thesis in his significant study of queer culture *No Future*, theorizing what he terms “queer negativity” (6). Opposing what he terms “reproductive futurism” which uses the figure of the Child to reproduce a heteronormative structure, Edelman draws on psychoanalysis to argue that queer subjects should rather embrace the “death drive” which exists outside of a reproductive framework and, therefore, offers a space of resistance (27).

²⁶ Other scholarly works on sexual subjectivity from Spain engage with queer theory and principally recognize Anglophone and Francophone scholars. Ricardo Llamas' *Teoría torcida* (1998) also takes a “queer” approach, incorporating the theories and contributions of several Anglophone and Francophone theorists (Foucault, Butler, Weeks, Halperin, among others). The premise of Llamas' study is to analyze the relationship between interpersonal relationships and systems of production, reproduction and distribution (or representation) (8). For Llamas the appearance of the term “queer” is important for what it offers in understanding and constructing individual subjectivity: it provides a new vocab to a language and representational system that influences daily life. In recent years Editorial EGALES has published *Teoría Queer: políticas bolleras, maricas, trans, mestizas* (2005), edited by David Córdoba, Javier Sáez and Paco Vidarte and *El laberinto queer: la identidad en tiempos de neoliberalismo* (2008), by Susana

López Penedo, both volumes summarizing the development and objectives of queer studies in Spain and draw heavily on Anglophone and Francophone scholars. Perhaps the most innovative contemporary queer theories, within and outside of Spain, are those of Beatriz Preciado. Preciado has also been heavily influenced by Anglophone and Francophone queer theorists. In 1999, Derrida invited Preciado to participate in a seminar at L'École des Hautes Etudes en Sciences Sociales which led to her participation in the beginning of queer theory in France. Apart from scholarly essays such as her aforementioned "Multitudes queer" (2003), her acclaimed *Manifiesto contra-sexual* was translated from the original French in 2002 in which she develops a modern day representation of what she terms "counter-sexuality," and in 2008 she published *Testo yonqui*. For a more in depth reading of Preciado's work within the broader context of Spanish queer theory see Jorge Pérez's thorough study "Pensamiento y no solo acción". Also, for a detailed analysis of queer cultural production in Spain and the influence of Anglophone and Francophone scholars see Chris Perriam ("Mapping Spanish 'Queer' Cultural Identities") and Brad Epps ("Retos, riesgos, pautas y promesas de la teoría *queer*").

²⁷ Several studies emphasize the oppressive role of the Soviet government and the punitive system in enforcing heteronormativity (Masha Gessen's *The Rights of Lesbians and Gay Men in the Russian Federation* (1994), Laurie Essig's *Queer in Russia: A Story of Sex, Self, and the Other* (1999), Dan Healey's *Homosexual Desire in Revolutionary Russia: The Regulation of Sexual and Gender Dissent* (2001), Brian James Baer's "Queer in Russia: Othering the Other of the West" (2012)). Francesca Stella also explores the repression of homosexuality during the Soviet Period, specifically concentrating on the strict invisibility of women involved in same-sex relationships during the period. Stella's chapter, "Lesbian Lives and Real Existing Socialism in Late Soviet Russia," is based on interviews with women who were involved in same-sex relationships during the Soviet period. Stella's study specifically focuses on the "more pervasive

and subtle mechanisms of everyday surveillance and shaming in making female same-sex relations invisible” (53).

²⁸ Among the talks presented at the 2009 Jornadas Feministas Estatales in Granada that explore the intersection of gender and sexuality with migration are Ana Murcia’s talk “Del feminismo multicultural a la resistencia transfeminista,” Justa Montero’s “Sexo, clase, ‘raza,’ etnia y sexualidad: desafíos para un feminismo inclusivo,” and “Realidades diversas de las mujeres migrantes,” a joint presentation by the groups Asamblea de Mujeres de Granada, DD.HH., 61Hetaira and Centro Creativo Joven-RECA.

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