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IDENTITARY SYMBOLS AND SPANISH CINEMATIC DISCOURSE – FROM FRANCOISM TO ALMODOVARIAN CINEMA

Abstract

This paper examines identitary symbols in the context of Spanish cinematic discourse. In the frame of Francoist and Almodóvarian cinema and from the deconstructive and comparative approaches, this article argues that televisual narrative requires close reading in relation to the cultural and political context. Accordingly, each film as a mass medium, inherently transfers aesthetic ethos as well as ideological message. To support this point, this paper will analyze the main features of the Francoist and Almodóvarian cinema. Likewise, by comparing Spanish cinema during Francoist era with the changing cinematographic politics of the Transition period (la transición), this article will reveal that the political shift also enabled a cultural and sociological shift which was reflected in the birth of new cinematographic topics and consequently Almodóvar's new representations of Spanish identity, as well as gender identities. For this reason, identifying and understanding identitarian symbols of Spanish film discourse from the Francoist dictatorship era to a newly established democratic state not only outlines the social, cultural and political evolution of Spain, but also proves pivotal for the interpretation of Almodóvarian unique cinematic expression and its impact on Spanish national identity.

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Keywords: *Spain, mass media, film discourse, identity, Francoism, Transition, movida, Pedro Almodóvar.*

INTRODUCTION

Bearing in mind that the sole concept of discourse is closely related to the constructivism learning theory and the key role of language in constructing social realities,¹ the film discourse certainly has transformative possibility which affects viewers' value system and esthetic norms inherent to them.² As one of the most influential tools of mass communication, cinematography represents a distinctive cultural phenomenon within the media space and film discourse with its global impact is a powerful form that has multi-semiotic characteristics related to the cultural, political and social background of the viewer. Likewise, as a special form of public language, "the media discourse inevitably participate in shaping collective as well as national awareness",³ so the film discourse as a system of interactive signs delivers unique meaning that undoubtedly affects acquired viewer's ideology and ultimately components of its national *identity*. From this general perspective, we can conclude that just as any media content can be seen as a strategic tool of political communication,⁴ the film discourse's semiotic/linguistic dimension always intersects, on one side, with cultural and social structures, as well as with ideological and political, on the other. This further means that, in the form of communicative process: "The symbolic power of televisual discourse as one of the most far-reaching is at the same time the one of the most dangerous due to its capacity to create reality by transforming the prevailing believes, cultural values and practices".⁵

In this research, we define the film discourse as multimodal and intersemiotic structure that transfers the verbal and non-verbal features which by addressing the place and time in which they were constructed enable the viewer's specific approach to film and its historical and cultural contexts. To analyze Spanish identity features inherent

¹ Milena Pešić, Sanja Stošić (2019), „Kritička analiza diskursa i politika”, *Srpska politička misao* 65, N° 3, 391.

² Sanja Stošić (2016), „Sadržaj medijskog prostora u Srbiji tokom 2015. godine”, *Srpska politička misao* 51, N°1, 256.

³ *Ibid*, 253.

⁴ *Ibid*.

⁵ *Ibid*, 266–267.

to the cinematic discourse of Francoism and Almodóvar, we have chosen the following concepts as the most representative: the human body as embodiment of multiple identities; stereotypes or ideas associated with Spanish identity; the family relationship; the specific environment of different Spanish rural landscapes, as well as of the city of Madrid.

Through analysis of the above mentioned identitary symbols of film discourse, in this article we will first analyze the autocratic nature of *Francoist cinema and its prevailing narrative, and then we will try to explain the evolution of Spanish cinema after Franco's death in 1975. Namely, during Franco's 36-year reign (1939-1975) the cinematic discourse was equal to Francoist propaganda, that is to say, the film discourse of Francoist cinema served as a valuable medium for building collective memory of the Spanish Civil War. Additionally, by referring to ideological control and by manipulating history, under Francoist cinema some forbidden topics were transformed into myths. Hence, in order to represent national identity, this mythological discourse of artifice and theatricality aimed to revive the myth of Eternal Spain, Catholicism and family, as well as the elements of popular Spanish artistic heritage related to traditional stories and folklore. In that way, the Francoist film discourse was inherently oriented towards the "naturalization of history",⁶ finding its expression mainly through documentary movies.*

In turn, *through the imposition of new narratives regarding social and moral considerations on women's role, sexual and delinquent behavior, and in the context of the Transition period and new political circumstances, the national cinema from 1975 until 1996 presented the film discourse substantially different from the Francoist ideological discourse inherent to controlled narrative of Franco's cinematic process of national mythmaking. Throughout the period of "Democratic Transition" (1975-1983) and "Transformation" (1984-1995) Spanish cinema reflected political changes that occurred during the last period of Francoism, as well as their impact on Spanish society.⁷ Nonetheless, it is important to bear in mind that the Francoist system didn't end with a political rupture but rather with a transition. Subsequently, in the era of liberal democracy the film discourse adopted features of an emerging model of deep Spanish cultural transition which rehabilitated previously banned*

⁶ Pietsie Feenstra (2011), "From Prohibition to Clear Exhibition: How to Read into These Film-Images?", *New Mythological Figures in Spanish Cinema: Dissident Bodies under Franco*, Amsterdam: University Press, 25.

⁷ Natalia Ardánaz (1998), "The Spanish Political Transition in Cinema (1973-1982)", *Communication & Society* 11 (2), 153.

cinematographic topics. Moreover, since 1980 and after years of Francoist censorship, Spanish cinema evolved from different ideologies, producing various genres and “representing new social imaginary significations”.⁸

Instead of embodying the political unity, due to Spain’s transition to democracy, in the 1990s the national cinema developed in different political and historical context introducing new cinematographic concepts and new myths. While Francoist cinematographic discourse ignored the topic of sexuality by replacing it with concepts of love and morality, in the transitional period the concept of sexuality transformed *into the complexities of human body*. Namely, *as within the new film discourse the human body became essential for understanding various facets of identity*, the transitional cinema reflected how people had changed their bodies in order to adjust to or resist the new sociopolitical circumstances. In that sense, the sexual identity was modernized and not only separated from the traditional structure of family but also represented throughout the homosexual and delinquent body associated with criminalization of youth, Gypsies, prostitutes, terrorists or drugs.

Furthermore, as each film documents cultural and political context, the cinema itself can be viewed as an “archive of the past” that can lead the viewer to new ways of contemplation on a past presented on film.⁹ Bearing in mind the above mentioned, we can say that the cinema as well as the written history comprehends “convention-governed narratives” that inevitably consists of imaginary elements or myths,¹⁰ and thus prevailing ideologies of the society. As the film discourse of the Francoist Spanish filmography was not primarily artistically motivated but rather used as a mass medium, besides documentaries, predominant cinematographic productions were revisions of melodramatic narratives about heroes, musicals and folkloric comedies. Subsequently, the Transition period propelled the cinematographic discourse of the political cinema diversified in numerous documentary and fiction films made mainly as adaptations of distinguished novels about the Spanish Civil War and the postwar period. Although in the context of democratization peak (between late 1980s and early 1990s) societal views on sexuality and woman’s representation changed, within the film discourse

⁸ Stanton McManus (2018), “From Past to Present, Melodramatically: The Politics and Ethics of Democracy in Early *Transición* Spanish Cinema.” *Journal of Film and Video* 70, no. 2, 21.

⁹ Antoine De Baecque (2008), *L’histoire-caméra*, Paris: Gallimard, 13.

¹⁰ Robert Rosenstone (2010), *A história nos filmes, os filmes na história*, traduit de l’anglais (États-Unis) par Marcello Lino, [éd. orig. *History on Film/Film on History*, Harlow: Pearson Education] São Paulo, Paz e Terra, 22.

the concept of human body was still essentially used like an aesthetic form, especially in the *destape* movies.¹¹ Moreover, despite the efforts of the Auteurist generation to develop a more democratic framework for national cinematography and modernize the national film discourse as more artistically and free, some genres like pornography, or horror, remained relegated while the discourse of cold realism prevailed.¹² Actually, in the context of Franco's death and newly adopted democracy and socioeconomic system, the Transition period transferred the film discourse of repetitiveness which expressed the feeling of anxiety towards changes and the upcoming future. In that sense, the Auteurist group, which included directors like Carlos Saura, Basilio Martín Patino, Alfredo Matas and Pilar Miró, couldn't accept the "artificiality" and burlesque discourse inherent to Almodóvar's cinema¹³

Nevertheless, throughout the late 1980s to mid-1990s with the rise of Pedro Almodóvar as a central figure, Spanish cinematographic production became more famous abroad. In the 1980s Madrid was transformed into the capital of new urban cultural movement or The Madrilenian Scene known as *La Movida*¹⁴ Influenced by the UK's punk scene, Glam Rock and New York's New Wave, the Madrilenian youth felt the urge to build its own identity by rejecting the political legacy of Spain's right-left division. Instead of the conservatism of Franco's regime, exhibitionism, pornography, hedonism and an aesthetic of "melodrama, kitsch and excess" became the youthful expression of fun and joy,¹⁵ while the artistic expression was linked to drug experimentation and "gender-fluid sex".¹⁶ Carrying the connotation of turmoil and outcry for

¹¹ Although referring to sexuality, *destape* movies implicitly treated the topic of the female body, that is, without showing it directly; see: Pietsie Feenstra (2011), *op. cit.*, 41.

¹² The group of post-Franco directors oriented towards creating a "New Spanish Cinema" and "films as a reflection on social reality" under the influence of Italian Neorealism, avant garde and European cinema. On this see Núria Triana Toribio (2016), *Spanish Film Cultures: the Making and Unmaking of Spanish Cinema.*, British Film Institute: Palgrave, 19.

¹³ Paul Julian Smith (2014), *Desire Unlimited: the Cinema of Pedro Almodóvar*, Verso, 138-139.

¹⁴ Under the decades-long Franco's repressive rule, homosexuality, abortion and anything that wasn't regarded as traditional was prohibited, and almost all cultural production in Spain was censored. Thus, after Franco's death in 1975 and decades of isolation, the country and Madrid, in particular became alive due to the new youth wave which engendered new forms of expression in art, music and fashion.

¹⁵ Sian Creely (2016), "Melodrama, Kitsch and Excess: The Art of the Movida Madrileña", *The Culture Trip*.

¹⁶ The literal translation of the word *movida* is the verb to move, but the context of *Movida Madrileña* implies "a move to find drugs". Tom Seymour (2020), "La Movida Madrileña: the Punk Movement that Changed Madrid's Arts Scene Forever", *The Culture Trip*.

freedom, *la movida* gathered everyone willing to experiment not only physically but also artistically. Along with various artists, musicians and photographers like Alberto García-Alix, Pablo Pérez-Minguez, Miguel Trillo and Ouka Leele (Bárbara Allende Gil de Biedma), Pedro Almodóvar who collaborated with them and made one of his famous films like *Pepi, Luci, Boom y otras chicas del montón* remained as the *movida*'s standout figure.¹⁷

In addition, the beginning of the 1990s brought economic boom, Spain's entrance to the European Union, Barcelona Olympics, the Seville World Expo '92, the Spanish Socialists Workers' Party (PSOE) political fall and return of the conservative People's Party (PP). Overall, the Spanish national cinema went through significant transformation regarding all aspects – from directors, producers, scriptwriters, actors to audience. Therefore, the early 1990s represented for various reasons “central epocal shift” in Spanish film industry.¹⁸

By introducing altered images of human body, Pedro Almodóvar's has profoundly changed the history of Spanish cinematography and film discourse. Exposing provocative scenes of bodies reshaped by silicone, man dressed as woman, or eccentric and unconventional female characters, Almodóvar has managed to destroy without textual discourse preconceived stereotypes and taboos of Francoist and post-Francoist cinema. Overstepping borders of marginality, Almodóvar represents characters like homosexuals, transsexuals, prostitutes, delinquents and drug addicts as normal human beings. In that way, without explicit political involvement Almodóvar sends through his movies social messages that clearly reject the fascist heritage. The analysis of Almodóvar's unique filmography often reveals the mixture of different genres in one movie accompanied by the harlequin and segmented style and perplexing plots. The film maker's use of human body infringe all rules of gender and sexuality, creating in that way new social, sexual and cultural identities. Through his frequent use of feminine characters and maternal figures the director addresses questions about equality and family relationships. In the context of the Almodóvarian world, cinematic metaphors act as an expression of the deepest human desires and fears.

¹⁷ Pérez-Minguez's studio was a central place for *movida*'s artists and youngsters, where numerous parties took place. Likewise, the studio served as a setting in some of the first Almodóvar's movies, and place where were created early portraits of the filmmaker dressed as a drag queen and punk singer.

¹⁸ Jay Back and Vicente Rodríguez Ortega (2008), *Contemporary Spanish Cinema and Genre*, Manchester University Press: Palgrave Macmillan, 3.

All in all, Almodóvar's movies undoubtedly had a significant impact on the Spanish national identity. Due to his unique style and particular scepticism, Almodóvar has gained commercial and critical success both at home and abroad and hence the position of an "international auteur". As the "ambassador of national culture"¹⁹ and director of exclusively Spanish movies,²⁰ in his colorful movies Almodóvar plays equally with human passions and cultural reality, or happiness and grievance, promoting worldwide Latin-American culture and Spanish language. Almodóvar's cinematic expression is free of ideology, but fosters religious elements of Spanish Catholicism, represented in opposition to all sorts of human imperfections. Originally using parody and exaggeration along with the Hollywood's intertextuality, the filmmaker manages to present Spain as a motherland, reflecting in his work the evolutionary process of Spanish identity.

THE POLITICAL AND SOCIAL IMAGINARIES OF FRANCOIST FILM DISCOURSE

The evolution of film culture in Spain was marked by Spanish slow industrial growth and cultural zeal of its neighbors. Moreover, from its beginning, the Spanish cinema has been evolving in the context of turbulent sociopolitical climate due to the loss the Spanish last colonies.²¹ In the following period of political instability, the monarchical rule approved the dictatorship but eventually, with the victory of the republican and socialist parties the monarchy itself collapsed and a violent Civil War (1936-1939) consumed the country. On 1 April 1939 Francisco Franco took power and his almost forty-year long dictatorship was installed

¹⁹ Marta Saavedra Llamas, Nicolás Grijalba de la Calle (2020), "The Creative Cinematographic Process at the Service of National Identity: Pedro Almodóvar and the Promotion of Spanish Stereotypes", *Creativity Studies* 13, N° 2, 371.

²⁰ Due to inclusion of vulgar language, picturesque representation of urban local spaces and rural landscapes, folk music, flamenco and traditional Spanish songs, as well as of the Latin-American characters and music, especially Mexican boleros, throughout his production company *El Deseo* guided by his brother Pedro Almodóvar has not only internationally promoted Spanish culture and music, but also Latin America.

²¹ Edison launched public film screenings in 1894 and in December 1895 Auguste and Louis Lumière inaugurated the Cinématographe and first public cinema. Due to its openness to Europe at that time, only five months after the Lumière's first moving pictures, the Spanish public also had the opportunity to enjoy in them in one of Madrid's hotels on May 11, 1896. Two years after the first motion pictures were presented in Spain, the Spanish fleet suffered defeat in the Caribbean and the Pacific battles in Spanish-American War (1898) and lost its last colonies – Cuba, Puerto Rico and the Philippines – along with its imperial status.

(1939-1975).²² Under the dictatorial Franco's regime, the national cinema was under complete censorship, so Spain was isolated from the rest of the world. Thus, in order to see a movie or attend an exhibition, one would have to go abroad.²³ Nonetheless, as Franco placed great importance on film not only as a tool of entertainment but also as a mean of political indoctrination, for the first time the state started to support financially the film production. As a result, Spanish filmmakers began to engage in film industry at the beginning of the 20th century, but under the influence of French, Italian or American cinematography.

After declaring the end of the Spanish Civil War, Franco organized a victory parade in Madrid to celebrate the birth of the "New Spain". In order to emphasize its military, political and providential legitimacy, Franco wore the Laureate Cross of Saint Ferdinand during the parade. With the same goal, Franco organized inaugural ceremony in the Church of Santa Bárbara during which he employed distinct symbols from medieval military, political, and religious sphere, inherent to the "Christian royal coronation". In that way, Franco's totalitarian ideological discourse followed the pattern of "political religion",²⁴ or "clerical fascism".²⁵ In addition to using Spain's glorious past and Catholicism as a base for nationalistic films,²⁶ early Francoist film discourse followed the pattern of political engineering oriented towards constructing the leader's image of moral exemplarity. Hence, with the aim to construct an idealized image of dictator's "imperial grandeur", the Franco's regime presented to Spaniards various images of Franco as a charismatic and

²² Due to the loss of its last colonies, Spain experienced political instability which resulted in electoral victory of the Republicans in 1931. As the Republic couldn't resolve problems related with secessionist demands of Catalans and Basques and economy crisis, the military, industrialists, landowners and the Church denied its support to the Republic which led to unsuccessful military coup in 1932, the emergence of right-wing party CEDA and unstable Azana's government. After the electoral victory of CEDA in 1934, left parties and Popular Front organized strikes and riots, taking control of Spain again. Nonetheless, under Franco's leadership, right side politicians decided to support a military dictatorship and in 1936 started the Civil War which ended with the defeat of the Republicans in Madrid.

²³ In order to suppress discourse and images in contradiction with Catholic morality and Francoism's right-wing political ideology, screenplays and movies were submitted to rigid reviews.

²⁴ Zira Box and Ismael Saz (2011), "Spanish Fascism as a Political Religion (1931-1941)", *Politics, Religion and Ideology* 12 (4), 372.

²⁵ Hugh Trevor-Roper (1981), "The Phenomenon of Fascism", in: Stuart J. Woolf, (ed.) *Fascism in Europe*, London: Methuen, 18-38.

²⁶ As it happened in Italian cinema under Mussolini, and in German cinema under Hitler, Franco actually used cinema as a popular mass medium to justify his dictatorship. See: Román Gubern (1997), "Los imaginarios del cine del franquismo", *Un siglo de cine español*. Madrid: Cuadernos de la Academia, Octubre, Nº1, 157-158.

admirable leader at everyday situations. In that way, the Spanish public could imagine Franco as: caring family man; devoted religious man; meditative or thoughtful head of government, or a resolute and fearless military commander.²⁷ Actually, the prevailing public discourse was of propagandistic nature and implemented by the government in order to justify the 1936 military coup and ferocities of civil war.²⁸

The process of framing Franco's leadership comprehended the notion of a "sacred crusader" by which was built the historical conception of "moral and political legitimacy" of dictator as "the saviour of Spain" or *caudillo*.²⁹ More specifically, by associating religious and historical iconography of Spanish Reconquista with totalitarian and ultranationalist ideology, the Francoist discourse developed "a kitsch interpretation of Spain's past, or a picturesque and clichéd image of Spain".³⁰ Accordingly, Franco the victor, entered with his military troops into Madrid as pompously as King Alfonso VI.³¹ The final goal of this discourse was oriented towards building the Francoist moral exemplarity³² and "submissive citizens who would identify with state ideology"³³ Furthermore, to build an appropriate Francoist discourse, the leader was compared also to Napoleon, Alexander the Great, or even Saint Michael the Archangel.³⁴ In that sense, representing the war against the Spanish Republican government³⁵ as "a Second Reconquest", some symbols and events from Spanish history were evoked by the Francoist discourse as iconic

²⁷ Paul Preston (2004), *Franco: Caudillo de España*, Barcelona: Debolsillo, 14.

²⁸ The Francoist discourse was forged not only by newsreels and propagandistic movies, but also by parades, commemorations, posters, busts and statues of Franco placed all over Spain.

²⁹ Hitler was known as Führer, Mussolini as Il Duce, while Franco named himself *Caudillo de España* which meant "great leader of Spain by the grace of God". The word *caudillo* originates from the time of the Reconquista and was used in Latin America in 19th century to denote chief-tain or authoritarian military power and commander able to exert political control through the use of country's armed forces.

³⁰ Alejandro Yarza (2018), "The Petrified Tears of General Franco: Kitsch and Fascism in José Luis Sáenz de Heredia's *Raza*", *The Making and Unmaking of Francoist Kitsch Cinema: From Raza to Pan's Labyrinth*, University Press: Edinburgh, 23.

³¹ During the siege of Toledo when Muslims were defeated in 1085, El Cid Campeador followed Alfonso VI, see: Paul Preston (2004), *op. cit.*, 365-367.

³² As during the Civil war and in the postwar period Franco presented himself as the heroic rescuer of Spain similar to the legendary medieval characters, due to his involvement in the Moroccan colonial wars, before the Civil War Franco was presented as the Hero of the Rif, while after the World War II he was the incarnation of Commander of Numancia, or legendary hero who fearlessly defended his town and people against Romans. Preston (2004), *op. cit.*, 14-20.

³³ Yarza (2018), *op. cit.*

³⁴ Preston (2004), *op. cit.*, 11.

³⁵ As the armed conflict between fascism and communism preceding World War II, the Spanish Civil War is also historically known as the "Little World War".

ones. To that end, Franco brought to Madrid: the relics of Don Pelayo who supposedly had initiated the Reconquest of Spain against the Muslims; the chains of Navarra as a sign of Christian victory in the Battle of Navas de Tolosa in 1212; the lantern from the Battle of Lepanto during which Juan de Austria defeated the Ottoman Empire in 1571; in the presence of highest military, religious and political figures his sword to the Sacred Christ of Lepanto.³⁶

In other words, the Francoist discourse was supported by a scenery adapted to Franco's image as a "worthy coeval of the Duce and the Führer, as well as a fitting heir of the great warrior kings of Spain's glorious past".³⁷ However, unlike European fascist exemplars such as Hitler or Mussolini, Franco has managed to retain to a certain degree moral exemplarity embodied in the current rise of neofascist or right-wing populist movements. Due to Francoist propagandistic discourse, a legend of Franco the savior still persists in right-wing political parties oriented towards reviving "traditional values" and patriotic exemplarity of *caudillo* as a builder of the unified and insoluble homeland.³⁸

The filmmaking in Spain was tightly controlled throughout the Franco's regime which by strict censorship sought to impose its ideology as well as the exceedingly nationalist and Hispanicized discourse.³⁹ Particularly, the main goals of censorship were to defend moral exemplarity and prevent corrupted language, blasphemy and infiltration of

³⁶ Giuliana Di Febo (1999), "Franco, la ceremonia de Santa Bárbara y la "representación" del nacionalcatolicismo", in: Xavier Quinzá Lleó and José J. Alemany (eds.) *Ciudad de los hombres, Ciudad de Dios: Homenaje a Alfonso Álvarez Bolado*, Madrid: Universidad Pontificia de Comillas, 464-471.

³⁷ Preston (2004), *op. cit.*, 362.

³⁸ Franco created a path towards a unified Spanish nation under conservative and monarchic regime, but with the new democratic paradigm in 2007 the Socialist government passed a Memory Law which provided support to the victims of Francoism, opening legal question of massive human right violations under Franco's dictatorship. Thus, the exhumation of executed Republicans from the mass graves changed the narrative of Franco's moral exemplarity to negative exemplarity and Franco was represented as a ruthless fascist and war criminal. However, the global rise of right-wing populism brought to power far-right party like Vox whose campaign relies on national revival and Francoist political iconography; see: Francisco Ferrándiz (2022), "Francisco Franco is Back: The Contested Reemergence of a Fascist Moral Exemplar", *Comparative Studies in Society and History* 64, N° 1, 219-223.

³⁹ The film censorship in Spain began before Franco's regime, precisely, in 1913. In order to spread its ideology, in 1937 the Franco regime created the Superior Board of Film Censorship (*Junta Superior de Censura Cinematográfica*). The members of the Board were from the fascist political party Falange, the Church and the Army, and although their decisions were final, their criteria on censorship was arbitrary; see: Jorge Díaz-Cintas (2018), "Film censorship in Franco's Spain: the transforming power of dubbing", *Perspectives* 27, 186.

dissident political ideas,⁴⁰ while the prevailing nationalist discourse was mainly oriented towards the following themes: “the origins and glory of Spain, the defensive wars, the imperialist Spain, the Catholic Spain, the romantic-folkloric Spain and the modern Spain”.⁴¹

Generally speaking, during the Civil War and the first half of the 1940's, the process of national mythmaking found its expression in the genre of national epic films or so-called crusade cinema or *cine de cruzada*. This war movies were colored by propagandistic and patriotic discourse with the aim of legitimizing Francoist anti-Communism.⁴² The most prominent movies of this kind is *Raza* (1941), based on the book written by Francisco Franco himself but under a pseudonym. The movie was directed by José Luis Sáenz de Heredia whose friend Manuel Parada captured the mood of Hollywood movies by composing the music under the influence of Wagner and Strauss and Spanish traditional melodies articulated in accordance with movie's leitmotifs. As an embodiment of the Francoist discourse, *Raza* represented ideological and narrative clichés that served both as a model to Spanish filmmakers and antithetical model to opposition directors over the next twenty years.⁴³

During the 50's the Civil War was presented more as a fight between Christians and communists. Thus, as national identity was built primarily on religious beliefs, the Francoist discourse changed under the influence of National-Catholicism.⁴⁴ Also, as Church was deeply involved in censorship, religious discourse of Catholic conservatism penetrated historically inspired cinema and the genre known as *cine de sacerdotes*. With the protagonist represented as martyrs, those movies promoted Christian virtues like tolerance, compassion, humility and sacrifice. One of the most famous movies of this kind is art documentary film called *Cristo* (1954), directed and produced by Margarita Alexandre and Rafael Torrecilla. This movie represents the life of Jesus through the work of Spanish paintings like Titian, El Greco and Rubens.

⁴⁰ *Ibid.*, 195.

⁴¹ Gabriela Viadero Carral (2016), *El cine al servicio de la Nación (1939-1975)*, Madrid: Marcial Pons, 361-382.

⁴² Laura Miranda and Dan Hamer (2010), “The Spanish ‘Crusade Film’: Gender connotations during the conflict”, *Music, Sound, and the Moving Image* 4, N° 2, 161.

⁴³ Virginia Higginbotham (1988), *Spanish Film Under Franco*, Austin, Texas: University of Texas Press.

⁴⁴ This change in historically inspired cinema was probably the result of greater presence of catholic groups in the government (1946-1957). Likewise, due to the Cold War, Franco wanted to legitimize his fight against Communism, so he signed a Treaty with the Vatican and created a military alliance with USA. Viadero Carral (2016), *Ibidem*.

Overall, due to the fact that Spanish historical cinema between 1944 and 1950 primarily served to glorify the imperial history of Spain and sublimely impose the collective ideology of national unity within the Franco's autocratic regime, it is frequently defined as reactionary "papier-mâché cinema". The most distinguished movies of the historical cinema are those directed and produced by Juan de Orduña, like *Agustina de Aragón*, *La leona de Castilla*, *Alba de América* and *Locura de amor*. The prevailing discourse of those mainstream movies was not purely propagandistic, but more of an escapist nature, although artistically shallow and conventional. In another words, this genre was adapted to popular taste, and developed under the influence of North American film industry. Likewise, the movie music was used diegetically and in accordance with "cinematographic classicism", mostly composed by Juan Quintero.⁴⁵

Furthermore, by the late 1950s, censorship control was slightly reduced and the prevailing movies were popular ones, denigratory known as *españoladas*, or movies featuring Spanish customa and identity symbols in excess.⁴⁶ This kind of films was very popular in the 1960s and supported by the regime that wanted to incite economic development and thus improve Spain's international image and represent it as the ideal tourist destination.⁴⁷ As at that time Spanish film production and censorship were under control of the Ministry of Information and Tourism and Franco decided to open up the country to the outside world, this period is also known as the *aperturista* period. Hence, movies of this kind mainly represented "an image of Spain with a folkloric-romantic air". One of the most prominent examples of *españoladas* is movie called *España insólita* (1965). As profoundly commercial, these movies helped the government to entertain the viewers in order

⁴⁵ Joaquín López González (2009), *Música y cine en la España del franquismo: el compositor Juan Quintero Muñoz (1903-1980)*, Tesis doctoral, Granada: Universidad de Granada.

⁴⁶ *Españoladas* grew out of the 19th century literature and theater and forms like travel writings, French novels, comic plays, and the Spanish *género chico*, a subgenre of the *zarzuela* or traditional Spanish operettas. This subgenre wasn't exclusively related to Francoist cinema, but also existed during the Republic and persisted until the 1970's as an alternative or reactionary discourse to regime ideologies. As forms of "folkloristic cinema" *españoladas* represent popular and modern remakes of traditional and identity discourse through cinema; see: Eva Woods (2007), "Radio Libre Folklóricas: jerarquías culturales, geográficas y de género en Torbellino (1941)", in: J. Herrera and C. Martínez-Carazo (eds.) *Hispanismo y cine*, Madrid: Iberoamericana Vervuert, 45.

⁴⁷ After the end of the Second World War and Franco's abandoned hopes of an Axis victory, as the only European fascist state Spain was isolated and eager to modernize. Specifically, the 1960s brought to Spain various social and economic changes, like tourist and urbanization boom, shifting gender practices and higher standard of living.

to forget the *harsh reality* of scarcity and lack of freedom. As a symbol of true and glorious Spanish identity, Andalusia had special place in the formation of this folkloric-romantic presentation of Spain, as well as Aragon and Madrid. Main identitary symbols of this folkloric-romantic discourse were stereotyped characters, like *cantadores* or flamenco singers, *bandoleros* or bandits, *toreros* or brave and heroic bullfighters, and *gitanos* or Gypsies.

During the period of late Francoism, also genres known as *comedia desarrollista*, *comedia celtibérica*, or simply *landismo*, dominated in the popular cinema. Without great esthetical value and with the aim of creating an image of a modern Spanish citizen “newly integrated into global consumerism”, late Francoist comedies functioned as “*tecnología estatal*”⁴⁸ Bearing in mind that national cinematic discourse was oriented towards building identity around tradition, the introduction of modernity and foreign identitary symbols produced a clash of ideas usually embodied in the rural Spanish small town/modern large city dichotomy or genre’s recurring metaphors. Through these movies predominated stereotypical humoristic discourse in which the national essence (*lo hispánico*) was in collision with foreign modernity, like in the *macho ibérico-sueca* dichotomy, for example. One of the most prominent of these movies were movies like *La ciudad no es para mí*, directed by Pedro Lazaga (1966), or *No desearás al vecino del quinto*, directed by Tito Fernández (1970).

As a reaction to Franco’s “aesthetic of repression”, since the early 1950s a new generation of film scholars started to challenge the rigidity of regime ideology and monolithic discourse of Francoist cinema. Under the influence of Italian neorealism, directors like Luis García Berlanga and Juan Antonio Bardem developed an anti-Francoist film aesthetic by promoting an alternative cinema known as “New Spanish Cinema” that will lead to unique Almodóvarian discourse and Madrid comedies’ of the 1980s.

⁴⁸ Martin Repinecz (2018), “Spain Is (Not So) Different: Whitening Spain through Late Francoist Comedy”, *Transmodernity: Journal of Peripheral Cultural Production of the Luso-Hispanic World* 8, 92-93.

THE ALMODOVARIAN DISCOURSE AND REDEFINITION OF SPANISH NATIONAL IDENTITY

In the period between Franco's death and Spain's accession to the EU, the Spanish society underwent a sea of change. Politically, after nearly forty years Spain transitioned from dictatorship to parliamentary democracy, organizing the first free election in which Adolfo Suárez became the first Prime Minister. After so many years of extreme-right authoritarianism, Spaniards opted for the center which was formed of: liberals, Christian-democrats, repented Falangists and Juanista monarchists, and The Union of the Democratic Center (UCD).⁴⁹ Nevertheless, after the Franco's death, the middle-ground coalition government couldn't refrain its citizens to enjoy their freedom, celebrating everything that was previously denied to them and prohibited under the Franco's dictatorship regime. Specifically during the period of *La Movida Madrileña*, within which was in Spain in the 1980s constituted a rebellious and extravagant cultural movement, where heteronormative behaviors/identities experienced were rejected, while sexual liberation as well as free artistic expression flourished, and explicit ideological and political discrepancies were left aside.

In this respect, despite the proliferation of political movies, literary adaptations about the Spanish Civil War and the postwar period, as well as Franco's false image represented internationally even after his death by the Spanish filmmakers who were unmotivated to portray contemporary society, the landscape of Spanish cinema was exposed to radical changes with the emergence of Almodóvar's first movie *Pepi, Luci, Boom y otras chicas del montón*.⁵⁰ Declaring in the 1980 "that he made movies as if Franco had never existed",⁵¹ Almodóvar dared to

⁴⁹ Fernand Díaz-Plaja and William W. Cressey (1997), *La España que sobrevive [The Spain that survives]*, Washington, DC: Georgetown University Press.

⁵⁰ Pedro Almodóvar was born in 1949 in a small town of Ciudad Real, province of Catile-La Mancha, in an ordinary working family. As a child, he was educated by Franciscan and Sicilian friars. At the age of seventeen, Almodóvar moved to Madrid where he worked as administrative assistant at Telefónica, which later became a source of inspiration for his works. As a member of the Madrilénian scene, Almodóvar was writing for alternative newspapers and magazines, participated in film festivals, acted with the independent avant-garde theatre company, led a punk-rock band Almodóvar and McNamara, and invented the character Patty Diphusa, an international porn star whose serialized confessions were published; see: Mark Allison (2001), *A Spanish Labyrinth: The Films of Pedro Almodóvar*, London: I. B. Tauris & Co Ltd, 8.

⁵¹ Marsha Kinder (2013), "Re-envoicements and Reverberations in Almodóvar's Macro-Melodrama". in: D'Lugo, Marvin / Vernon, Kathleen M. (eds.) *A Companion to Pedro Almodóvar*, Wiley-Blackwell, 281-303. 33-44.

erase completely Franco's existence and legacy. The Spanish spirit of freedom had been restricted for four decades, so Almodóvar's films from the early 1980s were rebellious and passionate expressions that "portray a highly uninhibited and deliberately provocative society."⁵² At that time, Almodóvar's unrestrained discourse, colorful, transgressive and postmodern avant-garde style offered new stimuli to the audience eager to embrace spontaneity and authenticity and dismiss all taboos and repressions of the Francoist regime. Accordingly, Almodóvar's cinema has created a challenge from its very beginning to conventional societal beliefs and therefore also about gender matters.

Besides evoking the concepts of Spanish empire, glorious military past and Catholicism, Francoists cinematographic discourse was oriented towards traditional values related to woman, sexuality and family. Hence, under rigid visual and cultural style of Francoist cinema the homosexuality was stigmatized and "it was impossible to show it using a serious and honorable image".⁵³ Likewise, the family was equally idealized and considered sacred as "a micro-cosmos or totem in cinema". As representative of "social order and stability", the family was represented through conventional images of family values, thus any unappropriated behavior was culturally unacceptable and extramarital affairs, contraception, abortion, delinquency and homosexual relations were forbidden and punished as deviations from social norms.⁵⁴ In this regard, with the Almodovarian discourse, "Spanish cinema has reinvented itself".

In the Francoist discourse, masculinity depended on service to the nation via participation in the so-called public world of politics, higher education, economics, and the military. True Catholic womanhood, conversely, delineated women's place as the nation builders within the private realm of the family. By upholding the traditional Catholic values of virtue, modesty, and obedience to their husbands—enforced legally through pronatalist policies and women's exclusion from the workforce—women would provide succor to the men rebuilding the strong Spanish nation".⁵⁵ In direct contrast, by replacing the stereotype of *ma-*

⁵² Juan Carlos Ibáñez Carlos (2013), "Memory, Politics, and the Post-Transition in Almodóvar's Cinema", In *A Companion to Pedro Almodóvar*, Malden, MA: John Wiley & Sons, 169.

⁵³ Pietsie Feenstra (2011), "From Prohibition to Clear Exhibition: How to Read into These Film-Images?", *New Mythological Figures in Spanish Cinema: Dissident Bodies under Franco*, Amsterdam: University Press, 46-47.

⁵⁴ Pietsie Feenstra (2011), *op. cit.*, 40.

⁵⁵ Sandie Holguín (2001), "True Catholic Womanhood: Gender and Ideology in Franco's Spain. By Aurora G. Morcillo", *The Journal of Modern History* 73, N° 3, 214.

cho ibérico and transforming the traditional representation of submissive woman of Francoist Spain with independent and strong female figures capable of destroying lame male characters, Almodóvar managed “to perform a radical sex change on Spain’s national stereotype”.⁵⁶ For that reason, Almodóvar is internationally known as “women’s director” whose cinema is brimming with impulsiveness, strong females, emotionally intense situations and archetypal Spanish tradition represented within the comedienne, tragical and farced discourses.

In his first film *Pepi, Luci, Boom y otras chicas del montón* (1980) Almodóvar clearly reflected the transition “from social and sexual repression that constructed Franco’s seamless iconography and monolithic values, to a postmodern deconstruction of those values”.⁵⁷ Furthermore, Almodóvar’s work introduces a new notion of gender equality as his cinema intrinsically deals representation and perceptions of gendered identities. Despite the Almodóvar’s explicit lack of political engagement, his films articulate social commentaries that “seemed to offer the best path to the reinvention of the subject in a new democratic era”.⁵⁸ In that sense, Almodóvar sees himself as a promoter of the new way of approaching at things experienced during the eighties: “I represent the most contemporaneous [of Spain]. My films reflect the changes produced in Spanish society, [...] because they would not have been able to be made before”.⁵⁹ For that reason, Almodóvar’s movies can be regarded as the “representatives of the Spanish Queer cinema and his characters as iconic portraits of contemporary Spanish femininity and masculinity”. Almodóvar’s movies like *Laberinto de pasiones* (1982), *Entre tinieblas* (1983), *¿Qué he hecho yo para merecer esto!!* (1984), *Matador* (1986), *La ley del deseo* (1987), and *Mujeres al borde de un ataque de nervios* (1988) represent characters dominated by their obsessions through hyperbolic camp discourse, hence their emotions are frivolous, extravagant, theatrical and often cross-sexual.

By creating new identities around the theme of human bodies, “In Almodóvar’s cinema, identity [...] is still unstable and provisional...it is shot through pleasure as well as pain, liberation as well as constraint,

⁵⁶ Marsha Kinder(1997), *Refiguring Spain: Cinema/Media/Representation*, London: Duke University Press. 3; and Mark Allison (2001), *op. cit.*, 5.

⁵⁷ Efrat Tseñlon (2000), “Woman and the gaze”, in: Fleming, Dan (ed.) *Formations: 21st Century Media Studies*, New York: Manchester University Press, 263.

⁵⁸ Juan Carlos Ibáñez (2013), *op. cit.*, 172.

⁵⁹ Frédéric Strauss (2006), *Almodóvar on Almodóvar: Revised Edition*. Translated by Yves Baigneres, London: Faber & Faber, 18.

playfulness as well as trouble.”⁶⁰ With this in mind, in comparison with Hollywood’s filmmakers, Almodovarian discourse of sexuality is much deeper. Actually, more than half of Almodóvar’s movies comprehend the concept of crude sexuality in which passion is related to pain, and sketchy scenes of rape are pretty common. In his movies like *Átame* (1989) and *Kika* (1993) Almodóvar deals with dark aspects of sexuality. Reacting to the taboos of Francoism, Almodóvar produces new representations of the body, or better said, new identities invisible before.⁶¹ In this regard, homosexual-themed discourse and genre hybridity appear more and more present in Spanish cinema in the late 1990s onwards. Bodies in Almodóvar’s cinema are actually “silhouettes in continuous movement”⁶², thus their performativity could be regarded as the prevailing discourse of Almodóvar’s cinema. Within continuous transformations and the mutability of the body, characters of Almodóvar seek to remove the traditional notions of identity and identification.⁶³ Hence, challenging the conventional patriarchal and phallogocentric discourse, Almodovarian world spins around gender fluidity, identity, homosexuality and the motherhood in order to reconstruct cultural and sexual values and change the social and moral logic of the past.⁶⁴ As a result, typical Almodovarian characters are an “ensemble of homosexual, bisexual, transsexual, dooper, punk, terrorist characters who refuse to be ghettoized into divisive subcultures because they are figured as part of the ‘new Spanish mentality’ – a fast-paced revolt that relentlessly pursues pleasure rather than power, and a post-modern erasure of all repressive boundaries and taboos associated with Spain’s medieval, fascist, and modernist heritage”⁶⁵ Moreover, within Almodóvar’s films like *Carne trémula* (1997), *Hable con ella* (2002), *La mala educación* (2004), *Los abrazos rotos*, (2009) and *La piel que habito* (2011) which focus on re-definition of stereotypes and values inherent to traditional norms, both by the feminine and masculine dominated discourse, can be seen the multilayered film narratives rightfully considered as representative of a “New Almodovarian Cinema”.

⁶⁰ Isolina Ballesteros (2009), “Performing Identities in the Cinema of Pedro Almodóvar”, *All About Almodóvar: A Passion for Cinema*, Minneapolis: University of Minnesota, 97.

⁶¹ Pietsie Feenstra (2011), *op. cit.*, 17.

⁶² Marsha Kinder (2013), “Re-voicements and Reverberations in Almodóvar’s Macro-Melodrama”, in: D’Lugo, Marvin / Vernon, Kathleen M. (eds.) *A Companion to Pedro Almodóvar*, Wiley-Blackwell, 287.

⁶³ Isolina Ballesteros (2009), *op. cit.*, 87.

⁶⁴ Efrat Tseñlon (2000), *op. cit.*, 264.

⁶⁵ Marsha Kinder (1987), *op. cit.*, 34.

Over the course of Almodóvar's career, the autobiographical input into the discursive context of mothering exemplifies Almodóvar's appreciation for female figures. Accordingly, Almodóvar's female representation is crucial for understanding his work because "his motherly figures (male or female) could be seen as a representation of Spain itself or interpreted as the agents of both political and psychic repression".⁶⁶ Generally, Almodovarian early mother figures are presented as cruel, resentful and hostile authority figure often abandoned by their husbands and in the need to maintain control over their headstrong children. Bearing in mind that those movies were made within a decade after the death of Franco, the overall representation of authority figures as dysfunctional and pathological parental figures was understandable. Following on from this, "the mother represents the law, the police... When you kill the mother you kill the law, you kill precisely everything you hate, all of those burdens that hang over you".⁶⁷

Contrary to the Francoist discourse on women's identities as pious housewife or mothers as examples of moderation and subjugation to their families, in his movie, *¿Qué he hecho yo para merecer esto?* Almodóvar articulates the social remarks on working class housewife, struggling to feed herself and her children in an oppressive and unhealthy family environment. On the contrary, in his later movies such as *La ley del deseo* (1986) and *Tacones lejanos* (1992) the mother figure is unaffected by gender, age and sexuality and families can be formed by casualty or necessity which brings alternative and unconventional portrayals of motherhood through the images of: single mothers, lesbian mothers that address the question of homosexual family, the change of roles between mothers and daughters, and so forth. Therefore, in Almodovarian discourse the concept of motherhood acquires new notions and maternal figures may appear in diverse forms or frequently as biologically unrelated outsider who is capable to substitute a child's absent or abusive mother. Consequently, "Mothering is constructed through men's and women's actions within specific historical circumstances. Thus, agency is central to an understanding of mothering as a social, rather than biological construct".⁶⁸

⁶⁶ Lesley Heins Walker (1998), "What Did I Do to Deserve This: 'The Mother' in the Films of Pedro Almodóvar", in: J.T.a.S. Zunzunegui (ed.) *Modes of Representation in Spanish Cinema*, Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 274.

⁶⁷ Marsha Kinder (2004), "Reinventing the Motherland – Almodóvar's Brain Dead Trilogy", *Film Quarterly* 3, N° 2, 9-25.

⁶⁸ Glenn Evelyn Nakano, Grace Chang and Linda Rennie Forcey (1994), *Mothering Ideology. Experience and Agency*, London & New York: Routledge, 3.

Unquestionably, in Almodovarian discourse mothers are reinvented women who want “to name the nameless so that it can be thought... as mothers who struggle towards responsible thinking, they will transform the thought they are beginning to articulate and the knowledge they are determined to share”.⁶⁹ Hence, as in his movies mothers act as amalgamation of family and often have direct impact on children’s behavior, Almodóvar emphasize the importance of mother’s love and support. In his movies *¿Qué he hecho yo para merecer eso? La ley del deseo*, *Tacones lejanos*, prevails the discourse of invincible mother or happiness related to encountering substitute family members and simply being mothered. In that sense, *La flor de mi secreto* is a movie that reflects Almodóvar’s new sense of maturity towards motherhood. Colored by the influence of Almodóvar’s childhood in rural area and his own mother, the film represents the auteur’s wish to examine his mother’s life while living far away from her children in a provincial setting.⁷⁰ The discourse of nurturing mother present in *La flor de mi secreto* is developed also in Almodóvar’s movies like *Todo sobre mi madre* (1999) and *Volver* (2006). Regarding the motherhood exemplified in *Todo sobre mi madre*, it can surely be interpreted as a silent tribute to a mother’s all-consuming and unconditional love as the most cherished, magical and sublime thing in world.⁷¹

Furthermore, the strength of this feeling is particularly presented in *Tacones lejanos*, where the separation of a mother and a daughter appears due to the distance, both physical and emotional. In this regard, the discourse of an absent mother reflects Almodóvar’s incipient indifference towards old Spanish values, as well as the “the old tension of rural versus urban Spain, tradition versus modernity [which] again threatens the unity of the family”.⁷² In this respect, in Almodóvar’s movies the burden and anxiety provoked by the harsh urban life often is presented as the cause for rupture of the family bonds which leads to the quest for an alternative mother substitute, while a return to the rural roots appears as the milieu for restoring a relationship between mother and child. In this respect, in *Tacones lejanos* “the placement of the character’s childhood

⁶⁹ Sara Ruddick (1994), “Thinking Mothers/Conceiving Birth”, in: Donna Bassin, Margaret Honey and Meryle Mahrer Kaplan (eds.), *Representations of Motherhood*. New York: Routledge, 40.

⁷⁰ Frédéric Strauss (2006), *Almodóvar on Almodóvar: Revised Edition*. Translated by Yves Baigueres, London: Faber & Faber, 18.

⁷¹ Wilson, Emma (2020), “All About My Mother: Matriarchal Society”, *The Criterion Selection*.

⁷² Marvin D’Lugo (2006), *Pedro Almodóvar*, Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 90.

trauma in the transitional national phase, near the end of Franco's regime, gives the melodrama an allegorical angle"⁷³

Certainly, for Almodóvar the urban milieu has always been an indispensable setting that enables him to naturally develop the particular film narratives and the cinematic discourse he aspires. Hence, whereas his movie *Laberinto de pasiones* explicitly presents Madrid as the world's most important city where anything is possible, the movie like *Mujeres al borde de un ataque de nervios* uses Madrid primarily as background setting that enables the overlapping narratives.

In conclusion, within Almodóvar's work the Spanish identity is being internationally promoted, so his cinematic discourse has the function of national branding. By emancipating Spanish stereotypes, Almodóvar emphasizes the role of family, but in a modern sense, and also identifies Madrid both as the iconic symbol of his artistic universe and the symbol of Spanish identity. Through his cinematic discourse Almodóvar manages to annihilate the repressive past of Franco's regime. By virtuously rehabilitating the Francoist discourse and thereby turning it paradoxically against itself via the concept of new Spanishness, the auteur uses epitomes of traditional patriarchal order like the Church, the family and law, and presents them in his film discourse as "the agents of ushering in new cultural desires". In particular, by realigning the center with the marginal and by replacing the traditionally central figures with the marginalized ones, Almodóvar both deconstructs and reimagines the dominant ideology.⁷⁴ For that reason, despite the assertion of the auteur's lack of political compromise, "Almodóvar's films reappropriate and recycle the cultural markers of Spain perpetrated by Fascist iconography under Franco's rule"⁷⁵ By using the cinematic discourse "Almodóvar not only trains his caustic vision on the ill-effects of Francoist society but also, and above, on all deeper cultural processes never fully debated in the context of transition and post-transition culture, with the result that these new demons [...] continue to act upon the contemporary Spanish psyche"⁷⁶

⁷³ Ernesto R. Acevedo-Muñoz (2007), *op. cit.*, 135.

⁷⁴ Efrat Tseñlon (2000), *op. cit.*, 264-266.

⁷⁵ Ernesto R. Acevedo-Muñoz (2007), *op. cit.*, 2.

⁷⁶ Juan Carlos Ibáñez (2013), *op. cit.*, 157.

CONCLUDING REMARKS

The evolution of Spanish cinematic discourse is deeply conditioned by the Civil War and Franco's fascist-catholic dictatorial regime that aspired to implement its totalitarian ideology on the cinematic medium. As ideology is by nature "opaque" and "naturalized" through language use, the Francoist film discourse is surely representative of "explicit political perspective".⁷⁷ Accordingly, films are by nature bearers of ideology⁷⁸ and Spanish cinematography, as historiography, is closely linked to Francoist narrative which has been the subject of reminiscence as well as of blundering. In that sense, the concept of historical memory is crucial for understanding the nature of cinematic discourse in Spain. In other words, Francoist national cinema sought to impose "homogenizing fictions of nationalism"⁷⁹ and a totalitarian aesthetic of "truly Spanish", framing the cinematic discourse of coherent traditional identity.

Nonetheless, assumptions of what "Spanishness" entails have always been closely tied to imaginations and ideologies of the society. Consequently, with the death of Franco and the Democratic Transition, the Spanish culture entered into a new, transformative period. Although censorship was abolished and cinematic discourse of the Post-Franco years brought visual liberty regarding sexuality, the woman's position, delinquency and consciousness of Spain's socio-historical traumatic past, the traces of Francoism were still present, holding back the country and its society to evolve. Hence, even in today's Spain, under a democratic and parliamentary system, ghosts of Francoist past are alive. This is clearly visible in the controversy related to the *Valle de los caídos* (Valley of the Fallen) or Civil War Memorial built under Franco's order by the prisoners. Despite the Historical Memory Law approved in 2007, by which all monuments and street names recalling Francoist past had to be removed, there are divided opinions regarding the mausoleum of Franco's remains. Actually "the funerary treatment of the Civil War dead is key to understanding the deep impact Francoism has had, and continues to have" on Spanish society.⁸⁰ Moreover, these events clearly reflect

⁷⁷ Milena Pešić (2022), "Critical Discourse Analysis as a Critical Social Study: Norman Fairclough's Approach", *Politička revija* 74, N° 4, 90–91.

⁷⁸ Sue Thornham (1999), "Taking Up the Struggle: Introduction", in: Sue Thornham (ed.) *Feminist Film Theory: A Reader*, Edinburgh: EUP, 12

⁷⁹ Stephen Crofts (1993), "Reconceptualizing national cinema/s", *Quarterly Review of Film & Video* 14, N° 3, 57.

⁸⁰ Ferrándiz, Francisco (2022), *op. cit.*, 2014.

that popular metaphor of the “two Spains” related to the winners and the defeated during the Civil War, prevails in the popular and collective memory of contemporary Spain where some people still consider that life under Franco’s regime was better.⁸¹

Nonetheless, with Almodovar as its crucial figure, *la Movida Madrileña* as a rebellious and countercultural movement represented “an instantaneous break with repressive social norms and regulations”.⁸² This complete rupture with the Francoist past didn’t refer to political opposition to the dictatorship regime, but rather to an explicit eradication of it. Therefore, this position has often been defined as “radical apoliticism or *pasotismo*”.⁸³ Combining elements of European cinema, Spanish and Hollywood traditions of camp and melodrama, Almodóvar has made his marginalized characters into authentic and complex ordinary people. Reflecting cultural memory of Spanish tradition and reinterpreting the cultural symbols of Francoist discourse like flamenco dance, and bullfighting, Almodovarian discourse found the way to represent the most complex human emotions using contrast, religious iconography, theatricality, “kitsch”, grotesque humour and blurred film’s narrative structure. As one of the most famous internationally known filmmakers, through his movies Almodóvar has facilitated a greater understanding of Spanish culture, empowering its unique values and portraying the social evolution of his county from the 1980s to the present. Due to the Almodovarian discourse and his peculiar cinematic expression, Almodovar has actually internationalized Spanish cultural identity and by modernizing its national stereotypes, he has also managed to redefine the national identity of Spain.

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⁸¹ Finally, after the 1953 agreement with the United States that ended Spain’s diplomatic isolation, Franco came to be seen as the Father of the Nation; see: Paul Preston (2008), *Ibidem*, 20.

⁸² Mark Allinson (2001), *op. cit.*, 13.

⁸³ Marvin D’Lugo (2006), *op. cit.*

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