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The Passion of Marta Díaz de Lope Díaz: A Conversation with the Filmmaker

*In her directorial debut, Ronda native Marta Díaz de Lope Díaz takes inspiration from the cartography of her origin for her filmic vision. Her cultural roots anchor her life and filmography, that she has been perfecting over the years of her study and teaching at the ESCAC film school in Barcelona. Her first feature-length film, *Mi querida cofradía* (Hopelessly Devout), clearly reflects this influence since it drinks and revels in the most traditional celebration of her hometown: Holy Week. Likewise, as can be seen in this interview, the feature establishes an interesting parallel between the passion of the protagonist Carmen (Gloria Muñoz) to realize her dream of leading her Catholic brotherhood and the aspiration of its own Marta Díaz to become a film director. With humor, her cinema masterfully delves into the experiences of women, of their sisterhood, in both the private and public spheres, displaying the obstacles that they encounter when trying to fulfill their goals in a man's world and exhibiting their skills at overcoming interference. In other words, her cinema is in sync with the many voices that clamor for true equality in the urgent gender debate of recent years.*



*With this interview, conducted in person and via Skype on December 18, 2019 and edited with the objective of maximizing the effectiveness of its communication, we invited the readers of Gynocine to join us on a stroll through the work and life of Marta Díaz. We trace this route on the basis of a rich metaphor from the world of *Hopelessly Devout: Holy Week* (the preparations [“la armá”], the passion, and the future steps). This debut film fuses two passions: that of Holy Week and that of its director for cinema. We hope that through this interview, our readers will be called to follow the path of her passion.*

Marta Díaz de Lope Díaz (Ronda, 1988-)

*Marta Díaz De Lope Díaz was born May 10, 1988 in Ronda (Málaga), although she has resided in Barcelona in recent years. In 2012, she graduated with a specialization in directing from the ESCAC (Film and Audiovisual School of Catalonia), where she currently teaches. During her studies, she wrote and directed a short *Menopáusicas* (2011) that earned, among other prizes, the award for Best Director in the Andalusian Youth Institute Competition, and a sequence alongside her classmates in the feature *Los inocentes* (2013). Her culminating project at the ESCAC, the short *Y otro año, perdices* (2013), was selected by the Seminci festival in Valladolid and awarded at the Medina del Campo film week, among other festivals. In 2016, she premiered*

her third short, *Los pestiños de mamá*, financed by ESCAC Films. Thanks to the continued support of this producer, she directed her debut feature, *Hopelessly Devout*, which she also wrote. Since its premier in April 2018, the film has enjoyed a warm reception from both audience and critics as can be seen in its recognition to date (Audience Prize at the 21st Málaga Film Festival, Audience Prize for Best Comedy at the BCN Film Fest 2018, and Premios Feroz 2019 nomination for Best Comedy).

The Preparations [La armá]



Escac Films (Making of de *Hopelessly Devout*, 2018)

MARÍA GARCÍA PUENTE and ERIN K. HOGAN: The article “Generación Ágata”, published in *Fotogramas* in June 2017, announces a new batch of women directors that has appeared in recent years in Spain. If we were to conceive of this cohort both as the context within which you have created your work and as a cinematic guild or sisterhood [*cofradía*], who would be your “big sisters” and why?

MARTA DÍAZ: It’s difficult to single them out but perhaps Mar Coll, Elena Trapé and, more recently, Nely Reguera have been the women filmmakers who have influenced me because the ESCAC is also a smaller guild within the “Generación Ágata” that you mention. In Mar’s case, I have fond memories of her that motivated me to try and work hard during my first or second year at the ESCAC: she was invited to school to present her first film, *Three Days with the Family* (2009), for which she later received the Goya for Best New Director. I attended the screening and discussion that followed and I suddenly felt a special connection to her work. She looked so young to me and her project was so interesting and solid that I remember leaving the event energized and ready to make my dream of directing my own film a reality. Often female role models in direction, maybe due to the difficulties that they face when trying to access the industry, seem distant, almost impossible. Nevertheless, Mar seemed accessible and closer to me

at that time since she, like myself and my classmates, belonged to the school and had taken the same path. That's why I consider her an important point of reference in my career¹.

MGP and EKH: Moving on from sisters to brothers, in other interviews you have mentioned the influence that Luis García Berlanga and Pedro Almodóvar have had on your cinema. What is it that you find interesting about these auteurs? How do you think we can appreciate their mark on your works?

MD: I consider myself a great admirer of both directors, especially Almodóvar. I'm really moved by Almodóvar's cinema; it produces in me an explosive mix of emotions. I discovered some of his films when I was a teenager, around twelve, thirteen or fourteen years old, and they had an impact on me. His stories astonish me because they portray a world that in some aspects seems eccentric or outlandish to me, but at the same time very close because his focus is on the world of women and daily life. I, who was raised surrounded by women, can easily identify with their stories and with the drama that they transmit. I find Almodóvar's personal imprint on his films very interesting and stimulating.

With respect to Berlanga, I became familiar with this cinema a bit later and, principally, what I find most interesting is the choral quality of his characters. For me, Berlanga's stories share something with the dressing room in the Marx Brother's *A Night at the Opera* (1935) because they are populated with characters that can be confused and that speak over each other. Nevertheless, he masterfully used that noise and boisterousness, to address serious topics and to communicate relevant messages, all underscored with a sophisticated sense of humor. I don't know if Berlanga's imprint can be perceived in my work or not, even though it's true that the choral characteristic of his characters and commotion I have tried to adapt to the stories I write and, therefore, are also present in my films.

MGP and EKH: You anticipated in your shorts a number of central themes and characters in your work (the mother, female relatives, domestic space, gastronomic traditions, women's rites of passage, sibling rivalry, and sisterhood) that you explore in more depth in *Hopelessly Devout*. Where does your interest in these aspects come from and are there any autobiographical elements in your projects?

MD: Of all of my films, *Los pestiños de mamá* is without a doubt the most autobiographical, even though I've realized that my family is present more or less directly in all of my stories. On my mother's side, I have five aunts, they're a total of six sisters, and some of my dearest childhood memories involve the moments in which they all got together in my grandmother's house. This happened fairly often since we always got together for family celebrations. Therefore, when I remember my childhood, I immediately think of my aunts and girl cousins in the kitchen, where they spent a lot of time dramatizing [*emocionándose*], arguing, laughing, crying, etc. That mix of humor and family drama has seeped into me and, as can be seen in my films, is something I'm really attracted to. Even if you one couldn't say that my stories are based on my family, there's no doubt that my female characters are directly inspired by the women in

¹ In effect, in "Generación Ágata" Mar Coll is described as "fairy godmother of this new generation" (Engel 98, translation ours), to which also belong the directors Marta Verheyen, Alba Cros, Laura Rius y Laia Alabart (*Las amigas de Ágata*, 2015), Elena Martí (*Julia ist*, 2017), Carla Simón (*Summer 1993*, 2017) and Laura Ferrés (*Los desheredados*, 2017).

my life: they talk like my aunts, they move like them. It is definitely a very intimate atmosphere. In fact, the framed portrait of the mother of the protagonists of *Los pestiños de mamá* that is broken at the end of the short is a photo of my maternal grandmother.

MGP and EKH: Other ingredients of your cinema, like its music, come from popular culture. In a certain sense, one could say that music sets the rhythm of your film. How does your treatment of this aspect fit into your creative process and into your work?

MD: With time, I reflect on my decision making during the creative process, when I do things a certain way and, most of all now that I am writing, I consider how and why I opt for developing certain stories. In my particular case, I have realized that music functions as a creative motor for me. Just like for people whose ideas are generated by images; music awakens sensations in me that over time help me discover what excites me about a certain story. Therefore, from the moment I begin to write or outline a story, I surround myself with songs.

In *Hopelessly Devout*, to go no further, the influence of music was the determining factor in my creative process since listening to the marches of the Holy Week processions inspired me to write this film about the world of the brotherhoods. They're marches with dramatic weight that helped me find the tone from which I wanted to tell Carmen's story and to imagine her story. I always try to ensure that the music I select for my films coincides with the emotion, the mood that I want to transmit in the scene, and as the story advances, I return to them for narrative cohesion. For example, popular music plays a fundamental role in both *Y otro año, perdices* and *Los pestiños de mamá*. For these reasons, I think that this aspect has a defining role in my films.

MGP and EKH: You recreate in your works a community of women that is not often depicted in cinema, in which the action does not revolve around the male characters nor is it motivated by romantic interests. Instead, your protagonists are mature women, played often by the same actresses³, that chase other life goals (familial, personal, etc.). Why does this interest you or why is it important to you to portray on the screen the experiences of women with these diverse profiles and to offer another representation of the relationships between women?

MD: When I entered the ESCAC, I constantly had the need to search for stories to film. While writing, instead of finding inspiration in the experiences of others, I tried to examine my interior to tell stories that moved me and had some special to move others. In my case, this exploration always takes me to emotions and feelings within the family, to interesting aspects or anecdotes from my immediate environment that I think could also be found in other families.

For example, I filmed my first short, *Menospáusicas*, when I was just twenty and my mother was experiencing the early symptoms of menopause⁴. Everytime I went home and we spoke about the topic, I busted up laughing from the natural way that she expressed what she was

² In *Los pestiños de mamá* the actresses perform the *pasodoble* "Batallón de modistillas", while *Y otro año, perdices* opens and closes with two famous *coplas*: "No te mires en el río" by Concha Piquer and "Lola, La Piconera" by Juanita Reina, respectively.

³ Her recurrent actresses are Pepa Anierte, Carmen Flores y Cristina Rodríguez.

⁴ The short intelligently portrays intergenerational sisterhood through two milestones of adolescence and maturity: first period and menopause.

living: the drama of her female coworkers, of their families, etc. These conversations planted the seed, so to speak, of the project since I realized that it was possible to base a powerful story on the topic. Not all women speak as openly about this experience as my mother; there are others who, due to the shame or prejudice they were taught as young girls, put on a mask in public so as to hide what they are experiencing. In the short I was interested in investigating the relationships among women, how we express ourselves and how we help each other, that are constants in my cinema.

It's possible that it could be surprising to some people that such a young director would write stories like *Menopáusicas*. Nevertheless, I was to emphasize that I really didn't set out to portray women in a certain way; it's just manifested like this. Maybe on account of the kind of women that surround me, for now I am much more attracted to telling the experiences and contradictions of mature women than writing a love story with a girl of my age. Moreover, curiously, it seems like the age difference is increasing with each project, because in *Hopelessly Devout* Carmen is already sixty years old. And I've always been told that I'm an old soul [*un poco señora*] (in a good way)! Joking aside, like I said, I don't know what will happen in the future but for right now these are the stories that move me.

MGP and EKH: This conversation is for the *Gynocine* project. From our point of view, your cinema can be considered gynocinema in so far as it can be interpreted with a feminist lens. Do you consider yourself a feminist director? Why?

MD: It's funny. In the past I was shy about recognizing my feminism as a director but, when I stop and think about it, I can't explain why. What I mean is: I, Marta Díaz, as woman and person, consider myself a feminist. It seems that we are increasingly now as a society more aware of the necessity of feminism and it's not difficult for me to affirm myself as feminist but it didn't used to be this way. When I was a kid I already behaved like a future feminist: I wanted to play soccer and I fought to be able to compete with my male peers, but at that time you didn't hear the label "feminist" and no one spoke explicitly about it. I've always just tried to achieve what I wanted and until recently I would answer that I wasn't a feminist director because I do not conceive of my stories with a definitive political intention; I write them as they occur to me.

Of course, now I realize that this is absurd. I believe in equality between women and men, in my daily life I fight for it and, naturally, I write stories that reflect my way of seeing and being in the world. My films talk about women who are not only mothers of, lovers of, wives of, nor secondary characters, but rather they carry the weight of the plot. To this I would have to add that my protagonists are not attractive young women but rather mature women. In *Hopelessly Devout*, Carmen is already a grandmother and she fights throughout the film to be able to reach a position in a very conservative realm that has historically been dominated by men. Additionally, like I mentioned, in *Menopáusicas*, I explore a topic that is almost taboo, that of menopause, that has a strong feminist charge. Even though I would always say that my films were more feminine than feminist, I realize that my stories can be considered feminist since they advance an important message for the world in which we live: that women can become what we want. I don't know if my future projects will have the same female focus as my works thus far, but I am not ashamed to recognize that, for now, I am interested in exploring feminine subjectivity: this is my style.

The Passion



Escac Films (*Hopelessly Devout*, 2018)

MGP and EKH: In fact, a recent survey (November 2018) reveals that more than half the Spanish population feels somewhat or very feminist, a social turn towards feminism, all of this conflicts with some of the fundamental tenets and motivations of one of the bastions of machismo in Spain: the Catholic Church and the film industry (Álvarez). Both audiences and critics have celebrated *Hopelessly Devout* as a feminist film whose protagonist achieves, with much effort, the presidency of her brotherhood during Ronda's Holy Week. Nevertheless, there were a few solitary voices that expressed their disagreement with your portrayal of the world of the brotherhood, affirming that it isn't as machista as you represent (Velo). However, you had the blessing of the Diocese for filming at the Santo Entierro Church. How were you able to combine these two antagonistic worlds? In other words, how were you able to reconcile the challenging gaze of your film with tradition?

MD: Obviously, I always insist that the story is written from a place of affection and respect for the cultural tradition with which I've always lived very naturally and to which I belong. Even though it is true that I have never been involved in a brotherhood nor do I form a part of that very closed world, I have attended the processions since I was little, I have enjoyed them a lot and I think that the script of *Hopelessly Devout* reflects my admiration for this tradition. In fact, as you mention, we didn't have any problem with the Diocese, who after having read the screenplay, gave us their approval for filming in a church in Ronda. Curiously, they only asked us to eliminate a small detail in the scene in which the protagonist gets mad at Ignacio (Juan Gea) and angrily throws a decorative plate on the floor of her kitchen⁵. Carmen's character is a conservative woman with a strong character who loves her brotherhood above all. She was educated in accordance with certain values that would preclude her from wanting to take charge, and this creates internal conflict for her because she realizes that her professionalism and dedication to her brotherhood make her deserving of the position of President [*hermana mayor*].

⁵ In the original script, the plate Carmen breaks was decorated with the image of the Virgin and is accompanied by the message: "In a moment of anger due to harm done, be patient" (translation from subtitles). Nevertheless, upon the Diocese's request, Mary's image was replaced by a marital symbol.

I was already aware of the criticism from the *Diario de Jerez*, but what gets my attention is that so many people, women and men, who belong to brotherhoods congratulated me for my portrayal of this world after seeing the film. Of course, not all brotherhoods are the same; there are probably many differences across them. Nevertheless, when I began the project, in 2014, only 2 years had passed since the first woman president was elected in the brotherhood of the Semana Santa of Seville⁶. *Hopelessly Devout* arrives a little late but the situation that it portrays is not the norm nor could one say that there is equality. I'm glad that there are brotherhoods that are less sexist [*machista*] but it's still an exception for a woman to reach a leadership position in a brotherhood; that's why it's relevant and necessary to talk about this situation.

MGP and EKH: Ronda has a starring role in the film that can be seen from the beginning of the story. Could you tell us about the opening sequence?

MD: With the opening we wanted to highlight the important role that the town would play in the story. I was really interested in showing the social implications of Holy Week in a place like Ronda, where the neighbors who belong to brotherhoods are benefitted with greater weight and influence within the community. Through the character of Carmen I explore none other than this social aspect of the cultural tradition.

It wasn't clear from the start that we would be able to film the movie in the city but, since we were finally lucky enough to do so, I decided to include such an imposing orientation shot that shows off Ronda's monumentality. In this aerial shot, that was filmed with a drone, we see Carmen dressed in yellow walking decisively through the streets of the city, whose nooks and cultural idiosyncracies she will uncover during the film. With this shot we wanted to show spectators the space that the heroine will dominate.

MGP and EKH: We get the feeling that this opening sequence is closely related to the promotional poster, where there is a direct identification between the Virgin and Carmen. In this image, the protagonist occupies a central position with the city of Ronda worshipping at her feet. How did you come up with the concept for the poster?

MD: It's true. In the poster, Carmen appears, like the Virgin, surrounded by flowers and "crowned" with a mantilla. Moreover, in the first version of the poster we had a slogan, "To heaven with her!", that we finally cut. That was a very meaningful phrase because it's often said to the Virgin when she's lifted for the Holy Week processions. This is what the film is about: how Carmen assumes power as President, "heaven" of her brotherhood, with the help of the women around her. We explore this idea in a much more explicit way in the teaser poster we designed while we were still writing the script with the objective of visualizing it. In that poster, Carmen was elevated on a throne, occupying the position of the Virgin, and on the shoulders of her daughter (Pepa Anierte), her neighbor (Carmen Flores) and her girlfriends.

⁶ The Holy Week of Seville is an extraordinary case since it wasn't until 2011 that a decree by Monsenior Asenjo, Archbishop of the city, permitted the incorporation of women in the brotherhood (Macías). Since then, only one woman, Maruja Torres Trujillo, has achieved this position; she is President in the Penitence Brotherhood, of the Los Javieres brotherhood (Parejo).

MGP and EKH: Carmen is the main character of the film and on whom the greater part of the dramatic weight falls. Additionally, she is the first of your protagonists whom you extricate from the home so that she may frequent other spaces that are traditionally dominated by men, like the brotherhood of Holy Week. What do you think about Carmen's aspirations within her brotherhood? Is her final success that of a woman, a devout woman, or a professional woman?

MD: I think it's all three at once since Carmen is a very devout woman and very capable but also very family-oriented. On the one hand, I think that her relationships with her daughter, granddaughter, and neighbor are very interesting. They do not belong to the brotherhood and we're not sure what they think of it but they don't hesitate rolling up their sleeves to help her realize her dream. This is a gesture of solidarity between women that I find beautiful and that I wanted to celebrate.

I thought many times about writing Carmen's failure rather than success at the end because it would be more credible and realistic. Nevertheless, at the same time, I resisted concluding the film with a negative ending because I think the idea is to transmit hope. Carmen's final victory doesn't occur just because she is a woman. The film departs from the idea that the protagonist will be elected President of her brotherhood because she really doesn't have any competition: she is a consummate professional that, besides being extraordinarily prepared, she is devoted to and has sacrificed a lot for the brotherhood. Carmen has been second place nearly all her life and now it's finally her chance, as we see with the revelation at the end, to win the vote for President.

Something we repeated a lot during the preparation of the film was: "They can prevent a woman from achieving her goals even if she's earned them". The film shows what a woman has to do in order to be able to get as far as a man just because he's a man, and that's why it was necessary to have an optimistic ending. Because, despite the inconveniences, with effort and mutual help, we (women) can achieve anything we want.

MGP and EKH: Relating to that, we'd like to highlight when Carmen says: "It's hard to want to be something that you've never seen before". With these words you address a subject of urgent immediacy, which is that of the representation (democratic, cinematographic) and visibility. As a woman professional in the audiovisual sector, do you personally identify with Carmen's words? Is this a commentary on the objective of your film: to emphasize the need to recognize and overcome the obstacles that women encounter in certain professions?

MD: In my case, I have been very lucky because my brother and I were raised the same and my family has supported everything that I've wanted to do, although I do have girlfriends that have had a much harder time than I studying what they wanted. Therefore, when I thought of the phrase that you allude to, I thought: "finally I'm expressing myself clearly." From the beginning, I have insisted that the film speak about life but with its setting in the brotherhoods of Holy Week it seems like the social criticism is just limited to this world. All things considered, Carmen's brotherhood in *Hopelessly Devout* could represent many other realities: local government, the film business, definitively, any institution governed by a hierarchy in which women are discriminated against.

I think that it is so important that there is a variety of references in all realms: television, cinema, politics, etc. In my case, I remember that I wasn't familiar with any women in the audiovisual world. For those of us who liked cinema, the only woman director with whom we

were vaguely familiar was Isabel Coixet, and that was after she directed *My Life Without Me* (2003) in the United States. Obviously, there's no doubt that there were more women directors who tried to break into the field but they were unknown to us because their work didn't reach us. Just like with me, I'm sure that there are many girls still today who would like to participate but find it unreachable. Therefore, it was important for me to introduce that phrase in the script to emphasize the need to break the glass ceiling. Precisely, in relation to this, Icíar Bollaín advocated in an interview that I read for the urgency of diversifying the curriculum in schools and including more women. I totally agree with this vindication. A young person, I just turned thirty, like me grew up reading mostly male authors and wasn't even aware of it until recently when I decided to find and read works by women authors. The gap is tremendous: it's so much harder for us women to get our stories out there, and this is a problem for generations of women who come after us.

MGP and EKH: We noticed the importance of the stove and the domestic space in your films. Would it be correct to say that your work celebrates house wives [*marujas*] with power? What role does gastronomy play in your vindication of the archetype of the house wife?

MD: In my cinema I celebrate the figure of the house wife since I have the impression that they rule the world⁷. With respect to food, many of the topics that I'm interested in exploring in my films, like familial relationships, are intimately tied to the space of the kitchen and to culinary traditions. For me, talking about family makes talking about recipes, celebrations and events with an important gastronomic background also inevitable. Likewise, I've realized that within the family, an abundance of food often takes the place of a lack of communication or affection, and this topic is really fascinating to me. For someone like me who's a terrible cook, food is nostalgic and takes me back to my childhood.

MGP and EKH: The scholar Jo Evans notes a large difference between the portrayal of motherhood by Spanish women filmmakers (Isabel Coixet and Icíar Bollaín, to be precise) and other directors like Pedro Almodóvar⁸. In relation to this, we are interested how you identify Carmen verbally and visually with the Mary Help of Christians [*Virgen*

⁷ In 2017, the SGAE (General Society of Authors and Editors) organized a series and dedicated to the pejorative popular representation of the house wife (*maruja*). Included in this series, organized by Laura Freixas, were titles such as *Margarita y el lobo* (1969) by Cecilia Bartolomé, *What Have I Done to Deserve This?!* (1984) by Pedro Almodóvar, *Woman Without a Piano* (2001) by Javier Rebollo and *María (and Everybody Else)* (2016) by Nely Reguera. The full list of films and the series' introduction can be found on SGAE's webpage (www.sgae.es).

⁸ Evans begins her study commenting on the lack of visibility of women filmmakers in Spanish cinema and continues by analyzing the figure of the *mater dolorosa* or self-sacrificing mother and the castrating mother. For the author, Almodóvar combines these two archetypes in the melodrama of Gloria, protagonist of *What Have I Done to Deserve This?!*, while the mothers of Isabel Coixet (*My Life Without Me*) and Icíar Bollaín (*Take My Eyes* and *Flowers from Another World*) are in her opinion multifaceted women whose motherhood represents only one facet of their existence (337-38).

***Auxiliadora*], resematicizing this archetype of the *mater dolorosa* as an empowered and authoritative figure. Could you explain the reason for this identification?**

MD: Sometimes it's difficult for me to notice certain aspects of my own cinema, but now that you mention this, I realize that the mothers in my films do not suffer as much as Almodóvar's. As I mentioned earlier, Carmen's identification with the Virgin is obvious but I also wanted the film to go beyond simple identification in order to reflect in a more orthodox way how the protagonist lives her religion. Maybe it's something more typical of the South that isn't as common in other regions of Spain, but in Andalusia religious icons are treated with surprising familiarity. The faithful have heart to hearts with the Virgin and the saints, as if they were speaking with their own mothers. In my view, one of the key moments in the film is the scene in which Carmen looks upon the Virgin to complain that, if it weren't for the two of them, everything would be a disaster. Even though women in my films spend more time in the kitchen than maybe they should, they are not submissive mothers who suffer in silence. To the contrary, they voice their opinions and have no qualms about taking the reins of the situation when they need to. Carmen is a courageous woman who, when the time comes, reacts and decides that it's time to stop crying and to change the situation. Moreover, once she takes the reins, she fights to maintain her position as President.

MGP and EKH: Spanish popular comedy has always revealed deeply entrenched machismo. Nevertheless, your comedy distances itself from sexist stereotypes. In your opinion, what is the recipe for making a comedy without machista registers? What are you aiming at with the comedy of *Hopelessly Devout*?

MD: On a daily basis we hear and laugh at micromachista jokes that also find their way to the screen. We have all been in environments in which comments are made that, when we stop to analyze them, are hurtful and offensive. Luckily, we are becoming more aware of this and we are better at detecting this, which is a way of beginning to change things. Sincerely, I think that the recipe for making comedies that aren't sexist lies in the transformation of society and this is a very difficult task that requires time and awareness. In the end, comedy is a reflection of our daily life and experiences and, as long as sexist humor is part of society, it will also be present in the stories we tell.

I, personally, do not find sexist humor the least bit funny. What's more, I find it out of date, and that's why I do not reproduce it in my films. Nevertheless, it is possible that some people might misinterpret my cinema for the mere fact that I situate my protagonists in the kitchen. For me, it all depends on how one was raised and one's experiences. In my case, the humor and stories of my films are inspired by my most familiar environment and how I was raised.

MGP and EKH: Delving deeper into this topic, you've cited Berlanga's cinema as one of your references. From our perspective, some of the dark comedies of Berlanga, *The Executioner* (1963) for example, critique the Franco regime at the cost of women characters, who are ridiculized or appear either superficially or as self-serving. What does your comedy have in common with Berlanga's? Would it be correct to assert that your cinema challenges Berlanga's approach to humor?

MD: It's interesting how sometimes we take what we like from films and ignore, or even justify, what we don't. It's complicated to attack Berlanga's cinema but I think that I do agree with what

you mention. In *The National Shotgun* (1978), if we were to look no further, the Marquis of Leguineche (Luis Escobar) collected women's pubic hairs and in *Welcome Mister Marshall!* (1953) the character of Carmen Vargas (Lolita Sevilla), the dumb folkloric performer, was ridiculized to an extreme.

MGP and EKH: We could even argue that you turn the tables on this situation because in *Hopelessly Devout* a lot of humor occurs at the expense of men and women resist the role of trophy wife [*mujer-florero*]. Do you agree with this reading?

MD: Unfortunately, we are accustomed to seeing women characters in film as evil or objects, therefore it's fun for me to flip this: women aren't dependent on men and their political projects but rather live in accordance with themselves and their own needs. In *Hopelessly Devout*, Carmen decides to become the first woman president of her brotherhood and her daughter categorically refuses to keep on as first lady to her husband the mayor (Joaquín Núñez).

By contrast to women, who are heroines and carry the action of the films, male characters are much less archetypal and much flatter. To be frank, I'm not very concerned with this unevenness. The time has come for male actors too to incarnate these roles in the cinema. Before the premiere, I expected to receive criticism for the treatment of male characters, the anti-heroes of the story; nevertheless, so far no one has called me out for this, I suppose because it is something that isn't often seen in Spanish cinema. With the mayor, the priest (Mauel Morón) and Ignacio, I wanted to portray socially-recognizable figures that obstruct the protagonist's dream of leading her brotherhood. Ignacio, on the one hand, is only interested in social status, in appearances. He's a fake who's achieved social recognition on the sole basis of deception, since he is not the least interested in the wellbeing of the brotherhood. The priest, on the other hand, represents the vestiges of a conservative and unchanging Church that, unfortunately, is still active in some places. The film reminds us of the darkest past of the institution and wishes to overcome it.

MGP and EKH: Delving deeper into the Biblical intertexts of *Hopelessly Devout*, Ignacio could be interpreted as a representation of the Passion of Christ. Considering, in your particular filmic revision of the Passion, the cross that Christ bears could also have other meanings. Would you agree with the reading of the cross in the film as a symbol of patriarchy? The characters of Carmen, her daughter and the neighbor characterize their experience of relocating Ignacio as a "stations of the cross" [*vía crucis*].

MD: Even though Carmen is a religious woman, the religious context in terms of the film's narrative and aesthetics represents a hostile space for her. While writing the script we decided that her home would represent the familiar facet of the character while the church, with its religious symbolism and corrupt priest, would represent the hostile masculine environment that obstructs her dream. Like you say, at one moment Carmen herself characterizes her journey to achieve her goal as a "stations of the cross" because she literally has to carry the body of her rival and all that he represents. Even though I didn't think consciously from the beginning of the cross as a symbol of patriarchy, your interpretation is very interesting to me.

MGP and EKH: In this "stations of the cross", Carmen also has to face another representation, from bullfighting, of Spanish patriarchy: the bull. In a sense, one could say that your character must "fight the bull of patriarchy" in the film and, to do so, she often passes by Ronda's arena and she dresses as "bullfighter" with mantilla for the final fight.

Nevertheless, Carmen defeats her particular “bull”, Ignacio, without needing to kill him. This is very interesting because you symbolically bury your Ignacio-Christ in the Holy Burial Church [*Iglesia del Santo Entierro*], but he “resuscitates” at the end. Why doesn’t Carmen kill Ignacio like Almodóvar would⁹? Isn’t this solution problematic if we see Ignacio as a representation of patriarchy?

MD: This was a constant subject of discussion during the preparation of the script. From the beginning, my colleagues insisted that Carmen had to kill Ignacio or, at the very least, everyone would have to think that he was dead for a while. Still, I refused because it would have totally changed the idea of the film. Without a doubt, a murder could allow for more comic situations, but I preferred to approach the story for more a costumbrist rather than comedic perspective. In all my stories I always hope that the spectator identifies with what s/he is seeing and sympathizes with the characters. From the get go, Carmen’s character, given her particular characteristics, could seem distant for some of the audience, and my intention was always to bring her closer. For me, it was fundamental that the protagonist act like my grandmother would or any average woman of her age in this situation. Therefore, it didn’t make sense for Ignacio to die. And, Carmen isn’t a killer: if she had really thought for a moment that the life of her rival was in actual danger, she would have called an ambulance and the film would have been over.

MGP and EKH: In that case, could we say that your film advocates for a democratic solution? Instead of killing Ignacio, you set him aside, giving Carmen the time and space to be recognized as President by her brotherhood, as was decided in the elections at the very beginning.

MD: Exactly, the film reflects a certain kind of social change since we cannot forget that Carmen’s peers had originally elected her as President of the brotherhood. The foundation of collegiality and confidence in her abilities were there from the beginning and this recognition is crucial.

MGP and EKH: It’s really curious to us how Carmen reacts once she assumes the presidency of the brotherhood. Why did you decide that Carmen would initially betray the mantillas by imposing the rules “enforced on us by men”?

MD: From the beginning I had to emphasize to the people surrounding me that the protagonist of *Hopelessly Devout* was not a revolutionary, nor feminist leader, like many told me. For me it was very important to be consistent with the character and to make clear that we weren’t in the presence of another Manuela Carmena [Communist mayor of Madrid 2015-], but rather all the opposite. Actually, Carmen is the polar opposite of what the mayor of Madrid represents: she is a woman from a small town, Catholic and conservative and has simply at seventy years of age learned something about herself and her society that has made her reconsider her life. This can happen often in life: it’s not until something affects us that we realize its meaning and true implications. In her case, Carmen has been educated to think that women aren’t presidents of brotherhoods and subconsciously internalizes that lesson, assumes it. Therefore, when she has the opportunity to rise to power, there is an ambitious part of her that exercises authority as men would until, luckily, she realizes her error. I think that this detail makes her more believable as a

⁹ The murder of the patriarchal figure is prominent in the argument of two films by Almodóvar: *What Have I Done to Deserve This?!* and *To Return* (2006).

character, more real. The film reflects, definitively, how authority is often misunderstood by women, who think that they must “masculinize” and act like some men, since it’s all they know, in order to maintain their power.

MGP and EKH: Ignacio is not the only patriarchal symbol in *Hopelessly Devout*. The mayor son-in-law could also be interpreted as such. This character, who is constantly escorted by a body guard, seems like quite a ridiculous caricature to us. Tell us more about him. What are you trying to convey with this figure of the clumsy politician? And what are you trying to convey with the official who visits town (a more modern and solidary politician) and gets along well with Beatriz?

MD: I recalled that in all the processions there is a receiving line of authorities in which the president appears alongside the town’s mayor and representatives of other brotherhoods, and it seemed perfect to me that the mayor of the film represent the more political aspect of the tradition. Stemming from this idea, the character of Julián acquired, little by little, other ridiculous, or caricaturesque, features: he’s an antiquated figure who is only concerned about his appearance. I think that the film reflects really well the relevance of posturing, of the social appearances. Moreover, Julián is a character who gives us a lot to work with for comedy. This mayor is accompanied at all hours by his escort, who’s only there to make him look important, and he symbolizes a way of understanding politics, and if you twist my arm, society, that promotes an image of women as trophies, set apart from the public sphere. *Hopelessly Devout* criticizes this exact stale and traditional vision of society and politics that, unfortunately, is still alive and well, and begs for renovation.

Future Steps



Escac Films (*Hopelessly Devout*, 2018)

MGP and EKH: What do you think of the work CIMA has done in recent years to promote gender equality in the audiovisual industry? Are you involved with this mission or would you like to be in the future?

MD: I'm not involved in CIMA yet but I'd like to be in the future because I think that the work they're doing is very important. I have followed the trajectory of the association especially in recent years when it has started to stand out due to its successes. I think their advocacy is fundamental; most all all, their show of data confirms the historic discrimination of women in the audiovisual sector. The scarcity of women in positions like sound direction, photography, etc is really shocking and should make us reflect as a society. Even though progress has been made in recent years¹⁰, reverting this situation of disadvantage seems very complicated to me because it's a structural program that afflicts all of society and has its roots in education.

I, who am a director and instructor, can testify that this disparity is not due to a lack of women. In recent years at the ESCAC I have been able to see how little by little the student body has been diversifying. When I was a student, there were only two women among twelve students in the direction specialization and now there are equal numbers. What's more, I'm probably not wrong in saying that, having only directed three shorts in my case, I was only able to advance my film thanks to the school's production company. Luckily, film schools are helping young people (both men and women) direct debut features.

MGP and EKH: One of the measures the CIMA supports, relating to quotas, is a bit controversial. What is your position on this measure?

MD: This may be something that I need to rethink but since I consider myself a product of the ESCAC, sometimes I have the feeling that I don't belong to the audiovisual industry just yet and I don't understand its mechanisms. With regard to CIMA's position on quotas, I'm not sure what to think. For starters I think that it is problematic but it's obvious that something has to be done to end the historic discrimination of women in the industry since current initiatives do not suffice to compensate the disadvantage. I think the points system for including women in the technical crew is a step forward, even though I think that it might be more effective for the committees who distribute film funds to themselves be more equitably and diversely comprised so they could make more balanced decisions. It's noticeable that the budgets of films directed by even the most notable women filmmakers are lower than those of their male peers. In my case, I consider myself privileged because my film, born from film school, was given a lot of freedom.

MGP and EKH: As you've mentioned, you are also an instructor at the ESCAC. What classes do you teach and what is your teaching philosophy for film?

MD: The school's philosophy is very practical: learning by experience. I teach the third year practicum, with students who have already chosen their specialization. I think that this course is very interesting because students begin to organize departments for the first time and learn the difficulty and beauty of working together and getting along. In my course students form groups of mini filming teams, they make shorts and then we view the results together in the classroom and we edit them. The pace of the class is pretty intense; throughout the course, each team has to make eight shorts, one every three weeks, so we are constantly coming up with stories and filming them. Basically, my work consists of mentoring the scripts (commenting on them,

¹⁰ **Despite this, the figures from CIMA's last report (2017) show that women make up only 24% of the Spanish audiovisual industry. In the case of women filmmakers, the disparity is greater since they comprise only 12% of the total. These figures highlight the standstill of women in the past three years that, depending of the specific area (production direction, director of photography, sound, etc), even shows backtracking ("INFORME CIMA 2017").**

helping them prepare the shoots). As an instructor, I try to reaffirm the gaze of each of my students, helping them see that they should tell their stories from a particular point of view, and teach them how to balance form and content.

MGP and EKH: With respect to your future projects, what bulls are you currently fighting or what will be your next bullfight?

MD: Right now I am writing, so you could say that I'm fighting many bulls. My current project is a story about my family, one of the recurring topics from my shorts, and I will again tell it from a woman's perspective and with humor. For now, I'm really happy because I had a dry spell in writing and I've finally started up again. Additionally, it's possible that the producers of *Hopelessly Devout* will be interested in filming the story, although it's still really early to say.

MGP and EKH: What is the question no one has asked you that you would like to answer?

MD: At this moment I wouldn't be able to tell you a specific question. Many of your questions I hadn't considered and they have been really interesting to me. Something that I find off-putting in some interviews is when they speak of films by women as if they were their own category, which is just another symptom of our society. In fact, recently, someone told me that they found it strange that I chose to direct a comedy and not an intimist film and asked if I did it to stand out. Can you imagine my reaction?! I think that we will have truly advanced as a society when it's not longer "strange" for a woman to direct a comedy, a thriller, a horror film, etc. It makes me uncomfortable to only be asked about my gaze as a woman filmmaker because I don't think it's fair to be labelled into the category of "women's cinema." Often times a woman filmmaker's gaze is related to a certain genre of narrative: intimist and directed to women spectators. I, however, prefer to consider myself a director who tells stories, thus far about women, with which a diverse audience can identify. The key, in my view, is who each of us are, beyond our gender. If I had been raised in a different family, dominated by men, I would not write as I do.

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