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## Representation of Rape in Almodóvar's Cinema

**Abstract.** This paper questions ethical, political and gender issues of representations of rape in films of Pedro Almodóvar. From the beginning of his career he deals with the effects of trauma through the lives of common people, and through their lives, he stresses the consequences and general effects of the transition of Spanish society after the death of Francisco Franco. Almodóvar is well-known as feminist director; however, most of the negative critiques came from his representations of rape, although, according to his own words, his representations of rape should liberate and empower women. The rape, as a theme is present in nine of his films: *Pepi, Luci, Bom* (1980), *Matador* (1986), *Tie Me Up! Tie Me Down!* (1989), *Kika* (1993), *Talk to Her* (2002), *Bad Education* (2004), *To Return* (2006), *Broken Embraces* (2009), *The Skin I Live In* (2011). The representation of rape, as a core element of many of his stories, makes a productive tension between right and wrong; both when concerning ethical problem of representation of rape itself, and the storylines which Almodóvar uses to exploit the rape as a narrative element. His representation of rape is sometimes explicit, sometimes implicit. In these films, the victim usually passes through a process of transformation, alike in American rape-revenge films. This process provides some form of justice for the victim and a *fresh start*; however, it is usually beyond judicial system and state administration. The rapists seem as random characters for serving plots, yet they are *archetypes* of rapists, classified by evolutionary psychologists. Almodóvar's victims and rapists are represented through complex social relationships, in camp-style satire and irony setting.

**Keywords:** representation of rape, trauma, gender, Almodóvar.

### Introduction

This paper questions the set of rape scenes in Pedro Almodóvar's cinema, and the reading of these scenes within feminist and postfeminist framework on the representation of rape, juxtaposed (to certain extent) to evolutionary psychology on rape. Almodóvar's representation of rape, and female characters in general, have been very often described as misogynistic and both empowering for women (depending of the scholar).

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This paper will explore this dichotomy, emphasizing Almodóvar's prevailing need to portray taboos in post-Franco's Spain, in many cases by using radical plots and unusual characters in order to tell a story.

At the beginning of this paper, very definition of rape itself has to be assessed. On the account of rising feminist campaigns in 1960s and 1970s, in the US and Europe, rape was no longer a taboo, and the broad term encompassed many types of sexual assaults, that were before out of the legal framework (and out of any media representation). The legal definition of rape, for well over fifty years has been radically changed throughout the world (with the exception of the countries under Sharia law), it now covers sexual assaults of (long-term) partners and spouses, it changes the way perpetrator's responsibility could be proven and how the victim should be treated during the legal process (e.g. rape shield laws), it also shifts gender roles (e.g. male as a rape victim), racial stereotypes in the US (e.g. a foreigner, African American was popularly considered and represented as rapist prototype of a middle-class white woman) it focuses on rapes in war. However, some of these legal changes were not welcomed by all anti-rape activists and feminists, as they support "rape culture", where sexual violence is normalized phenomenon (Projansky 7-11). Therefore, a "triumph" of some feminist movements, for others seems to exacerbate the problem, making the representation of rape hard to portray and often critically disapproved.

Representation of the rape has long cinematic history in feature films, with a rich tradition of its exploitation, both in European and Hollywood Cinema. Explicit representation of rape in Spanish cinema at the end of 20<sup>th</sup> and the beginning of the 21<sup>st</sup> century became more often as the society, and its films came into a transitions period after the death of Franco, and the fall of his regime. Prior to this period, as John Hopewell states, representation of any sexual intercourse was limited to few clichés: marital sex, macho Spaniard with a foreign woman, prostitution or rape. Censorship standards encouraged representation of patriotism, dogmas of Catholic Church and patriarchal family values (Hopewell 37).

After the death of Franco, sex was no longer the other and three shifts took place: the gradual abandonment of the virgin/whore dichotomy; the shift from the family to the couple as the basic narrative and ideological unit; the emergence of active (heterosexual women) and gay men as subjects of desire (Talens and Díez 219).

The transition that Spanish society has experienced is vastly represented in early films of Almodóvar, where he portrays *La Movida Madrileña*<sup>1</sup>. The rape, as a theme was shown in nine of his nineteen feature films he had directed so far: *Pepi, Luci, Bom/Pepi, Luci Bom y otras chicas del montón* (1980), *Matador* (1986), *Tie Me Up! Tie Me Down!; Átame!* (1989), *Kika* (1993), *Talk to Her/Hable con ella* (2002), *Bad Education/La mala educación* (2004), *To Return/Volver* (2006), *Broken Embraces* (2009), *The Skin I Live In/La piel que habito* (2011). With the exception of *Bad Education* where rape is homosexual and statutory, a "voluntary act" of submission to pedophilia (between college boy

who gives himself in order to save a friend to a Catholic priest), his representation of rape is always heterosexual.

Almodóvar's portray of rape often does not fit into the clichés of a certain genre (e.g. rape-revenge films), instead his rape scenes vary from comical to pathological and dark. He has been using "sexual mobility to challenge the calcified political correctness of every ideological persuasion". (Kinder 21)

The representation of rape, as a core element of many of his stories, makes a productive tension between right and wrong; both when concerning ethical problem of representation of rape itself, and the storylines which Almodóvar uses to exploit the rape as a narrative element. His representation of rape is sometimes explicit, sometimes implicit. Different approaches to aestheticization of the rape, as opposed to its importance in narrative could be misleading should one wants to draw conclusions based merely on these parameters.

There are many stereotypes of the representation of rape to the purpose of this paper, and at this point, narrative of rape-related stories can be classified in two main categories:

- rape victim passes through a process of transformation (e.g. rape-revenge narratives);
- rape happens as a result of woman's "inappropriate behavior" (e.g. provocatively dressed woman, or a prostitute).

Almodóvar blends both categories, leaning to the first, where life of rape-victim eventually changes for better, as direct or indirect result of the rape.

In his films, representation of such violence is often questioned and criticized by many scholars, however one should have in mind that "...rape serves as metaphor, symbol, plot device, for character transformation, catalyst or narrative resolution" (Russell 4), and that Almodóvar is using it both as main and side plot in order to tell a story, very often about woman.

"I'm aware that my liking of the private life of women may still be a reflection of machismo. But I hope not. Because I'm really interested in women and their world, not just when they go to gossip in the bathroom, but at all times. I believe I'm one of the least machista men in the world and one of the most authentically feminist." ("Almodovar Revisited")

### **Representation of Trauma and Rape**

Representation of the rape, as any representation of trauma or violence, should be carefully treated by any film director. Alexandra Heller-Nickolas explains that "inability to capture the magnitude of human suffering that results from sexual violence [...] is the understandable source of [...] critical discomfort" (Heller-Nicholas 8) resulting in clashing views regarding a representation of rape (or any violence).

Where representation of rape takes place, one should have in mind that “immoral” events should trigger ethical reflection in viewers. However, ethical concerns lie on both sides: representation (director) and reception (audience). Since the World War II representation of any trauma has been, criticized as injustice to the real victims (e.g. Teodor Adorno on the representation of the Holocaust); or that trauma should be portrayed unconventionally, stylistic, symbolic or metaphorical (e.g. Julia Kristeva) in narratives in order to prevent *entertainment* in representation.

Representations of rape came in various forms in stories: definition of a man and a woman in contemporary societies, contemporary and historical legal contexts (e.g. partner rape, regarding woman as a property), historical – colonialism and slavery (e.g. rape of native women by white men), war, race, etc. (Projansky 3-7).

When representing a violent scene, “the right way” should emphasize empathy for the victim. As Dominick LaCapra said that empathy is an important feeling but difficult to control – it is connected with our relation to our past, or past that we have experienced. When watching the rape scenes, one should always acknowledge the fact that looking at someone’s trauma is not the same as taking part in such event. The “right” amount of empathy that representation of violence should cause, in not full identification, but “empathic unsettlement” (LaCapra 102), which varies from person to person. However, some degree of empathy is “necessary for understanding (however limited or selfquestioning may be)” (LaCapra 104). These scenes should be balanced while disrupting the conventions, and engaging viewers to ones involved in depicting the suffering. There is no right amount of empathy or unsettlement that should by all means be accepted for most of the spectators, especially with depicting the rape one should have in mind different feminist approaches to anti-rape activism, and even more variously representation of the rape in feature films. LaCapra categorizes three forms of representation of the historical trauma<sup>2</sup>, which can be applied to any representation of trauma including the rape:

- texts that deny trauma,
- texts that act out trauma, and
- texts that work through trauma.

Text in denial of trauma (in the case of the rape), extends further victimization of rape victim by relativizing rape (both causes and effects), questioning the very existence of such event, jeopardizing the attempts of anti-rape activist to draw attention to rape, etc. LaCapra comprehends texts that act out trauma, and those that work through trauma, not as binaries, but a countervailing force. The first, deals with close-circle, repetitive process, in which, a victim relives the trauma in the present, with no distance from it; and the second, where victim tries to distances from a trauma, being able to distinguish the differences between the past (when trauma occurred), present and future. This classification will be used as an analytical tool for Almodóvar’s representation of rape, and directors dealing with the causes and effects of rape.

The “wrong” way of representation of the rape comes when one, accidentally or deliberately fails on previously mentioned “right ways”. However, at this point it is necessary to mention that some scholars strongly believe that any representation of the rape in any feature film should be banned. Feminist Robin Morgan famously claimed during the 1970s that “Pornography is the theory, rape is the practice”, this also seamlessly blends to theories where rape scene is regarded as an erotic scene, because of blunt representation of violating act. Some scholars believe that rape scenes also distance viewers, and instead of provoking empathy towards the victim, encourage them to sense empathy with a perpetrator or arousing them sexually.

[...] graphic representations of rape, at least for the moment in the text during which the rape appears, can be understood to express hatred for and violence against women and thus can potentially increase anxiety and discomfort for many spectators. (Projansky 95)

Shana MacDonald states that: “If women and men experience a heightened awareness of their bodies in their experiences of viewing rape, then the distinctions in their experiences are an important site for further investigations into the intricacies of embodied spectatorship” (Russell 8). When dealing with the representation of rape one should have in mind Laura Mulvey’s point of male gaze regarding women, as objects to be lusted upon and looked at as a source of pleasure in all films: “In a world ordered by sexual imbalance, pleasure in looking has been split between active/male and passive/female.” (Mulvey, “Visual Pleasure and Narrative Cinema” 11) Her essay further discusses the position of camera angles, slow motion and editing in order to fully objectify women in eye of the audience which could be seen as heterosexual man. Many feminist critics opposing to this thesis, argue that visual pleasure for all spectators comes from passive, masochistic perspective, as a result of overwhelming cinematic image. Mulvey’s subsequent article, an afterthought on the first essay, further explores the position of a woman as the spectator. She sees a woman in certain genres as metaphoric trans-sex or transvestite, that incorporates male gaze as her own, in a form of Oedipal nostalgia (Mulvey, “Afterthoughts on ‘Visual Pleasure and Narrative Cinema’ Inspired by King Vidor’s *Duel in the Sun* (1946)” 127-129). The position of woman in many narratives supports Mulvey’s claim that woman only supports a man in story, and that her function in narrative is only to enable further development of his plot.

Especially in rape-revenge films<sup>3</sup> there are conflicting opinions regarding a female spectator. Peter Lehman states that “rape-revenge films are a licensed form of violence in which a woman acts out male desires for the erotic satisfaction of a predominantly male mass audience” (Cohan and Hark 114), he adds that these films make the male spectator identified with mutilation of other man, even questioning their heterosexuality. Some film feminist critics opposed this views claiming that

many women enjoy watching rape-revenge films and that it should not be viewed so simplified.

Having in mind these concerns of gaze, what further problematizes the representation of rape, or any trauma, is the fact that we as spectators have the safe distance from the screen, and sometimes, rape in film, is one of many plots, serves (only) to tell greater story which can be “justified” when reading a rape scene as a part of the art cinema. With all defining aspects of such films, that David Bordwell suggests: “not classical narratives, realism, authorial expressivity and author’s important role in film’s system, focusing on characters’ psychological states and their causes and a competent viewer” (Fowler 94-102); representation of rape as a plot, drives these films closer to “art cinema”.

When rape is represented as unequivocal, as in legal and popular discourses, it is stranger rape, violent and crippling. But in art cinema, where reflexivity, the elusiveness of truth and importance of interpretation are privileged, rape is less a fact to be avenged, judged or overcome through cathartic closure (marriage, legal action, death) as in rape revenge and Hollywood films, than a specter to cast doubt on those very words: fact, vengeance, judgment, closure. (Russell 5)

Furthermore, any representation of the rape, even the most brutal one that can hardly be seen as voyeuristic pleasure can be regarded as anti-feminist because of their coherence with media culture in which women are regarded as objects.

Representation of rape is a matrix where gender identities, sexuality and all the oppositions can be traced as a part of a culture, rape is “central to the very construction of gender identity and that our subjectivity and sense of ourselves as sexual beings are inextricably enmeshed in representation” (Higgins, *Rape and Representation* 3).

The theory considers rape through reception, genre, conventions, spectatorship, representation, pleasure, gender and power (games) in its interpretation. This theoretical overview, serves as a tool for reading Almodóvar’s representations of rape on the level of narrative discourse, on the story level the classification will be made by evolutionary psychologists on rape (rapists and rape victims) as another analytical tool for reading his stories.

### **Heterosexual Rape Patterns in Almodóvar’s Cinema**

There are not too many papers that deal with a common thread of representation of rape in Almodóvar’s films, contrary to that, there are plenty of separate studies on rape from many different angles for each of his films. Although, from this assemblage of texts, a certain pattern can be recognized regarding the analytical tools that were being used (gender, misogyny, gaze), common conclusions vary to author. Leora Lev in “Our Rapists, Ourselves”, says that in Almodóvar’s films “rape functions as an objective correlative for, or literal and figurative embodiment of, broader scenarios regarding the vexed relation between gender, politics, libidinal economies, and

specularizing media landscapes." (D'Lugo 200) Lev further suggests exploring his rape scenes in much broader context than usual critics on misogyny, heterosexual patriarchal values, and society in Spain. She believes that his "representations of rape dismantle and critique gender [...] essentialism by staging this act with grotesque, surreal, and darkly camp *mise-en-scène*". Her thorough study includes three of his films (*Tie Me Up! Tie Me Down!*, *Kika* and *Talk to Her*). Lev succeeds in finding the common thread for these rape themes in his artistic approach to cinema, highlighting their multidimensionality (on the side of the reception), as the core function of his narratives. She concludes her study saying that:

"Almodóvar's staging of rape is the unwelcome mirror image whose very distortions and dark camp tenor speak uncomfortable, even unbearable, truth to power, and in doing so, also refuse reductive discourses featuring predator/victim and self/other binaries. This forces viewers to acknowledge their own complicity in perpetuating ideologies and practices that enable rape culture and rape itself." (D'Lugo 222)

Higgins believes that "rape is the perfect crime for [...] film", like in real life rape can be "rewritten retrospectively into 'persuasion', 'seduction', or even 'romance'". (Higgins, *New Novel, New Wave, New Politics* 91). Horeck emphasize its sexual component stating that rape is "a crime that dominates public fantasies regarding sexual and social difference". (Horeck 4) These views, of rape further address representation of rape, that are easy to associate with Almodóvar's films.

Although Almodóvar uses social circumstances of contemporary Spanish society as a starting point for story development (where he employs rape into the story); the rape-patterns, and the victimization processes, according to evolutionary psychologists' have global, biological background, more than current social context. The main perspective for hypothesis of evolutionary psychologists' is what certain organism biologically gains and/or loses by performing a particular behavior, which leads to specific "effects on reproductive success over evolutionary time" (McKibbin *et al.* 87).

Evolutionary psychologists' approach to gender (and women), is often criticized as highly misogynistic, anti-feminist, and as field of study that legitimizes and confirms gender inequalities around the world. However, this binary opposition to the most of the previously mentioned theories of (representation) of rape is challenging one, especially regarding critical texts about Almodóvar's films, including ethical, moral, and gender issues. As mentioned before, Almodóvar in his films through play of "wrong" and "right" representations carries out a special deconstruction of gender, introducing new perspectives on rape, often through (bad) humor, satire and clichés that (seemingly) establish the patriarchal views on gender. Therefore, the dominant patriarchal gender optics, can find its scientific base in the studies of evolutionary psychology on rape upon which, the rapist wants to extent the specie, regardless of the means.

Evolutionary psychologists propose five types of rapists: “(1) disadvantaged men who resort to rape, (2) “specialized” rapists who are sexually aroused by violent sex, (3) men who rape opportunistically, (4) high-mating-effort men who are dominant and often psychopathic, and (5) partner rapists motivated by assessments of increased risk of sperm competition. (McKibbin *et al.* 89)”. These types of rapists and their behavior will be further analyzed in next chapters.

These causes and effects of rape will be framed within Almodóvar’s cinematic representation of rape in all of his films, in order to show the balance between his artistic means of representation, and his masculine “evolutionary predisposition” to establish story within theoretical framework of evolutionary psychology.

Alongside with its importance to narrative discourse, on the story level, his films have a common thread in evolutionary psychologists’ classification of rapists:

- disadvantage men: Benigno (Javier Cámara) in *Talk to Her*;
- specialized rapists: Ángel (Antonio Banderas) in *Matador*;
- opportunistic rapists: the police inspector (Félix Rotaeta) in *Pepi, Luci, Bom*;
- high-mating-effort rapist: Pablo/Paul Bazzo (Santiago Lajusticia) in *Kika*;
- partner rapists: Ernesto Martel (José Luis Gómez) in *Broken Embraces*; Ricky (Antonio Banderas) in *Tie Me Up! Tie Me Down!* Robert Ledgard (Antonio Banderas), Zeca (Roberto Álamo) and Vicente (Jan Cornet) in *The Skin I Live in*.

### **Disadvantage Men (Rapists)**

Almodóvar’s *Talk to Her* is, in brief, a modern version of *Sleeping Beauty* (Russell 83), where Benigno, not represented as usual Spaniard macho but “sensitive ‘new man’” (Fouz-Hernández and Martínez-Expósito 14), represents a modern fairy tale prince.

As Anne W. Eaton in her essays points out the story of Benigno and Alicia is almost never referred in reviews as rape story but as a “love affair” (Eaton 12) she thinks that audience believes that “since we do not see the repugnant act itself, we can easily avoid thinking of it as a rape” (15).

At the end of this film, Almodóvar’s prince commits suicide, for not being able to be with the women he loves – Alicia (Leonor Watling). Therefore, his suicide is far from what the audience expects, they would also like that he never gets caught or punished. (A. Hermes and Ritzenhoff 348). For this purpose, Almodóvar carefully and deliberately builds up empathic story around 30-year-old male nurse Benigno (his name means benign) and a comatose patient Alicia (whom he has met briefly before her accident that brought her to coma) he is taking care of.

Before the rape, earlier in the film, Benigno defines himself as a gay to a psychiatrist, and in some manner to his mainly female co-workers. His false claim, serves as a shield for his virginity and sets him into category of disadvantage rapists – “men who are motivated to rape if they have no other means of securing copulations” (McKibbin *et al.* 89). According to research conducted by evolutionary psychologists this type of man has low socioeconomic status, less attractive and desirable.

Rape scene is represented by imaginary silent film *The Shrinking Lover/El amante menguante*, which first serves as a distract, then a metaphor, and implicit denotation of his psychological state before the rape. This sequence could represent a type of dream, like dreaming awake or hallucination, a latent-manifest dream that was triggered by the memory of the film he had watch the previous day. It is edited by parallel switching of dreamlike sequence and Alicia's room. The musical theme in silent films starts as non diegetic to the main scene, however it continues to diegetic connecting two storylines. Also, Benigno talks to Alicia about the movie making the parallel or a psychological transfer between the protagonist he has previously watched. In *The Shrinking Lover*, Alfredo (a male lover) drinks a potion that was made by his lover Amparo (female lover). He then shrinks to a phallic size and enters her vagina while she was asleep. While this not being shown as any form of violation, this is a rape, for she did not consent (Eaton 17). In that moment Benigno is mentally ready to rape Alicia. Almodóvar is using these two scenes as opposites than gradually reveals them as one, connecting the shots of Amparo's and Alicia's faces on (editing) cut. He concludes the representation of rape in shot of lava lamp where two liquids collide.

Instead of using a rape-revenge narrative where an agent instead of Alicia's deals with Benigno, Almodóvar "awards" her by waking her from coma as form of justice. As a result of the rape Benigno gets arrested, Alicia gets pregnant, and gives birth to a stillborn, not being aware of what has happened upon waking. Before Benigno finds out what has happened to Alicia he commits suicide. "His suicide adds a fantasmatic dimension of fairness to the film [...] the film engages the imaginary possibility that the wages of rape should be death, even as it allows viewers to avoid making a choice about Benigno's proper punishment." (Epps and Kakoudaki 227)

Although Almodóvar's representation of Benigno and the implicit scene do not easily fit into common rape narratives, his perpetrator belongs to the group of disadvantage rapist due to his virginity, and a social status.

### Specialized Rapist

On the contrary to the lack of real Spanishness in *Talk to Her*, where two main male characters show almost mother-figure empathy toward their beloved ones, in *Matador* Almodóvar wants to show machismo in its *almost* traditional form. Almodóvar builds a thriller "which relies for its effects on engaging the spectator at a bodily level" (Labanyi and Pavlović 269). Having in mind Spanish culture, and bullfighting history, Almodóvar constructs a twisted love story. However, in *Matador*, filmed in the 80's, Almodóvar continues his work on portraying of post-Franco period and its characteristics through "subversive reinscription of some of Spain's most rooted cultural symbols" (Pavlović and Alvarez 178).

Ángel is bullfighting trainee. After his professor asks him if he was gay, because he has not yet been with a woman, Ángel, raised as Catholic becomes upset, and

immediately looks for a way to prove that he is not. He watches his neighbor, and professor's girlfriend, Eva (Eva Cobo) taking a bath and dressing up to leave her home, before the storm starts. He follows Eva to the first dark alley, and then drags her out of a sight. He puts his knife under her throat, and before Ángel begins to rape Eva, a lightning struck and it begins to rain, he ejaculates. Eva pushes him away, he apologizes to her, then she slaps him. When she turns away she slips on glassy road and cuts her cheek. When Ángel saw the blood on her face, he faints. The next day, Ángel voluntarily goes to police to admit the crime. When he asks for an inspector to tell him about raping Eva, policewoman looking at him says: "Some girls have all the luck". This statement successfully continues Almodóvar's satire on rape (Allinson 77), and culminates when Eva accompanied with her mother Pilar (Chus Lampreave) comes to the police station. Police inspector asks Pilar to leave, considering the situation, however both of them insist that Eva will not file the charge, as this had happened to her several times before. Eva explains to the inspector, that Ángel failed in his rape attempt, thus making him feel even more ashamed, and making the police consider if he was the one who has been raped. This rape scene<sup>4</sup> serves as a minor component to the main narrative story as it deflates phallic-centered narrative (Fouz-Hernández and Martínez-Expósito 203) where bullfighting and sadomasochism are interlaced into sexual tension and men's penetrative role within heterosexual matrix and Spanish society, it is also a deconstructing factor for the traditional values through "twisted universe of sex, murder, and perversion" (Pavlović and Alvarez 271).

In terms of category of evolutionary psychology, Ángel fits in some manner into a category of specialized rapists and disadvantage rapists. Specialized rapists are aroused by "violent sexual stimuli" (McKibbin *et al.* 89) that is perpetuated in Almodóvar's representation through his virginity and bullfighting, he is motivated to rape Eva because he sees no other option in securing his manliness, thus making him a disadvantage rapist as well.

At the end of the film, Eva shows glimpse of affections toward Ángel, thus making the rape attempt as it has never happened.

### Opportunistic Rapists

Almodóvar's camp film *Pepi, Luci, Bom* starts with a rape scene that drives the whole narrative. When a police officer, and a neighbor, spots marijuana plants on Pepi's window he comes to her flat. Pepi suggest oral or anal sex in order not to pay the fine or go to jail. However, policeman declines her suggestion and rapes her. The scene ends with the sign "Pepi was hungry for revenge". As Alexandra Heller-Nicholas points out, the rape was during the history treated as property crime (the possession of a woman), here, Almodóvar makes Pepi treating her own rape as property, because she wanted to sell her virginity, thus "rape was not as much traumatic for Pepi as much as it was more fiscally inconvenient" (Heller-Nicholas 142). Instead of asking a male figure, like in other rape-revenge films, to vengeance

her virginity (and rape), Pepi asks her female friend Bom to help. By mistake Bom and her punk band take revenge on policeman's twin brother. After this failed attempt, Pepi is plotting another complex approach – to destroy his marriage by befriending with his wife Luci. Nevertheless, she finds a new friend in Luci and her vengeance is never achieved. When Luci recommends her to undergo a hymenoplasty, Pepi calmly says: "No thanks. For the moment I want to keep on using it."

A masochist Luci leaves the policeman and starts living with Bom, becoming lovers. The policeman tries to find Luci and then he commits the second rape, pretending to be his brother. He rapes Luci's friend Charo. In second rape scene, while she resists at first, when he promises her that he is not going to tear her clothes, she gives up.

In both scenes, the policeman is an opportunistic rapist as he finds "associated costs, such as injury or retaliation by [...] society are particularly low (McKibbin *et al.* 90)". Almodóvar's first feature films introduce a rape as a central plot for many of his future films. Almodóvar's in this movie shows a vast police corruption, as the policeman does not want to investigate the attack on his brother in order to find his wife.

The happy ending in this film concludes the comedy, as Bom goes to live with Pepi, and Luci returns to her husband.

### High-Mating-Effort Rapists

Controversial farce, rape scene, is very important to Almodóvar in *Kika*, as it was later televised later on in a form of a reality show. Almodóvar taught that this scene will "show the strength of female characters in difficult situations" (Allinson 77), as he said for an interview to Frédéric Strauss, nevertheless, it was the key point for many to classify the director as misogynist. As Susan Martín-Márquez said, he led "some movie-goers to conclude that, in the context of Spain, the phrase 'feminist cinema' could only be considered an oxymoron." (Heller-Nicholas 142)

In this scene Pablo (his stage name is Paul Bazzo – literally 'Big Fuck'), an ex-boxer, ex-legionnaire and porn star prison escapee, comes to Kika's (Verónica Forqué) apartment. With the help of his lesbian sister (with who he had incestuous relationship many times before) Juana (Rossy de Palma), stages a robbery, and goes to rape Kika in her room. Before he hits her, for her to be unconscious, as a part of the deal, he ties her to a chair, as Juana said to him not to touch Kika.

However, while Kika was asleep, he shows her his muscles, and then starts to rape her. When she wakes up, she formally asks him: "You are Paul Bazzo, aren't you?", this scene continues without him showing any signs of knowledge that he is not in a porn movie, but in real life. They communicate during the rape, but he never stops to rape her. Kika even complains "One thing is a rape, another is keeping me here all day". This scene lasts for seven minutes. A parallel scene interrupts it briefly as a voyeur calls the police to report the crime he sees from his apartment. Almodóvar

again, shows the incompetent police, as they finally decide to investigate out of sheer boredom.

When Juana wakes, she manages to come to Kika's bedroom and talk her brother to stop raping her. When police arrive, they pull him off Kika, however he runs to a balcony wherefrom he ejaculates on female reporter Andrea (Victoria Abril) while she waits for a great TV shot.

Pablo blends into a category of high-mating-effort rapist, as he "appear[s] to be more sexually experienced [...] aggressive, dominant [...] and psychopathic" (McKibbin *et al.* 90). These features are even more enhanced in Almodóvar's scene as Pablo is represented as delusional.

Kika is not traumatized by the rape before she sees it on television, as feminist will call it "metaphorical second rape", this "suggests the real target of Almodóvar's satire: the media coverage of sensational(ized) events" (Allinson 134). "Moreover, a blurry haze of low-definition video bleeds over into the movie, contaminating the typically glossy big-screen production values that are typical of Almodóvar." (Epps and Kakoudaki 47)

### Partner Rapists

There are only three rape partner scenes in the *Skin I live in*. This is the first Almodóvar's film where explicit rape scenes are not situated in Almodóvar's camp style.

Scientist-surgeon Dr. Robert Ledgard (Antonio Banderas) kidnaps Vicente Guillén Piñeiro (Jan Cornet), as a punishment for his attempted sexual assault on his daughter Norma Ledgard (Blanca Suárez); in captivity he performs a sex change, and complete visual transition of Vicente to Vera (Elena Anaya) in order too look like his late wife Gal. Vera is imposed to identity change, that she tries to resist, struggling to keep the core of her true identity as Vicente.

Robert's half-brother Zeca (Roberto Álamo), escapes from the prison and comes to Robert's house while he was away. When he sees Vera (Gal) he rapes her. Zeca was unaware of the fact that Gal (whom he had an affair with while she was Robert's wife) committed a suicide and that the woman he "is making love" is not her. When Robert came back to his house, he shoots Zeca and pulls him off Vera.

The second rape scene comes few days later, when Robert decides to make love to Vera, she deceives him to stop lovemaking for a moment, then goes for a gun and shoots him. This rape revenge response is instant, however, it was caused not just by the rape, but the captivity, torture and sex change.

The complexity of reading two of these scenes as *heterosexual* partner rape scenes is the fact that both male have psychotic, inverted, perception of a sexual subject that they are about to rape. Evolutionary psychologists believe that men will "rape their partners under conditions of increased sperm competition risk [...] when a man learns or suspects that his long-term partner recently has been sexually unfaithful"

(McKibbin *et al.* 91). Two brothers' competition over Vera (Gal), classifies both scenes as partner rapes. First, when Zeca rapes Vera (Gal), it comes as a response to her marriage to Robert, and his matting competitiveness. Second scene comes as delusional love making to Robert's late wife, which had another "affair" with Zeca.

The fact that these rapes are actually homosexual is never clear to the rapists, therefore, and especially in this film, one should have in mind, that Almodóvar's explicit representation of rape is so far, always heterosexual in appearance, and somewhat misogynistic – In order to represent a rape of a man, Almodóvar changed his sex.

In *Tie Me Up! Tie Me Down!*, he explores the Stockholm syndrome, through Marina's (Victoria Abril) relationship with Ricky (Antonio Banderas). According to Caroline Moorehead female hostages can develop a need to engage in sexual intercourse with her captive in order to strengthen the alliance, for feeling unsafe (Graham 20-21). This scene also shows a type of semi-consensual rape, and a partner rape scene, like in the film *Broken Embraces*, where Lena (Penélope Cruz) is making love with Ernesto Martel (José Luis Gómez), after which she goes to vomit (often reaction of rape victims). These type of scenes have both, for Alexandra Heller-Nicholas "regressive implications, they represent a salient idea of female desire and a significant (if ironic) phase in sexploitation's feminization." (Heller-Nicholas 46)

### Conclusion

Representation of rape in Almodóvar's cinema has an artistic value and narrative importance to the stories. Having in mind the history of Spanish cinema before Almodóvar (during Franco's era), and especially the representation of rape, his approach gave multidimensional, much further insight on the society, gender and women in specific.

In Almodóvar's films, at the level of narrative discourse, these representations can be read as misogynistic, due to lack of "right ways" in representing a rape. "In fact, the validity of his films is found precisely in his ability to show characters who cannot be easily classified according to simple dichotomy between good and bad." (A. Hermes and Ritzenhoff 354) Taking a look into his mostly gynocentric narratives, where independent female characters often seek their social equalities, and usually succeed, these scenes represent a contradiction. What further destabilizes this dichotomy, is his tendency to unstable the genre structures, that often combines dramatic and traumatic experience with satire, irony and some form of "patriarchal punishment" in a form of societal clichés. However, as Sarah Projansky said these narratives "are not simply narratives marketed for consumption in an entertainment context or 'talk' about real things. They are themselves functional, generative, formative, strategic, performative and real." (Projansky 2)

Most studies on representation of rape in film, and their feminist critiques, concentrate on raperevenge stories. Almodóvar is using canons of these films, offering the victims a process of transformation, while blending their causes in

woman's "inappropriate behavior". His films often portray some sort of sexual assaults, where a victim takes a revenge on attacker, or more poetically, due to certain circumstances, the assault or the rape becomes some form of a rebirth for the victim. Klaus Reiser and Tony Williams question the path of a victim where women take revenge, because "not dying" does not necessarily means the victim has won (Heller-Nicholas 10). However, this view contextualizes the rape within the "rape culture" and its representation. His form of justice to injustice is an artistic mechanism for the representation of story. For example, in *Matador* "males become the object of both male and female gaze" (Allinson 83), in *Talk to Her* he "romanticizes rape, downplays its harms, ascribes to it imaginary benefits, and encourages sympathy for its perpetrators" (Eaton 18).

These artistic mechanisms that drive rape-related narratives in his films, can be regarded through his biological background (while having in mind that he is openly gay), as a man. According to classification of evolutionary psychologists on rapists, Almodóvar has represented all forms of heterosexual rape. From his early films, such as *Pepi, Luci, Bom* to his last (on rape) *The Skin I Live In*, as presented in previous chapters. However, the complexity of his storylines, often portray other psychological and social circumstances that add current social context, that adds comprehensive artistic representation of rape-related narratives.

While, Almodóvar said, in one of his interviews, that he did not change the Spanish society through his films, but merely placed it on screen, his representation of rape opens vast field of readings which make him, alongside with Luis Buñuel, Alejandro Amenábar one of the greatest directors of Spanish and world cinema.

### Endnotes

- 1 La Movida Madrileña is a countercultural, hedonistic movement which took place in Madrid after the death of Franco in 1975. Its main features were freedom of expression, sexual liberation, use of recreational drugs, etc.
- 2 For the purpose of this paper, this classification of trauma texts, will be used through optics and the level of empathy, not through historical component that LaCapra relates his writing on the Holocaust.
- 3 Rape revenge-revenge films, must (at the beginning) feature rape(s) and an act of revenge. Rape and act of vengeance (by a victim or an agent in her behalf) have to be central to the narrative.
- 4 This scene is placed after an opening scene where Ángel's professor masturbates while watching the extreme violence on women, making the (possible) rape scene much softer for the audience.

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