

‘LA FAMILIA YA NO ES LO QUE ERA’: INTER-CULTURAL LESBIAN RELATIONSHIPS IN CONTEMPORARY SPANISH CINEMA

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Resumen

Este artículo considera el papel variable de las mujeres con respecto a la institución del matrimonio y al entorno familiar a través de la representación cinematográfica de relaciones interculturales y de lesbianas. Sostiene que ese tipo de relación constituye un ejemplo de la visibilidad emergente de formas familiares alternativas al modelo heteronormativo. Tomando en cuenta las dimensiones lingüísticas, temporales, y espaciales de estas relaciones, analiza tres películas: *Costa Brava: Family Album*, *A mi madre le gustan las mujeres* y *Room in Rome*. En resumen, el artículo cuestiona la posición del deseo intercultural lésbico dentro de las representaciones cinematográficas de la familia contemporánea en España.

Palabras clave: Familia, lesbiana, intercultural, cine, España.

Abstract

This article considers the changing role of women within the institution of marriage and the family set-up through the cinematic representation of inter-cultural lesbian relationships. It argues that the inter-cultural lesbian relationship constitutes an example of the emerging visibility of alternative forms of kinship to the heteronormative family model. Analysing the linguistic, temporal, and spatial dimensions of such relations, it takes three films as case studies: *Costa Brava: Family Album*, *A mi madre le gustan las mujeres* and *Room in Rome*. Ultimately, the article interrogates the place of inter-cultural lesbian desire within cinematic representations of the contemporary Spanish family.

Keywords: Family, lesbian, intercultural, cinema, Spain.

Introduction

Sofía, a middle-aged divorcée, reveals to her three adult daughters that she is in love, hesitantly confessing that her new partner is somewhat younger than herself. The girls are enthused; 'seguro que está como un quesito' ('I bet he's really attractive'), remarks Sol, the youngest daughter. However, their enthusiasm quickly falters when their mother introduces her new lover: 'Chicas, os presento Eliska' ('Girls, this is Eliska'). From its opening scene, *A mi madre le gustan las mujeres* (Inés París and Daniela Fejerman, 2001) posits the inter-cultural lesbian relationship as a means of cinematically refashioning the contemporary Spanish family, a project underscored by the film's tagline 'La familia ya no es lo que era' ('Family ain't what it used to be'). The inter-cultural lesbian relationship poses a dual challenge to the heteronormative family unit. The congruency of lesbianism and child-rearing continues to be called into question, both within conservative, homophobic contexts, and within certain queer frameworks, whereby queer identity is deemed to be incompatible with the heteronormative domain of the family¹. Similarly, inter-cultural relations continue to provoke angst amongst some conservative factions. This anxiety is rooted in differentialist racism and fears over racial and/or cultural contamination². With this in mind, I argue that the inter-cultural lesbian relationship constitutes a key site for the reformulation of the role of women, in particular lesbian women, within both the marriage institution and the family setting.

1. On the lesbian mother as oxymoron, see, as an example, THOMPSON, Julie M. *Mommy Queerest: Contemporary Rhetorics of Lesbian Maternal Identity*. Amherst, University of Massachusetts Press, 2002. On the incompatibility of queerness and the family, see, for instance, EDELMAN, Lee. *No Future: Queer Theory and the Death Drive*. Durham, Duke University Press, 2005.

2. The inter-cultural aspect of these lesbian relationships merits further study. However, this is beyond the scope of this article.

For more on differentialist racism and inter-cultural (heterosexual) relationships in contemporary Spanish cinema, see, for example, FLESLER, Daniela. «New Racism, Inter-cultural Romance, and the Immigration Question in Contemporary Spanish Cinema». *Studies in Hispanic Cinemas* 1:2 (2004), pp.103-118.

Alongside the aforementioned film, this article studies the inter-cultural lesbian couples of *Costa Brava: Family Album* (Marta Balletbò-Coll, 1994) and of *Room in Rome* (Julio Medem, 2010). The temporal span of these films (1994-2010) provides an opportunity to study how the cinematic representation of inter-cultural lesbian relationships has changed in contemporary democratic Spain. Furthermore, whilst recognising that a film is the product of a collaborative artistic process, and without suggesting that the perspective of the director is definitively emblematic of the overarching standpoint of the film, the director(s) of each of these works can be said to provide distinct angles on the inter-cultural lesbian relationship. *Costa Brava's* director Balletbò-Coll is herself a lesbian. *A mi madre le gustan las mujeres* is the product of a directorial collaboration between two women, whose sexual orientation is not cited in reference to their work³. And *Room in Rome's* director is a heterosexual man, a fact which, combined with the sexual explicitness of the film, risks a representation of lesbianism primarily by and for the heterosexual male gaze and heterosexual male desire. Finally, the genre and the production context of each film are distinct. *Costa Brava* is a self-funded, independent production, and the recipient of several audience awards at international film festivals, such as the Frameline Festival in San Francisco⁴. *A mi madre le gustan las mujeres* is a light-hearted, popular comedy, which enjoyed relative commercial success in Spain, and which also featured in international gay and lesbian film festivals⁵. Lastly, *Room in Rome* is a romantic drama, by internationally-renowned Basque director Julio Medem. Lead actresses, Elena Anaya and Natasha Yarovenko, won the Fotogramas de Plata Award for Mejor Actriz de Cine (2011) and the Turia Award for Best New Actress (2011) respectively, and the film received a number of Goya nominations in 2011 including Mejor Actriz Principal (Anaya), Mejor Actriz Revelación (Yarovenko), Mejor

3. In my research on the film, I have not found any reference to the sexuality of Paris and/or Fejerman.

4. Susan Martin-Márquez notes that the film received no public funding, and observes the note at the end of the credits which asserts that 'the movie was shot in fourteen days with film stock donated by various Spanish production companies' (MARTIN-MÁRQUEZ, Susan. *Feminist Discourse and Spanish Cinema: Sight Unseen*. Oxford, Oxford University Press, 1999, p.290).

The film also won audience awards at Outfest (Los Angeles, California), at Cineffable (Paris), and at Un Sguardo Diverso (Milano, Italy) <<http://www.costabravafilms.com/eng/otherfilms.htm>>, consultado el 06-03-2014.

5. COLLINS, Jacky: «Challenging the rhetorical oxymoron: Lesbian motherhood in contemporary European cinema». *Studies in European Cinema* 4:2 (2007), pp.149-159, pp.154-155. <http://www.imdb.com/title/tt0306432/releaseinfo?ref_=tt_ov_inf>, consultado el 06-03-2014.

Guión Adaptado and Mejor Canción Original ('Loving Strangers')⁶. Across a range of distinct temporal moments and generic contexts, the films thus offer a spectrum of diverse cinematic interpretations of inter-cultural lesbian relationships.

A further reason for selecting these films is simply that there are relatively few Spanish films focusing on such relationships⁷. The restricted cinematic visibility of the figure of the lesbian is linked to the historical absence of a public sphere for lesbian self-expression in Spain⁸. Not only is the visibility of lesbianism limited in the context of Spanish cinema, so too is scholarship addressing this phenomenon. In a recent study on lesbian identity in Spain, Nancy Vosburg and Jacky Collins highlight the difficulty in 'tracing the development of lesbian identities' because of 'the invisibility of women's relationships, both heterosexual and homosexual, throughout history'⁹. Against this backdrop, Margaret G. Frohlich warns against an uncritical, celebratory approach to both visibility and speech, given that both concepts 'are linked to the system of relations that maintain marginalization [...] being seen and heard is a complex socio-political exchange that can both oppose and maintain exclusions'¹⁰. This article thus considers the stakes of lesbian visibility and speech in contemporary Spanish cinema by tracing the linguistic, temporal,

6. <http://www.imdb.com/title/tt1263750/awards?ref_=tt_awd>, consultado el 05-01-2015.

7. Conversely, there are significantly more films, also spanning distinct genres and temporal moments, focusing on inter-cultural heterosexual relationships. Among others, these include: *Las cartas de Alou* (Montxo Armendáriz, 1990), *La pasión turca* (Vicente Aranda, 1994), *El efecto mariposa* (Fernando Colomo, 1995), *Susanna* (Antonio Chavarrías, 1996), *Cosas que dejé en La Habana* (Manuel Gutiérrez Aragón, 1997), *Flores de otro mundo* (Iciar Bollain, 1999), *Tomándote* (Isabel Gardela, 2000) and *El próximo Oriente* (Fernando Colomo, 2006). For more on this, see FLESLER, Daniela. *Op. cit.* Interestingly, there are even fewer films that focus on inter-cultural homosexual relationships among men. *Los novios búlgaros* (Eloy de la Iglesia, 2003) is a notable exception.

8. In support of this, Chris Perriam contends that while gay men have developed a public voice, and carved out a public space for self-expression, the same is not true for lesbians, who have continued to remain largely invisible (PERRIAM, Chris: «Gay and Lesbian Culture», en Helen Graham y Jo Labanyi (dirs.): *Spanish Cultural Studies: An Introduction*, Oxford, Oxford University Press, 1995, pp.393-395).

9. VOSBURG, Nancy y COLLINS, Jacky (dirs.). *Lesbian Realities/Lesbian Fictions in Contemporary Spain*. Blue Ridge Summit, PA, USA, Rowman & Littlefield Publishing Group, 2011, p.9.

10. FROHLICH, Margaret G.: «Representation and the Politics of Visibility», en Nancy Vosburg y Jacky Collins (dirs.): *Lesbian Realities/Lesbian Fictions in Contemporary Spain*, Blue Ridge Summit, PA, USA, Rowman & Littlefield Publishing Group, 2011, pp.31-59, p.31. For more on the problematics of lesbian visibility in the context of cinema, see, as an example, VILLAREJO, Amy. *Lesbian rule: Cultural Criticism and the Value of Desire*. Durham and London, Duke University Press, 2003.

and spatial vectors of inter-cultural lesbian relationships in the three aforementioned films. In so doing, I explore the extent to which these films present the inter-cultural lesbian relationship, an alternative form of kinship to that prescribed by heteronormativity, as an exemplary site of the changing dynamics of the family in contemporary Spanish cinema.

1. Costa Brava: Family Album

Costa Brava concerns the developing relationship between Anna (played by the film's director Balletbò-Coll), a thirty-something Catalan tour guide and aspiring performance artist, and Montserrat (Desi del Valle), a twenty-seven year old Jewish-American seismic engineer, who teaches at the Escola Técnica Superior D'Enginyers Industrials (Universitat de Barcelona). The film both humorously and emotively depicts the trials and tribulations of the women involved in this inter-cultural relationship. Only a handful of scholars, across both Anglo- and Hispanophone contexts, have critically engaged with the film. Ann Davies considers the film's spatial reconfiguration of female subjectivity within the context of tourism¹¹. María Yazmina Moreno-Florido explores the relationship between space and marginalised identities in the film, as well as the ways in which lesbianism problematises the Catalan national project¹². Jaume Martí-Olivella examines the dialogue that emerges in the film between Catalan identity and other expressions of otherness (historical, sexual, international)¹³. And Yeon-Soo Kim posits *Costa Brava's* lesbian family as disconnected from the national, situated instead in terms of globalisation and migration¹⁴. Building on these critical investigations of the link between sexuality and space, I argue that *Costa Brava* situates lesbian identity within a wider, internationalised network, and thus draws attention to the linguistic, temporal, and spatial limitations of lesbianism within the Catalan context at the time of the film's production.

11. DAVIES, Ann. *Spanish Spaces: Landscape, Space and Place in Contemporary Spanish Culture*. Liverpool, Liverpool University Press, 2012, pp.129-133.

12. MORENO-FLORIDO, María Yazmina: «Turismo queer por el mediterráneo. Cataluña revisitada en *Costa Brava (Family Album)*». *Arizona Journal of Hispanic Cultural Studies* 13.1 (2010), pp.27-39.

13. MARTÍ-OLIVELLA, Jaume: «Textual Screens and City Landscapes: Barcelona and the Touristic Gaze». *Chasqui* (2005), pp.78-94.

14. KIM, Yeon-Soo: «Family Album as a Portable Home: Marta Balletbò-Coll's *Costa Brava (Family Album)*». *Revista Canadiense de Estudios Hispánicos* 27.3 (2003), pp.469-484. See also: MARTÍN-MÁRQUEZ, Susan. *Op. cit.* pp.287-291 and FROHLICH, Margaret G. *Op. cit.* pp.42.

1.1 Language

Costa Brava posits English as the linguistic ground of the inter-cultural lesbian relationship. In spite of the film's setting in Barcelona and the Costa Brava, as well as the fact that director Balletbò-Coll is Catalan, the predominant language of the film is English. There are only a few brief moments in which Catalan is spoken/heard, and each of these is imbued with a sense of discord. For example, a journalist waits outside the theatre to speak to Anna's former partner, Marta L. Puig, who Anna describes as 'the diva of independent Catalan theatre'. The journalist is in the background of the shot, her Catalan dialogue drowned out by Anna's narrative voice-over in English. The Catalan language is thus both visually marginalised within the frame, and orally/aurally marginalised on the soundtrack¹⁵. In another instance, Anna speaks in Catalan with local producers in an effort to stage her monologue in Barcelona. She is physically distanced from the producers, insofar as her conversations with them occur over the telephone. Furthermore, she is compassionately distanced from them, given that her requests for funding are rejected. As a final example, we hear Anna's former lover Marta performing in Catalan in a theatrical production entitled 'Oedipus Queen'. Sound and image are discordant in this sequence; we hear but do not see Marta's performance. The camera instead offers us close-ups of posters which include still images of the actress' face. Recalling Frohlich's warning about the potential problematics of lesbian speech and visibility, Catalan in *Costa Brava* is characterised by rejection, miscommunication, and disconnection, emphasised by the disjunction between sound and image in these instances.

The English language conversely facilitates communication and connection in *Costa Brava*. The majority of Anna's relationships are mediated by English. These include her blossoming romance with Montserrat, her interactions with the tourists she guides through Barcelona and the Costa Brava, and her exchanges with production company 'Another Stage' in San Francisco. The communicative, connective potential of English is emphasised through frequent close-ups on textual material. Examples include (among others) close-ups of Anna's printed monologue 'Love Thy Neighbour', the leaflets of 'Costa Brava Tours', the company for whom Anna works as a tour guide, and the faxes that inform Montserrat about a job offer in the US and Anna about her success with 'Another Stage'. In this way, *Costa Brava* posits the English language, rather than Catalan, as an important facilitator of inter-cultural lesbian relations. This, in turn, reflects the changing dynamics of the family in

15. Thanks to my friend and colleague Dr. Lorna Muir for this point.

contemporary Spanish cinema, not just in terms of its incorporation of alternative forms of kinship to those prescribed by heteronormativity, but also in terms of its regionalist and nationalist dimensions. *Costa Brava's* English-language, inter-cultural lesbian relationship thus can be read as advocating queer alternatives to the heteronormative family model¹⁶.

1.2 Time

The temporal representation of the inter-cultural lesbian relationship at the core of *Costa Brava* adds further support to the film's promotion of queer forms of kinship as alternatives to the heteronormative ideal. The film unfolds in a linear and chronological manner, although it is not organized through temporal markers, such as times or dates. While the plot is loosely linear, the film's structure resembles a collage, insofar as it is composed of repetitious and episodic montage sequences, often accompanied by the reiteration of instrumental music or narrative voice-overs from both Montserrat and Anna. For example, we hear Montserrat's voice-over debating her sexual identity at various points in the film. She alternates between asserting that her desire for Anna does not necessarily mean that she is a lesbian, and that she is a lesbian but that this does not mean that she no longer desires men. The film's looping, repetitious composition, coupled with Montserrat's uncertainty over her sexual identity, indicates a cautious approach with regards the representation of lesbian relationships. In this way, the film resists an uncritical, celebratory, binaristic approach to lesbian relationships as a straightforward, unproblematic alternative to the heteronormative model.

Through this flexible and free-flowing approach to time, *Costa Brava* posits the temporality of the inter-cultural lesbian relationship as distinct to the linear, progressivist, developmental conceptualisation of heteronormative growth, which encompasses a series of rites of passages from childhood to adulthood, matrimony, and then finally parenthood. The film prefigures

16. This brief overview of language in *Costa Brava* cannot sufficiently convey the complexities of the linguistic dynamics between Catalan, English and Spanish in the film and its significance at the time of the film's production. The use of English by protagonists Anna and Montserrat might be read as emblematic of their position as foreigners or outsiders in the context of the film's Catalan setting and in Spain more generally. However, their decision to conduct their relationship linguistically through English, rather than Spanish or Catalan, is imbricated with Catalonia's contemporary struggle for linguistic, cultural and political autonomy following years of repression under Franco. A further dimension of the film's linguistic composition concerns production and dissemination, as the film formed part of several international film festivals and the use of English facilitated its accessibility to the widest possible audience.

frameworks that would subsequently emerge in queer theory, such as Kathryn Bond Stockton's conceptualisation of 'sideways growth', which explores 'ways of growing that are not growing up', and Judith Halberstam's reconfiguration of queer time as a 'potentiality', given that it constitutes 'a life unscripted by the conventions of family, inheritance, and child rearing'¹⁷. In a similar vein, *Costa Brava* depicts the temporality of the inter-cultural lesbian relationship as circular, repetitious, and not necessarily linear, in contrast with the 'straightness', verticality, and forward-motion of heteronormative time¹⁸.

1.3 Space

Just as Halberstam's intervention concerns spatial as well as temporal relations, *Costa Brava's* inter-cultural lesbian relationship not only advocates the circular, looping, and repetitious character of queer temporality, but also promotes queer reconfigurations of space. Scholars present distinct perspectives regarding the film's spatial dynamics. For example, Martí-Olivella insists that the film's opening image, in which Anna performs her monologue before the iconic towers of the Sagrada Familia, concerns the legitimisation of 'queer love as a possible alternative family under the same skies blessed by Gaudí's Sacred Family'¹⁹. Conversely, Davies contends that the film's final scene, in which the two women run through the streets of Barcelona, presided over once again by the Sagrada Familia's iconic towers, suggests that there is no

17. BOND STOCKTON, Kathryn. *The Queer Child, or Growing Sideways in the Twentieth Century*. Durham, Duke University Press, 2009, p.11. HALBERSTAM, Judith. *In a Queer Time and Place*. New York, New York University Press, 2005, p.2. Neither of these frameworks is wholly unproblematic. In the case of Bond Stockton, she argues that 'every child is queer' (*Op. cit.*, p.3), which risks reducing the significance of the term 'queer', as well as the category of the 'queer child', and in so doing, rendering both redundant. How useful are these terms and categories if they apply to every single child? With regards Halberstam, she overlooks the fact that the desire to have a family is not an exclusively heterosexual domain. However, their respective concepts of 'sideways growth' and queer time and space are useful frameworks for thinking through the significance of the inter-cultural lesbian couple in contemporary Spanish cinema.

18. Montserrat's hesitancy and uncertainty regarding her sexual identity might lend support to an interpretation of her as bisexual, a sexual category considered by some as a transitory phase that forms part of the process of 'coming out' (see, for example, CHAPMAN, Beata E. and JoAnn C. Brannock: «Proposed Model of Lesbian Identity Development: An Empirical Examination». *Journal of Homosexuality* 14 (1987), pp.69-80). However, this linear perspective of sexual identity formation has been called into question over the last twenty years (see, for instance, RUST, Paula C.: «"Coming Out" in the Age of Social Constructionism: Sexual Identity Formation among Lesbian and Bisexual Women». *Gender & Society* 7:1 (1993), pp.50-77).

19. MARTÍ-OLIVELLA, Jaume. *Op. cit.*, pp.91-92.

place for lesbian desire in Barcelona, the Costa Brava, or indeed Catalonia²⁰. Just as *Costa Brava's* aforementioned collage-like, temporally free-flowing structure invites, encourages, and holds these ambivalent readings in tension, the film's spatial dynamics are not easily reduced to one single, definitive signification of the site(s) of inter-cultural lesbian desire.

As the film's title suggests, the geographical locale of the Costa Brava is its primary setting. The Catalan coast constitutes a spatial microcosm of the inter-cultural lesbian relationship, for it is a site associated with both tourism and lesbian and gay identity²¹. The relationship between Anna and Montserrat flourishes on the coast, as the couple spend the weekend there and have sex for the first time in Montserrat's red car. The car, unfixed and mobile, thus becomes the principal site of lesbian desire in the film. In a sequence that naturalises lesbian desire within the landscape of the Costa Brava, the camera pans from close-ups on natural elements (stone, rocks, tree roots, tree bark, acorns, grass) to the car's surface. Deflecting the camera's probing gaze, the car thus functions as a visual barrier, refusing to make visible this intimate moment between the two women²².

Similarly, the Catalan capital of Barcelona is denied a spectacular, seductive, graphic visual presentation. In support of this, Martí-Olivella argues that the film 'constantly disrupts the scopic desire of the touristic gaze'²³. The spectator glimpses only fleeting fragments of the city's iconic sites, such as the Sagrada Família and the Parc Güell, in images which are often blurred and grainy, filtered through the lenses of tourists' cameras. Furthermore, the film constructs a counter-image of Barcelona through the sites most often inhabited by Anna and Montserrat. Besides the interior of Anna's flat, the lesbian couple is most frequently depicted on Montjuïc, literally meaning 'Jewish Mountain'.

20. DAVIES, Ann. *Op. cit.*, p.133. See also KIM, Yeon-Soo. *Op. cit.*, who discusses the lesbian family album as a symbol of both home and homelessness for the lesbian couple.

21. This aspect of the film's spatial configuration is discussed, to varying degrees, by DAVIES, Ann. *Op. cit.*, pp.129-130; MORENO-FLORIDO, María Yazmina. *Op. cit.*, p.30; and KIM, Yeon-Soo. *Op. cit.*, pp.475-476). Further layers of significance of the film's principal setting include the liminality of the coastal space, and the suggestion that, like tourists, the inter-cultural lesbian relationship can only be fleetingly, temporarily accommodated.

22. Kim argues that this scene cements the car as the symbolic space of Anna and Montserrat's relationship, and discusses the car's contrastive significance in photographs, in which it is de-eroticised, its windows wide open, and 'the faces of the characters involved in activities other than sex [...] clearly recorded' (KIM, Yeon Soo. *Op. cit.*, pp.474-475). Davies places this scene within a wider argument regarding the beach as 'the space in which local as well as tourist desires are acted upon' (DAVIES, Ann. *Op. cit.*, pp.130-131).

23. MARTÍ-OLIVELLA, Jaume. *Op. cit.*, p. 81.

They are seen strolling by the 'Font màgica de Montjuïc' (the fountains constructed for the 1929 International Exposition), as well as overlooking the city from the mountain's summit²⁴. The couple's association with this particular locale not only emphasises Montserrat's connection to Catalonia through Jewishness, but also underscores her migrant status. Montjuïc, as the primary location of both the World Fair in 1929 and of the Olympics in 1992, is a site of both historical and contemporary globalisation, transnationalism, and transience. *Costa Brava* thus situates the inter-cultural lesbian couple within a queer dynamics of space that naturalises lesbian desire within the site of the Costa Brava, and reconfigures Barcelona as the node of a transnational and transient network, in dialogue with other spatial and temporal locales, even if ultimately, as Davies suggests, lesbian desire can neither be accommodated nor contained by the Catalan capital²⁵.

2. A mi madre le gustan las mujeres

While *Costa Brava*, with its subtitle 'Family Album', focuses primarily on the kinship between its two female protagonists with very little reference to their wider familial contexts, *A mi madre le gustan las mujeres* overtly considers the place of the inter-cultural lesbian relationship within the heteronormative family set-up. As mentioned above, this is underscored by the film's tagline 'La familia ya no es lo que era' ('Family ain't what it used to be')²⁶. Rather than prioritise Sofía (Rosa Maria Sardà) and Eliska (Eliska Sirová), *A mi madre le gustan las mujeres* concentrates on the negative reactions of Sofía's daughters, Elvira (Leonor Watling), Jimena (María Pujalte), and Sol (Silvia Abascal). While the film's focus on the daughters' responses to their mother's new sexual identity subjugates, at the level of narrative, the inter-cultural lesbian

24. In this way, the film produces a contemporary reinscription of Catalonia's and Spain's Jewish heritage. That lesbian incomer Montserrat embodies this reinscription is significant. It reminds the spectator of the expulsion of Jews and various other Others both in the historical context of the Inquisition, and in the more recent twentieth century context of the Civil War and the Francoist regime. Martí-Olivella also makes reference to the film's reliance 'on a heightened sense of Catalonia's Jewish cultural heritage' (MARTÍ-OLIVELLA. *Op. cit.*, p. 79).

25. DAVIES, Ann. *Op. cit.*, p. 133.

26. Kim discusses the notion of family in *Costa Brava*, arguing that 'They are the sole components of their family unit: nowhere in the film do we see other members of their kinship. Nor does Anna mention her parents, siblings or relatives at any point during her relationship with Montserrat. [...] The only people included in their family album, other than the couple itself, are their former lovers: Anna's ex-girlfriend, Marta, and Montserrat's ex-boyfriend and an ex-girlfriend' (KIM, Yeon-Soo. *Op. cit.*, p. 470).

relationship, it also, like *Costa Brava*, questions the space and place of lesbian desire within contemporary Spain.

As is the case with *Costa Brava*, there has been little scholarly engagement with the film to date. Frohlich claims that *A mi madre le gustan las mujeres* constitutes 'an example of when lesbian visibility does not favor lesbians'²⁷. Isabel Santaolalla argues that the film posits an understanding of European identity, which simultaneously embraces less favourable neighbouring countries, as well as those of the more developed North²⁸. And Collins critiques the film's mitigation of the lesbian couple by means of a male protagonist, as well as its displacement of the lesbian relationship in favour of Sofía's reinstatement within the established order as a mother²⁹. While I agree with Collins, I argue that the film conducts an inward-facing assessment of the place of such forms of kinship within the sphere of contemporary Spanish culture, and that it concludes with both an acute awareness of the precarious situation of such affiliations and an implied future horizon in which such bonds might be incorporated into the dynamics of the contemporary Spanish family.

2.1 Language

Unlike the other two films studied in this article, which are both English-language productions, *A mi madre le gustan las mujeres* is mostly in Spanish, with brief moments in Czech. While *Costa Brava* and *Room in Rome* situate the inter-cultural lesbian relationship within a wider framework through their use of the English language, the decision to produce *A mi madre le gustan las mujeres* in Spanish suggests an inward-facing focus, in which local audiences are invited to question and consider the place of inter-cultural lesbian desire within contemporary Spanish society. This functions on a microcosmic level within the film, as the plot centres on the way in which the daughters gradually come to terms with their mother's newfound sexual identity. Just as Sofía's daughters are responsible for splitting up the couple, they are also instrumental in the couple's reunion. *A mi madre le gustan las mujeres* thus operates didactically, encouraging Spanish audiences to relate to the three daughters, and their eventual acceptance of their mother's inter-cultural lesbian lover as part of their family network.

27. FROHLICH, Margaret G. *Op. cit.*, p.44.

28. SANTAOLALLA, Isabel. *Los «Otros». Etnicidad y «raza» en el cine español contemporáneo*. Zaragoza: Prensas Universitarias de Zaragoza, 2005, p.156.

29. COLLINS, Jacky. *Op. cit.*, p.156.

In this film, language is initially the primary identifier of otherness, and a principal site of discrimination. Eliska's limited linguistic capabilities in Castilian Spanish are subject to criticism from Sofía's daughters. For example, they snigger when she gives Sofía a birthday present and mispronounces the word 'regalo' (adding the feminine suffix of '-a' instead of the masculine '-o'). Furthermore, Eliska's linguistic insufficiency in Spanish is publicly mocked by Sofía's youngest daughter, Sol, who is the lead singer in a band. At a concert attended by the whole family, the band performs a song entitled 'A mi madre le gustan las mujeres', in which Sol sings the line 'es veinte años menor y no habla en español' ('she is twenty years younger and does not speak Spanish'). That Eliska is younger, foreign, and a woman, is especially problematic for the girls. However, the hypocrisy and immaturity of this perspective emerges later in the film when the girls visit the Czech Republic, and Sol becomes romantically involved with Eliska's brother, even though they are unable to converse in the same language. As a counterpoint to the inter-cultural lesbian relationship between Sofía and Eliska, Sol's liaison with Eliska's brother undermines her previously disdainful attitude towards the limited linguistic abilities of the young Czech woman. This fusion of Sofía's and Eliska's families highlights the changing dynamics of the family as represented in contemporary Spanish cinema, both in relation to alternatives to heteronormative forms of kinship, and in terms of its new European character, neither of which should be limited by language.

2.2 Time

The temporality of these shifting family dynamics is, the film suggests, located in the present, and in the future. The structure of *A mi madre le gustan las mujeres* is linear and chronological, with the exception of the opening and closing sequences. At the beginning of the film, shortly after the girls are introduced to Eliska, they watch their mother and her new lover sit side-by-side at the piano, playing one of their favourite pieces. The camera focuses on each of the daughters, and their reaction to this performance, in turn. We then see a close-up of a framed photograph, Sofía's birthday present from Elvira, of the girls as children seated around the piano with their mother. This leads to a flashback, indicated by a dissolve, in which Elvira remembers posing for this photograph, which was captured by her father. The flash of the camera transports Elvira back to the present moment as her sisters applaud Sofía and Eliska's performance. This initial flashback evokes the nostalgia experienced by Sofía's now adult daughters. In this sequence, as the film's aforementioned

tagline suggests, they long for a simpler, past time in which their mother was united with their father, and in which she was heterosexual.

Mirroring the opening sequence, the film's conclusion also features a moment of analepsis. In a ceremony celebrating the marriage between Miguel (Chisco Amado) and Eliska, and thus implicitly the fact that Eliska can now remain in the country with Sofía, Eliska dances first with her brother, and then with Sofía, in the middle of a ring of guests. Eliska then steps aside as Sofía gestures to her daughters to join her in the centre of the circle. At this point, the film intercuts between this present moment and a memory in which Sofía and her daughters, as children, dance together. The music becomes softer and more lyrical, and the image is rendered in slow-motion. Eliska is depicted on the sidelines, happily clapping along to the rhythm of the music. As the music reverts to the original fast-paced tune, the camera zooms out and up, providing us with a closing shot of the two concentric circles of individuals celebrating this moment. Collins reads this as ambivalent, arguing that it simultaneously 'conveys the notion that this is a lesbian mother who [...] will not abandon or neglect her children', and diminishes 'the status of the lesbian relationship' by 'restoring the female subject to her assigned role – that of mother – within the established order'³⁰. While Collins' criticisms are well-grounded, I read this concluding sequence as a demonstration of the inclusivity of family, which now incorporates Eliska, her brother and other family members, as well as Sofía's ex-husband, and Jimena's new partner (who is not the father of her child, and with whom she has become romantically involved over the course of the film). Although 'La familia ya no es lo que era', the closing flashback, which alternates between past and present, between heteronormativity and inter-cultural lesbianism, suggests that this is not necessarily to be feared. Sofía and her daughters remain close, and their family network is now more inclusive, centred on women, womanhood, and female solidarity, rather than on patriarchy and/or heteronormativity. The conclusion of *A mi madre le gustan las mujeres*, like that of *Costa Brava*, therefore gestures beyond the diegetic limits of the film towards the future as a possible temporal horizon of the inter-cultural lesbian relationship.

2.3 Space

As is the case in *Costa Brava*, the future of the inter-cultural lesbian relationship in *A mi madre le gustan las mujeres* is also articulated in terms of space. Just as Anna's apartment is an important site for the lesbian couple in *Costa*

30. COLLINS, Jacky. *Op. cit.*, p.156.

Brava, the interactions we see between Sofía and Eliska primarily take place in Sofía's apartment. However, while Anna and Montserrat are often depicted out and about together in the Catalan capital of Barcelona, Sofía and Eliska are rarely pictured out in public together³¹. This indicates that the place and space of the lesbian couple remains confined to the intimate, private setting of Sofía's apartment. The significance of this confinement of the lesbian couple to the domestic sphere is ambivalent. On the one hand, it can be read as indicative of the need to conceal non-normative affiliations, such as the lesbian relationship between Sofia and Eliska. On the other hand, the film's reinscription of the family home as a site of lesbian desire subverts the conventionality of the association of women and domesticity, which has a particularly strong resonance in the context of post-Franco Spain given the constrictive gender ideologies of the Francoist regime.

The film does not meditate on the geographical site in which it unfolds. Madrid, as a city, is not visualised in any detail over the course of the film. This is contrasted with the film's visualisation of the Czech Republic, in the brief episode in which Elvira, Jimena, and Sol travel there to encourage Eliska to rekindle her relationship with their mother. The sequence begins with the image of a plane landing, and darting past the camera in a haze of smoke, the airport visible in the background. A series of tracking shots of Czech landscapes are then intercut with shots of the three girls in the back of a taxi, taking in the views that surround them. The camera mirrors their touristic gaze, and encourages us to identify with their perspective.

The film thus draws a clear distinction between Eastern European Eliska and Spaniards Elvira, Jimena, and Sol. While Eliska will return to Spain, only to be threatened with expulsion, the girls are free to travel as, how, and when they wish. In this respect, the film highlights the privileges of those individuals who can cross borders and visit other places without persecution and/or repression. The girls are able to fly to the Czech Republic, and, in Sol's case, to enter into a relationship with a Czech national, while Eliska can only remain in Spain through her compliance with the heteronormative institution of marriage. *A mi madre le gustan las mujeres* therefore signals the precarious spatial dynamics of the inter-cultural lesbian relationship, which, at the time of the film's production in 2001, can only be sustained on Spanish territory

31. An exception would be the scene in which the girls invite their mother and Eliska out to the park for a picnic; however, this episode consists in the girls attempting to separate the couple, so that they can sabotage the relationship. As a result, the sequence features Sofia talking with her daughter Elvira, while Sol attempts to seduce Eliska. The lovers are thus out in public, but not together.

through the intervention of a heterosexual, Spanish man, and more generally, of heteronormativity.

However, rather than view this as a dismissal of alternative forms of kinship to the heteronormative institution of marriage, I read it as an acknowledgment of the limited avenues for the expression of these bonds at the time of the film's release. The film was produced four years before same-sex marriage was legalised in Spain³². While the conclusion of *Costa Brava* intimates that lesbian desire can neither be accommodated nor contained by Catalonia, and by extension, Spain, the closing sequences of *A mi madre le gustan las mujeres* gesture towards this future moment in which same-sex marriage will be legalised. The marriage of Miguel and Eliska is in effect a marriage by proxy between Eliska and Sofía, given that this will allow the couple to remain together. This idea is underscored by the fact that when the newly-weds are informed that they may consummate their marriage with a kiss, they each turn to embrace their respective partners – Miguel to Elvira, Eliska to Sofía – provoking a stunned reaction in the ceremony's officiant. In further support of this, the closing sequence, in which the couple dance happily together amongst their family and friends, is a celebration not of the marriage of Miguel and Eliska, but rather of the union of Eliska and Sofía. Unlike *Costa Brava's* Anna and Montserrat, Eliska and Sofía will, it is indicated, remain in Spain. In the short time elapsed between the production of these two films (1994-2001), lesbian desire acquires a place, albeit a precarious one which is mediated by heteronormativity, in the representation of the family in Spanish cinema.

3. Room in Rome

The representation of the inter-cultural lesbian relationship in the most recent of the three films studied here, *Room in Rome*, draws on some of the ideas discussed above in relation to *Costa Brava* and *A mi madre le gustan las mujeres*, as well as taking the inter-cultural lesbian relationship in several different directions. For example, like *Costa Brava*, Medem's film is predominantly an English-language production, and, akin to *A mi madre le gustan las mujeres*, it situates its lesbian protagonists within a wider, traditional family network. Based on a Chilean film (*En la cama*, Matías Bize, 2005), which tells the story of a man and a woman who spend just one night together, *Room in Rome* details the sudden, dramatic, passionate encounter between Alba (Elena Anaya), who is Spanish, a lesbian, and a mechanical engineer and inventor,

32. Same-sex marriage was legalised in Spain on 2nd July 2005.

and Natacha (Natasha Yarovenko), a Russian art history student, soon to be married to the director of her thesis³³. The film depicts the one night the two women spend together, in which they become both sexually and emotionally intimate with one another, revealing their problems, fears, and insecurities. Given its relatively recent release date (2010), there has not, at the time of writing, been any academic material published on the film. Analysing the linguistic, temporal, and spatial dynamics of the inter-cultural lesbian relationship, I contend that *Room in Rome* casts such relations as ambivalent, and in so doing, problematises the place of such bonds in contemporary Spanish culture.

3.1 Language

As mentioned above, *Room in Rome* is primarily an English-language film, with only fleeting moments in Russian, Spanish, Italian, and Basque. Both women are multi-lingual, with Alba speaking Spanish, Italian, and English, and Natacha speaking Russian, Italian, and English, over the course of the film. As in *Costa Brava*, the linguistic territory of the inter-cultural lesbian relationship in *Room in Rome* is thus English. From a cynical perspective, this might be seen as a move to increase the film's commercial viability beyond Hispanic contexts. However, this linguistic decision also underscores the dynamics of contemporary globalisation, in which the English language dominates communication, with the brief flashes of other European languages denoting, even if superficially, the wider context(s) in which these women are situated.

A further linguistic comparison unites *Room in Rome* with *Costa Brava* insofar as Basque director Medem, like Catalan Balletbò-Coll, hails from an autonomous region within Spain. As discussed above, the Catalan language is visually and orally/aurally marginalised, signalling disconnect and discord in *Costa Brava*. In *Room in Rome*, there is only one brief moment in Basque, when Alba watches a video of her partner Eburne and her two children on her

33. Alba's profession – mechanical engineer and inventor – provides an intriguing point of comparison with *Costa Brava's* Montserrat – a structural engineer who specialises in bridges – the symbolic significance of which is discussed briefly by Martin-Márquez (MARTIN-MÁRQUEZ, Susan. *Op. cit.*, p.289) – and seismic activity. This is significant for several reasons: both Alba and Montserrat occupy conventionally male-dominant professional spheres; and both are also involved in the creation and construction of new forms and formulations, which relates to my analysis of the films as providing a consideration of the linguistic, temporal, and spatial forms of expression available to lesbians within and beyond Spanish borders.

mobile telephone. Natacha inquires as to the language that they are speaking, with Alba explaining that it is Basque, and that she is trying to learn but the children poke fun at her when she makes mistakes. Like the instances of Catalan in *Costa Brava*, the Basque language in *Room in Rome* is a site of disconnect and discord, epitomised by the distancing of the language through the use of telephonic communication. The linguistic discrimination levelled at Eliska in *A mi madre le gustan las mujeres* takes on a distinct form in *Room in Rome*, whereby the Spanish Alba is mocked (albeit in a light-hearted manner) for her lack of linguistic ability in the ancient language of the Basque Country. This brief moment hints at the linguistic politics of autonomous regions that, according to Martí-Olivella, 'seem to go global in order to remain local'³⁴. Like *Costa Brava* then, *Room in Rome* suggests that the inter-cultural lesbian relationship is linguistically at home in Anglophone contexts, and positions that relationship in the context of an international, globalised community.

3.2 Time

In contrast with the linguistic breadth that characterises *Room in Rome's* inter-cultural lesbian relationship, its temporal dynamics are restricted, as the events of the film are temporally contained to the one night that the two main characters spend together. The film takes place on the night of the summer solstice, the significance of which is twofold, and ambivalent. On the one hand, the film hints at the magical properties of this long summer night, where, it seems, anything can happen – even a heterosexual woman, engaged to be married, falling in love with a lesbian woman from another country. On the other hand, that the action is temporally contained to one night alone suggests that this is a temporary phenomenon, that the love and intimacy that the two women encounter in the hotel room will neither last nor stretch beyond the confines of this moment.

The implied temporariness of the developing relationship is countered in the film in the way it points towards other times and historical moments. These include the personal pasts of Natacha and Alba, which are explored through the intimate conversations between the two women. Both of them initially lie about their respective pasts, with Alba reappropriating her mother's history as her own, and Natacha confusing her life history with that of her twin sister. Past lives become performative; past time flexible. Furthermore, the two women discuss Rome's history, epitomised by their consultation of a map of ancient Rome, and of the history that surrounds them in the artwork

34. MARTÍ-OLIVELLA, Jaume. *Op. cit.*, p.80.

on the walls of Alba's hotel room, with art history student Natacha describing the various ways in which the paintings speak to one another. Finally, the two women gesture towards the future by discussing the possibility of continuing their relationship beyond this night. In the film's closing sequence, the two women part, walking off in opposite directions, before a bird's eye view reveals that Natacha runs back down the street towards Alba, who is out of frame. The ending is thus ambiguous, in that the spectator is unsure as to whether or not the two women will leave their respective partners and commence a new life together. In *Room in Rome* then, the temporal dynamics of the inter-cultural lesbian relationship are ambivalent, conveying this encounter as a temporary experience, but also subtly suggesting that this bond may continue beyond the temporal constraints of the summer solstice, and of the film itself.

3.3 Space

Like its temporal dimensions, the spatial dynamics of the inter-cultural lesbian relationship in *Room in Rome* are characterised by ambivalence. As its title suggests, the geographical site for the film's action is Rome, Italy, although the city itself is barely depicted in any detail over the course of the film³⁵. That Rome in Spanish ('Roma') reads backwards as 'amor' ('love') highlights the correlation between the spatial freedom of the protagonists and the relevance of the Italian city as a site in which love can flourish without prejudice and against all odds³⁶. Rome constitutes 'neutral territory', in the sense that neither of the film's protagonists is Italian. In this regard, the film is thus distinct to *Costa Brava* and *A mi madre le gustan las mujeres*, which take place within Spanish borders, and in which only one of the women involved in the relationship at the centre of the film is an incomer to the country. By contrast, the lead characters of *Room in Rome* are both migrants. They are both far from home, temporary visitors in an unfamiliar space, and perhaps, in this way, on more equal ground than the women of *Costa Brava* and of *A mi madre le gustan las mujeres*. However, Alba and Natacha are not migrants in the same sense; they have the luxury of circulating in this neutral space, to which neither of them 'belong', without trouble or discrimination. While Alba has travelled

35. Besides the opening and closing sequences of the film, which take place in Via del Corso, the rest of *Room in Rome* occurs primarily within Alba's hotel room.

<<http://cineuropa.org/ff.aspx?t=ffocusinterview&lang=en&treeID=2107&documentID=141160>>, consultado el 05-01-2015.

36. I would like to thank the anonymous reviewer of this paper for highlighting this aspect of the film's title.

to Rome for work, Natacha is in the city as a tourist with her sister. Unlike Eliska, and even Montserrat whose stay in Spain is linked to her position at a local university, these two women can move freely between their home countries and other European sites. In stark contrast with this implied freedom of movement, the majority of the film takes place within the restricted space of Alba's hotel room, with only brief moments on the street, which we see in bird's eye view, framing the action at the beginning and end of the film. The spatial containment of this inter-cultural lesbian relationship within the walls of a hotel room resonates with the two previous films, in which the apartment of one of the women constitutes an important locale of lesbian desire. However, that this is a hotel room, rather than a permanent site of habitation once again underscores the transience of this relationship.

Moreover, just as the film nods to other historical times through the paintings which adorn the walls of Alba's hotel room, it also gestures towards the spatial world beyond that room through recourse to visual symbols of cartography. As mentioned above, the two women study a historical, paper map of Rome. The map is detailed in close-up, as Natacha traces her finger over it, showing Alba where her hotel is situated, and remarking that 'this is the Rome of the Caesars'. This map is subsequently pushed aside in favour of Alba's laptop as the women explore each other's geographical origins through Bing maps, which we see in detailed close-ups. Natacha directs Alba to an island east of Moscow, where she says she lives, before Alba then shows Natacha her home, in San Sebastian in the Basque Country. This digital mapping is repeated in the closing sequence, when the camera zooms out from the white bedsheet flag, raised by the two women on the balcony of the hotel room, to reveal a Bing maps image of the world, upside down, recalling the palindromic possibilities, albeit linguistically, of the film's geographical setting ('Roma'/amor')³⁷. Overlooking the clichéd undertones of this image,

37. The notion that this image of the world is upside down depends upon (relatively recent) cartographical conventions, in which the north is placed at the top of the map. It should be noted here, that maps and cartography, like other visual technologies and their disciplines, are deeply embedded within cultural hierarchies and power structures. Historically, that which has been placed at the top of the map is typically deemed to be the most important. As an example, B. L. Gordon notes that Christian cartographers, as early as A.D. 550, placed 'east, their sacred direction, at the top of the world map', while 'early Muslims almost always put south at the top' (GORDAN, B. L.: «Sacred Directions, Orientation, and the Top of the Map». *History of Religions* 10:3 (1971), pp.211-227, pp.217-218). Is this image of the world, with the South Pole at the top and North Pole at the bottom of the map, thus subversively suggesting a drastic re-ordering of the world in which hegemonic structures, in this case the heteronormative family unit, are overturned? Does it advocate a politics of the minor/minority, which

specifically the idea that the lives of the two women have been turned upside down by this encounter, the use of these traditional and contemporary cartographical visual symbols suggests a desire to ground the inter-cultural lesbian relationship within the specific territorial sites of Alba's hotel room, Rome, Italy, Spain, Russia, Europe, the world. Like *Costa Brava* then, *Room in Rome* signals that the place and space of inter-cultural lesbian desire extends beyond Spanish borders to a broader, international, globalised community.

Conclusions

In conclusion, the linguistic, temporal, and spatial dynamics of the inter-cultural lesbian relationships in *Costa Brava*, *A mi madre le gustan las mujeres*, and *Room in Rome* reveal the complex place of inter-cultural lesbian desire within the family in contemporary Spanish cinema. *Costa Brava*, in spite of its geographically specific title, reaches beyond Catalan and Spanish borders to situate lesbian identity and the inter-cultural lesbian relationship within a wider, internationalised network. While the fleeting moments of Catalan in the film are associated with rejection and discord, the predominant English language conveys communication and connection, facilitating the development of the relationship between Anna and Montserrat. By aligning lesbian identity with a foreign language, the film unites non-normative forms of kinship with a more inclusive vision of Spain. Although the plot of *Costa Brava* follows a linear trajectory, the structure of the film resembles a collage or a montage. In contrast to the straightness and verticality of heteronormative time, lesbian temporality is circular, repetitious, and not necessarily linear. The space in which the inter-cultural lesbian relationship flourishes is replete with ambivalence and tension. While the film naturalises lesbian desire within the Costa Brava landscape by focusing on natural elements as the couple engage in their first sexual encounter, Anna and Montserrat are also most commonly depicted in the Montjuïc area of the city, emphasising their otherness. Furthermore, the film concludes with the pair leaving for the US in pursuit of new opportunities. In this way, *Costa Brava* draws attention to the linguistic, temporal, and spatial limitations of lesbianism within the Catalan context at the time of the film's production.

could be extended beyond the context of the heteronormative family to encompass the sought-after independence of autonomous regions, such as Catalonia and the Basque Country? I would like to thank Professor Ann Davies for alerting me to these historical cartographical conventions, and for inspiring these questions.

If *Costa Brava* projects the inter-cultural lesbian relationship as part of a wider, globalised network, *A mi madre le gustan las mujeres* conversely conducts an inward-facing assessment of the place of such forms of kinship within contemporary Spanish culture. In contrast to the other two films studied in this article, the predominant language in *A mi madre le gustan las mujeres* is Spanish. This is evidence of the inward-facing perspective of this film, which didactically encourages its audience to accept the inter-cultural lesbian relationship as a key component of the contemporary Spanish family. The fusion of the extended families of the lesbian couple at the end of the film underscores the need to integrate not only alternative forms of kinship, but also Spain's European companions as part of the contemporary Spanish family. The structure of *A mi madre le gustan las mujeres* is linear and chronological, with the exception of the analeptic opening and closing sequences in which Sofía is depicted as a young mother with her three daughters as children. While in the opening sequence the flashback represents the girls' nostalgic longing for a simpler time when their parents were not separated and their mother heterosexual, by the end of the film the flashback proposes an inclusive family framework centred on women, womanhood, and female solidarity. Finally, the spatial dynamics of the inter-cultural lesbian relationship in the film are ambivalent. The confinement of the lesbian couple to the domestic space might suggest either the need to conceal such relationships or, more subversively, a reinscription of the home as a site of lesbian desire. The freedom of travel and movement experienced by the three Spanish sisters sharply contrasts with the restricted possibilities of Czech lesbian Eliska, who must enter into the heteronormative institution of marriage in order to be allowed to remain in Spain with her lover Sofía. Ultimately, *A mi madre le gustan las mujeres* concludes with an acute awareness of the precarious situation of queer affiliations at the time of the film's production. The film proposes ways in which heteronormative institutions might be undermined in the contemporaneous moment, and suggests an implied future horizon in which such bonds might be incorporated into the dynamics of the contemporary Spanish family.

Despite being the most recent case study here, *Room in Rome* produces perhaps the most problematic portrait of the inter-cultural lesbian relationship and its place in the contemporary Spanish family. The use of English in *Room in Rome* might be read cynically as a commercially driven decision to make the film more accessible to a wider audience. However, the film is multi-lingual, and even engages with minority languages such as Basque. In this way, the film posits the inter-cultural lesbian relationship as being at home in

Anglophone contexts, and renders such affiliations part of an international, globalised community. While the timeframe of *Room in Rome* is restricted to one night, that night is the summer solstice, suggesting both the magical properties of the events that take place as well as their temporary, transient character. Furthermore, the film points beyond its restricted temporality to other times and historical moments, including the characters' own personal pasts, Rome's history, and the characters' imagined future together. The temporal dynamics of the inter-cultural lesbian relationship in *Room in Rome* are ultimately ambivalent, and the film refuses to provide a definitive conclusion in terms of whether this is a fleeting encounter or the beginning of a long-lasting relationship. Finally, the spatial dynamics of the relationship between Alba and Natacha in *Room in Rome* are once again ambivalent, juxtaposing the freedom of movement enjoyed by the two characters with their restriction to one hotel room for the duration of the film. That said, the appeal to cartography, both traditional and digital, in the film proposes that inter-cultural lesbian desire extends beyond Spanish borders to a broader, international, globalised community. Replete with ambivalence, *Room in Rome* ultimately remains uncertain about the place of the inter-cultural lesbian relationship within the contemporary Spanish family.

The films confirm Frohlich's scepticism of uncritical, celebratory approaches to lesbian visibility and speech. Both *A mi madre le gustan las mujeres* and *Room in Rome* are problematic in this regard, the former because it relegates the inter-cultural lesbian couple to the visual and narrative margins, and the latter because it is an erotic, sexually explicit representation of the inter-cultural lesbian relationship, directed by a heterosexual man. For Frohlich, works that affirm marginalised identity positions and challenge the social inequalities associated with such categories must, in addition, depict and critique 'the complex relation of margin to center', as well as the ways in which 'mechanisms of exclusion are perpetuated and produced in both sites' in order to 'hint toward the rupture of those power relations'³⁸. While the potential of the films analysed here is perhaps limited in this respect, they do present the inter-cultural lesbian relationship as an alternative form of kinship to those prescribed by heteronormativity. In so doing, they reflect on the changing dynamics of the family in contemporary Spanish cinema. If 'La familia ya no es lo que era', this is precisely because of the shifting role of women in general, and of lesbians in particular.

38. FROHLICH, Margaret G. *Op. cit.*, pp.53-54.

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