PRECARIOUS EMBODIMENTS:
NARRATIVES OF DISABILITY AND BELONGING IN SPAIN OF THE CRISIS (2005-2015)

BY

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ABSTRACT

Precarious Embodiments focuses upon literary and cultural production of the Spanish State between 2005 and 2015, the precarious years of the economic crisis. I examine how differences in ability as well as gender and sexual identity work together to determine the paradigm of viable citizenship in a climate of crisis. I investigate how the requirements of binary gender and heterosexuality inform the construction of the medically-approved, able body, helping to construct a "normalized" subject—an ideal citizen whose body is capable of work and full participation in society according to traditional gender roles. I examine neoliberal capitalist ideologies of productivity and self-reliance, interrogating the way these concepts are intertwined with requirements for gendered citizenship.

The unifying thread of this corpus is the representation of non-normative subjects at risk of becoming superfluous to society. It is unsurprising that these figures should abound in cultural production in time of capitalist crisis. Considering that the capitalist economy itself is destined to concentrate wealth in the hands of a few, it is inevitable that some percentage of humanity will become excessive to the system, and that this percentage will increase with a stagnation of the global flow of capital. Among those most expendable are those with disabilities who cannot participate in the labor market, and caregivers of the disabled—often women—who are also barred from "productive" work. Others who lack a valued place in industrial society include women not fulfilling the role of mother and caregiver and LGBTQ people not engaged in reproductive sexuality. In reading selected narratives of non-conformity, I ask how these vulnerable individuals are either included or excluded from notions of Spanishness, attentive to the manner in which their precarious lives tell the story of the economic crisis in Spain.

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For my husband,
Theodore Glennon Ohlms

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Introduction

> For if I am confounded by you, then you are already of me, and I am nowhere without you. I cannot muster the 'we' except by finding the way in which I am tied to 'you,' by trying to translate but finding that my own language must break up and yield if I am to know you.
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> -Judith Butler, *Precarious Life* (2004)

On the 15th of May, 2011, thousands of so-called "indignados" filled Madrid's Puerta del Sol, a national center of commerce and tourism, to protest the financial and political corruption that led to the global economic crisis. The term "indignados" was popularized to refer to those who protested the austerity measures taken by the Spanish government in response to the economic crisis. This moniker was derived from a 2010 political pamphlet written by French diplomat Stèphane Hessel entitled *Indignez-vous!*, which also inspired the Occupy protests in the United States. By 2011, the national rate of unemployment in Spain had surpassed 20%, with the rate of youth unemployment at 46%, and these numbers were only continuing to rise, as reported by the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD). Cries of "no nos representan!" denounced the actions of elected officials and the failures of the Spanish democracy in meeting its responsibilities toward the citizens. Luis Moreno-Caballud observes that the global economic crisis that followed the 2008 burst of the U.S. housing bubble in fact provided a valuable opportunity to question "common sense" and "status quo" understandings of how the world operates: "una apreciación justa de la situación actual debe tener en cuenta . . . un generalizado cuestionamiento de las narrativas de sentido hegemónicas, que han entrado también en una profunda crisis" (536). Known thereafter as "el 15M," the May 15 occupation of

the Puerta del Sol became more than merely an "indignant" protest of banks and government; communal services were set up to provide food, childcare and health care, thus re-appropriating this iconic urban space to enact alternative ways of living and being.

The 2013 documentary *15M: Excelente. Revulsivo. Importante.* by Stéphane M. Grueso, Pablo Soto and Patricia Horrillo illustrates how individual citizens oppressed by crisis were able to connect with others who shared their experience and engage in a common resistance that became the 15M movement. The documentary begins with a series of portrait-like shots of individuals who were present at the Puerta del Sol on May 15, 2011. Each shares their own personal narrative, beginning with the words "El 15M es…", even though some participants refuse to define the movement (*15M*). While one man speaks directly to the camera, the others appear still, as though listening while their stories are heard in voice over. The individual faces indicate that each person has a unique contribution to the 15M, that each individual counts, and that their collective presence in the urban space made a historic impact.

According to the audiovisual language of the documentary, the 15M is color, rhythm and movement, even in the still frames that are integrated. The sun shines on the thousands gathered in the public square, as their chanting keeps time with percussion instruments. The verb "despertar" is used more than once in the testimonies given. The words "dormíamos, despertamos. Plaza tomada" were engraved in a plaque and placed in the Puerta del Sol to commemorate the occupation, much to the dismay of its political opponents. These dynamic visual and verbal images of awakening stand in contrast to the reality of the economic crisis, the global stagnation of capital. Alex Iván Arévalo Salinas highlights the value of the 15M's invitation to citizens to take an active part in shaping their society: "insta e interpela al ciudadano a la reflexión y a la participación, donde se emite una crítica directa sobre los actores que

generan la violencia o la exclusión" (196). Rather than continuing as resigned victims of adverse circumstances, the 15M offered an opportunity for its participants to partake actively in a collective, to denounce the corruption of those in power, to insist on fair representation and to model new forms of coexistence.

One subject interviewed in the *15M* documentary explains how the movement has facilitated a closer examination of interhuman relationships and dependencies: "La idea dominante . . . es que cada cual se preocupa de lo suyo, y luego de los demás, pues mala suerte. . . . El 15M desmiente eso." An anecdote from one of the documentary's co-creators, Pablo Soto, illustrates this sentiment in action. Soto, who has a physical disability, tells how he was thrown to the ground by police in the Puerta del Sol. The audience does not know that Soto has a disability until the narrator (Grueso) indicates: "Pablo tiene problemas de movilidad, y no puede levantarse solo. Menos mal que otro amigo le encontró y le ayudó, porque el policía que le tiró al suelo se largó de allí" (*15M*). Despite his exposure to police violence, Soto says he remained unafraid and continued his activism. In fact, he now works in Madrid city government. The assistance offered to Soto to get up off the ground is perhaps emblematic of the spirit the 15M proposes to embody, of cooperative interdependence in place of the neoliberal competition that created the crisis itself. These images from the 15M illustrate how the questioning of cultural norms regarding diverse abilities and traditional gender roles can inspire fruitful new forms of social relationship.

I. "La economía es cultura": Expressions of the economic crisis

This dissertation project focuses upon literary and cultural production of the Spanish State between 2005 and 2015, the precarious years of the economic crisis. I examine how differences in ability as well as gender and sexual identity work together to determine the

paradigm of viable citizenship in a climate of crisis. I investigate how the requirements of binary gender and heterosexuality inform the construction of the medically-approved, able body, helping to construct a "normalized" subject—an ideal citizen whose body is capable of work and full participation in society according to traditional gender roles. I examine neoliberal capitalist ideologies of productivity and self-reliance, interrogating the way these concepts are intertwined with requirements for gendered citizenship. In dominant, heteronormative culture, gender norms are closely tied to the body's appearance and ability: masculinity is conflated with robust able-bodiedness, and ideal femininity signifies conformity to standards of beauty and the capacity for reproduction. Furthermore, while public participation in the workforce is a traditional requirement of men, women's private and unremunerated caregiving continues to undergird the economy. Disability studies scholars including Robert McRuer and Lennard Davis trace the modern idea of able-bodiedness to the rise of industrial capitalism, which required bodies capable of labor. As both McRuer and others such as Michel Foucault demonstrate, it was with the industrial age, also, that the nuclear family emerged as the essential building block of a stable society, rooted in heterosexual marriage and a gendered division of labor. Since both disability and queerness can be considered deviations from norms based in the capitalist economy, I interrogate the effect of the global economic crisis on the way in which ability, gender and sexuality are engaged to measure citizens' usefulness. In the words of Manuel Castells, the economy *is* culture: "La economía es cultura, o sea, valores y creencias que guían nuestro comportamiento" ("Culturas"). Undeniably, a crisis of the economy will likewise produce an upheaval in the fabric of culture, inevitably shifting values and practices.

The unifying thread of this corpus is the representation of non-normative subjects at risk of becoming superfluous to society. It is unsurprising that these figures should abound in cultural

production in time of capitalist crisis. Considering that the capitalist economy itself is destined to concentrate wealth in the hands of a few, it is inevitable that some percentage of humanity will become excessive to the system, and that this percentage will increase with a stagnation of the global flow of capital. Among those most expendable are those with disabilities who cannot participate in the labor market, and caregivers of the disabled—often women—who are also barred from "productive" work. Others who lack a valued place in industrial society include women not fulfilling the role of mother and caregiver and LGBTQ people not engaged in reproductive sexuality. In reading selected narratives of non-conformity, I ask how these vulnerable individuals are either included or excluded from notions of Spanishness, attentive to the manner in which their precarious lives tell the story of the economic crisis in Spain.

While analyzing literary and filmic representations of disability in precarious times, I ask whether a crisis of capitalism catalyzes a shift toward an innovative paradigm of citizenship that values interdependence and recourse to common sources of support. How might the recognition of vulnerability as an inevitable part of the human experience lead to a shift in paradigms of economic and personal relations? Or, conversely, when and why does disability remain framed as a burden to be overcome by heroic means, thus preserving and reinforcing neoliberal values? How do deviations from binary gender, traditional gender roles and normative sexuality suggest other ways of being human and of forming affective bonds with others? I argue that these topics are of particular urgency in the present day, as a return to economic prosperity is promised through the elimination of scapegoats, making new distinctions between productive and unproductive citizens.

II. "La dependencia no es viable": Dependent bodies in precarity

As I discuss portrayals of disability that have emerged from the cultural landscape of the crisis, I keep in mind also the lived reality of disability in the present-day Spanish State. Beyond the economic workings that led to the burst of the housing bubble and a global stagnation of capital, I acknowledge the human experience of the crisis and the changed relationship of the individual to labor, consumption, and the state. Ada Colau and Adrià Alemany remind uso of the importance of paying attention to the lives and voices beyond the statistics: "detrás de las cifras hay personas, vivencias, proyectos que se hacen añicos, sueños que se convierten en la peor de las pesadillas. Vidas hipotecadas, voces y testimonios que ponen rostro a los números y a las frías estadísticas" (21). I draw upon the work of such scholars as Castells, who studies the cultural effects of the crisis; Luis Moreno Caballud, who analyzes anti-capitalist forms of cultural production as resistance; and Luisa Elena Delgado, who theorizes what it means to be counted—or not counted—as part of the Spanish nation in a moment of crisis. My contribution differs from other crisis scholarship because of my focus on the body; I inquire into disability, gender and sexuality as intersecting factors that determine who is included in and excluded from the nation in this economic climate.

The crisis shifted Spain from being a welfare state whose public health system was among the best in the world, to a country where, amid ubiquitous unemployment, more and more dependents were denied vital public assistance. The United States National Bureau of Economic Research cites December, 2007 as the beginning of the severe recession that followed the burst of the U.S. housing bubble, a disruption that shook the global financial system to its foundations. Manuel Castells, João Caraça and Gustavo Cardoso describe the crisis as the result of "destructive trends induced by the dynamics of a deregulated global capitalism, anchored in an

unfettered financial market made up of global computer networks and fed by a relentless production of synthetic securities as the source of capital accumulation and capital lending" (2). These sociologists understand "the combination of deregulation and individualism as a way of life" as the economic and cultural facets that collided to create the conditions that gave way to a global financial crisis (Castells, et. al. 2). Such neoliberal trends brought policy that favors privatization of services and limited government involvement in regulating commerce and finance.

The effects of the crisis were especially severe in southern Europe—in Italy, Greece and Spain. In Spain, from the turn of the millennium, the rapid expansion of the housing sector and exorbitant housing costs were accompanied by relaxed regulation on credit lending. In the years following the burst of the real estate bubble, Spanish rates of unemployment soared, reaching their peak at 26% in 2013 (OECD). The youth rate of unemployment (among those between the ages of 15 and 24) reached 55%, placing half a generation outside the normalcy of working life (OECD). Many of these young people left the country, seeking opportunities abroad. It is not only the younger generation who reported a higher rate of unemployment but, not surprisingly, people who have disabilities. In 2012, el Comité Español de Representantes de Personas con Discapacidad (CERMI) reported an unemployment rate among those with disabilities that was 25% higher than that of the rest of Spanish citizens (72). By 2018, unemployment dropped to 16.6% and the crisis was said to have passed; regardless, its effect on Spanish culture is undeniable and sure to be long-standing.

With the ratification of the democratic constitution in 1978, following the decades-long regime of dictator Francisco Franco, the Spanish government established a relationship with its citizens that guaranteed education, health care, and aid to dependents. Despite this contract,

services intended to be publicly funded and democratically managed became increasingly privatized by the early twenty-first century. Under neoliberal policy, the deregulated flow of capital and the elimination or privatization of social services promotes "independence" as the ideal state of achieved human progress. McRuer explains how independence is also upheld as a goal for empowering people with disabilities, since "declarations of disability independence" are "positioned as necessary for full inclusion within society or as simply part of full inclusion within societies understood to place a high value upon independence" ("Taking" 5). "Inclusion" is often embodied by the laborer who is also a consumer, and who lives independently by the fruits of their own labor and the subsequent accumulation of capital. Nonetheless, for some individuals, independence and survival (or even comfort and happiness) are incompatible. McRuer's criticism of neoliberal narratives of progress is particularly relevant to contemporary Spain where, in a climate of crisis, the lived reality of many--regardless of ability--excludes the possibility of "independence" and "inclusion."

Due to the crisis, not surprisingly, funds budgeted for public assistance to families and individuals shrunk. Furthermore, the measurement of dependence was narrowed, excluding many who did not meet strict qualifications from the possibility of aid, and thus laying bare the link between the very definition of disability and the economic needs of the state. Spain's 2006 Ley de Promoción de la Autonomía Personal y Atención a las personas en situación de dependencia (also known as the "Ley de Dependencia") defines "dependence" as follows: "el estado de carácter permanente en que se encuentran las personas que, por razones derivadas de la edad, la enfermedad o la discapacidad, y ligadas a la falta o a la pérdida de autonomía física, mental, intelectual o sensorial, precisan de la atención de otra u otras personas o ayudas importantes para realizar actividades básicas de la vida diaria" (title 1, art. 2). In theory, this

population should have access to publicly-supported care; in practice, with austerity cuts to public aid, many no longer qualified for assistance or were placed on wait lists. Indeed, three days after his 2011 election, President Mariano Rajoy declared: "La dependencia no es viable" (qtd. in Morán). The president's choice of the word "viable," derived from the Latin "vita," or life, makes clear that the state was unable (or unwilling) to sustain the lives of dependents. Clara Valverde Gefaell mobilizes Achille Mbembe's term "necropolítica" to describe how neoliberal policy "lets die" those who are seen as draining the state rather than productively increasing its wealth: "La necropolítica (del griego *necro*, 'muerte') del neoliberalismo no necesita armas para matar a los excluidos. Por medio de sus políticas, los excluidos viven muertos en vida o se les deja morir porque no son rentables" (15-16). That is to say, despite the guarantees made to all citizens by Spain's 1978 constitution, neoliberal policy took over the Spanish economy, resulting in a hierarchization of lives based on potential for productivity.

III. Review of criticism

While disability studies has been an important theoretical field in the area of Anglophone for some time, its exploration by Hispanists remains inchoate, having only emerged in recent years. Two book-length publications currently exist studying disability in contemporary Spain, both published in 2013: Benjamin Fraser's *Disability Studies and Spanish Culture* and Matthew Marr's *Plus Ultra Pluralism: The Politics of Age and Disability in Contemporary Film*. Fraser's study seeks to examine representations of disability in Spain from a cultural studies perspective. To this end, he analyzes film, graphic novels, visual arts, and novels from the democratic era, asking how artistic discourses on disability can contribute to an understanding of Spanish society during these years. Matthew Marr's book also addresses the democratic era but focuses exclusively on filmic texts. He proposes that disability in film inspires a re-thinking of notions of

diversity and national identity in post-Transition Spanish culture.

Other Hispanist scholars of disability include Susan Antebi, Rebecca Janzen, Encarnación Juárez Almendros, and Julie Minich. Antebi's *Carnal Inscriptions: Spanish American Narratives of Corporeal Difference and Disability* (2009) challenges traditional literary analyses of disability as metaphor and insists upon the necessity of examining the material conditions of people with disabilities. Her study encompasses literature and culture from the time of the Conquest through the twentieth century, including materials from multiple parts of Latin America and the United States. Janzen's *The National Body in Mexican Literature: Collective Challenges to Biopolitical Control* (2016) is a study of state and religious oppression expressed in 20th-century Mexican literary representations of the body. Juárez Almendros' *Disabled Bodies in Early Modern Spanish Literature: Prostitutes, Aging Women and Saints* (2017) analyzes discourses of religious and imperial power as they seek to define and control female deviance in early modern Spain.

Minich's *Accessible Citizenships: Disability, Nation and the Cultural Politics of Greater Mexico* (2014) has elucidated my study of Spain as a nation-state that is in crisis, both economically and culturally. She employs critical disability studies as a tool for interrogating hegemonic concepts of nationhood and citizenship. This work focuses on contemporary Chicanx literature and culture, which presents an especially rich opportunity to query constructions of nationhood. Minich investigates how cultural representations of disability either uphold or subvert accepted relationships between citizen and state, disputing, for example, the primacy of the nation-state in guaranteeing human rights and social services.

Minich's reflections on the relationship between citizen and state have informed my own consideration of dwindling support for dependents in Spain. Her questioning of the nation-state

as a means of organizing individuals has also been relevant to my studies of the Spanish State, under which exist the stateless nations of Galicia, the Basque Country and Catalonia, each of which has its own distinct language, culture and history. With the advent of the economic crisis, debates about Catalan independence from Spain have become increasingly heated. On October 1, 2017, the Catalan people voted for independence in a referendum declared illegal by the central Spanish government, followed by police violence and the enforced dissolution of the Catalan government. Minich's studies of the Chicanx culture in the United States are helpful for approaching questions of queerness and non-normative bodies as factors that define citizenship in any stateless nation.

While these Hispanist scholars of disability have been influential to me, this project constitutes a unique intervention in its focus on Spain specifically in the context of the economic crisis, considering the effect of economic upheaval on the definition of citizenship and taking into account gender and sexuality alongside disability as sites of deviance from normalcy. I approach my selection of literary and filmic texts produced between 2005 and 2015 with the following questions in mind: How do literary and filmic representations of disability construct the economic crisis and its effects on Spanish culture? Beyond reading disability as a metaphor for a nation impaired by crisis, I inquire into the material conditions of disabled individuals living in crisis times, understanding literary and cultural texts as valuable responses to a lived reality. In studying this corpus, I ask how cultural narratives employ disability to envision and explore ideas of personal and national belonging in a time of crisis.

IV. Theoretical Framework

I draw from the field of critical disability studies in understanding disability as an intrinsic part of human life, as opposed to representing an exceptional state or event. To analyze

disability in literary and cultural production is to study the human expression of this reality, which stands to illuminate not only shared attitudes toward the differently-abled, but also toward other intertwined aspects of diversity and difference. The two classic models of disability are the medical and the social, generally considered to exist in opposition to one another (Kafer Introduction). The medical model conceives of disability as a pathology that can be diagnosed and normalized through medical intervention, whereas the social model locates disability in the cultural environment, rather than in the individual. For example, the medical model may define disability as a leg-length discrepancy that will limit a patient's mobility, since human beings evolved to walk most effectively on two legs of the same length. The social model, on the other hand, would hold that the person with leg-length discrepancy is disabled by their inaccessible environment. If such a person works in a building with no elevators, for instance, they will be unable to arrive at the office as quickly as someone who can climb stairs with no difficulty, and will be thus disabled from lack of modifications to their workplace. Alison Kafer finds each of these models to be incomplete, given their failure to explore the role of power in their construction. She emphasizes the necessity of recognizing that disability, beyond being produced by cultural barriers, is in fact "a system marking some bodies, ways of thinking, and patterns of movement as deviant and unworthy" (Kafer Chapter 4). To ignore this regulatory process of marking bodies and minds is to depoliticize disability, which in turn hinders resistance to these harmful ideologies. Kafer thus proposes an alternative, the "political/relational" model of disability. She explains that, "to say that something is 'political' in this sense means that it is implicated in relations of power and that those relations, their assumptions, and their effects are contested and contestable, open to dissent and debate" (Kafer Introduction). This scholar allows for a recognition of disability not only as a medical or cultural phenomenon, but as a product of

power relations, given that the ability to delineate the disabled from the abled constitutes a position of power and privilege.

My own approach to disability also engages Judith Butler's theorization of the body's materiality, and the manner in which cultural norms determine which bodies are intelligible and, thus, viable. I argue that it is crucial to recognize that disability is a phenomenon that is read in the body, and that this reading determines whether the individual is counted as human, as viable, and as a productive, welcomed citizen. Butler acknowledges the "invariably public dimension" of the body, which is "constituted as a social phenomenon in the public sphere . . . formed within the crucible of social life" (*Bodies* 26). She uses as an example the designation of binary gender—and thus intelligible humanity—upon infants: "Such attributions or interpellations [of gender] contribute to that field of discourse and power that orchestrates, delimits, and sustains that which qualifies as 'the human'" (Butler *Bodies* xvii). Those who do not conform to notions of binary gender are relegated to "an 'outside,' a domain of unlivability and unintelligibility" (Butler *Bodies* xxx). Conformity to expectations of humanity brings with it the social support for life, whereas failure to conform often makes this support inaccessible, thus placing these unrecognized lives in peril.

Building upon Butler's ideas, McRuer has demonstrated that norms of gender and sexuality are aligned with standards of able-bodiedness, since the ideal, normally gendered body is capable of and disposed to reproduction and the exertion of labor. McRuer develops the concept of "compulsory able-bodiedness in dialogue with Adrienne Rich's 1982 essay "Compulsory Heterosexuality and Lesbian Existence." Just as Rich proposes compulsory heterosexuality as an ideology that requires women to desire men in return for social recognition and acceptance, compulsory able-bodiedness denotes the culturally-imposed necessity of having

a body and mind capable of a certain level of productive activity. McRuer establishes that a "perfect" performance of heterosexuality relies on able-bodiedness as part of its execution, felt as a sense of culturally-approved "wholeness" (*Crip* Introduction). He demonstrates that both compulsory heterosexuality and compulsory able-bodiedness are generally imperceptible, thus allowing these identities to pass as "common sense" manifestations of normalcy. I follow McRuer's theory that compulsory heterosexuality and compulsory able-bodiedness work together to construct an ideal subject who is defined by what he or she is not: queer and/or disabled (*Crip* Introduction).

In this project, I acknowledge disability and queerness as intersecting axes of abnormality that challenge expectations of livable reality in ways that stand to be informative in a time of social and economic crisis. Butler reminds us that queerness is "a site of collective contestation, the point of departure for a set of historical reflections and futural imaginings . . . never fully owned, but always and only redeployed, twisted, queered from a prior usage and in the direction of urgent and expanding political purposes" (*Bodies* 173). In other words, rather than attributing a single, fixed definition to the term "queer," it is more advantageous to allow the term's further evolution and expansion to different forms of resistance to oppressive norms. The term "crip," similarly, is a word reappropriated from the derogatory "cripple." McRuer, too, hesitates to conclusively define the term, and instead proposes "crip theory" as the study of "how bodies and disabilities have been conceived and materialized in multiple cultural locations, and how they might be understood and imaged as forms of resistance to cultural homogenization" (*Crip* Chapter 1). While the words "queer" and "crip" are always haunted by their abusive history, their utterance makes visible the weaknesses in the norms they seek to question. Ultimately, both heterosexuality and able-bodiedness constitute unattainable fictions, goals impossible to achieve.

In re-stating Butler's theorization of heterosexual norms, McRuer maintains that all people are "virtually disabled" not only since, using Butler's words, "able-bodied norms are 'intrinsically impossible to embody' fully," but also because "able-bodied status is always temporary, disability being the one identity category that all people will embody if they live long enough" (*Crip* Introduction). Identifying the weaknesses in these norms creates space for resistance, which is crucial at a time when many dominant ideologies find themselves in crisis. In the texts I study, I ask how queerness and cripness can thus become empowering, serving as a point of departure for imagining alternative ways of being when traditional modes have failed.

The field of disability studies offers a diverse array of rich theoretical texts that have enriched this project. Further works that have influenced the following studies are those of S. Lochlann Jain, Nancy J. Hirschmann, Rosemarie Garland-Thompson, and Eva Feder Kittay. I draw from Lochlann Jain's meditations on breast cancer's effect on both the body's ability and its expression of gender. This discussion is further scaffolded by Rosemarie Garland-Thompson's groundbreaking analysis of disability's intersection with other elements of difference including gender and race. Nancy J. Hirschmann's consideration of the fear inspired by the disabled body is also relevant to anxieties raised by the differently gendered, which in turn inform the social dynamics that shape disability as a concept. Eva Feder Kittay's writings on the care of severely disabled dependents allow for a particular consideration of the gendered nature of caregiving and its implications for feminism and socioeconomic status. Each of these texts has helped highlight different aspects and implications of disability's representation in literary and cultural texts of the Spanish crisis.

V. Chapter summaries

This dissertation is divided into four chapters. In the first, "Unlivable: Discarded Bodies in Elvira Lindo's *Una palabra tuya* (2005)" I propose waste as a way to understand how dominant power structures marginalize lives in both the novel and its 2008 film adaptation, directed by Ángeles Gonzáles-Sinde. The protagonist and narrator, Rosario, works as a barrendera, or street cleaner, with her friend Milagros. While considering these women's socioeconomic instability and the repulsive nature of their profession, I seek also to understand how their non-normative embodiment and sexuality removes them from the sphere of that which qualifies as human, aligning them with the trash they collect.

Disability is present in this narrative in the form of dementia, a severely debilitating condition suffered by Rosario's mother, Encarnación. Rosario's largely unmitigated struggles with caregiving call into question normative family structures and cultural practices of caring for dependents. Neither Encarnación nor Milagros, who is both queer and unable to bear children, survives the end; both can be understood to be unviable, less than human, on the level of the garbage that pervades the novel. Rosario, instead, is reincorporated into society by virtue of her learned conformity to gendered, sexual, and reproductive norms.

In 2005, the year of the novel's publication, these characters' economic precarity is presented as exceptional. Nonetheless, the burst of the real estate bubble looms only a few years away. I consider the novel and the film as they can be read in the context of the crisis that closely follows, at a time when more and more Spaniards found themselves in "trabajos basura," earning dismal salaries under subprime conditions. I examine the ways that both the literary and filmic texts evidence neoliberal ideology's categorization of some bodies as superfluous junk, while others are retained as useful.

In Chapter 2, "Motionless: Disability and Snow White in Narratives of the Crisis," I analyze three versions of the Snow White story: Belén Gopegui's 2007 novel, *El padre de Blancanieves*; Pablo Berger's 2012 film, *Blancanieves*; and Marta Sanz's 2014 short story, "Las palabras que ensucian el ruido del mundo," illustrated by photographer Clemente Bernad. I read the legend of Snow White as a story of disability, of a paralyzing poison that banishes the heroine to the margins of society. These works, through presenting alternative forms of community, provide compelling insight for a cultural moment when the stagnation of capital has incapacitated the Spanish economy.

Gopegui's novel *El padre de Blancanieves* calls upon its implicitly "normal," middle class interlocutors to recognize their obligation to more vulnerable members of society, including immigrants and those with disabilities. This work questions the Snow White legend's misogynist assumption that the heroine's stepmother should bear all responsibility for her poisoning, asking why no one else intervened, including the absent paternal figure. Berger, in his film *Blancanieves*, places the quadriplegic body of a wounded bullfighter in 1920s Andalucía, inspiring reflection upon traditional ideas of Spanishness. The practices of bullfighting and flamenco imbue the film's visual language and soundtrack with vibrant movement, which comes to symbolize happiness, wellbeing, and cultural belonging. Immobility, in contrast, evokes tragedy, exclusion, and isolation. Meanwhile, the community formed by Snow White and her "dwarf" companions displays an unconventional understanding of kinship and acceptance.

Sanz's short story "Las palabras que ensucian el ruido del mundo," accompanied by Clemente Bernad's photography, reconceptualizes the tale of Snow White as one of feminist solidarity. In this version, Snow White's hyper-fertility and her stepmother's infertility construct two non-normative female bodies that defy imperatives of female sexuality and maternity.

Bernad's photography juxtaposes this text with imagery of Saharan refugee women, individuals deprived of nationhood, whose very existence resists both patriarchal norms of women's roles and norms of citizenship as a force that categorizes human beings. Each of the works studied in this chapter utilizes a familiar folk tale to inspire the imagination of collective bonds that oppose the ideology of capitalist competition that has led to crisis.

My third chapter, "Todos en el mismo saco": Disability and the Housing Crisis in Marta Sanz's *Black, black, black* (2010)", analyzes the use of the detective genre to critique the greed that created the housing crisis in Spain. Corrupt practices of credit lending and property development have made housing unaffordable for many Spaniards for several decades; the problem has only become more severe with the crisis, resulting in widespread foreclosures. Sanz's novel tells the story of the investigation of a young woman's murder in Madrid. My analysis focuses on the narration of Paula Quiñones, a woman with an orthopedic disability whose ability to empathetically "read" the social context allows her to solve the crime, despite her limited mobility. Paula's role as narrator and protagonist contradicts the common cultural and literary positioning of people with disabilities as victims. Her own contact with ableism and sexism informs her understanding of this individual case of violence as rooted in systemic inequality and conditions of desperation.

The narrative's setting in a diversely populated urban apartment building allows for consideration of what types of people are included or excluded from notions of Spanish citizenship. Sanz utilizes the detective genre to expose dominant tendencies of criminalizing the economically disadvantaged, immigrants, racial minorities and people with disabilities. To the contrary, Paula's queer ex-husband, a professional detective, is normalized and enabled to participate in male privilege, which counterintuitively proves a barrier to his solving the crime.

The female protagonist's identification with culturally excluded groups instead allows her to discern the true criminal element, rather than relying on racist or classist assumptions.

The final chapter, Post-Op in the Real World: Cancer and Queer Resistance in Isabel Franc and Susanna Martín's *Alicia en un mundo real* (2011)," discusses a graphic novel created by a queer, Catalan author and artist team: Isabel Franc and Susanna Martín. This work presents a counterpoint to the heteronormative and ableist perspectives studied in the first chapter of this project. The queer protagonist, Alicia, is diagnosed with breast cancer and undergoes treatment that includes a unilateral mastectomy. While the crisis of cancer causes Alicia's body to fail to conform to norms of able-bodiedness as well as gender, she persists with resolute efforts to continue her pursuit of happiness as an inalienable right of citizenship.

My reading understands breast cancer as a form of disability, as the condition and its treatment obstructs conformity to cultural imperatives of work, productivity and independence. Drawings of Alicia's hectic, pre-cancer life in the workplace contrast with images of the debilitating--and sometimes shocking--effects of illness and medical intervention on the body. These panels are interspersed with portraits of the queer protagonist as superhero(ine), who responds to the crisis of cancer with a resolute pursuit of happiness that questions neoliberal, ableist and heteronormative promises of the good life. This protagonist's embracing of her post-operative body, enjoying sexual relationships both before *and* after her surgery, defies normative notions of female embodiment and sexuality. This work diverges from mainstream cancer narratives, in which the disease and its treatment often decimate women's sexual desire and sense of attractiveness. By exposing and eschewing cultural imperatives of compulsory able-bodiedness and compulsory heterosexuality, this graphic novel serves to validate a variety of diverse breast cancer experiences, particularly those seen as lying outside the realm of the

commonplace.

My study of this work also places it into dialogue with other examples from Catalan culture, proposing that the concept of Catalan national identity can question all kinds of normative identity. While *Alicia*'s story is told in Spanish, the narrative and its accompanying images portray Catalonia and its diverse LGBTQ community. My analysis of Franc and Martín's work references publications from Grup Àgata, a Catalan organization that supports women with breast cancer in more gender-normative ways that include the promotion of prostheses and reconstructive surgery. I also discuss the work of the radical activist group, Post-op, which celebrates the sexuality of people with disabilities. Finally, I examine the intertextuality of the graphic novel with the work of Catalan poet Maria Mercè Marçal, who also experienced cancer. I ask how cultural production of this stateless nation represents queer and non-normative bodies, as well as alternative notions of citizenship.

VI. Precarious Embodiments

In the title of this project, I apply the descriptor "precarious" to the lives represented in the works I study. In these literary narratives and films, I find bodies in a state of precarity due to their dependence upon others, in a climate of neoliberalism that emphasizes independence and competition. I find bodies that are unstable, ever shifting and changing in level of ability, in performed gender, and in sexual orientation. I find bodies that are imperiled, culturally illegible, materially unsupported, existing outside the limits of citizenship. These subjects, through occupying narrative and filmic space, subvert dominant ideologies and demonstrate and exemplify how culture can lead the way to answering urgent questions in times of upheaval and despair.

Chapter 1

Unlivable: Discarded Bodies in Elvira Lindo's *Una palabra tuya* (2005)

Banana peels, chicken feet, diapers, used condoms: garbage repulses us. There is no place for it in our ordered world, so we strive to distinguish and remove ourselves from it. Nonetheless, we are inherently connected to garbage; it is the byproduct of human activity and industry. In Spanish author Elvira Lindo's 2005 novel *Una palabra tuya*, I propose waste as a way to understand the marginalized lives of the narrator and protagonist, Rosario, and her friend and co-worker, Milagros. These two trash collectors, or barrenderas, exist precariously at the margins of the economy. In this chapter, I examine the manner in which these individuals' non-normative embodiment and sexuality remove them from the sphere of that which qualifies as human, aligning them with the trash they collect. I analyze also the portrayal of Rosario's severely disabled mother, and how the responsibility of her care leads to Rosario's further marginalization. I place Lindo's novel in dialogue with its 2008 film adaptation, directed by Ángeles González-Sinde. I reflect upon the ways in which the audiovisual medium elaborates upon certain thematic aspects of the narrative, such as the idealization of marriage, motherhood, and the traditional family. I argue that, in the context of this narrative, the survival of the individual is reliant upon conformity to norms of binary gender and reproductive heterosexuality, requirements for recognition as a desired citizen.

In 2005, the year *Una palabra tuya* was published, Rosario and Milagros's undesirable occupation and resulting economic precarity is presented as exceptional. Yet, the burst of the real estate bubble looms only a few years away. At the time of the film's release, in 2008, the crisis was incipient, but unemployment and foreclosures were rapidly becoming more frequent. As the crisis prompts the reduction of public funding, increasing numbers of citizens with disabilities

will become disenfranchised. Careful consideration of these works' representation of economic struggle, refuse and social exclusion, and the care of dependents can illuminate cultural attitudes toward these topics, which will become ever more crucial once the crisis erupts.

Elvira Lindo, who was previously known for her award-winning series of children's books, *Manolito Gafotas*, was awarded the 2005 Premio Biblioteca Breve for *Una palabra tuya.* Neither the article nor the film has been much studied by literary critics. The novel begins with an epigraph from the book of Job: "¿Por qué no morí cuando salí del seno, O no expiré al salir del vientre? . . . Pues ahora descansaría tranquilo, Dormiría ya en paz, Con los reyes y los notables de la tierra . . . O ni habría existido, como un aborto ocultado, Como los fetos que no vieron la luz" (qtd. in Lindo 9). These verses frame the narrative that follows as the story of unviable subjects, of those who found no place among the living, who might have been better off had they not been born. Rosario, the novel's narrator, and her long-time friend Milagros are both social outcasts, unmarried women in their 30s working a job that most would find repulsive. In this chapter, I engage Signe Susan Morrison's and Zigmunt Bauman's theorization of waste to understand how the characterization of these women as trash collectors informs their position as citizens. Considering the processes by which some citizens are marked as superfluous, I examine also the portrayal of disability in the novel and the film, particularly how Rosario's unsupported caretaking of her disabled mother makes her life feel unlivable. Finally, drawing from Judith Butler's *Bodies That Matter*, I discuss how non-normative gender serves to dehumanize Rosario and Milagros, and how ultimately the only way to survive in this narrative world is to conform to compulsory heterosexuality.

I. "Nos pasamos el día jaleando con mierda": The streetcleaner narrator

Lindo's novel presents the first-person narrative of a subject who is socially marginalized in numerous aspects: she is a woman who initially shows no interest in marriage or children and is therefore seen by some as gender non-normative and queer; she works with garbage and subsequently becomes associated with filth itself; she acts as unassisted caregiver to her severely disabled mother; and she describes herself as just generally "strange" (Lindo 15). The first-person narrative voice, infused with humor, offers readers an intimate portrait of these experiences, inviting empathy for the characters' experiences of unbelonging. To read this work in light of the fast-approaching crisis is to gain insight into the precarious lives of many who will find themselves in "trabajos basura," without aid in caring for dependents and without resources to support traditional families. In the case of Lindo's narrative, non-conformity signifies unviability; normalization is the only path to survival. The narrator describes the redemptive process by which she meets cultural expectations of heterosexuality and motherhood, whereas her best friend and counterpart, Milagros, remains non-normative. Still, a tension is created by Milagros's central role in the narrative and the affection expressed for her by the narrative voice. While both Lindo's novel and González-Sinde's film appear to promote the erasure of non-normative lives, by making narrative space for Milagros they simultaneously create visibility for such subjects.

Rosario describes her days as a barrendera, arriving at work before dawn, cleaning streets in the morning, enjoying cañas with her co-workers in the afternoon, and then relaxing on the sofa at home. Her mother, Encarnación, becomes frustrated with her lifestyle, encouraging her to use the evenings to learn computer skills or English, in order to have more professional opportunities (Lindo 38). Both Rosario and her mother had viewed her work cleaning streets as temporary, rather than as a long-term career, with all its social implications: "Hacía tan solo un

año pensaba que mi trabajo de barrendera sería transitorio, ahora estaba segura de que lo único que era transitorio eran las estaciones" (Lindo 135). A job cleaning up after others is clearly not what Rosario's middle-class mother had in mind for her daughter. At the beginning of the novel, while Rosario is employed as a custodian at a travel agency, she lies to her mother saying she works in customer service instead: "con mi mesita y mi ordenador, para que no se disgustara" (Lindo 17). Joana Conill, Manuel Castells, Amalia Cardenas and Lisa Servon conducted a study, with the crisis in full effect, in order to discern generational differences in Spaniards' attitudes toward work. They report: "In the focus groups we conducted, retired persons were adamant in their defense of the culture of work, not only as a necessary economic practice but as a moral principle" (Connill, et. al. 223). In contrast, young people were shown to "value their own time and the enjoyment of life over work. They would certainly prefer to work less for lesser pay. For them, happiness is contingent on the ability of each person to choose work according to his or her preference of schedule and kind of activity" (Conill, et. al. 224). The protagonist transitions from one manual labor job to the next, without expressing ambition to pursue another career path or, as her mother suggests, to obtain any kind of professional training, despite feeling ashamed of her job: "para mí este trabajo fue la típica caída en picado en el escalafón social" (Lindo 35). Bauman discusses the prevalence of this attitude specifically among Generation X, of which Rosario would have been a part. According to Bauman, this generation's sense of being unmoored is a result of unattainable goals; it is not enough for younger generations to follow the tested rules of hard work to obtain monetary comfort or professional success, since "it is now a question of the elusiveness (and all too often delusiveness) of ends—fading and dissolving quicker than the time it takes to reach them, unfixed, unreliable and commonly seen as unworthy of undying commitment and dedication" (Bauman 16). Granted, Rosario would have been nearly

forty years old when the housing bubble burst in 2008, thus excluding her from the generation most strongly affected by the economic crisis in Spain. Situations like hers—of young people who grew up middle class resorting to jobs of presumably lower status and pay than those of their parents—will become even more widespread with the advent of the crisis.

Rosario's employment as a barrendera is an example of occupational "flexibility," the neoliberal prescription for the unemployed and the underemployed in the absence of social protections (Lindo 90). Bauman explains that the intended role of the disappearing welfare state was to guard its citizens against the prospect of being relegated to "waste" (89-90). If the state has absolved itself of the responsibility of protecting the citizenry, then it becomes the duty of the citizens themselves to find and accept subpar employment conditions in order to survive. As the crisis worsened, more and more Spaniards found themselves in "trabajos basura," earning dismal salaries under subprime conditions. In 2016, as many as 12.5% of employed Spanish workers reported being underemployed and underpaid in precarious work conditions (Gatoflauta). As David García explains, the desperate situation of the crisis has in fact facilitated the exploitation of workers: "La necesidad de encontrar un trabajo es el caldo de cultivo principal para estas ofertas que, aunque nos parezca mentira, tienen candidatos dispuestos a cogerlas" ("Cómo detectar"). García identifies various factors that define a trabajo basura, including "salario vergonzoso," "horario ilegal," "contrato ilegal" ("Cómo detectar"). Technically, Rosario's job as a street cleaner is not characterized as a trabajo basura in this sense; while Rosario complains about not making a lot of money, she and her colleagues all enjoy leisure time and can afford to live independently in apartments in Madrid. It is not the conditions of the job but the activity of cleaning trash that is viewed as a repulsive, lower class occupation.

Notwithstanding Rosario's general lack of enthusiasm for being a barrendera, her narration does reveal positive and enjoyable aspects of the job. For instance, she works beside her best friend, Milagros, and also becomes integrated into a tight-knit community of colleagues, which leads to a romantic relationship. María T. Pao maintains that Rosario's first-person narration lends authenticity to this account of working-class life: "This experience includes descriptions of Rosario's milieu; concrete, non-idealized details of streetcleaning as work, both unpleasant and pleasant; focus on the material; interaction among workers . . . a three-dimensional scope of psychic states embodied by the characters; the argot and tones of working-class speech" (503). While the narrator does not shy away from sharing honest details of trash collecting, she also tells of the pleasant aspects of her job, which include camaraderie with co-workers as well as enjoyment of the outdoors and an appreciation for the urban space of Madrid.

González Sinde's film utilizes music as one way to capture the affective multivalence of the narrative. The song "Corazón contento," popularized in Spain in 1968 by the singer Marisol, is a motif that is repeated several times throughout the film, though it is not mentioned in the novel. Marisol's version plays during the first minutes of the film, as Rosario and Milagros ride in a car with Rosario's boyfriend, Morsa, through the countryside. This sequence is preceded by a heated public argument between Rosario and Morsa, who is uncomfortable with the fact that Milagros (his girlfriend's friend) wants to bring a box containing a dead cat in the car. The camera alternates between close-up shots of Rosario and Milagros, both of whom wear expressions of sadness and worry, which contrast with the song's upbeat lyrics: "Tengo el corazón contento/ el corazón contento/ y lleno de alegría" (*Una palabra*). The dissimilarity between the emotions evident on the women's faces and those evoked by the soundtrack produces an effect of dark humor, and Milagros does eventually give her friend a small smile.

The song, which would have been popular in Rosario and Milagros's childhood, adds an element of cheerfulness and absurdity to what would otherwise be a tense scene. Milagros's smile, too, hints that it is the women's affective that brings them solace even in difficult moments.

Music is also used to portray the job of street cleaning in a more humorous and carefree manner. In a scene that is included in both the novel and the film, Milagros performs her own version of Frank Sinatra's "My Way" while dancing among garbage. The sequence opens with a high-angle shot of Milagros, standing on a sidewalk strewn with plastic cups and bottles. She sings "My Way" with her own made-up lyrics, wielding a broom as a pretend guitar as she sings: "Al fin, como ven, solo llegué a ser barrendera, ¿y qué? Si lo fundí a mi manera" (*Una palabra*). The camera cuts to a long shot, showing Milagros leaping and dancing along the sidewalk, as though it were a stage. In this sequence, Milagros makes light of the fact that she has never become anything other than a street-cleaner. Her affirmation of living "her own way"—as she dances through the mess she is paid to clean—celebrates, in this moment, the unconventional nature of her character.

While Milagros's spontaneous performance provides a moment of resistance to the idea that street cleaning is miserable work and those who engage in it are unfortunate citizens, the dominant perception of the occupation is abundantly evident in the narrative. Morrison explains the process through which those who clean and collect trash are seen as contaminated by the trash they touch: "People throw things out to clean up. In turn, people who are associated with trash as cleaners or processors become trash in our minds" (99). Rosario tells of how, when the trash collectors gather to eat after work, the bar owner designates a room for them that is separated from the rest of the bar by a screen. This is to spare other customers the sight of trash collectors while eating: "no puedes evitar pensar, cuando ves el conjunto que formamos a la hora

de la comida que todos nos pasamos el día jaleando con mierda" (Lindo 143). It is evident that the presence of the trash collectors would cause disgust, due to their prolonged proximity to and interaction with "shit," as Rosario says. Morrison cites Christopher Schmidt to define waste as "simultaneously civilization's *other* . . . as well as the *trace or remainder* of civilization" (qtd. in Morrison 9). Garbage is inherently human, is the unwanted but inevitable byproduct of human activity. Nonetheless, in order to establish an ordered society, superfluous waste must be removed or concealed. This is Rosario and Milagros' job, as barrenderas, to work at night and in the wee hours of the morning, invisible, making Madrid's public spaces more pleasant and attractive, and carrying away reeking bags of trash from private homes. Bauman describes trash collectors as "the unsung heroes of modernity," enabling the rest of industrial society to inhabit a world removed from the waste it produces: "Day in day out, they refresh and make salient again the borderline between normality and pathology, health and illness, the desirable and the revolting, the accepted and the rejected" (28). If "normality" is understood as a clean and healthy environment, free of garbage, then garbage itself represents "pathology." It follows, then, that those who collect trash tend to be seen as pathological and abhorrent.

Those who are associated with waste, then, become unwelcome citizens; it is preferred that they remain hidden from view. Street cleaners, despite their vital role in the function of society, are frequently disregarded and unseen by others. For Morrison, garbage collection can be understood as staging a display of urban order: "For the city to maintain its identity as a well-functioning organism, filth needs to be hidden. Public filth undermines the authority of urban infrastructure" (75). A well-run city is a clean city, and because the cleaning usually occurs out of sight, at low-traffic hours, its process goes undetected. Rosario shares various anecdotes about her invisibility as an individual who works cleaning public spaces. For her, cleanup on Friday

mornings is the worst because young people have left behind the refuse of Thursday night's drinking and carousing: "quien más sufre esa venganza, quien más la sufría en ese parque del Matadero . . . éramos nosotras, Milagros y yo, que les limpiábamos la mierda que habían dejado sin consideración, como si tuvieran derecho a tener esclavas" (Lindo 162). Surely those engaging in the practice of botellón, or public drinking that is beloved in Spain, do not consider the experience of having to clean up in order to restore order to parks and streets. According to Morrison, the erasure of garbage collection and those who perform it is a way society sanitizes itself through separation from its own waste: "The more anonymous the person cleaning up, the more unidentified and unidentifiable your own detritus becomes" (83). The dehumanizing of the trash collector allows for minimal identification between those creating and disposing of waste and those cleaning it. Rosario's narration, then, serves as a reminder of the barrenderas' humanity, which is not often taken into account. Friday mornings put Rosario in the worst humor because she reads the disorder of public spaces a lack of empathy on behalf of the "niñatos gilipollas" who have left behind their bottles and vomit (Lindo 162).

Rosario speaks of people who spit on the sidewalk as they pass her, without recognizing that it is she who will then have to clean their bodily fluids, or others who let their dogs defecate on corners that she has just finished clearing (Lindo 44). Both of these are specific examples, beyond just mere litter, of actual biological waste being released into public spaces without regard, which is not only more noxious than, say, discarded papers or containers, but also unsanitary and potentially hazardous. Narrating in second person to her unidentified interlocutors, Rosario describes how, repeatedly, elderly women throw their trash out windows as she passes by:

> ...algunas viejas están vigilando en la ventana, esperando a que pases por debajo y entonces, desde un cuarto, desde un quinto piso, tiran la bolsa de la basura para que tú la recojas, Y la bolsa se revienta al caer, claro. Se esparce toda la basura de la vieja por la acera, las pieles de los plátanos, los desechos del pollo, los restos del cocido, los botes vacíos de las medicinas, el pañal enorme que le pondrá al marido, toda la vida de la vieja se desparrama delante de tus narices para que la recojas (Lindo 44).

The woman in Rosario's description is defined by her refuse, which comes to represent "toda la vida de la vieja." The narrator first names kitchen trash that includes banana peels and chicken bones, the remnants of human nutrition and consumption. She also mentions empty medicine bottles, a common trash item for the elderly, who frequently take many prescriptions. Finally, she names an "enormous" adult diaper, implying the presence of actual human excrement, in addition to trash associated with cooking and eating. Following Morrison's line of thought, the action of throwing these items in Rosario's direction is an act of disassociation from waste, causing it to be associated with the one charged with collecting it rather than with the one who produced it. Lindo's text, however, provides the receiving point of view, rather than the point of view of the one engaged in the action of discarding and disassociating from waste.

After repeated instances of people dropping bags of garbage for her to clean up, Rosario finally loses patience and begins spewing insults. In response, a bar owner comes out and defends the older women, implying that Rosario is insensitive to their situation: "qué quieres, ¿que se la coma la porquería a la pobre abuela que o puede ni dar dos pasos? . . . Por Dios, mujer, . . . un poquito de compasión" (Lindo 44). Rosario responds: "¿Y de mí . . . quién tiene compasión de mí?" (Lindo 44). While the bar owner entreats Rosario to have compassion for an elderly, disabled woman, Rosario points out that, as a barrendera, she herself has also become

invisible and dehumanized. A parallel can be read here, then, between the Rosario's invisibility as a street cleaner, and the marginalization of those who are elderly and who have disabilities.

II. "Mi vida es para suicidarse": The burden of unassisted caregiving

Much like the narrative's graphic imagery of garbage, which society prefers to keep out of sight, Lindo's novel is brutally honest in its portrayal of the responsibilities of caring for an elderly person with dementia—a disturbing topic that is frequently hushed or whitewashed. The narrative is not told chronologically; the reader knows from the first pages that Rosario's mother will become increasingly disabled over the course of several years. Encarnación suffers from Alzheimers and her cognitive abilities deteriorate until the time of her death. These women's story exemplifies the manner in which not only are the elderly and disabled discarded by society, but the work of caregiving causes the caregiver—here, as is typically the case, a woman—to be marginalized as well.

Rosario's descriptions of her ailing mother often align her with garbage; Encarnación hides in the closet among other "useless" items that have been stored out of sight: "La encuentro emboscada bajo los abrigos . . . la dejo dentro, sentada entre zapatos, paraguas, y esas cien mil cosas inútiles que yo tiraré al contenedor algún día, en cuanto ella muera" (Lindo 68). Encarnación is here framed as an object that has outlived its usefulness, and should therefore be cast aside. Morrison demonstrates the cultural link between the elderly and garbage, as both are the considered society's unwanted leftovers: "Linked to rubbish, the elderly, along with the very young, wear diapers. Neither contributes economically to society, but children have at least the potential to one day be useful. . . . in order not to be reminded that we ourselves will one day be seen as trash, we sequester the elderly, those visible ghosts who we refuse to remember" (Morrison 116-17). Silvia Federici notes that this perception of the elderly is a significant

departure from their "being treasured as they were in many precapitalist societies as depositories of the collective memory and experience" (16). While both childcare and eldercare are devalued labor largely performed by women, the latter holds even less value by the measurement of the capitalist economy. Like others with disabilities, the elderly can be seen as "surplus" because of their inability to produce or participate in the workforce, either in the present or the future. The presence of the elderly also serves as an unwelcome reminder that, in the words of Robert McRuer, "able-bodied status is always temporary, disability being the one identity category that all people will embody if they live long enough" (*Crip* Introduction). The elderly become framed as burdensome because of their dependence upon others and for their failure to meet the physical requirements of the labor economy, which are the norms that draw the parameters of ability and disability (McRuer *Crip* Introduction). This means, consequently, that we all live in danger of becoming waste: ". . . assignment to 'waste' becomes everybody's potential prospect—one of the two poles between which everybody's present and future social standing oscillates" (Bauman 71). While most people prefer to think of themselves as distinct and safe from garbage, this separation is neither as wide nor as fixed as it seems.

While the elderly and disabled are understood as superfluous for their lack of productivity, their caregivers often suffer the same fate, since caregiving prevents full participation in the labor economy. The insufficiency of aid to dependents, which makes their care almost impossible, is evident in Lindo's narrative. Spain's aging population, due to increased longevity and decreasing birth rates, was among the stated motives for the 2006 Ley de Dependencia, ratified the year after Lindo's novel was published. In the year of the novel's publication, the median age was 41.17 years (Sánchez). This number has increased steadily, with a median age of 43.68 years reported in 2017, with individuals of 65 years of age or older

constituting 20% of the population (Sánchez). In the words of the law's own "Exposición de motivos": "es necesario considerar el importante crecimiento de la población de más de 65 años, que se ha duplicado en los últimos 30 años, para pasar de 3,3 millones de personas en 1970 (un 9,7 por ciento de la población total) a más de 6,6 millones en 2000 (16,6 por ciento)" (Ley 39/2006). The "new reality of the aging population" is stated as the need for updated legislation on dependency, given that more and more Spanish citizens experience "problems" of dependency at the end of their lives (Ley 39/2006). These statements prove that situations like Rosario and Encarnación's were not exceptional in their cultural context, and that Spanish lawmakers realized that, regardless of constitutional guarantees, public support for dependents and their families was inadequate. Article 50 of the Spanish Constitution of 1978 reads as follows: "Los poderes públicos garantizarán, mediante pensiones adecuadas y periódicamente actualizadas, la suficiencia económica a los ciudadanos durante la tercera edad. Asimismo, y con independencia de las obligaciones familiares, promoverán su bienestar mediante un sistema de servicios sociales que atenderán sus problemas específicos de salud, vivienda, cultura y ocio." The increasing number of elderly citizens paired with a decreasing number of younger workers and the national economy in crisis has threatened public assistance to the elderly. In the context of Lindo's novel, Rosario cares for her mother without aid from anyone but her friend Milagros; her only sister lives in Barcelona and claims to be occupied with her own family, and as a working-class individual, Rosario is unable to afford private assistance. She speaks with sarcasm of the "social services" provided to her mother: "una asistente social que viene de higos a brevas, un día de la semana y le canta unas cositas y le da la merienda como a los niños chicos, vale, muy bonito todo" (Lindo 119). These visits from the social worker are a formality rather than a significant source of assistance.

While it is true that the novel as a whole ultimately reinforces heteronormative ideals, Rosario's account of caregiving does question idealized notions of family and women's role in them. Federici explains how the capitalist system has caused domestic labor to become intertwined with femaleness: "Housework was transformed into a natural attribute, rather than being recognized as work, because it was destined to be unwaged. Capital had to convince us that it is a natural, unavoidable, and even fulfilling activity to make us accept working without a wage" (16). Despite being female, Rosario evidences no enjoyment of caregiving and, until the novel's conclusion, expresses no desire to pursue it in the future. She shares the details of daily life with her disabled and dying mother with a priest, a representative of the Catholic Church, which has prescribed gender roles in Spain for centuries. She asks the priest (and, implicitly, the reader) to try to identify with her experience:

> Póngase en mi lugar . . . dos años en los que tu madre va perdiendo la noción hasta para orientarse por el pasillo de su casa, dos años en los que ya no ordena sus horas de sueño, ni el camino de la cuchara hasta la boca, ni controla sus esfínteres, dos años en los que se pasa el día en el armario, dos años en lo que grita por las noches, dos años para comerte todo eso tú sola, sola, con una hermana que se lava las manos y con una asistente social que viene de higos a brevas, un día a la semana . . . . Comprenderá que en dos años yo también tenía derecho a perder la cabeza (Lindo 118-19).

While the priest offers a superficial attempt at expressing empathy, he is more focused on Rosario's sexual transgressions with Morsa than on helping her to heal from the pain of her mother's illness and death. It is not surprising that a priest—a man, without dependents, and part of a cultural institution that has long enforced women's roles as caregivers—is unable to provide any solace.

For Rosario, the responsibility of caring for her mother is so all-encompassing that it results in her own social isolation and marginalization. Within the first pages of the novel, the narrator paints an image of caring for an incontinent mother whom she had to physically restrain in order to avoid her covering the walls with her own excrement: “No me reconocía ni a mí que le cambiaba el pañal todos los días y la ataba a la silla para que no se lo hiciera en el pasillo y pintara con sus excrementos las paredes. Yo la avisaba, mamá, te ato, te voy a atar” (Lindo 12). Other unthinkable horrors of this impossible caregiving situation include Rosario locking her mother in a closet to prevent her from wandering into the bedroom while she has sex. Rosario justifies this act to herself because her mother goes into the closet voluntarily, due to her dementia (Lindo 65). In the midst of this consuming responsibility, Rosario declares her own life unlivable: “Milagros, mi vida es para suicidarse” (Lindo 33). This is not the only time she describes the burden of caretaking as life-threatening, as she also says: “mi madre me había puesto una soga al cuello” (Lindo 137). Rosario’s testimony as caretaker exemplifies the disenfranchisement described by Eva Feder Kittay as a product of neoliberal ideology. Feder Kittay discusses the manner in which neoliberal society is based upon the ideal of independence, which is not a realistic way for humans to live, and results in the oppression of both dependents and caregivers: “as long as the bounds of justice are drawn within reciprocal relations among free and equal persons, dependents will continue to remain disenfranchised, and dependency workers who are otherwise fully capable and cooperating members of society will continue to share varying degrees of the dependents’ disenfranchisement” (77). Because the elderly and the severely disabled are denied a place in society as valued citizens, those who care for them have no place, either. Rosario is doubly marginalized as a garbage collector and a caregiver; neither her public nor her private labor is culturally valued.

The film adaptation of *Una palabra tuya* presents a somewhat more lighthearted portrayal of Alzheimers caregiving. In the first few pages of the novel, as referenced above, Rosario explains that her disabled mother paints the walls with her own excrement if not restrained. This is, of course, a horrifying prospect, on the one hand, because of the repulsiveness of the image, and on the other because it constitutes an extreme loss of dignity on the part of the disabled parent. While this scene is not elaborated in the novel, its mention can be shocking to readers, and emphasizes the extraordinary challenge of Rosario's caretaking role. The film does indeed include a sequence of Encarnación drawing on the walls, but with crayons rather than excrement. The sequence begins with the camera panning backward to reveal a white wall covered in red and blue scribbles. Rosario appears, walking slowly and looking worried, touching the walls as she passes. As an eerie instrumental soundtrack plays, the camera turns to show Encarnación, intently covering the walls with crayon squiggles, her hair disheveled. This is followed by a cut to Rosario and Milagros cleaning the walls, and Rosario comments, "Ay, Milagros, mi vida es que es para suicidarse" (*Una palabra*) The scenario of an adult person marking up walls with crayons, combined with Encarnación's excentric appearance, Rosario's facial expression of concern and shock, and the soundtrack surely indicate an abnormal situation, but one that is benign in nature.

Drawing on a wall is a mischievous act commonly committed by children; the choice to have Encarnación use red and blue crayons, and to have her daughter catch her in this transgression, implies a role reversal that is common among those who care for elderly or disabled parents. Brightly-colored crayons, while they create an inconvenient mess, lack the element of shock and revulsion that drawing with excrement involves. Furthermore, the soundtrack is characterized by what sounds like a theremin**,** an instrument used to create sound

effects for classic science fiction films such as *The Day the Earth Stood Still* (1951). To pair these otherworldly sounds with this particular sequence inflects Encaración's transgression with dark humor, showing her activity to be almost whimsical, rather than horrific and disgusting. Nevertheless, in the following sequence, Rosario is seen cleaning up after her mother, and commenting that she feels like committing suicide. She makes this declaration with her back to the camera, partially obscured by a wall, and with her head outside the frame since she is standing on a step stool. Milagros, instead, occupies the center of the frame, placing more focus on her reaction than on Rosario's statement. She stops cleaning and promises, while breaking into tears, that she will join Rosario in suicide if she ever really decides to take her own life. Rosario is surprised, insisting "Que no lo decía por mí, que lo decía, pues, por decir, así, en general" (*Una palabra*). Milagros embraces Rosario, crying, while Rosario appears uncomfortable, wearing cleaning gloves and still holding a sponge, and does not return the embrace. This scene turns out to be a poignant foreshadowing, given that Milagros does later take her own life.

The scene unfolds similarly in the novel, but is elaborated by internal reflection from Rosario. She explains: "Yo lo decía para desahogarme, pero en el fondo, no tengo valor para eso, ni quiero, yo adoro la vida, aunque la vida haya sido muy perra conmigo y me haya puesto las cosas difíciles y no me haya concedido el dinero necesario para cambiar" (Lindo 33). While Rosario explains that her threat of suicide was merely an exaggeration, she also admits that it was the difficulties of caring for her mother that provoked it. She mentions specifically role of her financial situation in her frustrations, that her shortage of money also made it very difficult to improve her life. Spain's Instituto Nacional de Estadística reported a steady rise in suicides from the start of the economic crisis in 2008; by 2014, the number of Spaniards who took their own

lives doubled that of those who died in traffic accidents (Fonseca). While Barcelona psychiatrist Santiago Durán-Sindreu warns that merely blaming the crisis for this increase in suicides is reductive, it is undeniable that financial desperation can cause some to feel that their lives are not worth living (qtd. in Fonseca).

In the film, the song "Corazón contento" is incorporated into a scene of affection between Milagros and Encarnación, an interaction that is absent from the novel, and which portrays caregiving as an act of love. The sequence immediately preceding takes place in a rural cemetery, saturated with sunlight and accompanied by slow-paced, atmospheric music and the sounds of birds. The grave marker of Milagros's mother is framed in a tight shot: a wrought-iron cross that bears a photo of the deceased, a young woman smiling slightly. A plaque identifies her as "Milagros León" and indicates her brief lifespan of twenty-nine years. When Rosario asks her friend if she wishes to pray at her mother's grave, she responds: "rézale tú, si quieres" (*Una palabra*). This sequence cuts to a long shot of Encarnación's bedroom. The dying woman lies in bed, looking up at her daughter's friend, who takes her hand, smiling and singing "Corazón contento." The tenderness of singing to an elderly person with dementia recalls the way a caregiver might comfort a child.

> Yo quisiera que sepas
> Que nunca quise asi
> Que mi vida comienza
> Cuando te conocí
>
> Tú eres como el sol de la mañana
> Que entra por mi ventana (qtd. in *Una palabra*).

These lyrics express sentiments that one would not expect to be directed toward someone with dementia, especially given the way that caring for Encarnación has been framed as an unpleasant burden. In fact, Milagros's gestures toward her friend's mother constitute the greatest affection expressed toward her in the entire film. That the film cuts from the cemetery, in which Milagros expresses disinterest in her own mother's grave, to Encarnación's bedroom suggests that hereditary family does not motivate the young woman's affective bonds. She appears to have a greater attachment to Rosario's mother than to her own, even though her relationship with Encarnación is one of choice, rather than of familial obligation. Despite having been described as abnormally gendered, Milagros proves more disposed to the feminized activity of caregiving than any other woman in the narrative. The camera cuts from her singing at Encarnación's bedside to outside the bedroom door, where Rosario's sister Palmira asks "¿Qué hace aquí esa tía, si no es de la familia?" (*Una palabra*). Ironically, the only person who has supported Rosario in caring for her mother is Milagros, not Palmira, who is blood-related family.

The novel's description of Encarnación's death draws into relief the falsehood of cultural fantasies about caregiving as a feminine task obligated by family structures. Palmira notes the reflection of her and Rosario in the mirror on a closet door across from their dying mother's bed and asks: "¿a que parecemos un cuadro antiguo?" (Lindo 94). Rosario, in her narration, agrees: "Un cuadro antiguo. Las dos hijas inclinadas sobre la madre agonizante. La luz pobre de la lámpara. . . . La colcha sedosa de color granate, el crucifijo en lo alto, el rosario colgando de un lado del cabecero. Sí, era el cuadro antiguo de una madre antigua" (Lindo 94). While the film also includes a sequence of Rosario and Palmira at their mother's deathbed, the literary image of the "cuadro antiguo" is not replicated, despite its visual richness. Along with the Catholic accoutrements of the crucifix and rosary, this image portrays an idealized family portrait of the

past. This tableau represents the traditional role of daughter in relation to their aging mothers, a bond of caregiving and affection, particularly in Catholic, Mediterranean culture. Rosario's narrative of actual caregiving, however, stands in stark contrast to the peaceful scene conjured here. She tells Palmira that she never wants to be a burden, as her mother has been: "yo le tengo dicho a Milagros que si ve que empiezo a perder la cabeza que ponga un remedio rápido, no quiero vivir siendo una rémora, dije. Una rémora, dijo, qué palabra más fea" (Lindo 95). Palmira, who has taken no part in her mother's care, expresses disapproval at Rosario's use of the word "burden" ("remora") to describe her mother. It is obvious that the elder sister conserves an idealized notion of caregiving, refusing to recognize the realty of caring for a disabled dependent without support.

It is not so much Encarnación's disability in and of itself but the isolation and exhaustion of unassisted caregiving that makes Rosario's life unlivable. Federici, also drawing from her own biography as a Mediterranean woman, calls for "a cultural revolution . . . in the concept of old age, against its degraded representation as a fiscal burden on the state, on one side and, on the other, an 'optional' stage in life that we can overcome and even prevent, if we adopt the right medical technology and the 'life enhancing' devises disgorged by the market" (116). In reality, there is no medical cure for Alzheimers or for many debilitating conditions that come with age. While some can afford surgeries and therapies to thwart the aging process, for most, the experience of disability that accompanies advanced age is inevitable, should we live long enough. Federici asks how society would be different—for both the elderly and their caretakers—were we to recognize aging as a natural part of human life, rather than framing it as a drain on resources meant for the younger. Milagros's sharing in the care of her friend's mother, obligated neither by familial relation nor by capital exchange, is precisely a model of caregiving

in common that Federici suggests could improve quality of life for dependents and their (usually female) caregivers.

III. "Los raros nos olemos": Gender non-normativity

In addition to being culturally marginalized for their occupation and socioeconomic status, Rosario and Milagros are also described as unconventionally gendered women. Rosario claims to be "marked with oddness," and says that Milagros, also odd, was drawn to her for this reason: "Yo estoy marcada, marcada . . . . La marca del niño que es raro. Y Milagros reconoció mi marca desde el principio . . . . La rara, que era ella, la rara recién llegada del pueblo, reconoció a la rara que era yo. Los raros nos olemos" (Lindo 15). Rosario goes on to explain, however, that the difference between her and Milagros is that she has strived, her whole life, to fight against her nature and be "normal" (Lindo 15). Throughout the narrative, Rosario reassures herself that she is superior to her friend for being more socially acceptable. Normalcy becomes a form of cultural capital of which she possesses more, at least, than Milagros. Her mother shares this perspective: "Para mi madre, ver que existía un escalafón y que yo estaba por encima de Milagros fue una forma de acomodarse a la idea de que su hija trabajaba en las basuras" (Lindo 41). Normalcy can be understood as a continuum—those who are more normal, or less odd, are more easily integrated into society and, thus, seen more valued as citizens.

Rosario describes her friend's strangeness as nebulous and unidentifiable: "El caso es que tú no podías decir de dónde venía su rareza, pero su rareza ahí estaba, tanto por fuera como por dentro" (Lindo 73). Physically, Milagros is described as both strangely childlike and fat: "de aspecto infantilón, gorda de comer porquerías, inocente hasta rozar la anormalidad" (Lindo 14). She is concretely "odd" because she is a woman who has never had a menstrual period. As an adolescent, knowing that this was abnormal, Milagros would mimick the words and actions of

other girls, pretending to have a period: “sólo escuchó conversaciones de las otras niñas, las espió, supo en qué consistía ese ritual mensual y decidió apuntarse a él aunque ella nunca tuvo sangre, nunca fue mujer, como decíamos las niñas” (Lindo 78). The colloquial equation of having a period with being a woman, while denoting the passage from childhood to adulthood, also serves to equate menstruation with femaleness. By speaking of having a period and using menstrual products, Milagros can be said to engage in the imitation of gender norms, the repeated acts which, as Butler establishes, are what comprise gender itself.

According to Butler, bodies that do not conform to the binary system of gender are illegible as human. She explains that both the subject and the body become material through repeated, performative imitations of cultural norms, which serve “to materialize sexual difference in the service of the consolidation of the heterosexual imperative” (*Bodies* xii). It follows that that binary gender exists to bolster the hegemony of reproductive heterosexuality. Those who fail to correctly perform gender are disqualified from “the human,” relegated to a space of untenable abjection (Butler *Bodies* xvii). The space of garbage and waste that Rosario and Milagros occupy informs their “inhumanity” as illegible subjects who have become invisible to the rest of society.

Rosario shares several instances in which being characterized as masculine—or not feminine—has caused her anxiety. She say she is hurt, for instance, when her mother says that her work as a barrendera is inappropriate for a woman, presumably because it consists of manual labor and interaction with filth (Lindo 41). The implication, here, is that because of her occupation, Rosario is not truly a “mujer femenina . . . mi madre siempre añadía lo de femenina, cosa que me dolía” (Lindo 41). The narrator tells also how she was born looking like a boy and that, in school, she was always chosen to play male parts in plays, which gave her “a

complex": "no había otra niña que tuviera tanta cara de tío como yo" (Lindo 185, 79). She says that, as a child, she had read about the "strange cases" of intersex people, and so she became afraid that she would spontaneously grow a penis: "como yo crecí con el convencimiento de que era portadora de alguna anormalidad, de que era rara o diferente, y como no sabía en qué conisistía esa rareza" (Lindo 173). The narrator characterizes herself, here, with an unidentifiable strangeness, much like that which she attributed earlier to her friend Milagros. For Rosario, the consciousness of this intangible strangeness evolved into a fear of gender nonconformity. Butler speaks of this "terror over losing proper gender," which is intertwined with "the homophobic terror over performing homosexual acts" (*Gender* 182). These childhood anxieties help justify Rosario's meticulous efforts, in adulthood, to appear "normal." It is notable that, in the film adaptation, while the Rosario and Milagros' strangeness and gender non-normativity are mentioned, the actresses who play their characters (Malena Alterio and Esperanza Pedreño) are both conventionally attractive and feminine. Neither appears "masculine," and Esperanza Pedreño is slender, rather than "gorda" as Milagros is described in the novel. The casting of conventionally attractive actresses is of course common practice in the film industry, given that film is a commodity and producers wish to profit from ticket sales. Still, an aspect of these characters' abnormality and marginalization is lost when they are interpreted by beautiful women.

In this narrative, the successful performance of gender—and the viability that accompanies it—is reliant upon reproductive heterosexuality. The second chapter of the book begins with a presumptuous inquiry from a male co-worker as to whether or not Rosario and Milagros are lovers. "No me dijo exactamente si éramos lesbianas, me dijo bolleras. ¿Vosotras dos sois bolleras, no?" (Lindo 29). Rosario is deeply offended by this implication, insisting that

she is not a lesbian, both in dialogue with the male co-worker, Morsa, and in her narration directed at the reader. She even goes so far as to sleep with Morsa—and other men—to prove that she is "normal," or not a lesbian: ". . . a veces, he echado un polvo por no considerarme anormal" (Lindo 57-58). It is evident that, within Rosario's social circles, the only legitimate "sex" is heterosexual intercourse. Morsa later tells her that another male co-worker has accused her of being a virgin, since he says she is a lesbian and all lesbians are virgins (Lindo 59). In this text, not only is "being a woman" tied to having a period, but "having sex," for a woman, necessarily means intercourse with a man.

Butler points out that to label someone as "queer" is to occupy a position of power: "When the term has been used as a paralyzing slur, as the mundane interpellation of pathologized sexuality, it has produced the user of the term as the emblem and vehicle of normalization; the occasion of its utterance, as the discursive regulation of the boundaries of sexual legitimacy" (*Gender* 169). In the case of Lindo's text, the words used are "lesbiana" and "bollera," employed as slurs and clearly utilized, in context, to denote pathology. Because they are words uttered by men (Rosario and Milagros' male co-workers), they are spoken by individuals with greater social power than those they are labeling, a power to delineate who and what is "normal" and "legitimate." Not surprisingly, heterosexuality is never presented as an identity in the narrative, although Rosario considers many times what it means to be "bollera," insisting that having had sex with a woman doesn't actually make one a lesbian: ". . . probablemente era más bollera la tía que estaba deseando acostarse con tías y que no se atrevía, que la tía que lo había hecho porque se había visto empujada por las circunstancias" (Lindo 160). The narrator does confirm that Milagros has indeed had sex with women (Lindo 84). Regardless, she insists on questioning whether her friend is a "pure lesbian," or whether she is just in need of companionship and

intimacy (Lindo 84). Rosario also admits—but only briefly—that she and Milagros did once have sex (Lindo 160). Her choice to sleep with Morsa (and other men), however, is neither motivated by desire or attraction, but instead by the impulse to prove to him and to her co-workers that she is "normal." Milagros, on the other hand, does not share this concern, and appears comfortable being herself, declaring: "A mí me suda lo que piense la gente" (Lindo 179).

IV. "Eso no es humano": Unlivable

Despite her conviction of doing things her own way, Milagros ultimately proves to be a citizen unable to find a place in her society. She fails to be repulsed by garbage, forging a kind of alternative relationship to the refuse she is paid to clear from the public space. Rosario complains about her friend's tendency to forage items from the trash, but Milagros insists that many things are discarded for no reason, and that they still retain value: "¿Y tú no te das cuenta de que hoy en día la gente tira las cosas por tirar en nuestra sociedad?" (Lindo 169). She decides to keep a grill, for instance, which especially disgusts Rosario because it is a tool used for making food. Milagros, nonetheless, finds value in the objects she discovers, that others no longer want. Her most significant find is a living infant, abandoned in a dumpster. The filmic medium allows for a visual association of garbage with the baby. Milagros and Rosario appear off-center in the right half of the frame, next to a dumpster, struggling with the box that holds the infant, whose faint cries can be heard. The full left half of the frame shows the street littered with hundreds of plastic cups from the previous night's botellón. The prevalence of garbage in this mise en scène visually emphasizes the fact that a small human being was tossed aside in the same way as so many unwanted objects.

Milagros immediately bonds with the baby, perhaps not only because she is a maternal

person, but also because, as a person who is also a social outsider, she identifies with this abandoned creature. She says she wants to keep the baby and raise him as her own, attributing his finding to divine intervention: “es mío. Dios lo ha puesto en mi camino” (Lindo 179). From the beginning, Milagros refers to the baby as “el hijo” rather than “el bebé” or “el niño,” instantly placing him in the role of her son, and herself in the role of his mother (Lindo 180). She reveals that she has been praying to a plastic statue of Christ, also scavenged from the trash, and has asked him to send her a child. She interprets the baby’s appearance as miraculous; indeed, to describe the event thus does recall the Biblical tale of the discovery of Moses in the Nile River, especially since Milagros imbues the child with spiritual significance. Another aspect of the baby’s miraculous influence is his ability to turn Milagros into something she has never been: a mother. She explains to Rosario that this is why she asked the Christ statue to send her a baby, because she knows that she is otherwise unable to have children due to her lack of menstruation: “¡No, no puedo, no puedo ser madre! ¡No lo entiendes, no puedo ser madre! Por eso le pedí al Cristo que hiciera el milagro” (Lindo 181-82).

Rosario tries to dissuade her friend from taking the baby home; in the film script (but not in the novel), she says “Milagros, es un bebé, no es una parrilla” (*Una palabra*). Milagros insists that she can care for the child, citing as an example how she cared for Rosario’s disabled mother in her illness, in place of Rosario and her sisters (Lindo 182). While Milagros has already demonstrated her proclivity to caregiving, a talent that Rosario does not share, the baby’s discovery brings into relief the disparity between their feelings toward motherhood, specifically: “¿Tú nunca has querido ser madre, Rosario?” “‘¿Yo?’ se me puso una sonrisa vergonzosa, no sé por qué, seguramente porque no me había atrevido nunca a pensar en esa posibilidad” (Lindo 184). Rosario’s embarrassment at her friend’s question suggests an awareness that to be a

woman who has never wanted to be a mother is abnormal, perhaps even shameful. She ultimately decides not to interfere with Milagros's plan to take the baby home, despite the fact that her friend is violating not only laws but also social norms: "por una vez la generosidad consistía en saltarse las normas y los miedos" (Lindo 183). Notwithstanding Milagros's lack of legal right or blood relation to the baby, Rosario does not disabuse her friend of the belief that the child was sent by divine providence, and that he is her son.

Despite Milagros's attempts to care for him, the baby tragically does not survive. The child's adoptive mother insists upon his humanity and their familial bond, wishing to give him a respectful burial in her home town, rejecting Rosario's plan to bury him wrapped in a blanket: "yo quiero que tenga su caja, como todo el mundo. No podría dormir tranquila si supiera que está bajo tierra envuelto en una colcha. Eso no es humano" (Lindo 206). As Butler explains, mourning is an act that marks the lost one as human; to go unmourned is to be erased, to be made "unreal" (*Precarious* 32-33). Milagros spares her adopted son this fate, notwithstanding his brief life and Rosario's frustration as she asks: "¿no te das cuenta de que el niño no existe para nadie?" (Lindo 205). After the child's death, Milagros consoles herself in the knowledge that he has had a mother and a home, asking Rosario: "¿No crees que ha sido una suerte que muriera en su propia casa y no en un contenedor de basura?" (Lindo 205). The baby's corpse is described as resembling a doll, lying in a crib that Milagros had previously used for her cat (Lindo 204). This image, along with the fact that she has so quickly and irrationally adopted the role of the baby's mother, suggests a kind of childish playacting, an imitation of unattainable familial norms. It is later revealed that, in the days following Milagros's mother's death from an overdose, Milagros, then a child herself, continued her daily routines in the presence of her mother's corpse: "Esas dos criaturas, una muerta y la otra viva, la madre y la niña, hacienda el teatrillo de una vida

normal" (Lindo 246). As an adult, Milagros makes a second attempt at performing a "normal life" centered on a relationship between mother and child. Once again, this dream ends in tragedy, as she is barred from occupying the normative cultural role of mother.

While it is the difficulty of caregiving that drives Rosario to threaten suicide (albeit without conviction), it is the loss of a dependent that drives Milagros to commit the act. She swallows a bottle of pills, seemingly because she cannot bear the sadness of the baby's death. In the film, the sequence that portrays her funeral is filmed in the same rural cemetery where she and Rosario had buried the baby. This sequence finds a small circle of mourners, accompanied by a Catholic priest, in the same rural cemetery on a cold, cloudy day. The camera remains in motion, alternating between shots taken from slightly above the figures and others from behind them, focusing on Rosario as she cries and responds to the prayers read by the priest, which can be heard vaguely. A melancholy interpretation of "Corazón contento" plays during this sequence, a version recorded especially for the film, with arrangement by Julio de la Rosa and vocals by Queyi. The camera's focus on Rosario suggests that the song's lyrics express her love for her lost friend: "Tú eres lo más lindo de mi vida, aunque no te lo diga, aunque no te lo diga. Si tú no estás yo no tengo alegría, yo te extraño de noche, yo te extraño de día" (*palabra tuya*). In the novel, Rosario reflects upon the bond she shared with her friend, finally arriving at an understanding of family as created from affect rather than shared genetics: "Pienso que a Milagros le hubiera dado una gran alegría verme allí entre todas aquellas mujeres en las que se apreciaba un parecido físico con ella, verme como una más de la familia" (Lindo 249). It is only with Milagros's death that Rosario is able to "normalize" her life, a decision that guarantees her survival.

V. "Hagamos que empiece otra vida": Heteronormative happy endings

While both Rosario and Milagros are both characterized by non-normative gender and sexuality, it is Rosario's ultimate conformity to reproductive, heterosexual monogamy that enables her to live and to flourish with the help of implied societal support and recognition. Rosario is, after all, the story's narrator; it is her words that are given the permission and authority to construct the narrative world, while other voices and experiences—Milagros's, Encarnación's—are silenced by death. Their elimination proves necessary for the protagonist to move toward an idealized, heteronormative version of happiness.

In marketing the novel, the editorial Seix Barral describes the main characters as "dos proyecciones de un mismo espejo deformante, una hacia la nada más cruel desde una vida triste y la otra hacia un futuro expectante desde una vida redimida" (Agencias). According to this interpretation, the distinct fates of the characters represent diverging paths toward "nothing" versus "redemption." Rosario's redemption comes from fulfilling her culturally prescribed role as a woman, thus saving her from a past of abnormality and social exclusion. Milagros's path, instead, leads her only toward annihilation. Morrison traces thus the etymology of the term "waste": "In its earliest usages . . . waste was whatever is not or no longer utilitarian, something squandered, empty or barren, lacking purpose. Waste has meant desolation, pointlessness, and uselessness, but also excess and surplus; both extremes have been viewed as problematic, void of meaning, and immoral" (8). The verbage of this description can easily be applied to Milagros, particularly words such as barren (unproductive, unable to produce children), lacking purpose (assuming that the purpose of women is to bear children), thus pointless, useless, and therefore excessive and problematic. A dimension of immorality is also attributed to garbage, justifying the disgust it inspires, much like the effect of fear and distaste produced by the presence of the

sexually deviant or queer person.

In an ordered civilization, each citizen has their clearly assigned place. Morrison explains that some objects become waste also because they cannot be easily codified or categorized, and thus have no place in a clean, regulated world (11). “Codification facilitates the establishment of culture and civilization,” in other words, that which is hybrid or ambiguous, which has no clear category or place in society, must be removed in order to preserve social order (Morrison 18). Since, following Butler, distinct gender is necessary for the subject to qualify as human, Milagros can be understood as ambiguous enough to be problematic, as a queer subject who fails to even conform to the medical norms of womanhood. Her presence is disruptive, and it is with its elimination that Rosario is able to move forward in her relationship with Morsa, implicitly proceeding toward marriage and parenthood.

The film adaptation of *Una palabra tuya* emphasizes compulsory heterosexuality by changing the novel’s chronology to frame the story with two sequences that highlight heterosexual monogamy and reproduction. Within the first five minutes of the film, Rosario and Morsa appear talking to one another at a bar, both wearing tan jackets. They are filmed through a window, which reflects passing vehicles in the background, and the noise of a highway can be heard over their conversation. Morsa speaks of how he is alone in life, implying that he wants more of a commitment from Rosario, who is not receptive. The actor gestures with his hands, accentuating the earnestness of his sentiments: “yo creo que el papel de ser hijo ya… ya nos toca presidir la mesa. ¿Sabes a lo que me refiero?” Rosario appears uncomfortable, she tells Morsa this is not the right place for this discussion and walks away (*palabra tuya*). The reflections of traffic rushing by and its noise evoke the passage of time that Morsa speaks of, that he and Rosario are getting older, and it is now time to marry and become parents themselves. The partial

obstruction of the glass between the camera and the actors creates a barrier that feels like the emotional separation between the two characters.

In the novel, this exchange comes later, rather than opening the story. At the end of both the novel and the film, Rosario does commit to a long-term, monogamous relationship with Morsa, implying (though not explicitly describing) marriage and childbearing. In the final sequence of the film, Rosario sits on a park bench at the edge of a sandbox, appearing distressed. A series of dissolves show children filling up the sandbox in front of the static actress, adding bustling motion and sound to the sequence. Following is a medium shot of Rosario, off center to the left, highlighting her pensive but pleasant expression as she watches the children. Her face then changes as she sees something (Morsa) off camera. She goes to him and speaks a version of some lines from the final page of the novel: "No se puede cambiar el pasado, ni podemos evitar lo que ya somos, así que hagamos que empiece otra vida" (Lindo 251). This is a curious change of attitude from Rosario's previous assertion that she has never wanted to be a mother. Ultimately, she is exchanging one form of caregiving for another; while her own disabled mother was framed as a burden, this hypothetical baby poses an optimistic future for the parents, given that he or she will presumably have the capacity to become a productive citizen. Furthermore, in contrast to the deceased child found in a dumpster, the hypothetical offspring born to Rosario and Morsa is endowed with the legitimacy of being born into a monogamous, heterosexual relationship that offers the economic means and cultural approval for raising a child.

The film ends with a long shot of the playground, still full of children, as Rosario and Morsa embrace off center to the right, in front of a brightly-colored fence. Similarly to the sequence in the bar at the beginning of the film, there is a distance between the camera and the couple, but in this case, there is no glass barrier. Just as the reflections and noise of traffic in the

first sequence highlight the atmosphere of conflict and discomfort between the couple, the actors' placement in the long shot of the playground highlights the socially accepted association of children with happiness and fulfillment. Notably, this final scene is not part of the novel, but rather an invention of the scriptwriter and director. The cinematic choice to "bookend" the film with sequences about the long-term future of Rosario and Morsa's romantic partnership creates an arc that emphasizes the appeal of reproductive, heterosexual monogamy. The film adaptation of Lindo's novel may strive to appeal to a wider audience by offering a culturally recognizable "happy ending."

Scholars Matthew Marr and Chris Perriam both discuss the manner in which the cinematic production of democratic Spain deployed certain identities (specifically those of people with disabilities and LGBTQ people) to "represent a buzzing New Spain" (Perriam 7). Marr explores the role of disability representation in fostering the image of a progressive, pluralist nation in which disabled people could fully participate (2-3). While González Sinde's film does afford visibility to a character who has Alzheimers and manages to portray the disease as more absurd than horrific, Encarnación remains an isolated and pathetic figure, rather than a valued member of the nation. Undoubtedly, the types of disabled and LGBTQ subjects selected to represent a new, diverse Spain are carefully curated. Perriam points out that, in the case of LGBTQ representation, it is specifically healthy, white, cis-gendered gay men who are sold as appealing images of an "alternative lifestyle" in Spanish democratic culture (7). Rosario and Milagros, in their nebulous gender non-normativity, are far from this ideal. Perriam does, however, classify *Una palabra tuya* as a "queer" film, pointing out that copies were sold in LGBTQ bookstores (133). While both the novel and the film undoubtedly address topics of interest to an LGBTQ audience, I would hesitate to describe the film, in particular, as "queer,"

given its privileging of reproductive heterosexuality and its unwillingness to explore the abject spaces of waste-strewn streets and severely disabled dependents.

Perhaps surprisingly, considering its homophobic undertones, the novel was published in 2005, the same year that same-sex marriage was legalized in Spain, and the film adaptation was released three years later. Granted, legislation does not necessarily reflect universal cultural attitudes. The posture toward sexuality portrayed in this novel and film actually seems more aligned with older, francoist policy, which strove to eliminate homosexuality from the nation through its criminalization, while rewarding "familias numerosas" for their prolific childbearing. Lindo's very title, *Una palabra tuya*, which appears in the narration of the novel's final chapter, is taken from the Catholic Mass: "Señor, no soy digna de que entres en mi casa; pero una palabra tuya bastará para sanarme" (Lindo 250). In Catholic liturgy, the congregation recites this prayer to request purification before receiving Communion. The use of the word "sanar" invokes healing, the removal of iniquities from the body, mind and soul, thus making the faithful worthy of consuming the Eucharist. While neither Rosario nor Milagros is a practicing Catholic, both the novel and the film include Scriptural quotes (like the novel's epigraph) as well as anecdotes about attending Mass and seeking counsel from a priest. These details are vestiges of practices and beliefs that are fast disappearing from Western Europe, but that still represent a long-standing cultural foundation that remains below the surface of secular society.

In the novel's biblical epigraph, cited at the beginning of this chapter, the afflicted Job wishes he had never been born; "O ni habría existido, como un aborto ocultado, Como los fetos que no vieron la luz." These words are easily applied to the abandoned baby, who was never even registered as a citizen and thus, as Rosario pointed out, existed for no one. Regardless, Milagros states an irrefutable truth, demanding recognition of the child's humanity and his

relation to her: “el hijo existe, el hijo está aquí” (Lindo 180). Notwithstanding her untimely demise, Milagros herself can be considered a “Miracle,” a person who never should have existed, but who did exist, nonetheless, and who occupied a place in society for some number of years. Butler asks how the very lives of these invisible and unwelcome citizens stand as resistance to the ideologies that have made them unlivable: “What challenge does that excluded and abjected realm produce to a symbolic hegemony that might force a radical rearticulation of what qualifies as bodies that matter, ways of living that count as ‘life,’ lives worth protecting, lives worth saving, lives worth grieving?” (*Bodies* xxiv). Rosario grieves her friend, and in narrating her story she perpetuates her life. In making this life visible, the narrative raises questions, especially for readers of the crisis, about what is needed to make a life worth living: dignified employment? financial resources? marriage? children? While the conclusion of novel and film offer an ostensibly traditional response to these queries, Milagros’s role in these texts nonetheless presents dissent, an insistence on the space to live “a su manera” and to experience affective bonds according to her own desires. Despite her physical death, Milagros will doubtless continue to haunt her friend Rosario’s normative life beyond the edges of the narrative.

Chapter 2

Motionless: Disability and Snow White in Narratives of the Crisis

The figure of Snow White was first conjured in medieval Europe, through the spoken words of folk tales. She was captured in writing starting in the 18th century, the most famous version being that of the Brothers Grimm, which appeared in 1812 (Shojaei Kawan 329). The The Snow White legend has inspired a multitude of variations over the centuries, the most internationally recognizable being the 1937 animated film by Walt Disney. In early 21st-century Spain, during the years of the global economic crisis, several versions of the Snow White tale emerged: Belén Gopegui's 2007 novel, *El padre de Blancanieves*; Pablo Berger's 2012 film, *Blancanieves*; and Marta Sanz's 2014 short story, "Las palabras que ensucian el ruido del mundo," illustrated by photographer Clemente Bernad. That the tale should appeal in a time of crisis is not surprising, considering Snow White as an excluded figure. She is traditionally an unwanted person, lacking kinship ties, sent away into the liminal space of the forest. More specifically, Snow White is an excluded *woman*, thus making her story a creative means of exploring issues of gendered oppression. In each of these crisis-era iterations of the tale, it is non-normative embodiment that leads to exclusion. I believe these Spanish representations can help us understand their cultural context, and how citizens are judged as productive and viable in a climate of crisis.

It is seldom remarked that Snow White is a story of disability, of a young woman deprived of movement and speech as a result of poisoning by her evil stepmother. In Disney's version, the poisoned apple is meant to bring the "sleeping death," a kind of malignant spell. In the Grimms' tale, when the dwarves find Snow White after she tastes the apple, "there was no breath coming from her lips, and she was dead" (186). Disability is present in Gopegui's novel

through the memory of a deceased and beloved brother. The effects of the poisoned apple in Berger's film are ambiguous, but what is for sure is that it brings paralysis. In this version, Snow White's father is also confined to a wheelchair, paralyzed from the neck down after sustaining injury in the bullring. In Sanz's story, it is Snow White's stepmother who represents non-normative embodiment, as she is unable to meet the cultural responsibility of producing an heir to the throne. In my reading of these three Spanish iterations of Snow White, I examine the role of disability in determining which citizens are included in the nation, while others are relegated to its margins. This is an especially poignant fate to ponder in a nation wracked with economic crisis, in which many living citizens—but especially those with disabilities—are increasingly left without resources.

The Spanish Constitution of 1978 guarantees citizens the right to education, social security, public health care and housing, among other benefits. In response to the economic crisis, the state chose austerity measures that jeopardized its contract with the people. These actions are aligned with neoliberal trends of eliminating or privatizing social services, making them accessible only to those with capital at their disposal. The model citizen is one who lives independently, freeing the state from the burden of ensuring their wellbeing. Independence, according to neoliberal ideology, represents an ideal state, and is understood as the achievement of human progress. Robert McRuer has emphasized the necessity of thinking critically about the terms "independence" and "inclusion," which are often posited as self-evident solutions for people who have disabilities. He demonstrates that "vocabularies of independence and inclusion are risky, although by risky I mean that they are multivalent and that the work they perform is not fully predictable" (McRuer "Taking" 6). "Independence," that is, the ability to exist self-sufficiently, without the aid of others, is understood as necessary for "inclusion," or the

possibility of participating fully in society and living free from discrimination (McRuer "Taking" 8). McRuer, however, calls into question the assumption that if people with disabilities can live independently, they will enjoy a greater quality of life. For some individuals, independence and survival (or even comfort and happiness) are incompatible.

Julie Minich questions the idea that the nation state should be the sole benefactor of human rights and protections, since this arrangement excludes those living outside the ps of citizenship (Introduction). Nonetheless, she recognizes that the nation state remains the primary means of organizing human beings, and that it often providing a source of cultural as well as legal belonging. Minich highlights the importance of critically examining the ways in which the nation is represented: "Given that nations and nationalisms retain their powerful presence in our social landscape . . . rigorous analysis of the metaphors and images that we employ to imagine our national communities remains an important critical endeavor for scholars concerned with theorizing toward a more just world" (Epilogue). Of course, people feel united by shared histories (or by the way these histories are told), languages, and cultural practices that distinguish them from other groups. Many citizens of the Spanish State, however, feel their principle cultural identification to be with the stateless nations that exist within the Spanish borders: Galicia, the Basque Country and Cataluña. Although the people living in these communities (and numerous others worldwide) are constitutionally bound to the central government, many would argue that their legal citizenship is not equivalent to their cultural citizenship. In this chapter, I consider those who are excluded from reductive representations of "Spanishness": those subjects who are present within the legal and geographic space of Spain, but whose lives remain outside the limits of cultural belonging.

Each of these renditions of the Snow White story weaves marginalized figures into a

familiar folk tale, shifting audiences' and readers' perspectives on prototypical characters and accustomed forms of community. "Ahora soy responsabilidad suya" are the words spoken by a Latin American immigrant to a white, middle class Spaniard in Gopegui's novel, thus requiring the interlocutor to see beyond the bonds of citizenship (26). The present chapter begins with an analysis of this work, in which both the immigrant and the person with disability are framed as tied in a web of interdependence with the Spanish citizen. I continue with a study of Berger's film, *Blancanieves*, which populates a traditional "española" with such unexpected figures as a wheelchair-bound bullfighter and his bullfighting daughter. In this work, the paralyzed body is portrayed as excluded from the nation, while a community of non-normative individuals becomes a site of belonging. The chapter concludes with a discussion of Sanz's short story, "Las palabras que ensucian el ruido del mundo," which presents a feminist reimagining of the Snow White tale accompanied by Clemente Bernad's photographic images of Saharan refugee women. Sanz and Bernad succeed in representing a community of women in both visual and textual form, exemplifying feminist collaboration in the face of patriarchal oppression. Each of these works reflects upon the concept of belonging, allowing for a critique of traditional understandings of citizenship and the reimagining of alternative communities.

I. "Soy responsabilidad suya": Interdependence in Gopegui's *El padre de Blancanieves*

In her 2007 novel *El padre de Blancanieves*, Belén Gopegui challenges readers to interrogate their own social reality by highlighting the misogyny of classic Snow White narratives. In most versions, the villain is the evil stepmother, but this one instead calls attention to the absence of Snow White's father, emphasizing his role in the tragedy that befalls his daughter. Since the early 1990s, Gopegui has been known for using the written word as an activist tool for cultural critique and the promotion of social change. In the words of Luis Martín-

Cabrera: “Gopegui se distingue de otras voces del panorama literario español por concebir la novela no simplemente como un objeto de consumo y entretenimiento, sino como un vehículo para indagar y transformar la realidad” (119). This novel centers on the story of an Ecuadorian immigrant’s relationship to a middle class, white Spanish family, and also includes significant anecdotes about a young man with cerebral palsy. Through the stories of marginalized people, this work calls upon all individuals to recognize their common responsibility for more vulnerable members of society.

The novel’s primary narrative concerns Manuela and Enrique, a middle-class couple living in Madrid. Manuela inadvertently causes a supermarket delivery man, an immigrant from Ecuador, to lose his job when she places a complaint about an order arriving late. The next day, the delivery man, known initially only as “el ecuatoriano,” appears at Manuela’s home and demands that she take responsibility for his wellbeing: “‘Ahora soy responsabilidad suya,’ dijo el ecuatoriano . . . . Consiga que me readmitan” (Gopegui 26). Although this is the only time in the novel that “the Ecuadorian,” (whose name is Carlos Javier) speaks, his words “Ahora soy responsabilidad suya” constitute the narrative’s thematic cornerstone.

Most scholarship on *El padre de Blancanieves* has focused on the role of the immigrant in the novel’s collectivist message; my study intervenes by also interrogating its treatment of disability. I maintain this work, through affirming the human dignity of the disabled person, invites the reader to question dominant notions of a life that is “normal” and desirable. I focus in particular upon the narration of Goyo, a member of the activist group to which Manuela and Enrique’s daughter belongs. Goyo explains that his brother Nicolás was born with cerebral palsy due to lack of medical attention: “parálisis cerebral por falta de oxígeno,” pues “mi madre tuvo que seguir esperando. Dos de los médicos de ese hospital estaban atendiendo en consultas

privadas. Los otros dos no daban abasto" (Gopegui 33). In this case, the character's disability itself is attributed to the privatization of healthcare and an inequitable distribution of services. Nonetheless, Goyo does not primarily speak of his brother's cerebral palsy as a tragedy. He describes their relationship as loving and expresses grief and a sense of loss in response to Nicolás' recent death. He insists, furthermore, that his brother was "normal": "Nunca se me ocurrió pensar que Nicolás no era normal. Yo había crecido viendo a Nicolás" (Gopegui 34). To describe someone with a severe disability as "normal" challenges readers to question the concept of normalcy and the way it functions to assign value to bodies and lives.

The text reflects more than once upon the definition of "normalcy." It is depicted as a middle-class way of life, marked by normative sexuality and sound able-bodiedness, and generally understood as desirable in modern society. Enrique, for example, openly identifies as normal, simply saying: "Soy un normal" (Gopegui 92). He is an able-bodied, heterosexual man with three children, working a well-paid corporate job and living in Madrid. He illustrates thus his concept of normalcy: "esta boba e insípida placidez de ciertos seres felices de clase media que es, quizá, una de las conquistas más valiosas del género humano, más que cualquier sinfonía, cualquier cuadro, cualquier tratado científico" (Gopegui 27). Enrique understands tranquil, middle class life as normalcy, proposing this state as a great cultural achievement. This idea resonates with Lennard Davis's assertion that normalcy "is part of a notion of progress, of industrialization, and of ideological consolidation of the power of the bourgeoisie" (49). An ideal, "normal" life is also defined by what it is not; in Gopegui's text, an example of a life that is neither normal nor tranquil is that of Goyo's mother. Enrique himself significantly evokes the fragility of normalcy in terms of the body and the facility with which it can be injured or become ill: "Un pequeño dolor en la nuca, una depresión que no se disipa, un cáncer terminal, un

adelantamiento al camión equivocado y sobreviene la muerte o la parálisis en las dos piernas. . . . Puedo perderlo todo en un segundo, la razón, la movilidad, el futuro" (Gopegui 239). These musings equate normalcy with the able body and mind, easily shattered by an accident that results in disability.

Enrique's understanding of normalcy contrasts with Goyo's description of his brother as "normal," considering that Nicolás was disabled as the result of a medical accident. Goyo acknowledges that, while his brother was indeed a normal human being, the care of someone so dependent does not fit into what most would consider a normal life: "Nicolás era normal, lo que no era normal era la vida de mi madre porque seguía dándole la papilla tres veces al día a un niño de seis años, de diez, de dieciocho. Porque seguía cambiándole los pañales y usaba además pañales de tela pues los otros dañaban la piel de mi hermano" (Gopegui 34-35). It is notable that Goyo specifically describes the struggles of his mother, highlighting the gendered division of caretaking labor: "Las vidas de mi padre y mía eran bastante normales, pero daba igual" (Gopegui 35). Feminist scholar Eva Feder Kittay explains that post-industrial society is structured in such a way that "professional" work is visible, public, and remunerated, but dependency work remains private, invisible, often unpaid, and largely associated with women (Feder Kittay 40). For this reason, it is not only dependents but also their (often female) caretakers that are who become disenfranchised and are framed as superfluous to society (Feder Kittay 77).

The abnormality of Goyo's mother's life can be understood in two ways. On the one hand, the statistical majority of parents do not continue providing intense physical care and support to their children into adulthood. The level of care that Nicolás requires is aligned with the expected needs of infants, small children, and the elderly. In Goyo's words: "las personas no

suelen tener en su casa bebés de veinte años" (Gopegui 87). On the other hand, if normalcy is associated with a middle-class lifestyle of labor and consumption, Goyo's mother is certainly removed from these circumstances, as the labor of caretaking goes materially unrewarded. Because the responsibility of caretaking was relegated exclusively to Nicolás and Goyo's mother, she herself came to be marginalized, devoting her existence to full-time labor that was unremunerated and unrecognized. As Feder Kittay reminds us, "as long as the bounds of justice are drawn within reciprocal relations among free and equal persons, dependents will continue to remain disenfranchised, and dependency workers . . . will continue to share varying degrees of the dependents' disenfranchisement" (77). This scholar emphasizes that dependency is a fact of normal human life and that it is actually the cultural ideal of universal independence that is unrealistic and exceptional.

Goyo recognizes that dominant concepts of normalcy exclude disability, but he also acknowledges that normalcy's lived experience is a continuum. He recites a poem entitled "Felices los normales," by Cuban poet Roberto Fernández Retamar, which appears in the novel's text in its entirety. The piece begins with the line: "Felices los normales, esos seres extraños" (Fernández Retamar qtd. in Gopegui 35). This verse at once associates normalcy with happiness and recognizes it, paradoxically, as an exceptional state. The poem goes on to define, at first negatively, who these "strange beings" are: "Los que no tuvieron una madre loca, un padre borracho, un hijo delincuente, / Una casa en ninguna parte, una enfermedad desconocida" (Fernández Retamar qtd. in Gopegui 35). These requirements for normalcy involve the absence of deviant family members, homelessness, and illness. In other words, normalcy disallows mental illness and addiction (which can be considered, themselves, a form of disability) as well as poverty. The poem later poses positive examples of "normal" beings, which are infused with

commercial exchange, able-bodiedness and gender norms: “Los vendedores y sus compradores, / Los caballeros ligeramente sobrehumanos” (Fernández Retamar qtd. in Gopegui 35). Those who buy and sell on the market, as well as men who are strong—but not too strong—are here named among the “normal,” thus juxtaposing economic normalcy with normative gendered embodiment. Goyo responds to the poet’s words in a frenzied sentence with no punctuation: “Claro que había normales, familias con el futuro económico asegurado y un presente de padres sanos e hijos sanos y no locos ni alcohólicos ni encarcelados ni paralíticos ni diagnosticados de un mal sin solución o suicidados o muertos con cinco o treinta años” (Gopegui 38). Like Enrique, Goyo understands that the idealized state of humanity is that of a sound mind and body, and that injury, illness and disability disrupt the peaceful, “normal” existence of the healthy. He concludes that normalcy exists in relative degrees: “Había normales, con respecto a los normales se medía el infortunio de los que no eran tan normales. Seguro que había grados. Seguro que hay grados” (Gopegui 38). Someone like Goyo’s brother Nicolás could therefore still be “normal,” notwithstanding their severe disability, considering that there is always someone less fortunate. To be normal, however, is to be happy and to be lucky. It is toward those “more normal” individuals--the middle class, the able-bodied--that Goyo directs the story of his brother, hoping that they may find a common humanity with him, whom society has marked as “abnormal.”

Benjamin Fraser has highlighted the role of Spanish literary representations of children and adolescents with disabilities in drawing attention to social injustices. Fraser’s chapter offers an example from the early years of Spanish democracy, *Angelicomio,* a 1981 novel by Salvador García Jiménez about adolescents with disabilities who have been confined to an institution. This work was produced in a time when social change was sweeping the country but remained incipient for certain groups, which included the disabled. Spain’s cultural expression, during

these years, was engaged in imagining possibilities for the newly democratic nation. García Jiménez takes issue with francoist practices of institutionalizing the disabled, which remained prevalent even beyond Franco's death (Fraser 93). Fraser reads *Angelicomio*'s narrative as a demonstration that "that it is not enough to create complexes isolating children with disabilities . . . instead, they must be attended to through well thought-out forms of social integration" (81-82). He understands this work as emerging from García Jiménez's own experience as administrator of a mental hospital, suggesting that, like Gopegui, this author intends literary expression as a catalyst for social change (Fraser 83). While Gopegui wrote *El Padre de Blancanieves* three decades into the Spanish democracy, the novel makes clear that quality solutions for young people with disabilities have yet to be implemented.

In Gopegui's novel, advocacy for the disabled is found in the words of Goyo, who speaks on behalf of his deceased brother. He asserts that raising a child with a disability should be a "collective" rather than a merely private challenge: "Cuando un niño tiene una deficiencia física en una familia, lo que hay no es sólo un problema de dinero en esa familia, es un problema colectivo" (Gopegui 198). Granted, referring to the responsibility of a child with a disability as a "problem" is, of course, problematic. It is also not surprising, considering that people with disabilities, especially those as dependent as Nicolás, are typically seen as a "problem"--albeit a private one--by a culture that holds independence as the ideal for all individuals. Feder Kittay questions this ideology, demonstrating how it is detrimental to both caregivers and dependents, and arguing that society would benefit from more ethical treatment of both. She emphasizes that caring for a dependent is a labor of love (hence, the title of her book, *Love's Labor: Essays on Women, Equality, and Dependency*), and imagines "a world where the wider community accepts a social responsibility for the care of dependents and support for their caregivers, and where

caring for dependents does not become so costly to dependency workers that they are unable to be equals in a society of equals" (Feder Kittay 182). In Gopegui's text, Goyo evokes a possible solution by referencing the Venezuelan Centros de Rehabilitación Integral constructed under Hugo Chávez' socialist government. He calls for rehabilitation centers with jacuzzis and accessible playrooms, and says it should be easy for families to bring their children to these places, and easy for children to spend time there: "Por ejemplo construir gimnasios de rehabilitación con bañeras de burbujas y piscinas de masaje y tuberías de colores y salas de espera con sillones cómodos y salas de juegos adaptadas para los niños, y que para el padre o la madre o el hermano o el amigo o quienquiere que lleve al niño sea fácil llevarle, y para el niño sea fácil estar allí" (Gopegui 199). This type of resource would not only provide quality, subsidized care for people with disabilities, but would also allow caregivers the time and space to pursue an equitable quality of life themselves.

It is important to note that, while the narrative calls for a recognition of the common humanity of the Spanish citizen and the immigrant as well as of the able-bodied individual and the person with disability, both the immigrant and disabled perspectives are absent from the novel. This narrative choice suggests that the work is directed toward an able-bodied and middle-class audience. Keeping in mind Gopegui's activist project, this makes sense, considering that it is the able-bodied, bourgeois subject who holds hegemonic power in contemporary society. Gopegui's narrative itself does not pretend to incorporate Carlos Javier's perspective or voice; the only moment in which he speaks is in the aforementioned episode when he confronts Manuela. Though the format of the novel shifts between various first-person accounts, bits of Manuela's journal, discourses directed between characters, and letters from a "collective," Carlos Javier's perspective is absent. As Martín-Cabrera points out, one effect of this type of narration

is to call more seriously into question the lives of the middle class, rather than the struggles of the immigrant (or, I would add, the individual who has a disability): "En lugar de fijarse sólo en los múltiples obstáculos que tiene que superar Carlos Javier para sobrevivir en España, la novela invierte la mirada para concentrarse en la clase media blanca que rara vez cuestiona su posición" (Martín-Cabrera 127). Ultimately, this story is told from the point of view of the "normalized" subject, with the goal of altering their accustomed worldview and, ideally, impelling them to action.

Similarly to Carlos Javier, Nicolás' first-hand experience is also absent from the narrative, as is Nicolás himself, since he is deceased at the time the action takes place. This young man's life, instead, is presented by his brother, who concedes that he uses its example for a didactic purpose. That is, he says that the story he tells is not his own, but rather the explanation of what he learned from his brother: "Porque la historia de Nicolás que . . . había contado no era su historia sino la historia de algo que Nicolás le había hecho comprender casi como en una demostración matemática" (Gopegui 201). The message that Nicolás' life has transmitted to Goyo, and that Goyo wishes to pass on to others, is that people who have disabilities are not private "burdens," but should be embraced as valued members of society along with their caregivers.

With the economic crisis, the material reality of many Spaniards like Nicolás and his mother has undoubtedly become even more difficult and further removed from middle class normalcy. Following McRuer, the desired state of neoliberal normalcy implies the economic "inclusion" of the laborer who is also a consumer, and who lives "independently" by the fruits of his own labor and the subsequent accumulation of capital. With current levels of unemployment, the lived reality of many Spaniards—regardless of ability—excludes the possibility of

"independence" and "inclusion." Despite their potential to pass as "common sense," these values are undeniable products of Western culture, especially under neoliberalism. Luis Moreno-Caballud describes Gopegui's novel as "almost prophetic," seeing as it was published in 2007, before the crisis had emerged as an economic phenomenon, "durante los años de esplendor de la burbuja" (539). Notwithstanding constitutional guarantees of health care and aid to dependents, the Spanish government responded to the crisis with austerity measures that involved both cuts to budgets for public aid and a narrower definition of disability and dependence. The scarcity of funds for public assistance resulted in wait lists hundreds of thousands of names long. In 2015, over 400,000 individuals—an estimated 37% of those who should legally qualify as dependents—were wait-listed to receive aid (Morán). The imposition of a stricter definition of disability to qualify for public assistance has effectively resulted in fewer Spaniards who are legally considered disabled. This shift is no reflection of the material reality of disability and dependence in the Spanish State; it merely demonstrates a redefinition of what it means to be a Spanish citizen.

Just as the contours of citizenship are so easily re-drawn, so can other lines be blurred, such as that which separates the rich from the poor, the able-bodied from the disabled, and the immigrant from the "native." As Enrique recognizes, in Gopegui's novel, middle-class, able-bodied normalcy is fragile and can be decimated either by trauma dealt in the physical environment or by the bureaucratic stroke of a pen. While Gopegui's narrative bears little resemblance to the Snow White legend, the tale is mentioned briefly as a referent, the absent father evoked to invite readers to think critically about social responsibility. The fact that the novel itself is entitled *El padre de Blancanieves* also prompts a reading of the narrative through the lens of the fairy tale. One of the narrators, who declares themselves the voice of a collective,

does reflect upon the role of Snow White's father: "El padre de Blancanieves vive con la madrastra pero nadie lo nombra, nadie habla de él. La madrastra maquina contra Blancanieves, y el padre ¿por qué calla?, ¿por qué no actúa? Con todo, el padre nos delata . . . . el padre aguarda en el castillo, mudo" (Gopegui 54-55). This interpretation of the tale questions the usual focus on the stepmother, placing emphasis instead upon the father figure, laying blame upon Snow White's male parent for keeping silent. Martín-Cabrera points out that the figure of the "father of Snow White" is easily aligned with the middle class as witnesses of violence, injustice and oppression, who tolerate these ills in exchange for protection of their own private property and interests: "la historia muestra, por supuesto, la naturaleza patriarcal del poder pero también su fuerte componente de clase porque el padre de Blancanieves es como el padre de clase media en la novela; alguien que es testigo de la violencia, la injusticia y la opresión, pero que, sin embargo, las tolera a cambio de defender su burbuja de bienestares mínimos" (Martín-Cabrera 127-28). According to Martín-Cabrera's interpretation, the father of Snow White abstains from intervening to save her in order not to disturb his "bubble" of middle class normalcy. Given that the novel's message is directed toward a middle-class audience, the Snow White tale is employed as a reminder that those who keep silent in the face of injustice that they are not blameless. The idea of the middle-class bubble is, in fact, a fantasy; the novel proposes, instead, that the well-being of all people is connected, regardless of their race, nationality, social class, or ability.

II. "Sois mi familia": National Belonging in Berger's *Blancanieves*

Snow White's absent father, as Luis Guadaño notes, is a repeated feature of the tale in its myriad incarnations (70). In Pablo Berger's 2012 film *Blancanieves*, the father's absence is explained, in part, by his disability: he is confined to a wheelchair, paralyzed from the neck

down. Berger's *Blancanieves* is a black and white adaptation set in the age of silent film, casting Snow White as the daughter of a flamenco dancer and a bullfighter, growing up in 1920s Andalucía. For Berger's Snow White and her father, it is specifically the enjoyment of bullfighting and flamenco that become inaccessible: two stereotypically "Spanish" cultural expressions that happen to rely heavily on able-bodiedness. Movement, as evoked in the film's visual language and soundtrack, comes to symbolize wellbeing and happiness, whereas immobility instead signals impairment and tragedy. Able-bodiedness is furthermore equated with Spanishness, through its association with stereotypical, gendered symbolism for the nation, whereas disability signifies both social isolation and exclusion from the nation itself.

This film was released in 2012, with the global economic crisis nearing its peak. Like other critics, I ask how the film can shape our understanding of these extraordinary circumstances. Thomas Deveny reads the greed of the evil stepmother as a commentary on the capitalist exploitation that led to the crisis (343). Anna K. Cox believes Snow White's taking up the tradition of bullfighting is symbolic of young Spaniards' desire to intervene and take the reins of a country in crisis (333-34). I suggest a parallel between Snow White's paralysis and a nation paralyzed by the global stagnation of capital, and am the first to study the film through the lens of critical disability studies, with attention also to its portrayal of normative gender and sexuality.

The year 2012 also saw the release of two Snow White films in the United States: *Snow White and the Huntsman,* directed by Rupert Sanders, and *Mirror, Mirror,* directed by Tarsem Singh. Like Berger's *Blancanieves,* these films present a somewhat more empowered, feminist heroine than is found in traditional versions like Disney's. I agree with Guadaño's assessment that, unlike Berger's film, the United States films fail to reflect or inform the specific cultural

context of their production (82). It is true that each of the 2012 films presents a Snow White figure for modern times, a woman engaging in some form of skilled fighting or combat that is traditionally reserved for men. These heroines diverge from Disney's Snow White, who serves as a maternal figure to the dwarves, cooking, cleaning, and passively awaiting a prince. The heroine of *Snow White and the Huntsman*, played by Kristen Stewart (herself a queer actress), wears armor and fights among men. Her love interest is the huntsman, a peasant, rather than a wealthy, royal prince. *Mirror, Mirror*'s script is imbued with humor and its visual aesthetic is characterized by bright colors and attractive period costumes. Although this Snow White, interpreted by Lilly Collins, also learns to fight, the film lacks graphic violence or a plausible threat of danger. *Mirror, Mirror* was, after all, marketed as a comedy, unlike *Huntsman* and *Blancanieves* which are known as dramas. In this more lighthearted version, it is the king and the prince who are targeted by magic spells, rather than the female protagonist. Both United States versions are set in what Guadaño describes as "an undetermined, unrecognizable, and standardized colorful folktale kingdom, land, or country with castles and magic forests" (75). In addition to their generic fairy tale settings, the characters in these films even speak with British accents (despite many being played American actors), setting the stories in an Old World "long ago and far away" setting. These Hollywood productions are ultimately whimsical commodities, serving more to entertain than to inspire reflection upon specific social issues.

While Berger's choice to locate the Snow White story in the concrete setting of Sevilla Spain is a departure from other versions, the Andalucía that is conjured can surely be read as a kind of mythic locale, a reductive synecdoche for Spain that has long been marketed abroad. William Washabaugh traces the history of Andalucía coming to symbolize Spain back to the late 18th century (272). This cultural phenomenon was immortalized by Prosper Mériméeé's 1845

story “Carmen,” which was made into the world-famous opera by Georges Bizet in 1875 (Washabaugh 272). Washabaugh and others have highlighted the intertextuality of Berger’s film with *Carmen*, whose “tragic *torero flamenco andaluza*” heroine is consumed worldwide as a symbol of Spanish femininity (274). In reference to the 1960s francoist tourism campaign “Spain is different,” Sandie Holguín uses the example of the Andalusian tradition of flamenco to demonstrate how Spain was sold as a product to appeal to the perceived tastes of tourists: “Lo que ocurrió es que [se] dio al público lo que quería, exotismo flamenco, haciendo que una vez más Andalucía se indentificara con España” (525). Given that Berger is Basque, hailing from Bilbao, it is perhaps surprising that he would choose to construct a stereotypical vision of Spain that erases the multicultural reality of the nation. Additionally, the film was produced by a Catalan production company (Arcadia Motion Pictures), Berger developed the award-winning music in collaboration with a Catalan flamenco artist, Juan Gómez “Chicuelo,” and vocals were performed by Catalan singer Silvia Peréz Cruz (Cox 323). Deveny believes that Berger’s choice to set his Snow White film in Andalucía, to cultivate an aesthetic based upon “the most common (albeit stereotypical and controversial) cultural markers of Spanish identity” can be explained by the fact that the director studied film at New York University and lived for nine years in the United States (346). Deveny believes that this formation motivated the director to create a film projected to have “more transnational appeal” for featuring bullfighting, flamenco and an Andalusian setting (346). Berger’s Snow White can thus be said to inhabit a kind of exportable fantasy of Spanishness.

The opening sequence of *Blancanieves* establishes the importance of bullfighting to the community: the streets and plazas of Sevilla are seen, empty, followed by the question: “Where is everyone?” Then the movement of “everyone” erupts into the streets, a poster of the matador

Antonio Villalta (father of the unborn Snow White) is seen, followed by a shot that shows the entrance to the bullring. A series of extreme close-ups detail the ritual preparations of the torero: light reflects from the sequins on his traje de luces and likewise from the embellishments adorning the veil of a statue of the Virgin Mary, to whom he prays for blessings. The visual similarity of their two costumes attributes a kind of supernatural or divine air to the bullfighter, who is greeted in the ring with heralding trumpets. As Berger indicates, in the time period he is recreating, matadors indeed possessed an air of royalty: "el auténtico mundo de la realeza era el de los toros, con sus reyes matadores, su corte cuadrilla, su cortijo castillo de cuento" (qtd. in Belinchón). The choice to make Snow White the daughter of a famous bullfighter makes her, in effect, "popular royalty," as Guadaño points out, in keeping with the fairy tale (76).

It is important to remember that, beyond constituting a distinctive symbol of "national" Spanish culture, bullfighting (as well as flamenco) is a practice that require a rigorous level of physical ability, and the capacity to move the body in a certain controlled and skilled manner. In fact, one reason Berger names for his choice to make bullfighting a central to his film is the type of motion it brings to the screen: "siempre he pensado que los toros son muy cinematográficos. Tienen movimiento y conflicto. Ceremonia narrativa" (Berger qtd. in Belinchón). The almost superhuman skill needed by the successful bullfighter is emphasized by the text frame that announces Villalta's fight with the words: "Six bulls and one single matador, Antonio Villalta" (*Blancanieves*). It is not surprising that a body endowed with such exceptional strength and skill is proudly set forth in popular and touristic imagery to stand in for the Spanish nation. Minich explains that cultural representations generally "foment a preference for healthy, whole bodies over diseased or disabled bodies," and decidedly so when they are made to function as symbols of wider communities or nations (Chapter 1). To represent the nation with a fragile or

fragmented body is to acknowledge its susceptibility to perils that are both external and internal. Washabaugh, for example, uses a metaphor of fragmented corporeality to describe Spain's unstable national identity: "Spain is an old polity with a fragile sense of its own identity. Looking down at itself, it is hard pressed to recognize the unity of its own body" (271). The critic refers to Spain's long history as a nation forged from distinct territories and cultures, its populace tending to be deeply divided by political and ideological disagreement. The bullfighter's vulnerability in the ring, then, can also be detected in the body of the nation itself; when the bullfighter is injured and disabled, this individual tragedy can be read as epic in proportion.

The virile able-bodiedness of the bullfighter is also a key element of idealized masculinity. Rafael Núñez Florencio describes the art of bullfighting in terms of seduction: "el torero vendría a ser como don Juan, una especie de gran burlador" (449). Don Juan is, of course, another archetype of Spanish masculine sexuality; the association of the bullfighter with the burlador de Sevilla brings a notion of able-bodiedness to a sexual norm. McRuer has theorized that, in order to coherently perform heterosexuality (and, implicitly, to conform to the binary system of gender) the subject requires a perfectly able and medically "normal" body. He draws on Adrienne Rich's 1982 essay "Compulsory Heterosexuality and Lesbian Existence" to develop the concept of "compulsory able-bodiedness." Just as Rich proposes compulsory heterosexuality as an ideology that requires women to desire men in return for social acceptance, inclusion, and recognition, compulsory able-bodiedness denotes the necessity for the body and mind to be capable of a certain level of productive activity. McRuer establishes that a "perfect" performance of heterosexuality relies on able-bodiedness as part of its execution, felt as a sense of culturally-approved "wholeness" (*Crip* Introduction). Following this line of thought, when Antonio Villalta loses his mobility, his performance of masculinity is also compromised.

In Berger's film, mobility is simultaneously connected to the fulfillment of heterosexual social roles and to national belonging; paralysis, on the contrary, ultimately results in isolation from both. In the first minutes of the film, Snow White's father, the famous bullfighter Antonio Villalta, is gored in the ring. This injury transcends his physical body, attacking also his performance of masculinity. The bull who attacks him is significantly named "Lucifer," the embodiment of evil. It is this malevolence that brings Villalta paralysis and takes from him his mobility and the triumphs of his career. A camera flash distracts the bullfighter, which leads to him being gored and lifted from the ground by the bull's horns. Reaction shots of Villalta's mother-in-law and wife's horrified faces and reactions of alarmed spectators are interspersed with close-ups of the fallen torero screaming as the bull continues to trample him. Within this sequence, a skull appears for a mere second, the recalling a similar image from Disney's *Snow White*, a grinning skull that materializes on the stepmother's iconic apple to signal its deadliness. Just as the poisoned apple brings Snow White the "sleeping death," the bull's horns bring Antonio Villalta what some might consider a "living death;" he does not lose his life, but he is no longer able to move through the physical world, which results in his banishment from society. To be wounded in the ring, to no longer be able to fight, also becomes a form of emasculation. Núñez Florencio highlights the dimension of Spanish "honor" associated with bullfighting, always in a state of precariousness: ". . . el torero es el héroe vulnerable, víctima y verdugo, el ser que muere y mata sin perder nunca su dignidad. El español no se puede permitir nunca perder la dignidad. O el honor, como se decía en el teatro del Siglo de Oro" (457). As a quadriplegic, not only is Villalta unable to fight bulls, but he becomes dependent upon others for survival; the quintessential form of Spanish masculinity that he once embodied has become unavailable to him.

Antonio's accident also isolates him from his family. His wife dies in childbirth shortly after witnessing the trauma of the goring, and Antonio despairs, wanting nothing to do with his newborn daughter. He then marries Encarna, a nurse who cared for him in his convalescence, and who comes to occupy the archetypical role of the evil stepmother. Antonio's daughter, Carmencita (Snow White) does not meet her father until she comes to live with him and Encarna following the death of her grandmother. By this time, he has become a figure of supreme unhappiness, paralyzed from the neck down and confined to his large house. Villalta finds himself at the mercy of his second wife, who takes advantage of his fortune while forbidding him contact with any human being. His disability leads not only to the impossibility of the fame and fortune of bullfighting and the masculinity associated with the torero's embodiment, but also the impossibility of realizing the normative male gender role realized through heterosexual marriage and parenthood, a role that is particularly important to Catholic, Spanish culture.

Undoubtedly, Villalta's severe disability is the primary reason his second wife is able to victimize him and his daughter. Nonetheless, Villalta's own depression and despair also contribute to the situation. When he awakens after his injury, unable to feel his limbs, and discovers his wife has died in childbirth, he wants nothing to do with his infant daughter. Matthew Marr studies the connection between depression and disability in his chapter on Pedro Amenábar's 2004 film, *Mar adentro*, arguably the best-known Spanish cinematic representation of physical disability. Marr reads the quadruplegic protagonist, Ramón Sampedro, who is based on a real-life individual, as implicitly suffering from bipolar disorder, and therefore argues: "Whether consciously or unconsciously, in combining these two conditions in a lone central character's constructed subjectivity, Amenábar's film broaches a gap between visible (physical) and invisible (mental, cognitive, emotive) disabilities" (100). Mental illness contrasts with

physical disability in that it cannot be physically observed/diagnosed but must be instead narrated by the patient (Marr 101). In *Mar adentro* as in *Blancanieves,* disability leads to poignant exclusion from the culturally-specific, able-bodied activities the protagonist once enjoyed. Quadriplegia breaks the intimate relationship Sampedro developed with the sea, traveling the world as a merchant marine. Much as Antonio Villalta's identity as a Spaniard man is connected to his cultural role as a bullfighter, Sampedro's upbringing in Galicia is shown to tie him to the sea both culturally and personally. Due to his confinement as a quadriplegic, he is left only with his memories of the ocean. Much as Villalta's beloved bullring serves as the location of his paralyzing injury, Sampedro is also injured by diving in to the sea at low tide. According to Marr, Sampedro's evident struggle with depression conflicts with the "Iberian-Catholic ideal of emotional stoicism" that he believes "remains highly ingrained in relation to paradigms of masculinity" (97). Considered in this way, these men's experience of depression as comorbid with physical disability is yet another way they are removed from the ideal performance of Spanish masculinity.

The *Blancanieves* sequence in which Carmen meets her father for the first time visually emphasizes his social isolation. The sequence begins in silence, as the camera pans across a large, shadowy room. A subjective shot shows, from the perspective of the child, a solitary person seated in a wheelchair. Slow, melancholy music plays. The first bit of Carmencita's father that is visible is his hand, lying in his lap, palm upward, suggesting the incapacity for action. The camera focuses on the hand, then pans up the arm to finally reveal Antonio's face, eyes closed, head reclining against the chair, appearing almost as in death. I apply here Sara Ahmed's reflection upon the term "wretched": "coming from *wretch*, referring to a stranger, exiled, or banished person. The wretch is not only the one driven out of his or her native country, but is

also defined as one who is 'sunk in deep distress, sorrow, misfortune, or poverty,'" (Ahmed Introduction). Antonio is certainly a banished person; at the mercy of his wife, he has been removed from the social world, and his disability has expelled him from his former, gendered place in Spanish culture as a bullfighter. Antonio's exile from the nation is a source of misery; Luisa Elena Delgado establishes that national belonging goes beyond mere symbols, involving an essential affective aspect: "Asimismo ninguna afiliación nacional puede sostenerse únicamente por medio de identificaciones simbólicas e imaginarias; se requiere también un excedente afectivo, una conciencia del goce específico que se materialice en prácticas sociales y en los mitos nacionales que se estructuran alrededor de dichas prácticas" (*La Nación* 66). If belonging to the nation is a source of joy and enjoyment, then exclusion from it brings anguish and despair. Though Antonio Villalta is a fictional character, real people with disabilities have throughout the centuries have commonly experienced similar material conditions and emotional exclusion from the nation.

The motionless solitude of the wounded bullfighter contrasts with his daughter's secret visits, which are characterized by movement, light, and lively music. When Carmencita touches her sleeping father's face, the soundtrack's music quickens and he awakens. Extreme close-ups of their two sets of eyes express that they recognize each other as kin. The image of the zootrope becomes a symbol of the times they pass together. This toy simulated a kind of antique "cinema," as the interior part, painted with static images, turned while the viewer looked through an aperture, thus creating the illusion of a living image. In *Blancanieves,* the inside of the zootrope appears in extreme close-up, showing a tiny bullfighter. In a sense, the static bullfighter with the illusion of movement reflects Antonio himself, now incapable of physical movement or of the sport of bullfighting, but re-animated by the love of his daughter.

The sequences featuring Carmencita's visits with her father also expand upon the motifs of bullfighting and flamenco. It is here that Antonio secretly teaches his daughter the art of bullfighting, and she dances flamenco for his entertainment. Not only does Carmencita dance herself, as she learned from her maternal grandmother, but she also includes her father, turning his wheelchair, while the camera remains fixed in front of Antonio's smiling face, moving with him to capture his joy. The sequence is saturated with sunlight, as Carmencita pushes her father in circles, returning to him the sensation of movement. Antonio and Carmencita are seen laughing, and light bounces off of a bell hanging from Antonio's chair, implying a happy sound. It is this ringing that catches the stepmother's attention, however, ending an era of happiness between father and daughter. Not long after, Villalta's wife murders him by pushing his wheelchair down a flight of stairs.

Notwithstanding the film's framing of people with paralysis as hopelessly tragic, its unique representation of the dwarves offers an imaginative challenge to norms of gender and sexuality. Little people have long been featured in Spanish visual culture; notable examples are found in the work of 17th-century painter Diego Velázquez, including the woman who appears in his iconic *Las Meninas*, and portraits he created of little people from the Spanish court (Deveny 336). Despite their appearance in iconic national imagery, little people served as "bufoons" in the court, viewed as amusement rather than as equal human beings. Berger claims that his portrayal of little people is inspired by a photograph of early twentieth century enanos toreros from Cristina García Rodero's collection *España oscura* (Cox 318). Berger's Blancanieves is rescued by the little people when she is left for dead by the stepmother's huntsman, who has been hired to kill her. Suffering from amnesia, Carmen Villalta joins the troupe of little people, the enanos toreros, who travel around to carnivals putting on humorous spectacles of mock bullfighting.

One of these performers is transgendered, challenging norms of embodiment not only by stature but also by gender expression.

Furthermore, the "prince" of the story, Carmen's love interest, is one of the little people, Rafita. Their difference in embodiment defies traditional notions of what a fairy tale prince and princess couple—or any heterosexual couple—should look like. Santiago Solis reports that, when he watched Disney's *Snow White* as a child, it never occurred to him that one of the dwarves could rescue Snow White or have a relationship with her (115). This is likely to be a common experience, since the dwarves in the story are often posited as comic relief, as childlike, or as a woodland curiosity. Solis explains that the dwarves are never framed as sexual beings because they fail to conform to standards of able-bodiedness that are required of normative sexuality (Solis 115). This critic believes that, in most versions of Snow White, "the seven dwarfs' supporting role simply serves to legitimate sexual and physical normality," which are embodied by the handsome prince and the beautiful princess (Solis 115). Indeed, McRuer argues that heterosexuality and able-bodiedness are defined by what they are not: queer and disabled (*Crip* Introduction). Representations of disability can serve to bolster the presence of able-bodiedness which, as McRuer establishes, is also a key element of heterosexuality. Berger's film challenges this convention by failing to supply the typical prince and princess pair and instead placing a little person in the role of male love interest. Carmen feels an affinity with all the little people—despite her height, she becomes the "seventh dwarf." She joins the little people in their torero carnival act and tells them: "Sois mi familia" (*Blancanieves*). The sense of belonging that Carmen finds in this community serves to question assumptions about family and kinship, and also of seeing little people—or anyone with a disability—as fundamentally different from the able-bodied.

By the end of the film, Carmen follows in her father's footsteps as a bullfighter, thus offering a boldly feminist Snow White. As Cox points out, the placement of a female bullfighter in the setting of early 20th century Spain is a fantastic anachronism, not likely to have formed part of either the reality or the filmic representation of that time (325). At the film's climax, as Carmen stands in the bullring facing the animal, memories of her father are communicated through a montage of the film's previous moments, including images of both stillness and motion. The soundtrack changes to palmadas de flamenco, and a shot of Antonio Villalta's paralyzed hand is seen, followed by shots of him seated in his wheelchair, and then images of Carmencita's zootrope in motion, turning to the rhythm of the palmadas and giving movement to the tiny bullfighter figure painted inside. The montage continues with shots of Carmen's deceased mother and grandmother, dancing flamenco in her childhood. These frames alternate with close-ups of Carmen's face, filled with emotion. It is then that she decides to "terminar la faena para su padre," to take his place and fight bulls on his behalf (*Blancanieves*). In this sense, Carmen acts as a kind of prosthesis for her father, whose career was cut short due to disability. The fact that she, as a woman, stands in for him, with short hair and wearing the male torero's traje de luces, questions not only traditional gender roles but also the very idea of gender as a fixed, binary system.

True to the Brothers Grimm version of the story, adult Snow White ultimately falls victim to a poisoned apple from her stepmother, given to her as a gift following her success in the bullring. She is laid in a glass coffin, as in other iterations of the tale, but in this case as part of a carnival side show, in which people can pay to kiss her and see if she will awaken. Snow White is featured as an attraction along with "freaks" including the hirsute wolf man, a pair of conjoined twins in "Siamese" costumes, and a fat woman who is sexualized on stage, wearing

lingerie and showing off her legs. Curiously, Snow White's hair is now long, in contrast to the short style she wore in the bullring. This change creates the appearance of the classic fairy tale princess, a figure associated with passive femininity. A line of paying customers forms alongside Snow White's coffin, as each gives the unconscious woman a kiss in hopes that she will wake. The discomfort of this sequence is highlighted by reaction shots from Rafita and the other side show freaks. The face of the fat woman, who waits off stage, betrays discomfort and pity as she watches Snow White having to accept sometimes lengthy kisses from a series of strangers. This woman's empathy is understandable, since she herself has just been made into a sexualized spectacle for profit. These reaction shots establish a relationship of sympathy between the camera and the freaks, rather than with the able-bodied and "normal" carnival-goers who are participating in the sexual exploitation of a disabled woman.

In many versions of *Snow White*, a kiss from the prince awakens the heroine from her poisoned slumber, hence realizing a "happy ending." Ahmed points out that "there is no doubt that heterosexual happiness is overrepresented in public culture, often through an anxious repetition of threats and obstacles to its proper achievement. Heterosexual love becomes about the possibility of a happy ending; about what life is aimed toward, as being what gives life direction or purpose, or as what drives a story" (Chapter 3). That this centuries-old folk tale should culminate in the union of a man and woman (like many others co-opted by popular culture, for example, "Sleeping Beauty" and "Cinderella"), evidences the deep-seated association of heterosexuality with happiness in the Western cultural imaginary. Berger's ending, however, is more ambiguous; the director himself has stated that he prefers to allow audiences the space for a range of interpretations (Deveny 341). Despite receiving a kiss from Rafita, Blancanieves does not awaken. Instead, in the film's final frame, she lies in paralysis, a simulacrum of death,

as light reflects off a single tear emerging from her closed eye. Cox reads the tear as an optimistic sign of life and a promise of revival, though she acknowledges that "the spectator is left wondering whether Carmencita and all that she represents is dead or alive. Thus the film invites and even encourages dialogue in the end" (333). Like Washabaugh, I see Blancanieves as "stuck" and "immobilized" (275). The emergence of the tear suggests that Snow White is neither "dead" nor "living," but rather unable to live life with any kind of agency. To end the film on this note emphasizes the theme of immobility, and the unthinkable suffering and tragedy that it promises. Just as her father was rendered "wretched," in Ahmed's terms, by disability, separated from the happiness of both family life and a career in bullfighting, Blancanieves is also isolated from the promise of heterosexual happiness and from able-bodied participation in the nation.

III. "La revolución de la madrastra": Feminist Solidarity in Marta Sanz's "Las palabras que ensucian en ruido del mundo"

Of the three Snow White versions discussed in this chapter, Marta Sanz's 2014 short story "Las palabras que ensucian el ruido del mundo" is undoubtedly the most unabashedly feminist. In this narrative, creating a space for feminist solidarity results also in the accommodation of bodies that are diverse in their function and actions. Sanz's feminist reimagining of Snow White is accompanied by Clemente Bernad's photographs of Saharan refugee women. Sanz, in a book of essays *No tan incendiario*, which serves as a kind of *ars poetica* and which she published the same year as her Blancanieves story, expresses a wish for cultural production to resist commercial hegemony: "Ojalá la lógica empresarial que dirige la vida de la gente, comunidades y países, deje también de gobernar una cultura que se legitima en función de su rentabilidad y de su presencia anestésica, pero no inocua, en los mostradores" (*incendiario* 21). The author proposes to measure the value of culture by its capacity to be

thought-provoking, rather than by its potential as a commercial distraction from social realities. She depicts Snow White's traditionally "evil" stepmother as a feminist revolutionary, questioning the misogynist portrayals of her character as jealous and murderous. As the stepmother resists patriarchal oppression, the Saharan women in Bernad's photos realize resistance through the preservation of their minority culture.

"Las palabras que ensucian el ruido del mundo" was printed and distributed in the form of a small booklet as part of the *Te cuento* series published by Traficantes de sueños, a press and bookstore that seeks to decommodify culture, understanding it as a common good rather than as a source of profit. The appeal of this organization, founded in the early 1990s, has only increased with the crisis: "TdS has become an ever more necessary and requested knowledge factory because of its capacity to harbor a kind of reflection connected directly with attempts to escape the dominion of competition and corporatization. It has its own model of sustainability as a project that supports the 'social economy'" (Moreno Caballud 234). TdS's business model, which is based on community support and participation, has been more successful during the crisis than many other businesses that rely upon a more traditional, consumerist relationship with customers. It seems fitting, then, that such a press would participate in a project of re-writing fairy tales which, though they have been often appropriated for commercial gains, originally form part of folk culture held in common.

The narratives in the *Te cuento* series seek to disseminate innovative reinterpretations of recognizable tales with the potential to inspire readers to develop new interpretations and alternative orientations toward familiar themes. Andrés García de la Riva describes the series as: "destinada a públicos de todas las edades ya que la combinación de cuento clásico, reflexión actual y fotografía documental ofrece un relato nuevo, holístico, abierto a múltiples lecturas e

interpretaciones." Sanz's cover bears the title "Blancanieves," so readers know which classic tale they have selected. The author's original title, "Las palabras que ensucian el ruido del mundo," refers to the "filthy" words "reino, raza, estirpe" that are used to oppress the stepmother, making her into a mere means of perpetuating the royal family through reproduction (Sanz "palabras" 13). The stepmother can indeed be understood as disabled, since her body does not conform to heterosexist, gendered expectations of childbearing. Sanz's narrator is the famous magic mirror, who announces that he seeks to disabuse his audience of false versions of the story that have circulated over time: "creo que ha llegado el momento de tomar la palabra porque estoy un poco harto de escuchar mentiras. Versiones que no son fieles a la verdad" ("palabras" 7). The biggest lie that the mirror seeks to correct is the assumption that Snow White's stepmother envied her for her beauty. In fact Snow White was neither attractive nor intelligent; instead, it is Snow White's preternatural fertility that the stepmother envied (Sanz "palabras" 13).

Of the three Spanish versions of the Snow White tale discussed in this chapter, it is Sanz's that departs most sharply from realism in its description of the young woman's fertility, which could be read as a kind of gendered disability. As the mirror explains: "La fertilidad de Blancanieves era sobrenatural. Blancanieves rozaba con sus dedos una espiga de trigo y tenía un hijo; Blancanieves rozaba con sus labios el pico de un gorrión y tenía un hijo; Blancanieves rozaba con la punta de su pie un hormiguero y tenía un hijo; Blancanieves se empapaba de lluvia y tenía un hijo" (Sanz "palabras" 21). Snow White's numerous progeny are not engendered as a result of sexual intercourse, but rather in response to her body's contact with nature. In effect, the condition can be read as disabling because it impairs her movement through the environment. The stepmother warns Snow White: "Fíjate bien dónde pones las manos, los labios, los deditos de los pies…" (Sanz "palabras" 21). This admonition recalls the traditional warning that young

women should be vigilant of the ways their bodies move through the world in order to prevent unwanted sexual contact.

Much differently from Berger's little people, who become the protagonist's chosen family, Marta Sanz's dwarves are actually Snow White's unwanted offspring, wandering at large because their mother abandons them as soon as they are born ("palabras" 29). Sanz's dwarves, like those in the original Grimm tale, also work in a mine. They complain of harsh conditions, blaming their mother for their troubles: "No estaban contentos, sino muy resentidos contra una madre que los había olvidado" (Sanz "palabras" 29). The word "resentidos" appears here, as it does in Marta Sanz's novel *Black, black, black,* to describe the affective state of the economically oppressed. In this version of the tale, it is the dwarves who want to kill Snow White, their absent mother, "Por su falta de amor y entrega maternal. Por su inconsciencia. Por condenarlos a una vida de precariedad y penurias" (Sanz "palabras" 37). If Snow White's stepmother can be understood as both disabled and gender non-normative for her inability to have children, then the same could be said for Snow White herself, seeing as her hyperfertility is not accompanied by the maternal instinct that is typically associated with femaleness.

Contrary other portrayals of Snow White's stepmother as evil and malicious, in this story it is the stepmother who wears a suit of armor and leads a revolution. The mirror/narrator explains to the her that Snow White is not her enemy, that the real threat to her wellbeing is the oppressive, patriarchal requirement of childbearing. The stepmother then intervenes to save Snow White from murder by her unwanted offspring, the dwarves. She convinces them that their mother is not to be blamed for their economic marginalization, that instead the culprit is the unjust rule of the king (Sanz "palabras" 37). She organizes the dwarves and, together, they overthrow the king and establish a more just society: "La madrastra capitaneó la revolución de

un reino que se convirtió en un país donde los súbditos dejaron de serlo y ya no hubo nunca más ni reyes ni reinas asfixiadas por su obligación de procrear. Donde los enanos ya no eran explotados en las minas mientras en el palacio del rey se chupaba los dedos después de comerse una pata de pollo" (Sanz "palabras" 37). Finally, the "poisoned" apple that the stepmother gives Snow White is actually birth control, allowing her to enjoy her sexuality without the obligation of bearing unwanted children. Sanz's conclusion departs significantly from classic versions of the story both through its affirmation of female sexuality and unity it portrays among the female characters. The tale's "happy ending" is embodied in an egalitarian community, a kind of anti-patriarchal utopia that is inclusive of diverse sexuality and embodiment.

Similarly to Berger's choice to create a black-and-white, silent film version of Snow White, Clemente Bernad's photography adds an unexpected and innovative visual dimension to Sanz's Blancanieves and the other installations of the *Te cuento* series. Both the silent film format and Bernad's photography invite connections between a well-known tale and an unfamiliar temporal or cultural space. Rebecca Llorente describes the photographer as an artist dedicated to documenting the marginalized: "ilustra a través de la fotografía el mundo de los marginados: toxicómanos, inmigrantes, refugiados, parados, y demás excluidos de la sociedad." Bernad's artistic project fits thematically with Sanz's message of feminist solidarity; the photography included with this story documents Saharan refugee women sustaining their community in the absence of men. The male members of the community, as Bernad explains, are engaged in armed combat elsewhere. The photographs in this publication ostensibly have little to do with the story of Snow White: they present the lives of women living in a refugee camp, studying and caring for children. Images relating to childbirth and childcare also dialogue with Sanz's reflections upon the role of women as mothers. One photo, in particular, shows a young

woman standing in front of a drawing of a fetus positioned against a pelvic bone structure. The medical nature of the drawing seems prescriptive, describing the normalcy of the female body. The placement of woman's head directly below that of the fetus—in the location of the birth canal—suggests that she is destined for childbirth. The photo's juxtaposition with other images of women engaged in childcare further elaborates upon this social role; however, the inclusion of photos that show women learning from books serves as a reminder that they are multi-faceted subjects capable of engaging in a variety of pursuits.

Parallels can be discerned between these images and the Snow White tale; nevertheless, the connection is far from obvious or simple, demonstrating that fairy tales can be a catalyst for discussing many different issues. Like the stepmother in the text of Sanz's story, the Saharan women in Bernad's photos are also engaged in resistance, as a community of women: "Ellas saben qué es resistir. Resistir contra la ocupación militar, cultural y económica de su territorio por el régimen feudal marroquí. Pero no sólo resisten a eso. Resisten contra un océano de incomprensión . . . . Contra el silencio, contra el olvido" (Bernad). The refugee status of these women adds layers of complexity to their resistance; as people without a nation, they are illegible, and thus risk being denied their humanity.

In the wake of Spain's 1975 withdrawal from the Western Sahara, the Saharan people were scattered throughout Moroccan-occupied territories and refugee camps in North Africa. As refugees, the Saharans are, in the words of Zygmunt Bauman, "the human waste of the global frontier-land, are 'the outsiders incarnate,' the absolute outsiders, outsiders everywhere and out of place everywhere except in places that are themselves out of place" (80). Thousands of Saharans in Spain have been granted the status of "apátrida," citizens of no country. Minich cites Lisa Lowe to point out that, if citizenship is what binds the individual to the state and, in the

modern world, the state is the only entity that can grant one's civil rights, then to live outside of this relationship is to inhabit life-threatening precarity (Introduction). Those who live without citizenship are, as Elisa Silió enumerates: "personas que no pueden escolarizarse, casarse, comprarse una casa, abrir una cuenta o votar." Even this list of impossibilities is incomplete. Brahim Chagaf, a Sarahan filmmaker, recognizes that the cultural danger of living without citizenship is disappearance: "Sin identidad se acaba por dejar de existir" (qtd. in Delle Femmine). In 2013 Chagaf directed the first Saharan-made film, *Patria dividida*. His work, like Bernad's, seeks to document the Saharan community; however, the seminal difference between the two is that Bernad's photography represents the Spaniard's perspective, directed toward the Spaniard, much like the narration of Gopegui's novel directs a normalized, middle-class voice toward a middle-class audience. Chagaf, instead, is himself Saharan, and worked with members of his community to create a filmic representation of his own people. Bernad's words, printed at the end of the "Blancanieves" booklet, explain his project as an attempt to capture images of the Other: "Estas fotografías quieren volar entre estas mujeres que nos son tan desconocidas. Tan lejanas, tan pequeñas, tan extrañas." The use of "nos" in this description signifies that the project is destined for an audience similar to the photographer himself and, therefore, different from its subjects. To pair photos of these women with the Snow White story is to have them protagonize a known tale, thus making them more approachable and relatable to Spanish readers, for whom they are absolutely foreign. Their lives are lived truly at the margins of the modern world, models of survival without relationship to the state.

What all three of these *Snow White* stories have in common is their imagining of alternative forms of community: Gopegui's concept of disability as a common responsibility, Blancanieves' fellowship with the dwarves, and Sanz and Bernad's promotion of feminist

solidarity in resistance to oppressive gender norms and exclusion from citizenship. The global economic crisis has left Spain besieged with unemployment, uncertainty and civil unrest. From this turmoil, important debates have emerged surrounding the meaning of democratic citizenship, and the cultural agency of marginalized groups including women and people with disabilities. It seems unsurprising, therefore, that a story like that of Snow White would capture imaginations during this time. Tracey Mollet explains that Disney's 1937 *Snow White* was particularly appealing to the audiences of the Great Depression, since it provided an entertaining escape from reality while reinforcing the values of the American Dream with a "rags to riches" happy ending and a heroine who maintained hope in the face of adversity (113-14). The unclear prognosis of Berger's Blancanieves is especially poignant, considering the uncertain future of protections for vulnerable citizens in Spain. These disabled bullfighters, released into the cinemas of the crisis, cannot fail to evoke a nation paralyzed, even though Snow White's future is open to speculation. Sanz and Gopegui, in their interpretations of *Snow White*, employ a familiar narrative from most readers' childhoods to question the past and to modify orientations toward the future.

Delgado references Lennard Davis to trace the concept of the ideal nation as able-bodied back to the 19th century: "A partir del siglo XIX, la nación normal se metaforiza como un cuerpo sano, no marcado por ninguna desviación física ni mental y capaz de reproducirse en otros cuerpos sanos: es una metáfora poderosa, peligrosa y de muy largo alcance" (*Nación* 269). This metaphor also contains a dimension of futurity, implying that a nation characterized as able-bodied in the present can also count on a prosperous, able-bodied future. Antonio's and Carmen's failures to achieve recovery and a happy ending infused with able-bodiedness suggests a dismal future, in contrast with Disney's optimistic glorification of dominant ideologies. Gopegui and Sanz, in their interpretations of *Snow White*, employ a familiar narrative from most

readers' childhoods to question the past and to modify orientations toward the future.

Moreno-Caballud believes that the global economic crisis has given way to the widespread questioning of hegemonic narratives: "una apreciación justa de la situación actual debe tener en cuenta . . . un generalizado cuestionamiento de las narrativas de sentido hegemónicas, que han entrado también en una profunda crisis" (536). According to this scholar, in the face of economic collapse, it is human relationships that have prevailed: "redes de interdependencia e intercambio que no se han visto paralizadas por la crisis, sino que incluso más bien se han expandido . . . . Ante la debacle de los capitales privados y públicos apostados a todo riesgo en el casino neoliberal, la sociedad ha respondido reactivando sus vínculos comunitarios (familiares, vecinales, de amistad)" (537). One possible response to the economic crisis in Spain (which certainly cannot be understood as universal throughout the nation) is to have the wellbeing of each individual citizen be considered in community, rather than in neoliberal competition. This the essence of the immigrant's words in *El padre de Blancanieves*: "Soy responsabilidad suya." The possibility of discerning a continuum of interdependent humanity, rather than seeing a ruptured "us" versus "them," is diametrically opposed to the foundational narrative of capitalist society. Nonetheless, the collectivism suggested in the works studied in this chapter proposes a way of being that became a survival tactic in Spain of the crisis.

Chapter 3

"Todos en el mismo saco":

Disability and the Housing Crisis in Marta Sanz's *Black, black, black*

The appeal of the detective novel genre lies in its representation of extraordinary situations in familiar settings. Marta Sanz's 2010 novel *Black, black, black* presents the investigation of the murder of Cristina Esquivel, a young doctor strangled in her Madrid apartment. The apartment building where the victim meets her end is typical housing many in the urban centers of Europe and worldwide. The particular act of violence that occurs there is portrayed as exceptional, but it is proven to be the product of normalized structural violence. This novel tells the story of a criminal investigation against the background of the global economic crisis in Spain, where housing had become unaffordable for many, especially following the burst of the housing bubble in 2008. This chapter studies how Sanz, a prominent author in the contemporary Spanish literary panorama, utilizes a feminist iteration of the detective genre to explore the effects of the economic crisis on Spanish society, while at the same time re-conceptualizing the role of women, people with disabilities, immigrants and racial minorities.

Sanz's novel is divided into three parts, with three narrators of distinct social conditions and perspectives. The first narrator is a private investigator, a gay man named Arturo Zarco; the second is an economically privileged neighbor of the victim; the third is Paula Quiñones, Zarco's ex-wife. Paula, who has a disability, manages to solve the crime when her ex-husband, the professional detective, fails. She gains access to the building where the crime took place pretending to be a housing inspector. Her investigation reveals that the greatest threat to the

community is the inequality and precarity that have resulted from the housing crisis. Paula's lifelong struggle against sexism and ableism ultimately positions her as the individual best qualified to observe and critique the injustices of the social system that has created the conditions for the murder.

In the present study, I employ the ideas of Alison Kafer to examine how dominant notions of disability are questioned or upheld in the text's language and narrative content. Differently from the traditional detective novel, which privileges critical logic in solving crimes, Paula's empathetic identification with other marginalized groups proves to be her most valuable tool as a detective. I therefore refer to Rosemarie Garland-Thomson to analyze the intersection of disability with other marginalized identities that appear in the text. As a narrator who is a disabled woman, Paula aligns herself with others who fail to find belonging in dominant Spanish culture, including immigrants and racial minorities. In this chapter, I ask how Paula experiences and manipulates the prejudices against her, as a woman with a disability. I study how the genre of the novela negra is used as a tool to explore social problems in relation to the economic crisis, including xenophobia, racism and the inaccessibility of housing, and how these factors determine which citizens are viewed as productive and welcome.

Edgar Allan Poe's "Murders in the Rue Morgue" (1841) is widely recognized as the first detective story (Craig-Odders xvii). Some examples of the genre from 19th-century Spain include Pedro de Alarcón's *El clavo y otros relatos de misterio y crimen* (1853) and Emilia Pardo Bazán's *La gota de sangre* (published between 1893 and 1898). The plot of the traditional detective novel assumes that, once the guilty party is identified and located, the social order can be restored. In contrast, the so-called "novela negra" or noir novel is a type of police novel that highlights social injustice; rather than focusing on the criminal as an individual, criminality is

framed as endemic to the system in general: “La novela policiaca negra parte de una desconfianza total en la sociedad y sus instituciones. La constitución de la sociedad se considera intrínsecamente injusta e inmoral, basada en el dominio del poderoso sobre el débil” (Colmeiro 62). The noir novel traces its origins to the United States of the 1920s and 30s, decades of crisis and cultural change, following the First World War and the stock market crash of 1929. In Spain, although translations of North American and English crime novels were popular, the production of the genre within the Spanish State does not become prevalent until the 1970s, with Manuel Vázquez Montalbán’s *Tatuaje* (1974) is considered the first Spanish novela negra. Colmeiro associates the emergence of the genre in Spain with the transition to democracy: “la aparición de esta novela responde a la necesidad colectiva de ajustarse a la nueva realidad con todas sus ambigüedades” (222). While the Spanish State enjoyed new liberties and the promise of positive changes following the death of dictator Francisco Franco in 1975, these were also years of political instability and elevated crime rates (Colmeiro 212). The scholar explains that the noir novel tends to be popular in moments of change and crisis because it allows readers to experience a symbolic transcendence of the social problems that surround them (Colmeiro 220). Especially in the case of narratives that can be read as representing wider social ills, the act of reading about a criminal investigation and the process of justice affords the reader a feeling of satisfaction when seeing order imposed upon the uncertainty and chaos of human existence. The noir novel also appeals by offering an opportunity to explore the dark side of human nature without material consequences. Because the detective narrative invites reflection upon the link between systemic injustice and criminality, it is logical that the noir novel would be a popular genre in moments of social and economic crisis. Sanz’s work was published in 2010, two years after the burst of the housing bubble, which did tremendous damage to the infrastructures of

southern European nations. It was from this atmosphere of mass unemployment and abounding home foreclosures that the narrative *Black, black, black* emerged.

I. Paula Quiñones, la coja mala leche

Paula appears from the beginning of the novel as the interlocutor of her ex-husband's narration. The first physical description of this character comes from her husband's disdainful point of view: "Paula tiene una pierna un poco más corta que la otra. En un zapato lleva un alza con la que disimula. Cojea si no se calza sus zapatos especiales de coja conversa a la simetría" (Sanz 80-81). Even though Paula is a complex and multi-faceted character, her leg-length discrepancy is her most prominent physical trait, given that it is a visual difference that draws attention and influences her interactions with others. The word "coja" (which Paula herself also uses) interpellates Zarco's ex-wife as a disabled person, constructing her identity around her asymmetrical embodiment. Zarco furthermore assumes that Paula's goal is to cultivate the appearance of "normalcy;" without considering that her use of shoe inserts could result in greater comfort or facilitated mobility, Zarco assumes it is motivated by a desire to hide her condition. Notwithstanding her efforts to "convert" to symmetry, the supposedly desirable state of the human body, the reality is that Paula hides a non-normative body.

While decidedly more critical attention has been paid to Zarco's homosexuality than to his ex-wife's leg-length discrepancy, with the novel at times described simply as "la historia de un detective gay," it is Paula's disability that provokes stronger affective reactions within the narrative (Cruz 2017, Gutiérrez 2015, Rodríguez Marcos 2016). Zarco's interactions with the community show no evidence of homophobia. José Ismael Gutiérrez notes that, on a narrative level, the detective's sexuality serves merely to construct him as a well-rounded, "human" character, rather than to paint him as immoral or villainous (111). Paula's disability, by

comparison is a constant object of attention. Gutiérrez argues that the work's treatment of homosexuality is consistent with contemporary Spanish society, in which homophobia is less widespread than it once was: "Con el correr de los años, y a medida que homosexuales, bisexuales y transexuales alcanzan mayores espacios de libertad, la crítica a la discriminación sexual, que se hará menos beligerante, se matiza con la denuncia de otros problemas en alza" (111). By the time of the novel's publication in 2010, same-sex marriage had indeed been legal for five years in Spain. While there is no doubt that legal equality does not guarantee freedom from hatred and discrimination, homophobia does not figure into Sanz's narrative. For the detective, being gay does not constitute an experience of marginalization, or at least it does not inspire him to identify with other marginalized individuals who are viewed as "abnormal" by the dominant culture. As a white, Spanish man, Zarco instead occupies a position of privilege that impedes him from empathizing with others and perceiving the systemic injustices that led to the crime he investigates.

The words of Zarco's narration evidence his attitude of superiority toward his ex-wife, framing her as an unfortunate, disabled woman without a romantic (male) partner. The detective justifies his continued relationship with Paula after their divorce by describing her as a pathetic person: "No entiende que la llamo porque está sola y me da pena" (Sanz 24). Scholar Alison Kafer, herself a person with disability, explains that when people meet her, they tend to pity her, supposing her life to be full of pain and disappointment: "they imagine a future that is both banal and pathetic: . . . their visions assume a future of relentless pain, isolation, and bitterness, a representation that leads them to bless me, pity me, or refuse to see me altogether" (Introduction). Disability is generally viewed as a tragedy, and an incomplete and unsatisfying life is expected for people with non-normative bodies or minds. Zarco, besides feeling sorry for

Paula, also demonstrates repulsion for her, associating her with a series of monstrous, criminal figures: “rondan historias de tullidos que matan, de cheposos, de cojos mala leche--como Paula--, de tuertos que sacan los ojos a los niños mientras descansan en sus cunitas” (Sanz 81). The images evoked here defend the antiquated idea that a body or mind that is not “normal” implies a perverse or criminal subjectivity given to deviant acts (Kafer Introduction). Akiko Tsuchiya, in reference to Michel Foucault, explains that, when the science of criminology was developed, in the second half of the 19th century, criminality was understood as an observable characteristic of the individual (12). Deviant behavior was thus easier to control; once identified, the criminal body could be treated or isolated for the good of society. According to this perspective, criminality is an individual phenomenon, rather than a product of greater social ills. To include Paula in this list is to situate her beside criminals, suggesting that she, too, because of her disability, has the potential to deviate from the moral order. As a detective, it is Zarco’s responsibility to defend and restore this order. The antiquated association of disability with degeneracy also lends itself to a reading of disability as metaphor or, as Andrew Jakubowicz and Helen Meekosha describe, “the regular manipulation of disabled bodies and psyches as standing in for something else, and something deviant at that.” These critics note, also, that characters with disabilities are often expected to take passive roles in literary narratives: “usually, disabled people are stereotypically the objects of action taken against them, rather than subjects in their own actions” (Jakubowicz and Meekosha). Paula’s circulation through the city and her interactions with the community disabuse readers of the idea that the body with disability—in literary representations or in the material world—should be read as a symbol of immorality, or that the disabled person lacks the potential to protagonize their own actions.

Attention to the way disability is constructed in the novel elucidates other social

problems with which the work is concerned. Rafael de Asís Roig, in his analysis of Spain's Ley de Dependencia, discusses how models of disability have evolved in Western culture. He begins by citing the antiquated perception of disability as a divine punishment, necessitating the elimination of the disabled person, either by death or exclusion, in order to preserve the community (de Asís Roig 6). He refers then to the medical model, "la discapacidad como anomalía," a physiological or cognitive abnormality that could, ideally, be corrected or "healed" by professional medicine (de Asís Roig 6). The scholar finally names the social model, a late 20th-century development, in which "la discapacidad deja de ser entendida como una anormalidad del sujeto, y comienza a ser contemplada más bien como una anormalidad de la sociedad" (de Asís Roig 6). Kafer uses the social model as a point of departure for proposing a "political-relational" model, understanding disability as a cultural construction that is also implicated in relationships of power (Introduction). She explains that viewing disability as an individual diagnosis perpetuates the idea that it is "a personal problem afflicting individual people, a problem best solved through strength of character and resolve" (Kafer Introduction). Even the acknowledgement that we are disabled through the limitations of our culture, not those of our own bodies or minds, can ignore the role of power and oppression in causing some to be less abled than others. In my analysis of Sanz's novel, I take a political-relational perspective on both disability and the economic crisis. The effects of the economic crisis are at times blamed on the individual, based upon the assumption that those who work hard will remain untouched by failing economy. This perception obscures the systemic factors that have resulted in the unequal distribution of wealth that, in Sanz's novel, gives rise to violence. The main concern of this literary work is not an individual murder, but rather the social ills of ableism, sexism, racism and xenophobia, and the corruption that created the housing crisis.

II. Entre los atrapados: empathy as an investigative tool

Throughout the narrative, Zarco directs this attitude of superiority toward a number of marginalized people, for example when he mocks the accents of the immigrants he interviews in the context of his investigation (Sanz 45). Pilar Martínez-Quiroga observes that, when Zarco sees an immigrant child, he automatically assumes the child has a cognitive disability (27). This reading of disability—a trait that Zarco is known to view negatively—in the racialized body is further evidence of the detective's prejudices. He proves himself incapable of seeing beyond stereotypes, which results in an uncritical vision of the world that limits him in his investigative duties. Paula, on the other hand, is distinguished as a narrator by her ability to share emotional experiences with other non-normative individuals. Paula takes over the investigation when Zarco is hospitalized following a physical altercation with the victim's widower. According to Shanna Lino, of the novel's three narrative voices, Paula's is the most political, given that she expresses explicitly her solidarity with the most vulnerable members of society (39). I argue that this solidarity is a result of Paula's own social location, seeing as she is both a woman and a person with a disability. Garland Thomson explains thus the intersection between sexism and ableism: "Both the female and the disabled body are cast as deviant and inferior; both are excluded from full participation in public as well as economic life; both are defined in opposition to a norm that is assumed to possess natural physical superiority" (19). Both the female body and the disabled body have been considered problematic throughout history, and both have been excluded from the public sphere (Garland Thomson 19). This marginalization is certainly not unique to women and people with disabilities; Garland Thomson recognizes that there are many forms of injustice based upon the cultural interpretation of bodies, citing racism as another example (20). A consciousness of the intersectional nature of oppression is evident in Paula's words. She begins

her narration including herself, as a woman with a disability, in a list of people marginalized for their gender, socioeconomic status, age, appearance, race and ability:

> Los animales atrapados en un cepo, alanceados . . . las tejedoras peruanas, los viejos, los hombres no agraciados físicamente, las escritoras resentidas, los inmigrantes, los niños que aún no saben hablar, los parapléjicos, las cojitas como yo y los jóvenes con síndrome de Down... Todos en el mismo saco. . . . Quizá los seres más vulnerables son los menos inofensivos. Los que guardan dentro más rabia. También damos pena; inspiramos compasión (Sanz 223).

Similarly to Zarco's previous list, Paula is here identified as "coja," included in a group of people generally considered less fortunate. She begins this list with animals, beings that are usually considered to be under the command of human beings. Paula specifically evokes the image of the hunted animal, incapacitated and robbed of its liberty. In contrast to her ex-husband's discussion of monstrous figures, Paula's account is enumerated in first person, as it includes "las cojitas como yo." Instead of positioning these people as distant, unknowable criminals, Paula considers herself one of them, identifying with their lack of freedom and rights. In a kind of stream of consciousness, a technique that appears frequently in Sanz's prose, she names a series of people that, while they are very different, all deviate from what is considered "normal" and desirable, be it because of race or socioeconomic level (las tejedoras peruanas) or because of physical or cognitive ability (los parapléjicos, los jóvenes con síndrome de Down). "Los hombres no agraciados físicamente" could refer to the murderer; his experience of being scorned by society motivates his acts of violence, although it does not justify them. Paula also names the "escitora resentida," which appears to refer to one of the victim's neighbors but could also be a humorous allusion to Marta Sanz herself. Because Paula is the narrator of this last

section of the novel, she herself can be seen to occupy the role of "escritora," recording and relating her own vision of the reality she observes. To list these figures in a stream of consciousness obliges the reader to consider them all together, notwithstanding their diversity, and to consider the common marginalization that links them. These individuals, including their narrator, have been put "all in the same bag" by the dominant culture, dehumanized and indistinguishable. They share, furthermore, an affective experience of impotent rage: the sense of being "trapped," associated with the hunted animal.

Resentment, in fact, is the affect that most characterizes the social relationships developed in the narrative. Stefano Tomelleri explains that resentment, in and of itself, constitutes a social relationship marked by inequality: "Resentment is not an emotion like anger, hate, or fear, but a specific form of social relation, a way of viewing the world with 'bitter blood,' which arises in egalitarian and competitive societies with growing self-reflective capacities" (274). Tomelleri and others have pointed out the ways that the capitalist system cultivates resentment; in theory, all members of a democratic society are equals, but in practice, within an economic system based on competition, power is always distributed disproportionately: "Resentment is not so much fueled by egalitarianism, as by the acute contradiction between expectations of equality and structural inequality, of systemic antagonism between 'formal social equality' and 'great differences in de facto power'" (264). Clara Valverde Gefaell, in her study of necropolitics (the "let die" side of biopolitics), argues that neoliberal policy propagates the belief that all subjects are free to improve their lives by amassing capital, but ultimately all members of society are trapped at a fixed level: "en realidad cada sujeto tiene su sitio" (28). Some members of society, Valverde Gefaell argues, have no place at all, if they are unable to compete independently in the marketplace, as is the case for many with disabilities.

The emptiness of the neoliberal promise of hard work rewarded has never been so apparent as during the global economic crisis, when the scarcity of jobs has made upward mobility plainly impossible. The word "indignado" is frequently used to describe the reaction of the Spanish citizenry to the crisis; as Luisa Elena Delgado observes, this word sums up the nation's emotional habitus in these years ("Public" 271). The Spaniards' indignation can be understood as a response at once to the economic precarity resulting from a lack of employment, to corruption in the public and financial sectors, and to the falsehoods used to justify the neoliberal policies that made the crisis possible.

Paula recognizes the anger that results from entrapment, naming this indignation as "rabia." The word "rabia" is also used by Olmo, Zarco's lover and a neighbor of the victim, who has daltonism, or colorblindness. When Zarco observes that Olmo's butterfly collection does not include a single red specimen, his lover responds: "¿Ya te has dado cuenta? . . . Es que no las veo. Y siento rabia'" (Sanz 79). Because he loves hunting and collecting butterflies, Olmo is frustrated by his inability to enjoy the sight of the color red on the insects' wings. His anger can be interpreted as a form of resentment caused by his exclusion from a common human experience that he desires to have. In a way, Olmo is also trapped in his own visual capabilities, a limitation that frustrates him. Certainly, disability is not always associated with resentment, indignation, or a sense of being trapped; however, these emotions are common responses for those victimized by an imbalance of power and opportunities. As Kafer reminds us, disability itself is a product of power imbalance between the able-bodied majority and the differently-abled.

The experience of entrapment also has a temporal dimension, implying a hopeless future. The trapped subject feels rage at being unable to free themselves nor to determine their own

destiny. To have a non-normative body, according to cultural values, implies condemnation to a dark future. Kafer claims that: "My future is written on my body" (Introduction). Implicitly, then, the only way to guarantee a promising future for humanity is to eliminate these anomalies "any future that includes disability can only be a future to avoid. A better future, in other words, is one that excludes disability and disabled bodies; indeed, it is the very *absence* of disability that signals this better future" (Kafer Introduction). The "trapped" figures Paula names are those least protected by society because they do not fit into visions of a "better world." The sense of being excluded from the future resonates with the Madrid collective Juventud Sin Futuro, formed in 2011 by young people affected by the economic crisis, and dissolved in 2017. Their slogan, "Sin casa, sin curro, sin pensión. Juventud sin miedo. Recuperando nuestro futuro, Esto es solo el principio," rejected the idea that a future worth living should depend on participation in the labor market and the accumulation of capital (qtd. in López). The Juventud Sin Futuro (JSF) collective staged its first protest in Madrid, in April of 2011. Theirs is recognized as the first major citizen protest of the crisis, and a precursor to the famous occupation of the Puerta del Sol on May 15 of the same year (López). María López describes JSF's primary objective as debunking the notion that unemployment and poverty are individual problems: "De sí mismos dicen que supusieron el comienzo de la politización de lo cotidiano, de la dignificación de la vida y de la colectivización de unos problemas que se negaban a creer como personales." The collective was formed in response to the soaring unemployment rate for Spaniards under 40 years of age, which reached nearly 50% at the height of the crisis. This resulted in the exclusion of half the nation's young people from the workforce at a crucial moment of their lives, making impossible the neoliberal dream of independent adulthood centered on building a career and amassing financial resources over an average lifespan. Unable to see a future for themselves in Spain, many young people

moved abroad, an exodus which threatened to further undermine the future of the nation left behind. The collective disbanded in 2017, its organizers stating that, while the future remains uncertain for Spanish youth, they wish to move forward in new political ways (López). By retelling narratives of the ideal future, the organization of this collective was one generation's form of resistance against the sensation of being trapped by the desperate circumstances of the crisis.

Valverde Gefaell names JFS—alongside people with disabilities and the unemployed, among others—in her own list of those who find themselves "en el mismo saco": "Los enfermos crónicos, los discapacitados, los ancianos con pensiones míseras, los parados o con trabajos mal pagados, los sin techo, los niños hambrientos, los jóvenes sin futuro . . . son el producto de las desigualdades que crea el neoliberalismo. Pero se les etiqueta como culpables de su situación, como irresponsables y sospechosos" (25). Like Sanz's list of "atrapados," Valverde Gefaell's grouping of those with disabilities, the elderly, the impoverished and the unemployed demonstrates that these forms of marginalization intersect and are traced to a common source. According to dominant beliefs, disability implies a grim future, as does a future unscaffolded by employment and pensions. JSF sought to redirect the emotions of fear and anger that arise from this predicament in order to envision a new type of future. Collectively, these young people became empowered, reconceptualizing the crisis as an opportunity for creative solutions and strengthened communal bonds. Similarly, Sanz's novel presents the female detective's disability not as an impediment, but as an advantage for someone who occupies the world in a different manner.

Paula realizes a kind of resistance through her strategy of manipulating for her own benefit the prejudices her disability inspires, above all the emotions that her condition inspires in

others. Speaking in general (and, once again, in first person) about the most vulnerable members of society, she explains that, despite the anger that oppressed people feel, "también damos pena; inspiramos compasión." When she interviews Cristina Esquivel's father, she makes an effort to draw attention to her non-normative leg: "que se fije en mi calzado y que mi cojera sea un modo de atenuar la frialdad que barrunto en nuestro encuentro" (Sanz 274). In this context, Paula's leg-length discrepancy becomes an advantage that allows her to gain trust and to obtain information to solve the crime. She understands, nonetheless, that pity is not the only affect that people with disability inspire: "los cojos dan lástima, pero también se les imputa mal carácter, mala condición" (Sanz 274). This perspective is of course evident in Zarco's disparaging list of despicable and delinquent individuals with disabilities. In order to allay the suspicions people harbor toward those with disabilities, Paula strategically cultivates the image of "una señorita coja y católica," dressing "like a nun" when she goes to meet with elderly people as part of her investigation (including the victim's parents) (Sanz 277, 273-74). Through her manner of dress and behavior, she presents the image of someone who is innocuous and worthy of trust, which is an advantage for detective work.

Paula, as a detective without professional formation, utilizes unconventional (and ultimately successful) tactics to solve the crime, drawing from the emotional and affective understanding of her environment and of human nature. In the first place, it is important to remember that physical mobility is, as Kathleen Thompson-Casado notes, an intrinsic characteristic of the archetypical detective; it is his range of movement that allows him to analyze and observe criminality "The roots of the hard-boiled detective's solitary status spring in part from the frontiersman myth of the independent, autonomous, and highly mobile adventurer" (142). The image of the adventurer, moreover, generally implies a robust, masculine person;

being a woman who navigates the streets of Madrid despite her orthopedic disability, Paula challenges gender norms, the norms of the detective genre and the expectations of a person with disability. Thompson-Casado points out that this type of questioning is a common characteristic of police novels written by Spanish women: ". . . in the hands of Spanish women authors the re-writing of the detective novel becomes a valuable vehicle for questioning the stereotypes and values of the genre and the dominant culture" (139). Given that the detective novel is a traditionally masculine genre, it is not surprising that the figure of the female detective—especially when she appears in a novel written by a woman with political intentions—defies expectations of the typical criminal investigation narrative.

Notwithstanding her difficulties, Paula insists upon circulating through the urban space, and it is the circulation of her non-normative body that affords her a type of alternative and invaluable knowledge. Paula's emotional intelligence becomes her indispensable tool; according to Sander L. Gilman, the use of empathy distinguishes the literary detective with disability, who tends to utilize to emotional resources beyond the purely analytic intellect (273). Paula explains: "Aprendo . . . cosas que no tienen sólo que ver con el orden de los acontecimientos o con las verdades que se esconden en las mentiras y viceversa. Profundizo en mi compasión, en mi capacidad para entender las razones de cada ser humano" (Sanz 330). Through identification with others, Paula uncovers the truth of their motives and actions. She describes empathy as a physical sensation: "me pica el cuerpo y se me acelera el pulso" (Sanz 234). Sara Ahmed reminds us that emotions, above all in connection with the body, are traditionally associated with women, and are judged as inferior and less trustworthy than rational thought, which is associated with men (3). That Cristina Esquivel's murderer is found by a woman through the use of

empathy instead of logic is one of the many ways that *Black, black, black* deviates from the norms of the detective novel, demonstrating it to be a feminist example of the genre.

III. La novela negra: A genre for a time of crisis

Marta Sanz, in a book of essays *No tan incendiario* (2014) recognizes that cultural production offers an escape from the anxieties of the economic crisis (Sanz 19). While the author is conscious of culture's capacity to distract people from their precarious circumstances, as a writer, she interprets her art as a political act. In an interview, she explains her desire to invite readers to take a more critical look at the ideology that surrounds them, naming patriotism, the use of pharmaceuticals and practices for funding the arts as social problems that should be considered (Sanz citada en Rodríguez Marcos 2015). Sanz proposes to measure the value of culture by its capacity to be thought-provoking, rather than by its potential as a commercial distraction from social realities, and expresses a wish for cultural production to resist commercial hegemony: "Ojalá la lógica empresarial que dirige la vida de la gente, comunidades y países, deje también de gobernar una cultura que se legitima en función de su rentabilidad y de su presencia anestésica, pero no inocua, en los mostradores" (*incendiario* 21).In the case of *Black, black, black,* a series of elements points to a consideration of wider social injustices as the cause of localized violence.

It is no coincidence that Paula carries out her investigation by pretending to be a housing inspector. It is dissimulating this position that allows her access to the apartment building where the crime occurs. In this way, the narrative addresses two of the greatest social problems in contemporary Spain: the housing crisis and financial corruption. Article 47 of the Spanish Constitution of 1978 establishes that: "todos los españoles tienen derecho a disfrutar de una vivienda digna y adecuada." Nonetheless, this constitutional mandate did not prevent the Spanish

State from instituting neoliberal economic policy in the 1990s and the early 2000s that promoted the development of properties that were never sold and the lending of credit without limits (Colau y Alemany 28). Consequently, the cost of housing in Spain rose more rapidly than the average income, reaching levels that were unaffordable for a large part of the population. Of course, the word of the law does not correspond to policy, as Ada Colau and Adrià Alemany recognize: "el Estado propició la confusión entre el derecho a una vivienda y el hecho de garantizar el acceso al crédito; esto impulsó la propiedad privada más allá de los límites razonables y a costa del sobreendeudamiento de una buena parte de la población" (29). In a 2006 report by the United Nations Council of Human Rights, a series of causes were identified for the housing crisis in Spain: the scarcity of rental properties and inadequate policies surrounding rental; the excess of vacant housing and, at the same time, the lack of land available for housing development, the difficulty of said development; and finally the scarcity of publicly subsidized housing (Gagliardi Trotman 172). All these factors have facilitated the corruption of the housing sector, resulting in the particular exploitation of the elderly and other vulnerable groups (Gagliardi Trotman 173).

In 2010, the year Sanz's novel was published, foreclosures in Spain reached a record number of 47,809, creating an atmosphere of desperation (*El Confidencial* 2011). According to Spanish financial legislation, even when the home is seized due to nonpayment, the owner remains responsible for paying off the mortgage debt. With the advent of the crisis and 25% of the population unemployed, thousands of families found themselves without the means to pay their mortgage, and foreclosures became ubiquitous. David Harvey explains that "a massive phase of dispossession of assets (cultural as well as tangible)" is precisely what characterizes the experience of economic crisis (Chapter 8). Beyond provoking the loss of material goods—

including one's very home—the crisis also excludes many from participating in the consumption that forms an intrinsic part of modern life. Colau and Alemany identify the potential psychological and social repercussions of this desperate situation as: 'episodios de violencia, alcoholismo, desatención a los hijos, tensiones familiares, incremento de violencia de género e intentos de suicidio cada vez más frecuentes' (32). Sanz's novel thus presents an extreme case where crisis-inspired economic precarity creates the conditions for a homicide.

It is significant that the victim, Christina Esquivel, is the only one who speaks directly about the crisis, even though she doesn't appear to be at all affected by her country's economic situation. Cristina has had the good fortune to pursue a medical career that has afforded her a salary sufficient for buying a desirable apartment in Madrid's city center, with hopes, moreover, of improving and expanding it. While working as a doctor in nursing home, Cristina pays visits to her elderly neighbors, telling them not to blame their families for failing to visit often: "que todo el mundo tiene mucho trabajo en estos tiempos de crisis" (Sanz 284). Of course, this reasoning is ironic; in fact what most people do *not* have in a time of crisis is work. The crisis is curiously proposed here as a motive for individualism, an excuse for weakening or breaking affective bonds, a reason to worry about oneself instead of considering the welfare of family members, specifically the elderly who need assistance. It is Cristina who assists her neighbors, but during the investigation of her murder a selfish motive is discovered: she had convinced the older couple living beside her to sell their apartment and move to a nursing home, presumably so that she could buy their space and join it to her own. This plan creates an unforeseen complication because the couple's son had counted on inheriting their property, since that he himself lacks the capital to buy an equally desirable home for himself. Cristina herself never has the opportunity to justify her actions, but the narrative voice explains that she wanted to buy her

neighbors' apartment to expand her home, an example of "voluntad mostrenca, el empecinamiento, el instinto de propiedad, el deseo de expandirse y de marcar el territorio, una naturaleza autoritaria, depredadora" (Sanz 313). Even though she already owns a spacious and attractive dwelling, Cristina wants even more. Her ambitions reflect the desire to conquer space that, according to Harvey, lies at the core of the capitalist system: "What can be said with certainty is that the conquest of space and time, along with the ceaseless quest to dominate nature, have long taken centre stage in the collective psyche of capitalist societies" (Chapter 6). In the context of this novela negra, what seems to be an act of altruistic generosity—visiting one's elderly neighbors—turns out to be a façade for greed and the desire for accumulation.

IV. "Una casa típica": Architectures of the crisis

The organization of the apartment building that serves as the novel's setting physically reflects the division between those who live in economic precarity and those who find themselves more privileged. It is an old building, with more luxurious exterior units (including the home of Cristina Esquivel) that contrast with the interior apartments, which are small and without natural light. The exterior apartments are occupied by property owners, while the interior ones are rented. The pressure of the housing crisis is confirmed by the fact that real estate agents are said to visit weekly, estimating the worth of the exterior apartments with the intent of convincing their owners to sell.

Among the inhabitants of this building, there is not only economic diversity but also racial diversity (various neighbors are immigrants, including Cristina Esquivel's husband), and people of diverse ability: besides Olmo's visual difference, there are various older people with debilitating, age-related conditions. Paula describes this building as: "una casa típica del distrito central de Madrid, una casa de quiero y no puedo, de clase media rampante. . . . Una finca que

necesitaría una buena inspección y una rehabilitación que fuera más allá de una mano de pintura. Grietas y humedad recorren las paredes" (Sanz 232). This residence can be imagined as representative of many Spanish apartment buildings: with some units of higher quality than others, and many people sharing the same space.

Spain has not been known, during its modern history, for the diversity of its population. Until the end of the 20th century, Spain was a nation of emigrants. Between 1990 and 2013, however, Spain received the third largest influx of immigrants of any country in the world (Martínez Quinteiro 9). Although many immigrants have left Spain because of the economic crisis, the nation has undeniably become more racially, culturally and linguistically diverse in the last few decades. Cultural diversity is ever more widely touted as a source of richness for society, Pedro Garrido Rodríguez explains that its lived experience does pose undeniable challenges: "la experiencia indica que la coexistencia en un mismo espacio de culturas muy dispares puede producir, a la vez que beneficios, conflictos cuya deseable resolución pacífica exige imaginación, voluntad y esfuerzo de todas las partes" (13). The problem is that most who already harbor racial bias are unlikely to put forth the creative effort needed to live in common with those who are different than themselves. Ahmed points out that immigrants, especially, are seen as being at odds with the wellbeing of the national citizen: "the 'illegal immigrants' and 'bogus asylum seekers' are those who are 'not us' . . . . becoming this 'you' would mean developing a certain rage against these illegitimate others" (Ahmed 1). This rage tends to crystalize in times of crisis, when the immigrant is set forth as a scapegoat, the supposed catalyst for economic problems. It is implied, then, that the immigrant's absence will solve the economic problems of the country they have "invaded."

Sanz's novel in fact begins with the immigrant framed as the culprit. Martínez-Quiroga

maintains that the work uses the criminal investigation (and its unexpected twists) to manipulate readers' prejudiced expectations and thus highlight the nation's social problems (2). The case itself is motivated by the victim's parents hiring of Zarco as a private investigator in order to prove that their daughter's husband, Yalal, was her killer. It is clear that this assumption is based on the couple's disdain for Yalal, who is a Muslim immigrant. In the process of proving that their suspicions are unfounded, it becomes evident that the anxiety surrounding immigration in certain sectors of the Spanish population is a symptom of a social division that has become even more pronounced with the crisis. When Zarco her parents, his description of their home as "un chalé en una zona privilegiada de la ciudad," establishes the family's upper middle-class status (Sanz 16). When speaking with Zarco about his daughter's widower, Cristina's father insists on referring to him as "moro" (Sanz 13). When Zarco asks him, "¿Quiere usted decir árabe?, ¿marroquí?, ¿argelino?, ¿tunecino?," Señor Esquivel responds, simply, "Quiero decir moro'" (Sanz 13). Cristina's mother makes a connection between Yalal's linguistic abilities and his very humanity: "Ya verá, en cuanto usted lo vea, se va a dar cuenta de que el tipo es un animal, un primate... ¡Si hasta habla mal el español!" (Sanz 20). The Esquivels neither see their daughter's widower as a member of their family, their local community, or their nation. When Zarco refers to Yalal as their son-in-law ("su yerno"), they respond with distaste: "Los Esquivel se miran a los ojos. No les ha gustado nada que nombre al marido de la muerta con la palabra que designa el parentesco que les une a ellos" (Sanz 19-20). This couple wishes to imagine themselves as distinct and removed from immigrants; they prefer to relegate this population to a subhuman level, given its position at the periphery of the Spanish national imaginary. Their anger seeks to define Yalal, painting him as a threat to the nation, their daughter, and themselves, Spanish citizens who feel they have the exclusive right to occupy their own country.

In the apartment building where the murder takes place, the lack of cohesion between the different factions of the community is equally blatant. Luz, the narrator of the second part of the novel, who lives in an exterior unit inherited from her family, confesses that she has never come to recognize the "itinerant faces" of the inhabitants of the interior apartments; she perceives these renters as "una masa oscura, un alquitrán" (Sanz 210). Luz's depiction of her interior neighbor diverges from realism, suggesting that their very physiology has been altered by their dark, noxious environment: "Ciertos habitantes de los pisos interiores han adquirido el color de sus cuatro paredes: su pelo es ocre y su columna vertebral se encorva a causa de la falta de espacio. Se les ensanchan las aletas de la nariz por la falta de oxígeno y por los dióxidos que expelen los braseros. Otros moradores de la zona oscura tienen ojos albinos que no toleran la luz" (Sanz 210). She goes on to explicitly describe these beings as non-human: "Especies mutantes. Criaturas del mundo abisal que fosforecen o se vuelven transparentes" (Sanz 211). While it is known that these less costly dwellings are small and enjoy less sunlight, the assumption that they are actually toxic is never substantiated. It seems more likely that the presence of the poor, immigrants and minorities is what causes Luz to view these spaces as polluted, and their inhabitants as an alien species. The distaste for these "itinerant" residents, those who rent their homes, furthermore reflects an ideology with origins in the francoist period. In 1957, Spain's Minister of Housing, José Luis Arrese, declared: "Queremos un país de propietarios, no de proletarios" (citado en Colau and Alemany 34). According to Arrese, having more property owners in Spain would avoid civil disturbance: "El hombre, cuando no tiene hogar, se apodera de la calle y, perseguido por su mal humor, se vuelve subversivo, agrio, violento" (citado en Colau and Alemany 34). This perspective supposes that property ownership pacifies the citizen, and with more citizens contained in their homes there would be less possibility of subversion and

disruption in the public space.

This notion of the ideal citizen as a property owner results in the denigration of those who are unable to buy property which, in recent decades, has been the case for more and more Spaniards. Lino observes that the unequal distribution of valuable properties in the apartment building of Sanz's novel makes it into a kind of microcosm of capitalist society, where the majority of resources are concentrated in the hands of a few (46). Luz's observation of a circle formed by the building's residents when they meet to discuss the murder visually demonstrates this inequality: "El setenta y cinco por ciento del perímetro de la circunferencia está compuesto por los habitantes de los pisos interiores El veinticinco por ciento se concentra y se compacta en una de las áreas del perímetro; somos los moradores de las luminosas viviendas que dan a la calle. Y los de dentro nos odian" (Sanz 209). This narrator is aware that those of her own socioeconomic level are in the minority in her building and in society more generally. She assumes, without concrete proof, that those who lack access to more expensive and pleasant housing envy and hate those who possess it, and that they moreover pose a threat to her safety.

One of Luz's neighbors, Leo, a woman who was able to move from an interior apartment to an exterior one "con su esfuerzo y su capacidad de ahorro," similarly insists that the interior neighbors pose a threat: "los de dentro son unos resentidos. Cualquier día salimos todos ardiendo" (Sanz 116-17). Leo names the particular affect of resentment, assumed here as a logical reaction on the part of those who have fewer material resources but are forced to live in close proximity to wealthier, more comfortable neighbors. Leo believes that the residents of the interior apartments resent her more expensive unit that, according to her, she has acquired through her own hard work. It is notable that, in this novel, the experience of the neighbors of lower socioeconomic level is represented only through the perspective of the more privileged

residents. For this reason, their true opinions remain outside the narrative. Even though the inhabitants of the inner apartments are suspected of the desire to commit violence as recompense for their condition, none of them has the opportunity to carry out such an action. The lack of agency on their part illustrates the distinction between resentment and other affects such as hate or anger, according to Dolores Martín Moruno: "This aspect is exactly what distinguishes resentment from hate or effective anger—that frustration lies at the heart of the first, giving rise to strong feelings of bitterness. This characterization of resentment as a repressed reaction explains why resentful people can neither act, nor forget, as the effects of this emotion become more virulent as time goes by" (5). It is worth mentioning that, while the murder victim was an occupant of one of the more luxurious apartments, her murderer did not come from the "masa oscura" of the interior neighbors. She was, in fact, killed by a neighbor who, despite living in one of the more expensive apartments, was threatened by economic precarity.

Leo's preferences for certain neighbors betray wider cultural values with regards to citizenship. Leo's favorite neighbors are a Muslim immigrant named Driss and the Peláez family—the only ones she does not suspect of violence. Leo accepts Driss because he has "adapted" to Spanish customs, which makes him more relatable to her and, therefore, a welcome member of the community (Sanz 118). She describes the Peláezes as "una familia muy buena," with a father who had been a mining engineer, "un hombre cabal y recto" (Sanz 117). The members of this family seem like appealing neighbors because the patriarch is an educated professional, affording them a socioeconomic level to which Leo herself aspired and, through her "hard work," evidently achieved. Because these neighbors are white Spaniards, Leo identifies with them and sees them as similar to herself. Ironically, the murderer comes from this very family, thus questioning notions of what constitutes a "good" family.

The neighbors who provoke the most hostility in Leo are the residents of the interior apartments, whom she blames for their poverty: “Los pobres son vagos. Que trabajen. Hay que luchar” (Sanz 116). Paula relates the older woman’s opinions, which of course resonate with broader social attitudes that scapegoat the underprivileged: “los que menos le gusta a Leo son los que no han tenido redaños--‘huevos,’ dice ella . . . para luchar, trabajar, sacrificarse, ahorrar y aspirar a algo mejor. Los que no han salido de dentro hacia fuera y ahora odian a Leo” (Sanz 117). To assume that poverty is a result of individual actions is to deny the systemic injustices that have caused a discrepancy between opportunities for someone like Leo, a white, Spanish citizen who is part of a generation that came of age in more favorable economic times. Delgado demonstrates that the crisis itself and its repercussions have been reflected in popular culture as a personal issue instead of a social and political catastrophe (“Public” 273). She analyzes the example of the *Spanish* reality show *Entre todos* (2013-14), in which families affected by the crisis are given the opportunity to receive assistance in the form of private funding (Delgado “Public” 273). For Delgado, this way of “helping” those who participate in the show is problematic because, instead of recognizing the crisis as the result of failed economic policy, it is presented as a phenomenon of individual suffering that can be alleviated by the private generosity of other individuals: “In this model of sentimental culture, the only legitimate reaction is acceptance and hope that individual (rather than institutional) solidarity will alleviate the effects of a social disaster” (“Public” 273). To proclaim that poverty is at once the product of laziness and the cause of violent acts inspired by jealousy is a way of narrating the world and creating a reality couched in the principles of neoliberalism. As Zarco observes: “A su manera . . . Leo también escribe. Pero con otro tipo de tinta” (Sanz 118). The perspectives and voices of those like Leo decidedly construct a particular reality, in which “hard work” and independence

are the keys to prosperity and a good life, and where economic precarity is explained only by the failure of the individual.

While racism, xenophobia and classism were surely always present in this community (and in society at large), it is the murder investigation that brings these ills to the surface. The victim's widower, Yalal, observes that the murder shattered the appearance of peaceful cohabitation among the diverse population of the apartment building. In Yalal's opinion, this surface of normalcy has always hidden something sinister: "todos son malas personas, gente desagradable, pero acepta que se comportan con normalidad. . . . Normal. Normal. Todo normal. Excepto un día" (Sanz 297). It is his wife's murder that fractures the quotidian normalcy of the community and, according to Yalal, allows for the examination of its underlying reality. Descriptions of the architectural defects in the building itself serve to symbolize these fractures in the community. Leo comments to Paula (thinking she is a housing inspector) about the cracks in the walls of her dwelling "las grietas de su piso . . . las que rodean los vanos de sus balcones como arrugas. . . . le han dicho que pueden provocar un desprendimiento de la fachada, una catástrofe, como esas explosiones de gas que impúdicamente dejan al aire el interior de las viviendas, los comedores, las alcobas, sobre el anoréxico esqueleto de las vigas" (Sanz 239). The building's structural weaknesses threaten its existence, inspiring the imagination of violent explosions that would bring it to the ground. The building is moreover described here in terms of the human body, thus making a connection between the structure and its inhabitants. The body that is described is anorexic and frail, signaling the vulnerability of the community. Just as a structural inspection (in this case, a spurious one) calls attention to flawed construction, the investigation of Cristina Esquivel's murder reveals the precarious state of this community.

A parallel can be drawn between the state of a building in danger of catastrophic collapse

and the situation of Spain as a nation in crisis. Delgado has also utilized an architectonic metaphor to discuss the effects of the economic crisis in Spain: "en pleno apogeo de la crisis económica y con la ciudadanía en un estado de indignación patente, la fantasía de normalidad democrática ha empezado a mostrar sus propias fracturas estructurales" (*La Nación* 29). The "democratic normalcy" to which she refers is the depoliticized culture that characterized the years of the Spanish transition to democracy, a period when the nation counted on the stability that social consensus would supposedly provide.

Sanz's novel portrays, in a realist sense, a diverse microcosm of the nation; however, this community exists in contrast to representations from the earlier years of democracy, described by Matthew Marr as fostering "a vibrantly diverse vision of Spanishness" (3). As Chris Perriam notes, these national representations were of course carefully curated to include palatable and marketable forms of diversity in terms of race, class, etc. (7). The happy, democratic coexistence of the Transition years was predicated upon a kind of apolitical consensus, presuming that a stable and sound nation must necessarily be a nation without disagreements. According to Delgado, the economic crisis created an urgency to confront the nation's social problems, and it became impossible to continue living in a dream of democratic consensus. Similarly, in Sanz's novel, the peaceful normalcy of an urban community is disrupted by a crisis-inspired murder, bringing to light the social divisions that existed there all along.

Kafer questions the privileging of consensus as an idealized state, a requisite for the model "community," a belief that "rests on the notion that people can come together in consensus and unity, putting aside their differences in order to create a unified whole grounded in common experiences and common values. This presumption of unity however, excludes differences and dissent, thereby creating a self-perpetuating homogeneity" (Chapter 4). Kafer

believes it is necessary to eradicate the assumption that, in order to have a sound and stable community, all members must adopt the same logic, and that any difference will threaten amicable coexistence. The scholar argues that this type of consensus ultimately represents a fictitious condition that goes against human nature, and that the health of communities rests not on homogeneity but on the acknowledgement of differences and the creation of space for dialogue, the creative solutions to which Garrido Rodríguez alludes.

As Paula's criminal investigation reveals, what truly plagues the community is the growing inequality between its members, and the affective distance between diverse individuals. The narrative ultimately demonstrates, according to Lino, that it is not cultural and ethnic diversity that threatens the nation and its economy, but rather the greed and unequal distribution of wealth created by the capitalist system (49-50). Various characters throughout the novel assume the murderer to be an immigrant or a jealous neighbor living in the desperation of economic precarity. That the killer is the son of a respectable, upper middle-class family not only highlights the effects of the housing crisis in Spain but also obliges readers to question their assumptions about criminality and its association with certain types of bodies. Clemente may have seemed "safe" to people like Leo or even Cristina Esquivel's parents because he shared their ethnicity, social class and cultural heritage; it is ultimately proven, however, that familiarity is no measure of good or evil. As it turns out, the novel's second narrator, Luz, is correct when she warns, at the neighbors' meeting, that the "ill" of the murder may have come from within their own community: "a lo mejor no hay que preocuparse por lo que viene de fuera porque tenemos todo el mal metido dentro" (Sanz 2010). "El mal" here refers as much to the individual who committed the crime as to the greed that inspired it: the same impulse that led to the economic crisis.

V. "Las otras verdades que se esconden": Conclusions

Throughout the novel, a parallel is developed between process criminal investigation and the act of reading, a comparison appropriate for a literary police narrative with numerous metafictional elements. Paula says: "Zarco no sabe leer. No tiene ojos en la cara" (Sanz 224). She uses the colloquial expression "no tener ojos en la cara" to explain that her ex-husband is incapable of doing his job, of seeking and interpreting clues, and thus "reading" the text of the evidence. According to Paula, it is Zarco's vanity and self-centeredness that keep him from being successful in his work. She says her ex-husband wears blue contact lenses to make his eyes appear brighter and more attractive, and claims that this accessory impedes his vision: "Zarco se pega sobre el iris dos lentillas de color azul cobalto que le impiden ver, poner en orden los acontecimientos, imprimir cierta lógica a sus percepciones. Por mucho que él esté convencido de que poner orden es lo que debería hacer, no lo hace, no sabe hacerlo" (Sanz 224). Granted, colored contact lenses are designed not to interfere with the wearer's vision, but what Paula implies is that the vanity of wearing them impedes her ex-husband's ability to see clearly. Paula, on the other hand, is sure of her ability to "read" beyond the obvious: "No uso lentillas de colores. Sé leer por debajo de las volutas metafóricas. Por debajo de las caras y de las capuchas de los contribuyentes que me quieren engañar. De la gente que, contando mentiras, revela las verdades del arriero y las otras verdades que se esconden como chinches en las costuras" (Sanz 225). She demonstrates an ability to perceive the truth below the surface of words and appearances meant to hide a troublesome reality.

The first description of the city is narrated by Zarco, whose vision is made monochrome by the sunglasses he wears: "Veo gris el cielo y las fachadas de los edificios. . . . Grises los carteles de "Se vende" y "Se alquila" . . . . Grises las monedas para comprar el periódico . . . . Grises las ofertas de las inmobiliarias y los muebles de los anticuarios y los pescados de la

pescadería" (Sanz 22-23). Notably, these are all images relating to commercial exchange; in particular, as relating to the housing sector, which will of course be central to the plot. Among these images of commerce are also interspersed images of garbage and waste: "Grises las vomitonas que huelen desde el suelo. Grises las faroles y los contenedores de basura y las tapas de registro del alcantarillado" (Sanz 22). Because the smell of vomit is one of the most revolting to humans, this sensory image is especially repulsive. The refuse portrayed here can be understood as the inevitable product of capitalist society, its usually unseen dark side. These images are appropriate to the novela negra, a genre that serves to examine society's criminal underbelly.

In Zarco's narration, the color gray describes not only objects circulating in the economy, it also invades human bodies: "Grises las papeleras y el interior de la boca de los transeúntes . . . y las orejas en las que se apoyan teléfonos móviles. Los parroquianos acodados en las barras y los mendigos y las señoras que pasean a sus perros o tiran de sus caritos de la comprar, grises" (Sanz 22-23). The drab color even touches the narrator himself: "Gris el cristal de mis gafas por dentro . . . Grises mis manos cuando las saco de los bolsillos de la chaqueta para retirarme el flequillo" (Sanz 22). The narrator takes on the qualities of his surroundings, much like the inhabitants of the interior apartments are described by Luz as mutants who have absorbed the drab colors that surround them. Considered in this way, the gray that Zarco perceives could evoke the filth and grit of the city, tingeing everything in its path. This monochrome vision is also echoed in Olmo's inability to perceive certain colors, not by choice or because of obstructive lenses, but because of a disability. Lino interprets this description of Madrid as a city without color as symbolic of a modern world stripped of human connection (43). The world of commerce and consumerism, however, is a world of many colors, even though Zarco is unable to

perceive them. When he enters the murder victim's apartment building, however, color returns: "Lo veo todo gris pero, cuando entro en el portal de la casa en la que vivía Cristina Esquivel, me quito las gafas e imprevisiblemente todo se llena de colores" (Sanz 23). In contrast to the city streets, the private space—the scene of a murder—appears to the narrator in color. Martínez-Quiroga notes that it is in this space that Zarco falls in love with Olmo, and also where he is able to "perform" as a detective and enhance his self image (8). I argue the importance of taking into account that both the ubiquitous gray and the return of color represent Zarco's particular perspective: the description, after all, begins with the verb, "Veo." Zarco has demonstrated himself unable to capture the nuances of the material he observes; his socially privileged position as an able-bodied, white, male Spanish citizen has been no advantage. On the contrary, in Sanz's narrative, this identity proves to be an impediment.

The novel's title, *Black, black, black*, is plurisemantic. It can be interpreted, in part, as a reference to the genre of the novela negra (and its North American origin, given that its words are in English), to the darkness of its subject matter, which is furthermore set in a climate of economic depression, or to the difficulty of seeing in conditions without light. The final section of the novel, narrated by Paula, is precisely entitled, "Black III: Encender la luz." This title is appropriate to her narration, in which she sheds light upon the community and its ills. Paula's narration opens with a trip down the very same streets that Zarco saw in gray, which creates, as Martínez-Quiroga points out, the textual effect of palimpsest. Paula's vision of these streets contrasts explicitly with Zarco's: "los colores del barrio . . . son los colores normales de las cosas: los ositos de azúcar son verdes, anaranjados y rojos . . . sigo constatando, frente a las percepciones lisérgicas de un detective profesional, que el café con leche es de color café con leche. . . . En estas calles, no todo es gris como en los fotogramas de las películas en blanco o

negro" (Sanz 230). Paula assures her interlocutors that she perceives the city's true colors, in all their diverse tonalities. To speak with sarcasm of her ex-husband's "lysergic perceptions" emphasizes Paula's awareness of her own natural talent for his profession, in which she has received no professional formation. Sanz's text simultaneously subverts the norms of the crime novel and asks who is truly qualified and disposed to analyze their physical and social environment.

These contrasting descriptions in distinct narrative voices highlight the importance of perspective in the novel, and the role of the subject who sees and, through their words, reveals different aspects of the narrative world. Marta Sanz proposes literature as a means of obliging readers to see that which was previously ignored: "los libros que me interesa escribir son los que hacen visible la ideología invisible. . . . La lucidez es una navaja que, como la de Buñuel, se te clava en el ojo. A lo mejor luego sirve para reparar un daño, pero de momento duele" (qtd. in Rodríguez Marcos). For the author, to face head on the city streets and the relationships between those who occupy them is the first step toward reversing the injustices that affect everyone. Sanz attributes a dual purpose to culture: to at once reflect and shape lived experience: "La cultura no dialoga sólo con la cultura. . . . Los objetos culturales dialogan entre sí, pero fundamentalmente dialogan con lo real: parten de la realidad y a la realidad vuelven" (Sanz 33). Cristina Esquivel's murder at first appears to be an individual case of violence, but the process of investigation and, above all, the alternative perspective supplied by the female, disabled amateur detective reveals that the crime was undeniably produced by its social context.

Paula's leg-length discrepancy is neither depicted as an individual tragedy nor as a barrier that she must overcome. Her aptitude for feeling empathy and "reading" others' emotions ultimately acts as a kind of prosthesis to facilitate solving the crime. When she replaces her ex-

husband in the investigation, she recognizes her advantage over him: “Yo seré sus ojos y sus oídos-- seré mucho más: la inteligencia que a ratos le falta” (Sanz 227). Paula imagines herself as a kind of prosthesis for Zarco, the apparatus that will allow him to complete the investigation. Despite her difficulties with mobility, her superior vision and ability to process what she sees makes her a better detective than her predecessor, who possesses both formal training and a normative body.

Shelley Godsland maintains that the crime novel written by women is distinguished by its portrayal of criminality as a product of an unjust, patriarchal society rather than as an individual phenomenon (17). That a text is written by a woman does not mean that this consciousness will necessarily be incorporated into the work, but it is indeed evident in Paula’s narration: the represented voice of a woman whose physiology is considered defective and inferior. Paula’s body can be read as recalcitrant, following David T. Mitchell, for resisting the control of cultural norms: “Disabled bodies prove undisciplined because they refuse to conform to the controlling narratives of medical or rehabilitative science. In doing so, they are designated as pathological” (16-17). In the traditional novela negra, the crime represents a kind of crisis, the eruption of a pathology that breaks the community’s normalcy; it is the detective’s task to control and calm this chaos. In Sanz’s work, ironically, it is precisely the “pathological” individual who succeeds in reestablishing the social order by identifying the murderer and solving the crime.

Through the story of this disabled, female detective, Sanz’s novel presents disability as a strategic position, an attribute that, far from imposing limits or condemning people to a life of misery, actually brings special abilities to those who have it. It is curious that Lino, when she translates some quotes from the novel to English, uses the word “crippled” for “coja,” which is also sometimes translated to the more archaic term “lame” (40). In medical terms, Paula’s

condition is described simply as “leg-length discrepancy.” Like the English word “queer” was historically directed as an insult to LGBTQ people, “cripple” was used as a pejorative term for people with disabilities. Similarly to the way that “queer” has been recuperated as a term of pride by the LGBTQ community, “crip” has also come to challenge the negative connotations of disability. Kafer explains that the goal of “crip theory” is “imagining multiple futures, positioning ‘crip’ as a desired and desirable location regardless of one’s own embodiment or mental/psychological processes” (Introduction). This can could be applied to the Paula’s character; the way that her leg-length discrepancy is portrayed in the novel suggests an alternative way of imagining disability. It is approaching the challenges of the modern world in innovative ways that gives strength for survival and, furthermore, for achieving a greater quality of life.

Sanz’s novel at once draws in its readers with the intrigues of a murder investigation and presents an ironic but realist reflection upon the multiple violences generated by the global economic crisis, which is also a social and ethical crisis related to the normalcy of neoliberal ideology. To place Paula in the role of protagonist and detective questions the image of people with disabilities as mere victims, tragic figures, and financial burdens to society. Neither, however does she appear as a heroic figure, commended for “overcoming” her condition to live in a normalized manner. Her character functions as a representation of all these assumptions and prejudices, but also as their contradiction. Ultimately, to solve this case requires empathy and identification with the victims of an unjust system, but also an understanding of how this system favors abuse, greed and social division; it requires an understanding that, despite appearances and superficial differences, in many problems of today’s society “todos estamos en el mismo saco.”

Chapter 4

Post-Op in the Real World:

Disability and Sexuality in Graphic Novel and Film

According to its most rational definition, cancer can be understood as a mass of abnormal cells: a thing that can be located, excised, and studied. The human experience of the disease, however, is more phenomenological. It is an assault upon the body that cultivates anxiety and pain, orienting the patient in new and unexpected ways toward both their fellow human beings and the environment they inhabit. The main focus of this chapter is the 2011 graphic novel *Alicia en un mundo real*, created by well-known lesbian author Isabel Franc and artist Susanna Martín. This novel tells the story of Alicia, the queer protagonist who is diagnosed with breast cancer and undertakes a taxing treatment journey that includes chemotherapy, radiation, and a unilateral mastectomy. Like the original Alice in Lewis Carroll's 1865 novel *Alice in Wonderland*, this heroine finds herself on an absurd journey that shatters her accustomed reality. The graphic form of this work obliges the reader to behold and consider post-mastectomy embodiment, presenting breast cancer as a force that at once creates disability and erodes and destabilizes gender performance. Through its portrayal of an array of queer characters, *Alicia en un mundo real* presents a flexible concept of gender that transcends the binary model. The protagonist's resistance against norms of gender and female sexuality contrasts with mainstream cancer narratives, in which the disease and its treatment often decimate women's sexual desire and sense of attractiveness. This graphic novel, by exposing and eschewing cultural imperatives of compulsory able-bodiedness and compulsory heterosexuality, serves to validate a variety of diverse breast cancer experiences, particularly those that lie outside the realm of the commonplace and the normative.

I will begin this chapter by situating the Franc and Martín's work within the genre of comics in the Spanish State, specifically referencing queer and feminist expressions of the form. I will discuss breast cancer as a gendered disease that primarily affects women, exploring the ways that its treatment affects gendered embodiment. Also relevant to my argument is the manner in which cancer jeopardizes the patient's productivity, a side effect that is particularly relevant in a time of economic crisis. I ask, moreover, how the superhero motif and the graphic form work to elaborate upon the experience of cancer. Finally, I explore the effects of cancer on sexuality, placing this work in dialogue with other cultural products that address sexuality, illness and disability.

Because both the author and the artist of this graphic novel are Catalan women, and Alicia's story is set in Barcelona, I wish to situate the work in the cultural context of Cataluña. To this end, I contrast *Alicia*'s radical approach to breast cancer with that presented in the online and print publications of Grup Àgata, an organization based in Barcelona that supports women who have breast cancer. I will also comment on the poetry of Maria Mercè Marçal, which is briefly referenced in the comic. Despite the fact that neither the Catalan language nor cultural specificity figures prominently in the work, the queer resistance and strong LGBTQ community it presents is rooted in the Catalan context. The LGBTQ rights movement in the Spanish State traces its origins to 1970s Catalonia, where the political pursuits of feminists, queer people, and Catalan nationalists were often linked during the period of transition to democracy. The first Gay Pride celebration in the Spanish State was held in Barcelona on June 26, 1977, when 4,000 people gathered on the Ramblas to protest the continued criminalization of homosexuality by the Spanish government. Today, Barcelona remains a vibrant center of LGBTQ life and resources. This community is represented in the graphic novel as an alternative form of family that cares for

Alicia during her illness.

Cancer can separate the "sick" from the "well," barring the patient from the workplace as well as from leisure activities and sexual relationships, often isolating them from the communities to which they once belonged. While the primary focus of this chapter is the graphic novel, I also study three films: the 2004 documentary *El sexo de los ángeles*, the 2012 short film *La teta que os falta* and the 2015 documentary *Yes We Fuck! El sexo de los ángeles* discusses the taboos surrounding the sexuality of disabled people, specifically within the LGBTQ community. *La teta que os falta* demonstrates the potential of breast cancer to disqualify women from dominant beauty standards, desirability and belonging. In contrast, the documentary *Yes, We Fuck!* advocates the acceptance of disabled sexuality, which remains taboo in dominant culture, enabling people with diverse embodiments to experience pleasures often reserved for the medically "normal." Differently from the majority of works studied in this project, Franc and Martín's graphic novel celebrates bodies that are non-normative in terms of gender presentation, sexual desire, and conformity to standards of medical "normalcy." The queer protagonist, in her post-operative body, both finds a community of belonging and occupies the center of the narrative, providing a counterexample to Robert McRuer's assertion that, in contemporary cultural production, while "disabled, queer figures no longer embody absolute deviance," they "are still visually and narratively subordinated, and sometimes they are eliminated outright" (Introduction). In fact, in a reversal of the typical situation, it is the heterosexual figure that is narratively subordinated in Franc and Martín's novel, which does not include any openly straight characters, and only a very few men.

This work represents an unusually transgressive use of a genre, the comic book, whose production has long been dominated mostly by heterosexual males and whose roster of

characters has been dominated by hyper-masculine and uber-athletic superheroes. The powers and achievements of 20th-century superheroines like Wonder Woman and Mary Marvel pale in comparison to those of their male counterparts; furthermore, these female characters were largely defined by their relationships with men (Moix 331). A noted inspiration for feminist and queer women comic artists worldwide is the U.S. author Alison Bechdel, most famous for *Dykes to Watch Out For*, originally published in 1986. The "Bechdel test," named for the author, assesses comics for their degree of female involvement, asking whether texts feature more than one named female character, and whether those characters interact with one another discussing topics unrelated to men. To approach a comic from this angle challenges the sexist and heterosexist norms of the genre while also drawing attention to counterexamples, which have existed throughout comic history but have been less prevalent.

While comics have been largely male-dominated in Spain as well, they have also served as a vehicle for subversive content, particularly during the years of the Transition, which saw a flourishing of the comic form. Two notable queer comics from this time period are the publications *El Víbora* and *Madriz*. *El Víbora*, published from 1979 to 2005 in Barcelona, was an "underground" comic associated with queer counterculture. Gema Pérez-Sánchez notes that the emergence and popularity of comics featuring LGBTQ characters and lives, while not necessarily signaling their unequivocal acceptance, was emblematic of the wider cultural shift in Spain: "the representation of these radical themes without censorship serves to confirm that Spain had reached a high level of democracy and freedom, finally breaking away from Francosim" (179). *Madriz*, in fact, was funded by the socialist government, precisely in an effort to cultivate the image of a pluralist, progressive nation that could include diverse expressions of sexuality and non-traditional gender roles. To this end, numerous female artists were employed,

thus creating a space for women comic artists that had not previously existed, but that quickly disappeared when government funding for the project was cut (Pérez-Sánchez 171).

In 2013, in response to the lack of recognition for women comic artists in the Spanish State, the the Colectivo Autoras de Cómic was formed. The Colectivo's dual purpose is to seek greater visibility for contemporary female comic artists, while celebrating women of the past whose work went without due appreciation. In a documentary produced by the Colectivo Autoras, Susanna Martín describes the comic as a potential vehicle for activism and protest (*Presentes*). Four years after the publication of *Alicia*, Martín was involved in the coordination of the "Wombastic" project, a graphic response to proposals by the Spanish Partido Popular in 2014 to restrict access to abortions. The artist, who self-identifies as an activist for feminist and lesbian causes, says her comic creations cannot be separated from her political consciousness (*Presentes*). Isabel Franc, who has also published under the pseudonym Lola Van Guardia, has been qualified as "la autora lésbica de mayor renombre en España" (Arroyo Pizarro). Her body of work includes a trilogy that follows the lives of a group of urban lesbian friends (*Trilogía de Lola Van Guardia*) a collection of queer fables (*Cuentos y fábulas de Lola Van Guardia*), and a lesbian novela negra (*No me llames cariño*). Her 1992 novel *Entre todas las mujeres,* which tells the story of a mystical lesbian relationship between St. Bernadette and the Virgin Mary, was a finalist for the Sonrisa Vertical prize for erotic fiction in Spain. *Alicia en un mundo real* is yet another example of Franc's project of producing queer variants of conventional genres: the fable, the detective novel, the hagiography, and in this case the graphic novel.

I. "Shit, I am a woman": Cancer and gendered embodiment.

My analysis of *Alicia* begins by positioning cancer as an experience of disability, in addition to one of life-threatening illness. I am not the first scholar to study the disease from this

perspective: McRuer recalls in his discussion of disability the "army of one-breasted women" from Audre Lorde's *Cancer Journals,* aligning cancer with conditions more commonly thought of as disabilities such as blindness, deafness and compromised mobility (Introduction). Also, Rosemarie Garland-Thomson refers to the post-mastectomy body as having a "disabled breast" (24). After a mastectomy, the absent mammary glands can no longer serve their natural purpose of milk production, thus leaving the body technically disabled in this capacity. In general terms, the post-operative body fails to conform to gendered norms, which prescribe that two healthy symmetrical breasts should be present on the female torso. The post-mastectomy body might thus also be considered disabled in its capacity to attract sexual partners, since breasts are culturally intrinsic to female sexual attractiveness. In a sense, mastectomy can be understood in similar terms to other types of amputation—Lorde also employs this term to describe the surgery (14). Anthropologist S. Lochlann Jain observes that "women's mastectomy scars cite the amputation of gender" (82). Regardless of mastectomy, other markers of gender remain beyond the breast; the reading of gender becomes scrambled in the text of the post-operative body, resulting in a kind of unthinkable, unsettling embodiment.

Generally speaking, amputation of any sort tends to elicit horror in those who perceive or imagine it, as it draws attention to the frailty of the human body. Nancy J. Hirschmann explains that, ". . . as opposed to racism and sexism, which is fear of the not-self, of the different-from-self, fear of the disabled is fear of oneself, a fear of what might happen to one's own body" (141). The spectacle of differently-abled embodiment can at once inspire fear of the other and apprehension of disability that may one day come to reside in the self. Franc and Martín's graphic novel, in its unabashed visual representation of the results of mastectomy, forces the reader to face these fears. Rocco Versaci notes the unique capacity of the comic, as a genre, to

"challenge" the reader to view the non-normative body "without turning away" (55). A page divided into six panels shows Alicia's reaction to the first view of her post-operative body, as reflected in a mirror. The antique mirror that precedes the sequence recalls the Lewis Carroll trope, evoking his sequel to *Alice in Wonderland*, entitled *Alice through the Looking-Glass*, in which the mirror serves as a portal to a magical world. The antique mirror appears to be symbolic, since Alicia is shown in another panel to be standing nude in a modern bathroom. What she sees is not a fantasy, but is part of the "mundo real" referenced by the work's title. In the first panel, the protagonist covers her eyes. In the second, when her hands are removed, her eyes appear wide with shock. A close-up image of Alicia's wide eyes offers the reader intimacy with her emotional response, which appears to involve anxiety, horror, denial, and very possibly sadness at the sight of her one-breasted body. Below this detail is a point of view image of the intact right breast and a surgical incision where the left breast had been. Subsequent panels show Alicia touching the surgical site and contemplating her new appearance. The ghostly outline of the absent breast is drawn into the page's final panel, and Alicia says: "¡Qué se le va a hacer, peor hubiera sido un brazo!" (Franc and Martín 34). The heroine consoles herself with the fact that it would have been worse to lose a body part with more crucial functionality.

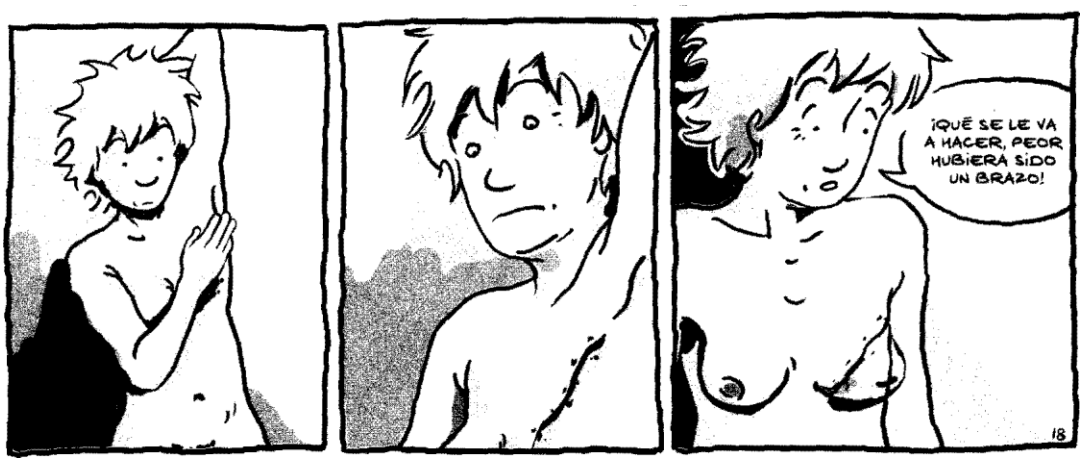

Figure 1: Franc and Martín 34.[1]

Undoubtedly, the role of breasts in personal aesthetic and gender performance varies for different individuals. For example, Lochlann Jain, who describes herself as a butch (or "masculine"-identified) lesbian, claims that, throughout her life, "breasts had forced me to live in a sort of social drag" (75). While she admits that she had never wanted "to actually *be* a guy," breasts were also culturally read as feminine in a way that conflicted with her cultivated self image. In fact, she describes the advantages brought by her post-mastectomy physique, such as an increased ability for yoga, now that breasts were no longer in the way (Lochlann Jain 75). In featuring a cast of characters who are primarily queer women, Franc and Martín's work also presents a flexible portrayal of gender. While the protagonist never explicitly labels herself as a certain "type" of lesbian (i.e. "butch" or "marimacha"), she consistently maintains short hair, wears androgynous clothing and confesses that she has never worn a bra (Franc and Martín 91). Her friends and female lovers also present an assorted range of gender performances. Some are marked as typically feminine (having long hair, wearing dresses and skirts) while others adopt a decidedly butch style; one woman in particular even describes herself as "masculina

[1] All images reproduced with the permission of the author, artist and publisher.

performativa, y a mucha honra" (Franc and Martín 123). Lochlann Jain emphasizes that breast cancer is an undeniably gendered disease (despite the fact that it also occurs in men, though with far less frequency). She cites Eve Kosofsky Sedgwick, another queer scholar who, upon receiving her breast cancer diagnosis, declared: "*Shit, I am a woman*: I am the person whose wheel of fortune pointed to the illness not only of cancer but of femininity" (qtd. in Lochlann Jain 85). Despite Sedgwick's (or Lochlann Jain's, or Alicia's) attempts to foster a subversive gender performance, a breast cancer diagnosis signifies the interpellation of the patient as "woman"—a category that is problematically reliant upon the presence of breasts.

While much of the cultural discourse that surrounds breast cancer interpellates the patient as a woman, the effects of the disease and its treatment, including hair loss and mastectomy, bring female embodiment under attack. Gender and sexuality are thus easily destabilized by the body that has been distanced from medical normalcy as the result of disease. Jennifer K. Stuller points out that, in comics, the role of the body's ability in scaffolding coherent, binary gender and heterosexuality (more specifically, male heterosexuality) is particularly evident: "the focus on male bodies in comics emphasizes the power of their physique, whereas the focus on female bodies in comics is meant to titillate the presumed male reader, as well as privilege his interests as consumer and audience" (237). The male body is almost entirely absent from *Alicia*, and the primary stated audience is comprised of women who have had breast cancer, rather than heterosexual male consumers. Franc and Martín's graphic novel, in highlighting the body's resilience rather than its physical prowess or aesthetic appeal, questions the validity of able-bodied and gendered norms.

The title page of *Alicia*'s Chapter Nine questions notions of the medically normal human body with a queer interpretation of an easily-recognized classical art piece: Leonardo DaVinci's

Vitruvian Man (Franc and Martín 99). DaVinci's famous original depicts a man circumscribed by a circle and square, with two sets of arms and legs outstretched. As it demonstrates the ideal geometrical proportions of the human body, this image has often been employed by popular culture to denote health. In Martín's version, Alicia's female figure replaces DaVinci's male; she wears a crooked scowl and her mastectomy scar disrupts the Vitruvian symmetry (Franc and Martín 99). Alicia's body can be read here as both queer (female in the expected place of a male) and disabled (female but with only one breast) in its transgressive deviance from the classical archetype. Norms of gendered embodiment are undeniably intertwined with standards of beauty, which are employed to measure the individual's level of sexual attractiveness. Garland-Thomson observes that women with disabilities are stereotyped as asexual, "as generally removed from the sphere of true womanhood and feminine beauty" (30). The breast cancer patient is isolated from what is understood as the desired female embodiment in a very specific way, given the possibility for losing hair and one or both breasts. One advantage of Alicia's queerness is that she remains mostly unaffected by oppressive female beauty practices, ostensibly because they are intertwined with a feminine performance to which she does not subscribe. While Franc and Martín's protagonist appears comfortable remaining outside the realm of traditional femininity, it is important to recognize that many disabled women, regardless of sexual orientation, are dismissed by mainstream culture as unfeminine, regardless of their desire to be or not be so. In her capacity as journalist, Alicia writes an article about shifting beauty standards, presumably in reflection upon societal pressures that commonly affect breast cancer patients. The first two pages of the chapter introduced by the Vitruvian Alicia present the protagonist's article, entitled "¿Quién es la guapa?" are accompanied by illustrations of changing beauty standards from prehistoric times to the present day (Franc and Martín 100). In her journalistic voice, Alicia

establishes that beauty is a cultural construction: “el conjunto de atributos que determina que una mujer sea guapa está a merced, única y exclusivamente, de los caprichos de la sociedad; según su cultura las tendencias políticas, la clase social o la ideología imperantes, resultará más o menos atractiva” (Franc and Martín 100). The panels of the subsequent pages reflect upon other beauty standards, although they incur the use of gendered cultural stereotypes, such as the association of bound feet with China: “Menos mal que no hemos nacido en China donde a las mujeres se les vendaban los pies” (Franc and Martín 101). A reductive parallel is then made between foot binding and the use of high heels, as Alicia’s boss is shown wearing stilettos that shoot stars, denoting pain in the visual language of comics. Alicia’s feet, however, appear comfortably beside those of her boss, wearing sneakers—Alicia is not the type of woman to be bothered with stilettos. The protagonist’s queer nonconformity presents her as a person whose sexuality and sense of attractiveness has never relied upon dominant norms of female beauty. On the one hand, Alicia’s seemingly self-imposed “banishment from femininity” is beneficial to her, excusing her from the societal pressures of painful or inconvenient beauty practices (Garland-Thomson 24). On the other, the narrative fails to recognize people who, regardless of sexuality, *do* identify with traditional notions of femininity, and who may experience distress upon being banished from the realm of female beauty due to illness or disability.

Despite the novel’s attempts to defy conventions of female beauty, its portrayal of cancer-related baldness ultimately reinforces negative perceptions of the disease’s effects on the body. Many cancer patients—especially women—fear hair loss as a side effect of chemotherapy, since hair is culturally associated with female beauty and baldness becomes a marker of cancer itself. Lochlann Jain observes that, “For women, baldness has become a signifier of either illness or aggression” (210). Bald women run the risk of being marginalized as diseased, dismissed as

unattractive, or resented for appearing threatening and "unfeminine." The stigma of female hair loss is evident in consumer culture; one such example is found in an advertisement for "Danien" wigs, aimed at women who have had cancer. The wigs are promoted on the first page of a 2010 issue of *Agata*, a publication of the Grup Àgata. Danien claims to be working to "minimize the aesthetic change" in cancer patients, thus improving their self esteem: "se et veus bé, et sentiràs millor" (Danien 2). With their wigs, Danien offers to help customers appear more "radiant," and to "hide" their hair loss (2). The idea is that, with the wigs, the customer will be able to disguise the evidence of disease and its toxic treatment, and will thus, in performing wellness, feel "better." The implied message is also that one can spare others the uncomfortable experience of observing cancer which, following Hirschmann, inspires fear of the potential for cancer in the observer's own body.

Alicia wears her wig in social situations and when she is drawn as a superhero; baldness is used visually to accentuate moments of suffering and vulnerability. At first, the text does approach Alicia's chemotherapy-induced hair loss with black humor. A panel of the protagonist holding a handful of blonde hair, her black t-shirt covered in fallen strands, is juxtaposed with an image of her shedding cat, scratching himself and surrounded by flying hair. In the shower, now completely bald, Alicia smiles and gives a "thumbs up" pointing out her savings on shampoo and haircuts (Franc and Martín 55). When she obtains a ridiculously enormous, shaggy wig, a hairdresser friend promises to fix it with a "corte más moderno," and the wig shop owner assures the client: "le quedará monísima" (Franc and Martín 53). Once it is styled, the wig comes to replicate Alicia's natural hair before chemotherapy, and she is drawn both with and without it throughout the duration of her treatment. It is notable that she often appears without the wig at times of greatest despair, such as when she cries in the office of a homeopathic doctor, or when

she is at home feeling weak and nauseated, or when she faces herself naked in the mirror, emaciated and missing a breast (Franc and Martín 54, 62, 72). The wig comes to operate in a culturally normative way within the text, as Alicia uses it to disguise her disease in public and in social situations. Other than signaling illness, Lochlann Jain points out that baldness can also be read as queer, since some butch women choose to shave their heads or wear their hair extremely short (46). *Alicia en un mundo real* neither engages with the subversive possibilities for baldness nor does it explore the queer possibilities for wigs, which can be employed (for example, by drag queens) to pursue a camp effect. In the context of Franc and Martín's graphic novel, baldness primarily signifies malady and fragility, rather than boldness, defiance or queerness.

Notwithstanding its conventional treatment of cancer-related baldness, the work does in fact embrace the aesthetic of the post-mastectomy body. Alicia personally prefers neither to have reconstructive surgery nor to wear breast forms in her clothing, thereby resisting what Garland-Thomson describes as: "the sexist assumption that the amputated breast must always pass for the normative, sexualized one either through concealment or prosthetics" (24). She confronts her friends with a particular cultural challenge when she asks them: "¿Tengo que implantarme una prótesis para seguir haciendo topless?" (Franc and Martín 92). While the practice of topless sunbathing is common in contemporary Spain, it would be a less common concern for mastectomy patients in other countries such as the United States, where most women cover their breasts in all public spaces. Despite the arguably relaxed environment of the beaches in Cataluña, Alicia wonders whether it is acceptable to be topless in a body that does not conform to cultural expectations of female breasts.

Ultimately, the protagonist chooses precisely to draw attention to her surgical scar by adorning it with a tattoo. Alicia reports feeling empowered when her tattoo artist suggests that

she think of body art not as hiding her mastectomy scar, but instead as an adornment that will actually draw people's attention to it: "No tienes que tapar la cicatriz, tienes que decorar la zona. En tu caso, el tatuaje representa un discurso, estás invitando a la gente a que mire tu cuerpo sin apuro" (Franc and Martín 96). Alicia believes that her tattoo will offer "presence" where previously there was "absence," musing that: "El efecto psicológico que produce en la persona que te mira es el de decir: ¿qué tiene esa chica? En lugar de ¿qué le falta?" (Franc and Martín 96). Framing the decorated scar in this manner upturns the assertion that mastectomy patients are "insufficients dependent on pretense," as suggested by the adoption of prostheses (Lorde 62). By the end of the novel, Alicia does indeed go topless at the beach with her queer friends. Furthermore, a photo of her posing nude, with her mastectomy scar tattoo, is hung in a cancer treatment center to as a courageous inspiration to other patients (Franc and Martín 96). These initiatives exemplify the ways in which the mobilization of "the inevitable failure to approximate the norm" (both heterosexual and able-bodied) can give way to "a newly imagined and newly configured public sphere where full participation is not contingent on an able body" (McRuer Introduciton). The graphic novel, by including these images, can assist the reader in envisioning a greater diversity of desirable post-cancer embodiment, rather than limiting the imagination to images provided by dominant culture, which tend to shy away from the post-operative body.

Of course, not every woman who undergoes a mastectomy will find herself disposed to embrace post-operative embodiment in the same way as Alicia. The page of the Grup Agata website dedicated to "Cirurgia plàstica i reparadora" recognizes the very real detrimental effect that mastectomy can have on one's body image. Two primary responses to the surgery are described: acceptance and the ability to live in peace with the surgery's results; and, alternatively, failure to accept, leading to the choice of mammary reconstruction. According to

this perspective, the reason for reconstruction is to preserve quality of life, which is compromised by one's body image after mastectomy. Grup Agata describes the goal of prosthetics as recreating the appearance of the pre-treatment body, thus improving one's emotional, social, and even professional wellbeing. While Lorde recognizes that prosthetics offer the mastectomy patient the prospect of escaping "the loneliness of difference," she strongly opposes them because she believes they foster denial and encourage women to hide the experience of illness (3). Unlike other prosthetics, which exist to help the wearer functionally perform certain activities (i.e. prosthetic limbs for walking, eyeglasses for seeing, or dentures for chewing), the only function of the prosthetic breast is to make the woman look "normal" in the eyes of others (Lorde 65). Lorde points out that the implicit message behind the promotion of these products is that the pre-cancer female body is more valuable, and thus must be approximated (42). While the Grup Agata website recognizes that some women will be able to resist this ideology and accept the appearance of mastectomy, it also acknowledges that reconstructive surgery exists as a support to those who, for whatever reason, wish to continue their lives with two breasts. It is important to recognize that the freedom to openly display one's mastectomy is not available to all; some women may feel compelled to conceal the effects of cancer in order to function in environments that actively discriminate against disability. For example, some may be forced to "masquerade" through the use of prostheses in order to retain opportunities in the workforce. Others may simply prefer to maintain the appearance of symmetrical breasts, for reasons of their own gender performance and personal aesthetic.

While Alicia herself chooses to forego both reconstructive surgery and wearing a prosthesis, the novel avoids being prescriptive in regards to the options facing mastectomy patients. When Alicia visits the "Asociación de Mastectomizadas Insurrectas," she meets two

other women who have undergone mastectomies and taken subsequent action different from her own. In a panel with the caption “Somos muchas y existen soluciones para todos los gustos,” three women display distinct options for the mastectomy patient: one wears a bra with breast forms; another has had reconstructive surgery and appears to have two breasts (even though they are not identical); and finally Alicia displays her mastectomy scar tattoo (Franc and Martín 113).

Figure 2: Franc and Martín 37.

Personally, Lorde chose to embrace her post-mastectomy body as the physical manifestation of her cancer experience, which she wanted to orient her toward community: “it is that very difference which I wish to affirm, because I have lived it, and survived it, and wish to share that strength with other women” (62). The fellowship existing among *Alicia*’s Mastectomizadas Insurrectas proves that prosthetics and reconstructive surgery to not have to stand in the way of feminist community. Granted, three decades had passed between the publication of *The Cancer Journals* and of *Alicia*, during which time cultural attitudes toward breast cancer have shifted, helping to dissipate the silence and shame that separated women from one another’s experience.

II. "Perderás un año de tu vida": Cancer and productivity.

In and of itself, Franc and Martín's graphic novel forms part of an effort to foster connection with those who have shared the experience of breast cancer. In the introduction, Franc recognizes the continued stigma associated with cancer, and offers her and Martín's work as a source of humor to those whose lives it has touched (Franc and Martín 5). She explains that Alicia's story is based on her own, and hopes that her readers will identify in some way with the character. In this sense, the novel functions as a kind of survivor testimony, since the reader knows that the author went on to live beyond her diagnosis and treatment. Within the narrative itself, it is also clear from the beginning that the protagonist will survive; the primary narrative is framed by the story of Alicia, who is a journalist writing a "novel" about the disease, as requested by her boss. She establishes in the prologue that she is writing from the tropical tranquility of Mexico, and appears in various panels throughout the book working at her laptop with the beach in the background. In these drawings, Alicia appears healthy, thus implying that she is recalling her story from the safe space of a cancer-free present. In reality, when the word "cancer" is spoken, it tends to conjure the specter of death, considering that the disease's various forms claim so many lives. In 2012, the year after Franc and Martín's book was published, 102,762 Spaniards died of cancer, and breast cancer accounted for 15.5% of these deaths (*seom.org*). Within the narrative, however, cancer is aligned more with disability than with life-threatening illness. When Alicia meets with her breast surgeon, he prepares her for the prospect of losing time and hair, but not life itself. In matching panels numbered one through three, the male surgeon dictates to his patient what the experience of cancer will entail. First, he informs her: "Tienes una enfermedad que antes era mortal," while making a gesture of cutting the throat (Franc and Martín 22). The word "antes" indicates that, while in the past Alicia's diagnosis

would have signified a likely death, in the present day it does not typically carry this threat. Granted, details of her cancer (what stage, the presence of aggressive cancer cells, etc.) are not disclosed. On the one hand, this lack of specificity allows for a wider range of readers to identify with the narrative. On the other, the narrative does not account for worse prognoses.

In the second panel, the surgeon points his finger and warns: "Perderás un año de tu vida" (Franc and Martín 22). Rather than losing her life, the patient should expect to lose only a year. Colloquially, the idea of "losing a year of one's life" implies wasting time, in the sense of being unproductive. The surgeon is thus preparing Alicia for a period of disability, in which her career will be put on hold. The work meditates visually on what this means, in the context of the capitalist economy. Chapter One is announced with a panel whose caption reads, in bold black letters, "¿Quién dijo planes?" (Franc and Martín 17). Alicia's calendar (a plain book labeled "Agenda") is shown on her desk, amidst other office supplies. As an object, the calendar acts as the guiding organization of her busy professional life as a journalist. The title page for Chapter 12 then visually reflects Chapter One: a panel shows Alicia crossing off twelve months of a hanging calendar, while a caption reads "¿Quién dijo agenda?" (Franc and Martín 127). In a thought bubble, she sees the surgeon, prophetically proclaiming: "Perderás un año de tu vida." This image proves the surgeon was right, at least by capitalist measures of gain and loss: Alicia's agenda has been erased, replaced by visual evidence that she has "lost" twelve months to cancer treatment.

Figure 3: Franc and Martín 127.

The exchange between the protagonist and her surgeon exemplifies the power of the medical establishment to unmoor the patient's very identity, as they had supposed it prior to diagnosis. In the final panel of their conversation, the surgeon prepares Alicia for a change in appearance as he commands her: "Ponte peluca," while indicating his own full head of curly hair (Franc and Martín 22). The surgeon's own abundance of hair separates him from the fate of the patient, as he strongly suggests the normalizing practice of wearing a wig to disguise chemotherapy-related hair loss. Medicine's power dynamics are evident here, as "white coat and hospital gown divide those who define the bureaucratic and medical realm of illness from the

one who necessarily, if perhaps not wholly, comes to be defined by it. . . . as doctors and/or patients, we all play roles in this script" (Lochlann Jain 15). In these images, the surgeon is drawn by himself in the center of the page, looking directly at the reader as he would at Alicia, rather than having the two figures appear to converse with one another, with both drawn in the same panel. Her reaction appears below his directives in three corresponding panels. At first, Alicia's figure is small, about two thirds the size of the surgeon, against a black background, mouth agape in fear. The second and third panels show her face morphing into Edvard Munch's easily-recognizable painting *The Scream.* No words accompany these panels; Alicia's anxiety is represented only visually. The progression of the protagonist's transformation from a scared patient into the distorted anguish of *The Scream* evidences the power wielded by the surgeon and his unemotional predictions of her immediate future.

This series of panels manages to capture the emotional transformation of cancer, which is also described on Grup Àgata's website: "L'impacte de la malaltia fa que la persona 'es desdibuixi' i deixi de sentir-se 'normal', tot i mantenir la seva essència intacta" (*Grup Àgata*). In these panels, Alicia is literally "undrawn," becoming blurred and diminished, her image twisted from that of a "normal" woman to a screaming expressionist figure. Versaci emphasizes that serial images incorporated by the graphic form, particularly in the case of memoir, lend themselves well to the representation of "the complicated and shifting nature of the self" (49). Distinct images contained within frames allow for different facets of the character to be read coherently in the same text. In addition (and in contrast) to her appearance as *The Scream,* Alicia is also portrayed at certain points in the work as a superhero. In the cover art, she appears wearing a black cape, gloves, and a yellow suit emblazoned with a radiation symbol. While patients are often said to "battle" cancer, in Franc and Martín's graphic novel Alicia is shown to

battle the challenges of everyday life, rather than the disease itself. On the title page of Chapter Six, which is entitled, "Lo cotidiano después de la catástrofe," Alicia appears in a wrestling ring, wearing a costume that can be associated at once with wrestling (it includes gloves and laced up boots) and with a superhero aesthetic (it includes a cape) (Franc and Martín 71). She is facing off with a personified planet Earth, symbolizing battle between the cancer patient and the world in which they live.

The graphic novel presents the built environment and the requirements of remunerated labor as forces with which Alicia must do "battle." Peter Coogan discusses the role of genre fiction in representing and normalizing cultural values, frequently through the dramatized conflict between hero and villain (207). In these images, it is not exactly cancer but the challenges of day-to-day survival in the modern world, along with the neoliberal demands of independent wage-earning, that are personified as the enemy to the recovering cancer patient. The chapter's first panel shows the heroine looking dejected, facing her reflection with its mastectomy scar and bald head. The caption reads: "Superado el tifón, había que recolocarse en el mundo y, entonces, me di cuenta de que mi cuerpo se había convertido en un gran desconocido" (Franc and Martín 72). The body is here understood as another entity that can be known or unknown to the subject who inhabits it. This phenomenon signals the great shift in embodiment brought on not only by the visual difference of the mastectomy and hair loss, but also by diminishing ability, as Alicia's body can no longer do the things it once did.

In an introduction to *Alicia en un mundo real*, author Isabel Franc explains the role of accessibility in her choic of the graphic form. She first reveals that she herself is a breast cancer survivor and that the work is based on her own personal experience (Franc 5). The autobiographical aspect of this graphic novel aligns it with other comics cited by Benjamin

Fraser that are concerned with portraying the experience of illness and disability (38-39). Fraser notes that these more realist comics signal a shift in the genre from the "mythic (read national) frame to the quotidian and the personal", which "allowed for alternative stories to be told" (39). Among the works named by this critic are those of U.S. author Harvey Pekar, creator of *Our Cancer Year* (1994), and Spanish comic artist Miguel Gallardo's *María y yo* (2010), about his relationship with a daughter who has autism. Fraser describes the graphic form as "radically enabling" in its potential to attribute visibility to disability experience (39). The critic argues that the visual medium of Gallardo's work is particularly appropriate to represent a narrative of autism, given that those on the autism spectrum tend toward visually-oriented cognition (Fraser 43). In the case of Franc's breast cancer narrative, the author expresses the hope that using images will make the narrative more easily consumable for potential readers who are, themselves, undergoing treatment for cancer: "cuando se está en tratamiento de quimioterapia se tiene mucho más tiempo para leer, pero pocas energías para hacerlo, y entrar en la historia a través de la imagen siempre ayuda" (Franc 5). In this case, the choice of the graphic form takes accessibility into consideration, recognizing that the cancer patient will experience reduced energy levels.

The protagonist's body, which has been altered by surgery and a debilitating regime of chemotherapy and radiation, is now situated in a new relationship to the physical environment. In addition to keeping track of a complex assortment of medications, Alicia also has to protect the site of her surgery while performing everyday activities such as getting dressed or carrying groceries. Her low energy levels affect both her social and professional life. When she returns to her job as a journalist, she faces the challenge of a travel assignment. A series of panels show her unexpectedly struggling to navigate a train station: "No contaba con la serie de obstáculos que

me salieron al paso. En mi nueva situación los desplazamientos con equipaje requerían unas estrategias que antes ni se consideraban" (Franc and Martín 76). She encounters non-working elevators and searches for an accessible train door, all the while grappling with two large suitcases. These images correlate with the social model of disability, which holds that the source of impairment is found in society and its spaces, which are designed for the able-bodied majority. Nonetheless, Alicia devises "strategies" for compensating, demonstrating resilience and ingenuity. The protagonist alone carries graphic weight in these panels; even the herringbone print of her coat is distinguishable. In contrast, other travelers are mere outlines, partial sketches that disappear into the background. This is a strategy commonly employed in the graphic novel, as Versaci points out that differences in the style in which figures are drawn can serve to emphasize difference between the characters (52). Alicia's apparent isolation from the able-bodied majority emphasizes her distinct relationship to travel. After two facing pages of panels showing her difficulties catching a train to Donostia, Alicia thinks: "Creo que mi próximo reportaje será sobre la supresión de barreras aquitectónicas" (Franc and Martín 77). Since the graphic novel represents Alicia's telling of her story, making architectural barriers visible precisely forms part of the book's project. Because inaccessible public spaces are not a unique challenge to breast cancer, but rather affect people with many kinds of disabilities, this sequence relates Alicia's narrative to a wider range of impairment.

III. "Follar es complicado": Narratives of cancer and sexuality.

Another challenge Alicia faces is the reorientation to sex and romantic relationships after cancer. The incompatibility of illness and disability with sexuality is commonly expressed in culture, with idealized sexuality most often represented by the union of two normatively "perfect" and able bodies. In this section, I will place Franc and Martín's work in dialogue with

three Spanish films—two documentaries and one short comedy—that address the topic of sexuality and non-normative embodiment. The earliest work, 2004 documentary *El sexo de los ángeles*, laments the inaccessibility of the LGBTQ community for people with disabilities. The 2012 short film, *La teta que os falta*, attempts to empower women by demonstrating that they can remain attractive after cancer, but ultimately reinforces heterosexist norms. Finally, the 2015 documentary *Yes We Fuck!* presents the activist work of the Grup Post Op, which assists people with disabilities in fully experiencing sexuality. These films demonstrate a variety of perspectives about the sexuality of people with disabilities and who have undergone mastectomies as part of cancer treatment, ranging from constrictive, conservative points of view to progressive and inclusive approaches that are more closely aligned with Franc and Martín's project.

Lochlann Jain acknowledges that one outcome of the mastectomy is the "undermining" of sexuality; not only in terms of the patient's level of physical attractiveness, but also in their ability to experience pleasure (82). The breast is not merely functional as a mammalian source of nutrition for offspring, neither is it purely aesthetic and exciting to the woman's sex partner; Lorde reminds her readers of the its importance also as a pleasure point for the woman herself (43, 79). Franc and Martín's portrayal of sex after cancer is optimistic but realistic: while Alicia resists the truncation of her sexuality due to mastectomy, her experiences are not exclusively positive. In Alicia's words, with her various pains, medications, and complications from her recent treatment, "follar es complicado" (Franc and Martín 84). Her first attempt at sex after cancer ends in frustration, with a critical and impatient partner. The partner, who is drawn in three out of four panels seated on the edge of the bed with her back toward Alicia, throws up a hand and declares: "Así no hay forma de correrse" (Franc and Martín 84). Alicia, in the

background, covers herself with sheets, a tear falling from one eye. The repeated image of the partner, with her disheveled hair and angry facial expression, physically refusing connection with Alicia, highlights the lack of empathy met by some cancer patients. In this scenario, the graphic novel at once acknowledges the protagonist's post-cancer embarrassment and lack of sexual pleasure, while also emphasizing the problematic behavior of the non-accommodating partner.

While the text shares other negative sexual experiences of women who have had breast cancer, they all happen to occur with men. One woman crosses her arms over her chest, forbidding her male partner to touch her. Another cries into her hands while her husband, who himself is drawn as an overweight man with thinning hair, accuses her of being an "incomplete woman" (Franc and Martín 97). Because these are the only examples of heterosexual relationships that appear in the novel, the text seems to imply that the outlook is bleak for the sexuality of women who have had cancer and are sexually attracted to men. Alicia, however, does eventually find a loving partner and explains that unconventional tactics are key to recuperating an enjoyable sex life: "A veces, ni siquiera es necesario follar en sentido estricto. Con un poco de complicidad y comprensión por ambas partes, hasta resulta sencillo" (Franc and Martín 119). The idea of questioning the necessity to "fuck in a strict sense" is essentially queer, since dominant notions of sexual intercourse are undeniably heteronormative. This idea, along with the narrative's failure to present a positive experience of post-cancer sexuality in a traditional heterosexual context, proposes that queerness—in this sense, non-normative sexual activity—is key to a satisfying sex life after illness alters the body.

The documentary *El sexo de los ángeles*, in contrast, presents a less optimistic view of disability in the LGBTQ community. Granted, this film was released seven years before the graphic novel's publication, during which time the administration of the Spanish government

shifted to the more liberal Partido Socialista Obrero Español (PSOE) and same-sex marriage became legalized. While these juridical changes were echoed in the national zeitgeist, the testimonies shared in Toro's documentary surely remain relevant for many in the Spanish State and elsewhere. The Press Book for the documentary film *El sexo de los ángeles* directed by Frank Toro, explains that the film was made to fill a perceived void in Spanish culture by discussing disability and sexuality; specifically, the sexuality of LGBTQ people with disabilities (4). Through interviews with a number of Spanish people who both have disabilities and identify as LGBTQ, the documentary establishes that, while Spain has come a long way in terms of cultural acceptance of sexuality other than heterosexual, people with disabilities are still often seen as asexual beings. Robert McRuer and Anna Mollow explain how sex and disability are seen as mutually exclusive: "a polarization, in the cultural imagination, between sex and disability means that each of these terms potentially disables recognition of the other. If there's disability, according to ableist logic, then there can't be sex . . . and conversely, if there's sex, then presumably there's not disability (23-24). The concept of sex as incompatible with disability is doubtlessly reinforced by mass media and its propagation of a narrow range of bodies as desirable.

As a result of these representations, those whose bodies are non-normative become unimaginable in sexual terms; as to sexualize them would be perverse or monstrous. Franc and Martín's work can be seen as especially subversive since it obliges the reader to confront the sexuality of non-normative bodies both textually and visually. Activist Beatriz Gimeno, in Toro's documentary, acknowledges that while sexuality—whether heteronormative or queer—is now widely represented and discussed in Spanish culture, it remains restricted to certain types of people: "parece que ha dejado de ser un estigma en aquellas personas que son el perfecto

estereotipo de la persona socialmente aceptable: varón, joven, cachas, eso sí" (*El sexo*). Sexuality remains taboo in relation to other groups, including the elderly and, of course, people with disabilities. The documentary highlights the particular difficulties of LGBTQ people with disabilities, including the inaccessibility of many "sitios de ambiente" (*El sexo*). Furthermore, images of gay pride celebrations in Spain show hundreds of men with muscular, conventionally attractive bodies crowded onto parade floats that pass through the streets festooned with rainbow flags. Those interviewed in the documentary lament the lack of a visible place for LGBTQ people with disabilities in queer Spanish culture. Gimeno insists that: "Una de las cosas urgentes es empezar a visibilizar otro tipo de personas, otro tipo de gays y de lesbianas . . . otro tipo de personas que no sean del estereotipo . . . que parece que son la única imagen posible de los homosexuales" (*El sexo*). In effect, the documentary does make "atypical" LGBTQ people more visible, allowing space for their voices and stories.

One of the subjects interviewed, a man named Toni Martín, explains that, after suffering a spinal cord injury, his sex life experienced a year-long lull. This experience is not unlike Alicia's after her treatment for breast cancer. During this time, Toni describes himself as "una persona totalmente asexuada, angelical" (*El sexo*). It is from Toni's words that the documentary derives its title; he references the common Spanish saying, "discutir sobre el sexo de los ángeles," used to describe an absurd argument, in reference to medieval theological debate about whether angels possessed genitals. To use this phrase as the title of the documentary references the dominant perception of people with disabilities as "angelic," holy, or even childlike, as persons lacking sex organs, sexual desire and sexual desirability. At the same time, the title signals the absurdity of this assumption. While Toro's documentary does the important work of identifying the need for a change in the perception of disabled sexuality, it does not show

evidence of this change in action, which leaves the audience to wonder about the futures of the individuals and communities it portrays.

The Grup Àgata website addresses the topic of sexuality after cancer only in terms of heterosexual relationships, presenting it as a challenge that can be overcome if women are able to recuperate their self image. Post-cancer sexuality is named in a brief article posted on the website, entitled "Algunes de les coses que més costa d'assimilar." The author, Ainhoa Videgain explains that body image can lead to "problems" in relationships: "és molt important l'impacte dels canvis en la imatge corporal i com podem fer que sorgeixin problemes de parella relacionats amb la sexualitat." Related to this topic, embedded in Grup Àgata's home page is a 2012 short film called *La teta que os falta*. Differently from *Alicia en un mundo real*, this film portrays a heterosexual experience of the post-mastectomy body, both from the perspective of the woman who inhabits it and the men who do and don't desire it.

The film begins with a sequence of four women drinking wine at a bachelorette party. Through their conversation, it is revealed that one of the women, Maca, has had a mastectomy. In contrast to the others, who wear festive party clothing, Maca wears a buttoned shirt and cardigan sweater. When her friends try to encourage her to flirt with men later, she says, "ya paso de hombres" (*La teta*). The film then cuts to the bachelor party, also a group of four men sitting around a table drinking wine. The division of men and women emphasizes binary gender and traditional gender roles, suggesting that members of each sex have an appropriate place and social context. Speaking of Maca and her surgery, one man says, "para mí, ha perdido bastante" (*La teta*). When another man insists that he continues to find Maca "savagely attractive," his friend asks: "¿No me digas que no te daría un poco de… repelusa verla en bolas?" (*La teta*). This sequence presumably gives its female audience a look into conversations held in all-male

company on the topic of women's post-operative bodies, discussing them as sexual (or asexual) objects. In this short film, the spatial separation of the men and women positions friendship and fellowship among those of the same gender, whereas the primary relationship between the two genders is sexual in nature. Moreover, men are afforded the authority to stand in judgment of women's attractiveness. In fact, Franc and Martín's work also portrays a strictly female community, but the male perspective is almost entirely absent from the work.

The bachelor party's requisite exotic dancer ends up providing an opportunity for female empowerment, but still but still within the parameters of heteronormativity. Extreme close-up shots highlight her legs and buttocks as she dances, capturing the female body in sexualized parts. At the end of the strip tease, the dancer appears with her back to the camera, a large umbrella hiding her torso from the men. When she drops the umbrella, their faces register shock, and one of the men exclaims: "¡coño, pero si solamente tiene una teta!" (*La teta*). Coincidentally, the hired dancer, like the bride's friend Maca, has also had a mastectomy. She is embarrassed and covers herself, explaining that her manager should have told the clients upfront about her physical difference. At this point, it becomes evident that, conveniently, the bachelorette party is taking place in the same space, an arrangement that the camera has not previously revealed. Maca approaches, turns the music on and also does a striptease. The dance ends with her and the original dancer, arm in arm, bare backs to the camera and facing the table of men. Maca announces: "una y dos. Aquí tenéis la teta que os falta" and winks (*La teta*). The "sisterhood" between Maca and the dancer as survivors, symbolized by their embrace and exchange of looks at the end of the film, also implies a kind of feminist unity built upon the common experience of cancer and its effects on the body.

The film can be interpreted in some sense as affirming diverse forms of female sexuality,

given that Maca chooses to perform a striptease in the presence of men she knows, and that one of the men expresses that he is and always has been attracted to her, regardless of her surgery. Robert McRuer and Anna Mollow believe that disability can lead to a positive reconceptualization of sexuality: "Disability . . . has the potential to transform sex, creating confusions about what and who is sexy and sexualizable, what counts as sex, what desire 'is'" (32). The short film does manage to portray two women who are "disabled" by mastectomy as "sexy and sexualizable," which would have been highly unlikely in media of several decades prior. Nonetheless, both actresses are young and conventionally attractive, and no mastectomy scar ever appears on camera; the women are only filmed from the back or from the neck up. This piece ultimately chooses to represent the breast cancer survivor as a normative woman, rather than visually representing the reality of the post-cancer body—the only indication of this reality is the men's shock upon seeing the dancer topless. The film's placement on the Grup Àgata site does create an opportunity for women with breast cancer to view an overall lighthearted scenario that offers hope for a continued sex life after mastectomy. At the same time, the film is undeniably heteronormative, and problematic in the fact that its affirmation of women's sexuality is rooted in their capacity to be pleasing to the male gaze.

The documentary *Yes We Fuck!* diverges from *El sexo de los ángeles* and *La teta que os falta* by at once eschewing normative gender, heteronormativity, and the notion that people who have disabilities are asexual beings. The ideological perspective presented in this film is perhaps more aligned with that in the graphic novel, although it unabashedly portrays more severe physical disability and non-normative gender. This film, directed by Antonio Centeno and Raúl de la Morena, follows the radical activism of the Post-Op collective, a group that assists people with disabilities in discovering new sexual practices. This is a topic that makes many

uncomfortable, as Andrea García-Santesmases Fernández observes, notably since people with disabilities tend to be viewed as childlike, creating a taboo around imagining their sexuality (226). The documentary's shocking title and its explicit imagery insists upon making visible the reality of sex and disability, contradicting the idea that people with disabilities are "inválidos para el placer" (García-Santesmases Fernández 226). García-Santesmases Fernández's analysis of the title, *Yes We Fuck!*, raises questions about who exactly is the "we," and what precisely is the meaning of the verb "to fuck": who is allowed to occupy the role of the sexual subject? What activities are understood as "fucking"? (231). García-Santesmases Fernández draws a parallel between disabled sexuality and queer sexuality, both of which have been considered simultaneously intriguing and unimaginable, especially in the case of people with non-normative gender identities (226). She defines Post-Op collective, in fact, as a "queer-crip" alliance, a new and unique coalition for the Spanish State.

The documentary begins with people on urban streets of various races and ages answering the question "¿Qué es el sexo?" Some responses are serious and some are humorous, including references to health, fun and emotional connection. The idea is that, while sex is a common human experience, people's concepts of it may differ, just as people themselves differ. This sequence is followed by shots of activists Elena Urko and Majo Pulido walking through night-time streets. In voice over, Urko explains that they identify neither as a man nor a woman, and Majo says they changed their name from María José in order to avoid gendered labels. This sequence establishes the two founders of the Post-Op collective as individuals who seek to live outside the boundaries of normative gender. They explain their project of holding "talleres postporno," with the purpose of providing alternatives to mainstream notions of desire, attractiveness and sex (*Yes*). What follows is a sequence that is likely to shock many audiences:

people with various kinds of disabilities, many of them severe, in states of undress, engaging in alternative sexual practices with different props and toys.

Urko defines the goal of these workshops as promoting a more accessible sexuality that involves the entire body rather than just the genitals, thus removing reproduction as the implicit, heteronormative focus of sex. McRuer and Mollow similarly argue that "a benefit of thinking of 'sex' as more than a set of genital acts—and 'sexuality' as more than a set of predefined identities—is the potential for contesting the common cultural assumption that disabled people are not sexual" (24). Urko states that they intend for the diversely-abled workshop participants themselves to be the protagonists of this reimagining, rather than having the facilitators impose solutions. The activist demonstrates an understanding of ableism's functioning through an established hierarchy of bodies: "Estamos en una sociedad que considera unos cuerpos más valiosos que otros en base a unas capacidades que se consideran más valiosas que otras. Y esas capacidades son simplemente las capacidades productivas. Si eres un cuerpo productivo, eres un cuerpo valioso, y si no, no" (*Yes*). While Urko themselves appears to be able-bodied, they speak of the unvalued "monsters" of society in first-person plural, including themselves in this category for being a queer, non-binary person. Urko's own experience as an illegible person has afforded them a sense of empathy with the differently-abled, particularly for the disgust often inspired by their little-understood sexuality.

The final words of the documentary are uttered by a woman with a disability who is working with a sex worker to explore her sexuality, "que es nuestro derecho también" (*Yes*). The idea of sexuality as a human right (which is also expressed in *El sexo de los ángeles*) is revolutionary, especially since sexuality was traditionally the privileged terrain of those bound by the Catholic sacrament of heterosexual marriage and engaged solely in reproductive acts. It is

an act of power to determine who is allowed to be sexual and who is not, and these limitations are reflected in media and cultural production. The activist work of the Post-Op collective and the documentary film itself constitute a political act of expanding and making visible notions of imaginable and acceptable sexuality and who can access it. Indeed, the documentary *El sexo de los ángeles*, the short film *La teta que os falta* and Franc and Martín's *Alicia en un mundo real* are all engaged in this same pursuit, despite their varying approaches and conclusions.

IV. "Prueba superada": The cancer patient as superhero

The graphic novel chooses to celebrate the post-mastectomy body both through the affirmation of its sexuality and through the use of superhero imagery to reconceptualize the disease's transformation of the body and persona. The protagonist is drawn as a cape-wearing superhero on the book's cover, with her eyes wide, eyebrows raised in an expression of ambivalent fear, surprise, or both. She is holding her remaining breast, the other's absence evident. Her cat sidekick, who also appears throughout the novel, leans against her. The first superhero image within the text itself appears again at the end of Chapter Four, which is actually entitled "No soy una heroína." On the title page of the chapter, Alicia does not appear heroic; instead, her face is placed at the extreme left edge of the panel, she wears a cap pulled low, covering her hairless head, and looking out a window at what might be the ocean. The first page of the chapter is without words; it shows six panels of Alicia receiving chemotherapy treatment. On the facing page, one large panel appears to show another angle of the image that opened the chapter: Alicia gazes out the window of the treatment center, her hand touching the glass. The windowpane can perhaps be understood as a barrier between the protagonist and the cancer-free world.

Once she finishes with chemotherapy, Alicia passes through the "recta final" or "last

stage" of her journey, which is that of radiation (Franc and Martín 57). Loose calendar pages float among radiation symbols to demonstrate the passage of radiation time: "No es tan duro, pero se te hace interminable" (Franc and Martín 57). Finally, Alicia appears in full body, not contained within a frame but as a lone figure in the bottom right corner of the page, dressed in her superhero costume, hunched over. A speech bubble contains the sounds "Arf, arf," indicating either gagging, coughing or exhaustion, and a caption announces: "último día: ¡prueba superada!" (Franc and Martín 57).

Figure 4: Franc and Martín 57.

Cancer is here presented as a kind of endurance test or challenge through which the superhero figure must pass in order to prove themselves worthy of their powers of survival. In addition to overcoming this challenge, radiation therapy has transformed Alicia into a heroine whose superpower is the ability to survive life-threatening disease. The idea that radiation should morph a mere mortal into a superhero is a reflection of early 1960s Marvel comics: a high school

student becomes Spiderman when bitten by a radioactive spider; a scientist turns into the Incredible Hulk after contact with gamma radiation; and participants in an experimental space flight are exposed to cosmic rays and turn into the Frantastic Four. For Robin Rosenberg, "At their best, superhero origin stories inspire us and provide models of coping with adversity, finding meaning in loss and trauma, discovering our strengths and using them for good purpose. (Wearing a cape or tights is optional)." Beyond generating a non-normative physical body, the experience of cancer and its treatment can be understood to have imbued the protagonist with superhuman qualities.

Chapter Four's title ("No soy una heroína") signals Alicia's ambivalence about her role as superhero. She at once demonstrates physical vulnerability and the capacity to overcome extraordinary obstacles. Fear and anxiety, nonetheless, are certainly present in her narrative. These emotions are evident in the protagonist's facial expression on the book's very cover, and continue to manifest themselves in the verbal and graphic aspects of the text throughout. That a cancer patient should experience fear is not surprising, even though it is an emotion not typically associated with superheroism. This chapter can also be read as a questioning of the "sadcrip/supercrip" dichotomy that Charles A. Riley discusses in the context of film and media. Riley explains that "the 'sadcrip-supercrip'" are "two sides of the dame coin—one is dependent on caregivers while the other is a miraculous triumph of medical progress teamed with willpower" (4). Both dimensions of Alicia's character are portrayed visually: the "sad," sick person who is weak and frightened, and the literal superhero in full costume. The simultaneous presence of these images in the graphic novel establishes them both as valid aspects of the experience of illness and disability, rather than privileging one over the other. In this way, Franc and Martín's text acknowledges the stark medical and physiological reality of cancer, while at

the same time offering the optimistic fantasy of the superhero.

The role of superhero in this work is furthermore intertwined with the interpellation of the cancer survivor. When Alicia is pronounced cancer-free, she appears once again as a superhero, once again in the bottom right corner of the page, not enclosed by a frame. Here, she holds her arms up in victory like the winner of a wrestling match, accompanied by a bow tie-wearing referee. This "victory" over cancer interpellates Alicia into the role of "survivor," even though this word is absent from the text and is more prevalent in the English-language discourse surrounding cancer. Lochlann Jain notes that the "survivor" identity is built upon statistics that stand in for the invisible presence of those who did not survive (31). This interpellation invites the survivor to feel triumphant for finding themselves on the desirable side of the statistics, rather than identifying with those fellow cancer patients who lost their lives to the disease (Lochlann Jain 31). McRuer uses the term "compulsory individualism" to describe the stark division between the person with disability and their caretakers, between the sick and the well (Introduction). This individualism is a product of neoliberal policy which, through the deregulated flow of capital and the elimination or privatization of social services (including health care) promotes "independence" as the ideal state of achieved human progress. The survivor, then, can be understood as a victorious individual, unburdened neither by the shadows of exhausted caretakers nor of the cancer battle's "losers." This interpellation thus promotes individualism, insulating the survivor by erasing the dead.

Neoliberal narratives frame disability and illness as the private responsibility of the family, assuming traditional, heteronormative kinship structures. In *Alicia en un mundo real*, queer notions of community provide an alternative support system to the individual facing health-related challenges. Alicia is cared for by a support network of queer women, who include

past and present lovers as well as friends, co-workers and neighbors, though none of her biological family members ever appear. The work can thus be said to gesture toward a model of alternative, non-heteronormative family that is able to provide support for this doubly marginalized queer-disabled subject.

Absent from the narrative, however, are financial concerns; the reader knows from the beginning that Alicia will survive her disease to enjoy a trip to the beaches of Mexico. Of course, as a Spanish citizen, she would have access to public healthcare; in contrast, in the United States, an estimated 60% of personal bankruptcies are attributed to "the catastrophic financial burden of illness" (Lochlann Jain 11). Ironically, cancer actually brings Alicia profit in the form of the memoir she writes: presumably, the graphic novel in the reader's hands. Her boss repeatedly pressures her into the project, and is even drawn at one point with Euro signs for eyes, drooling as she entreats Alicia to write a dramatic memoir that will sell copies: "que sea muy desgarrada, muy dramática, que vende más" (Franc and Martín 94). This image critiques those who seek to profit from sensational narratives, rather than delving into the nuance and complexity of illness and disability. Alicia's book project is the reason she decides to go to Mexico, in order to write in luxurious solitude. Not only does she survive cancer, but she finds herself, as described in the Epilogue, "sin una teta y en el paraíso," a humorous allusion to the Colombian television series *Sin tetas no hay paraíso* (Franc and Martín 137).

Figure 5: Franc and Martín 137.

Alicia retains her position as a journalist throughout her treatment, and never seems concerned about the destruction of her career. A series of panels in which she argues with her boss about her decreased productivity is introduced by the observation: “Tampoco es fácil volver a la vorágine laboral” (Franc and Martín 111). In the first panel, Alicia leans back in an armchair, insisting that her boss understand that she is unable to work as much as before: “Es que no puedo asumir tanto trabajo, Maru, entiéndelo. No tengo la misma energía que antes” (Franc and Martín 111). Granted, in an ideal world, those who have disabilities should have access to

accommodations in the workplace. In practice, in a profit-driven economy, many workers are not realistically in a position to insist that their boss recognize their limitations. Lochlann Jain speaks of the hardship that young adults experience when they have to unexpectedly "drop out" of the workforce due to cancer at a moment that is culturally assumed to be their most productive in terms of generating income and saving for retirement (52). Given the soaring levels of unemployment in Spain at the time of the work's publication, the flexibility shown in Franc and Martín's portrayal of the labor force is especially idealistic. Ultimately, this text's representation of the cancer patient's financial and professional prognosis offers a kind of fantastic, best-case scenario, rather than engaging with less fortunate outcomes.

Despite the pressing issues that remain outside the scope of *Alicia in un mundo real*, its unconventional cancer narrative proposes empowerment through alternative ways of being to those affected by the disease. Both Lewis Caroll's Alice and Franc and Martín's Alicia must travel through a space of darkness and danger, in which they are altered physically by "magical" substances and threatened with the loss of body parts and of their very lives. An important difference, however, is that Alice's adventures unfold in a make-believe realm, whereas Alicia inhabits the "real world"—her experience can easily become our own.

Examination of a line from a poem by Catalan feminist poet Maria Mercè Marçal can serve to illuminate the work's posture toward mortality. In an unframed image, Alicia appears floating, perhaps in water, the absence of her left breast apparent through her clothing. A caption reads: "Una de mis poetas favoritas habló de 'la cualidad humilde de los cuerpos vivos' y este cuerpo mío andaba entonces más humilde que nunca" (Franc and Martín 90). A frame is placed on top of this image showing a doctor's suggestion of reconstructive surgery, and Alicia expressing unwillingness to go through another surgical procedure (Franc and Martín 90). The

pairing of the phrase “la cualidad humilde de los cuerpos vivos” with these drawings implies that cancer and its treatment has “humbled” the body, highlighting its vulnerability and decreasing its aesthetic appeal. Considered in the wider context of Marçal’s poem, the humbled body is the finite body, in opposition to the deathless divine. The phrase Alicia cites is taken from *Raó del cos*, a collection of poetry written by Marçal while she herself was suffering from terminal cancer. This section of the poem reads as follows:

> Sagrada obscenitat
> del cos
> tocat per la promesa
> de la mort:
> intocable
> com un pària
> o com l’empremta
> d’un déu absent.
>
> Sigues sacrílega
> i retorna-li
> la qualitat humil
> dels cossos vius.

These verses speak at once of the Eucharist, the divine body, and of the human body, touched by the promise of death and celebrated in its mortality. Marçal wrote these verses in close proximity to her own death; while Isabel Franc, too, has had the real-life experience of breast cancer, hers is a survivor testimony. Rather than giving attention to the specter of death, Franc and Martín’s

graphic novel celebrates the continued life of the body in its humbled, disease-altered form.

In *Alicia*'s prologue, a panel shows the wing of a plane advancing down a runway, with a caption that explains: "Cada vida es un viaje y su itinerario no es siempre el deseado" (Franc and Martín 9). Neither cancer nor disability are welcome events, yet they can enrich lives by unveiling new facets of the self and inviting the formation of communal bonds with others. Alicia's story is perhaps idealistic, but it is also optimistic. Versaci speaks of the "escapism" of the comic, designed to transport the reader into an alternative realm (4-5). In Alicia's world, the woman who is diagnosed with breast cancer is condemned neither to death nor to a sexless existence. To share her journey is to accept an invitation to participate in the "madness" of questioning heteronormative promises of happiness and fictions of able-bodied wholeness.

Conclusions

Awakening from a Crisis Nightmare?

On July 28, 2017, a headline in the New York Times declared: "Spain's Long Economic Nightmare is Finally Over" (Goodman). Journalist Peter S. Goodman reported that the Spanish unemployment rate had dropped to 18% from its peak of 26% in 2013, and commerce was rekindling across the nation. According to Goodman's headline, Spaniards could breathe a sigh of relief as they awakened from what was merely a bad dream, secure in the knowledge that the nation was on its way back to normal. Luisa Elena Delgado warns, however, of the perils of viewing this period of capital stagnation as an exceptional catastrophe: "la idea de la 'crisis' económica actual se basa en la noción de que lo que ocurre no es parte lógica (no solo previsible, sino inevitable) de un cierto sistema y un cierto modo de vida, sino una lamentable aberración que hay que solucionar por medio de la misma lógica que llevó a la crisis" (*La Nación* 44). To inhabit the capitalist economy is to live with the inevitability of crisis.

While economic statistics suggest that the crisis has abated, a decade of mass unemployment, foreclosures and disenfranchisement will certainly have a longstanding effect on Spanish culture. Because crisis is inevitable and its impact is enduring and widespread, to study its representation in cultural production certainly proves a worthy endeavor. This project brings to existing crisis scholarship a particular focus on the body in the midst of these precarious times. Ultimately, the promise of a permanent state of economic prosperity and independent living is an unattainable fiction, not unlike the cultural fantasies of lifelong able-bodiedness, seamless gender performance and perfect heterosexuality. Paradoxically, even though crisis is a way of life in the Western world, so is the persistent ideology stating that the only viable and valuable individual is

one able to live and produce independently. In the analyses elaborated in these pages, I have demonstrated how attention to cultural representations of non-normative bodies can offer insight into the human experience of a capitalist crisis.

This project was guided by two primary research questions. The first asks how literary and filmic representations of disability construct the economic crisis and its effects on Spanish culture. My reading of texts including Lindo's *Una palabra tuya* and its film adaptation and Marta Sanz's *Black, black, black* highlights the systemic causes of the crisis. In these works, citizens find themselves at risk of becoming redundant, made invisible and relegated to waste. These portrayals of differently-abled characters and queer characters offer readers and audiences an additional perspective on the experience of the crisis, challenging them to re-think its causes. The Snow White stories and Franc and Martín's *Alicia en un mundo real* then propose survival tactics through innovative forms of community. Through subverting dominant notions of medical normalcy, gendered embodiment and acceptable sexuality, these works question neoliberal fantasies of what constitutes a life worth living.

My second primary research question asks how cultural narratives employ disability to envision and explore ideas of personal and national belonging in a time of crisis. While belonging is often achieved through conformity to a palatable and marketable image of the nation, the texts studied in this project are populated with subjects unwilling or unable to adapt to these norms. Diverse, indignant or recalcitrant bodies are afforded varying amounts of visibility, and some voices are more empowered to speak than others. What is certain is that the presence of disability in these texts inspires a questioning of prescribed social roles and an opportunity to re-imagine affective bonds. The unexpected coalitions between marginalized groups found in these works (the friendship between queer street cleaners in *Una palabra tuya*; the family formed

between little people and a female bullfighter in Berger's *Blancanieves*; the support offered by the lesbian community to a woman with cancer in *Alicia en un mundo real*; or the collaboration between queer people and those with disability in *Yes We Fuck!*) are models of community that stand to promote creative ways to improve lives in a time of crisis.

On September 30, 2017, in anticipation of the Catalan secession referendum, a group of Spaniards gathered to protest in Madrid's Plaza Cibeles. Media coverage showed a section of protesters brandishing the rojigualda alongside the red and black flags of Spanish fascism, emblazoned with the yoke and arrows. The crowd sang the francoist hymn "Cara al sol" and raised their arms in fascist salutes. Ironically, the occupants of Cibeles were mostly young people, with no lived experience of European fascism. They gathered to promote a supposedly glorious vision of Spain, a fantasy of the past that remains nonetheless haunted by those violently silenced and eliminated from the nation under Franco's dictatorship.

While the crisis was undoubtedly a motivating factor for 90% of Catalans who participated in the referendum (albeit only 42% of registered voters) to vote for secession, the fascist symbolism evoked in response also cannot be divorced from the crisis context (Dewan, et al.). Expressions of right-wing nationalism have reared their ugly heads worldwide, denouncing scapegoats upon which to blame the effects of the crisis. The month prior to the protest at Cibeles, on August 11, 2017, a violent demonstration of white Unite States nationalism erupted in Charlottesville, VA, complete with fascist symbolism. The rally began with "a torchlight procession—a symbolic gathering meant to evoke similar marches of Hitler Youth and other ultraright nationalist organizations of the past century" (Heim). Cries of "You will not replace us!" proclaimed the objective of redifining the United States as a white, Christian nation, resisting the influx of immigrants and minorities. In the face of such events, it is imperative to

critically analyze cultural constructions of nationalism while mindful of past atrocities that arose from economic precarity.

It is known that fascism erupted from the wreckage of the Great Depression, its most internationally recognized expression being that of Adolf Hitler, who promised to elevate the German nation through the elimination of the Jewish people. What is lesser known is that the Nazi dress rehearsal for the extermination camps of the Holocaust was the Aktion T4 plan to cleanse Germany of disability. While it is erroneous to equate Naziism with francoism, the 2013 Catalan documentary *Diferents*, produced by the disability activist Grup Caliu, utilizes the example of Germany to highlight similar injustices that occurred in Spain during Francisco Franco's regime. The opening frames of *Diferents* present a series of black and white photos taken in medical institutions. An image of a bleak cell with a with low ceiling and cinderblock walls, containing a hospital bed, is followed by a photo of Adolf Hitler and Francisco Franco side by side. The photos fade into one another, accompanied by a soundtrack of the ocean and melancholy, instrumental music. The film visually emphasizes the ideological similarities between the two fascist leaders, revealing also that Hitler supported Franco during the Spanish Civil War.

The stated purpose of the documentary is as follows: "coneixer el passat, per entendre el present, per assolir el futur" (*Diferents*). When a group of Catalans with disabilities are shown traveling by bus to Hadamar, Germany in 2010, the footage of the bus ride is colored with a gold filter and run across by occasional white lines. This effect gives the impression of an early twentieth-century film reel, and thus of a superimposition of the past and present. Beyond portraying an excursion into history, this image questions the perceived separation of the historical past from the current time. Titles in white typeface against a black screen detail the

Aktion T4 which, in the interest of safeguarding State funds and purifying the Aryan race, authorized the euthanasia of over 70,000 German people deemed "inferior" due to their failure to conform to standards of cognitive normativity. According to fascist ideology, those with disabilities were a drain on State resources; the only worthy citizens were those who could be "useful" to the State and its project of improving the race. The Catalan group, accompanied by German sociologist Uta George, then receives a guided tour of the infamous Hadamar Euthanasia Center. A zoom shot of the crematorium in the basement of the facility is accompanied by the soundtrack of a crackling fire. As George explains, according to the philosophy of Nazi eugenics, State funds should be reserved for those citizens who were of greater genetic value, and who would then reproduce and create a process of social change.

The group of Catalans returns home from Germany to witness the ways in which Nazi-inspired policy was implemented on their own soil. As the documentary explains, several medical professionals trained in Nazi Germany served in Franco's administration. One of these, AntonioVallejo-Nájera Lobón, Franco's head of military psychology, is quoted in the documentary as stating: "Tiene la democracia el inconveniente que halagar las bajas pasiones y concede iguales derechos al loco, al imbécil y al degenerado" (*Diferents*). According to this physician, democratic governance is deleterious to the nation since it allows the participation of those with mental illness and with cognitive disabilities, who are named alongside the "degenerate." Implicitly, society can be safeguarded with the elimination or silencing of this undesirable element, considered to be in diametric opposition to the ideally robust fascist subject. *Diferents* continues with a visit to Sant Boi de Llobregat, a former mental health institution, or "manicomi," of the Spanish State. These institutions housed not only individuals diagnosed with mental illness, but also those with conditions such as Down Syndrome or cerebral palsy. An

elderly psychiatrist named Enrique González Duro credits the Catholic faith with the prevention of genocide in francoist Spain, saying: "Hombre, éramos católicos, oficialmente no se les podía matar como hicieron los Nazis. Pero, en fin, si no hubiera sido por ese prejuicio, seguramente se lo hubieran liquidado" (*Diferents*). Although people with disabilities may not have been exterminated outright in Spain as they were in Nazi Germany, they were still ideologically framed as useless and undesirable, and were therefore isolated from society. Meanwhile, other groups such as homosexuals and communists were certainly targeted for execution by Franco's government, perceived as criminal threats to the state. Significantly, Catalan nationalists were also criminalized by Franco, and some were sent to Nazi concentration camps—Montserrat Roig explores this tragic history in her 1972 book *Els catalans als camps Nazis*. It is not surprising, therefore, that it was a Catalan activist group, specifically, who undertook the production of the *Diferents* documentary.

Consideration of the treatment of those with disabilities can lead to an understanding of many forms of marginalization, as I have demonstrated in this project. The devaluation of human persons based upon the measurement of their bodies and minds to medical standards cannot be divorced from other forms of prejudice, including but not limited to racism, sexism and homophobia. We may believe the atrocities of fascism to lie nearly a century behind us, its pernicious logic undoubtedly remains alive in our time. In the face of this menace, I propose that culture is our indispensable teacher, that literary and artistic production can lead the way to answering urgent questions. Moreover, the critical analysis of cultural representations of bodies that are differently abled, differently gendered and racialized can reveal the expansive possibilities that these lives suggest.

While liberal arts education is often justified as the purveyor of "critical thinking skills"

whose value is measured in the capitalist terms as revenue generation, J. M. Olejarz defends the value of literary studies in and of themselves: “Novels can also help us develop empathy. Stories, after all, steep us in characters’ lives, forcing us to see the world as other people do.” In a world where literary and artistic production is increasingly viewed as a superfluous luxury without marketable utility, I argue that its presence is even more vital. In the literary and filmic texts I have explored in this project, the examples of precarious embodiments offer lessons on how to live interdependently, and to realize valuable transformation through the imagination of new collective bonds. Human life is by nature precarious; we are threatened by the violence among us, the devastation of the environment, and our entrenchment in an economic system that can render any of us instantly redundant. It is through our interconnectedness that our precarity is lessened; it is in alliance with one another, in all our diversity, that we may fashion a viable future for our species.

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