

**Behind the Blurred Lines of Social Critique:
Identifying the Living Dead in Jaume Balagueró and Paco Plaza's [*•Rec*] Trilogy**

by:

Judson Scott Smith

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Approved by:

Jorge Muñoz, Chair, Associate Professor of Foreign Languages and Literatures
Kerri Muñoz, Lecturer Associate Lecturer of Foreign Languages and Literatures
Jordi Olivar, Associate Professor of Foreign Languages and Literatures

Abstract

The purpose of this thesis is to establish the relationship, within the theoretical/critical framework of postmodernism, between the [*•Rec*] horror movies and the social/historical context to which they belong. The intention in doing so is to show the importance and/or relevance of the commentary that appears in said films as it pertains to contemporary Spanish society. By establishing topics like the domineering power that the Catholic Church assumes within Spain, it becomes apparent in understanding the motives of why the directors chose to cover such topics as homophobia, xenophobia and racism. A closer look at the films reveals that the elements of the polemic topics remain largely the same within contemporary Spanish society as well. Upon closer examination of these topics, the relevance of how they are portrayed in the [*•Rec*] films becomes essential to understanding their importance both within this study, as well as within modern-day Spain.

Keywords: postmodernism, the Catholic Church, racism and xenophobia, homophobia

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1. Introduction

Horror movies often create a rollercoaster of emotions by pairing fear and uncertainty with speculation and joy. This genre also exposes its audiences to the ‘*terror implicit*’ of daily life (Pinedo 106). Author Isabel Christina Pinedo explains that such implicated everyday terrors may include: “the pain of loss, the enigma of death, the unpredictability of events, [and] the inadequacy of intentions” (106). Horror, as well as other movie genres, may also help convey social messages or critique. According to film critic and author Stephen Prince: “[t]he experience of horror resides in this confrontation with uncertainty, with the “unnatural”, with a violation of the ontological categories on which being and culture reside” (2). By confronting the unnatural, and going against these categories, horror has proven its popularity and shown its unique ability to dive deeply into the abyss of the human soul.

The purpose of this thesis is to establish the relationship, within the theoretical/critical framework of postmodernism, between the [*•Rec*] horror movies and the social/historical context to which they belong.ⁱ The intention in doing so is to show the importance and/or relevance of the commentary that appears in said films as it pertains to contemporary Spanish society. By establishing topics like the domineering power that the Church assumes within Spain, it becomes apparent in understanding the motives of why the directors chose to cover such topics as homophobia, xenophobia and racism. A closer look at the films reveals that the elements of the polemic topics remain largely the same within contemporary Spanish society as well. Upon closer examination of these topics, the relevance of how they are portrayed in the [*•Rec*] films

ⁱ As of current date of this thesis only [*•Rec*], [*•Rec*]² and [*•Rec*]³: *Génesis* exist. However, according to imdb.com, the final chapter, [*•Rec*]⁴: *Apocalipsis*, is scheduled to be released in Spain October 10, 2014.

becomes essential to understanding their importance both within this study, as well as within modern-day Spain.

For those familiar with the series, there is no mistaking that directors, Jaume Balagueró (Lleida, 1968) and Paco Plaza (Valencia, 1973) added unique characteristics to the [*Rec*] franchise by linking the origins of a zombie outbreak with religion. For some, the idea of associating a virus to religion may constitute an entire rejection to call the creatures in the [*Rec*] films zombies. However, this may also be interpreted as a way for filmmakers Balagueró and Plaza to add their own signature touch to the films much like George Romero (New York, 1940) was able to create in his classic 1968 film *Night of the Living Dead*. Before films such as Romero's masterpiece, zombies were portrayed to be much like their original roots as found in Haitian culture. It was not until the genius of Romero that the zombie became what it is today. With his direction and creative ability this filmmaker was able to aggregate the attributes of the ghoul, such as cannibalism, and combine them with the unstoppable strength that only the living dead possessed. For several decades to follow many directors have obeyed Romero's vision of the zombie, but not until 2007 did audiences witness a diversity from the mold. By adding a demonic presence to the zombie, much like Romero added the essence of the ghoul, Balagueró and Plaza have been able to add a new twist to the zombie genre. Much like *Night of the Living Dead*, the [*Rec*] films do not only serve as entertainment, they also speak to social commentary, which reveals the struggles found in contemporary Spanish society.

In order to better understand the social critique within, it is best to begin at the origin of the zombie itself. The introduction is centered on exploring the origin of the zombie in both culture and film, starting with its roots in Haiti. Chapter one, entitled

Extra Ecclesiam Nulla Salus: The Church Loosing its Grip in Spain, will focus on the importance of the Catholic Church as represented in the movies as well as in modern-day Spain. By observing the predominant role that the Catholic Church takes in the films, it is easier to understand the Church's position in the Spanish community. In taking an analytical approach to the Church's method of evangelization in both, the films as well as in Spanish society, it can be determined that the Church uses what theorist Jean François Lyotard coined as "metanarrative". By applying Lyotard's theory of metanarratives to the Catholic Church's methods of evangelization, it becomes apparent that the narrative function of the Bible is used to exert power and control in the form of tradition in order to oppress such groups as women and homosexuals. The remainder of the chapter focuses on some of the criticism that Catholicism has received, which facilitates the ability to understand why it is portrayed in a way that allows for negative critique in the movie series themselves.

Chapter two, which is called *Gender Roles in a Postmodern Society*, will begin to analyze social commentary found within the films related to homophobia and the importance of the roles of genders. By analyzing the films' social critique, topics like these are made prevalent subjects that concern modern-day Spain. Evaluation of the commentaries found in each film will be analyzed from a postmodern standpoint by looking at both the role of the female as well as the role of the homosexual in the films as gender subversion rather than the marginalized 'Other' (Muñoz 39). This chapter will also explore the negative impacts of stereotyping as according to Eve Kosofsky Sedgwick, a theorist who specializes in queer theory and gender studies. The information in the [*•Rec*] series will then be related to statistical information gathered from

government sources in order to show the correspondence between the films and contemporary Spanish society. The final chapter, called *The Effects of Xenophobia and Racism in a Postmodern Society*, looks at another social issue dealing with other marginalized individuals found in the [*•Rec*] series. Of the many races represented in the films, some are presented in a less positive light; therefore the goal of this final chapter is to analyze racism and xenophobia as seen throughout the film series. After canvassing the movies to identify the racial and ethical stereotypes, this information will be compared to statistical data from relevant sources such as *Informe Raxen*. This shall be done in order to determine if the exemplifications in the films are faithful representations of the many Spanish natives that were questioned and surveyed on similar topics. The [*•Rec*] series tends to pair many different ethnic groups into one common space. By showing this plurality on screen in modern-day Spain it helps establish the conflicts between diverse races and ethnicities. The lack of a homogeneous race as observed in the movie series can be related to a term called *hybridity* according to theorist Néstor García Canclini. As a result of approaching a postmodern Spain that is based on hybridity, it is easier to highlight the loss of its own original culture resulting in a melting pot fusion similar to that found in the United States.

1.1 Origin of the Zombie

The actual origin of the term *zombie* is somewhat of a debate. Cultural anthropologist Elsie Clews Parsons suggested that the term came from the word *ombres* meaning shadows, hence *z'omb'e* then later *zombie*. The anthropologist also suggested a link to the West Indian term for ghost, *jumbie* or *juppy/duppy*. Whereas author and filmmaker Maya Deren believes that the term originates from indigenous Arawak Indian

culture in the predominantly African society of rural Haiti; she notes that *zemis*, the souls of the dead, are directly related to zombies (Davis 57). Although the origins of the term itself are not completely clear, most researchers agree that the notion of the zombie originated from French-African Vodou heritage:

Most authorities, however, indicate an African origin for the word. In his *Philologie creole*, Jules Faine (1937) wrote that the word came from the Bonda language —the word *zumbi*—and was probably transmitted to Haiti by Portuguese slave trades. Among the Mitsogho of Gabon the cadaver of the deceased is called *ndzumbi* (Dieterlen 1973). Wyatt MacGaffey (pers. Comm.) suggests that the word comes from the Kongo *nzambi*, meaning more or less “spirit of the dead person.” (Davis 57)

Regardless of whether the word itself originates from French-African roots, the practices involving zombies are indeed associated with Haitian culture and religion. Many Haitians practice Vodou, a sophisticated African-based religion that has its own deities, priests, sacred rituals, as well as magic (Anderson x).

The threat of becoming a zombie establishes order in Haitian society, and according to popular belief, zombies are created to control mischievous behavior. Canadian anthropologist and ethnobotanist Wade Davis documented his research in an attempt to uncover the mystery surrounding zombification in Haiti in his book entitled *Passage of Darkness: The Ethnobiology of the Haitian Zombie* (1988). In his book, Davis comments on the well defined and disciplined social order that he finds within Haiti. Economically, men are responsible for clearing fields, and women control the family finances, whereas education relies largely on the oral transmission of songs, tales, etc.

(40). Upon arriving in Haiti, Davis observed that the majority of Haitian inhabitants practice *voodoo*. To his discovery, within voodoo society exists a sophisticated system of moral laws, education, and medicine. Vodoan medicine is based on the equilibrium of both physical components as well as spiritual constituents. As part of traditional Haitian education virtually every inhabitant has common knowledge of the herbs and leaves utilized in medicinal treatments to care for common ailments (43). It is when there is a disruption in the equilibrium of the being's spiritual components that a much more powerful source is needed. A *houngan* or a vodoan specialty priest, may treat issues like bad luck or marital distress, but first the houngan must decide if the illness is natural or supernatural. If indeed supernatural matters cause the illness, the priest may then act accordingly by using herbal baths, plant potions or animal sacrifices (45).

Voodoo, as the researcher discovered, also has a dark side. Sorcerers known as *bokers* are those that deal with the harsher side of voodoo. Bokers are said to be the malevolent sorcerers responsible for raising their victims from a comatose trance where they were thought to lie dead and leading them to distant farms or villages for mind-controlled slavery (60). According to some Haitians, these witch doctors were able to induce these comatose trances not by the means of the supernatural, but by use of poisons (60). Such poisons altered the mind and slowed the metabolism to a point that the victims appeared dead, thus causing confusion. Edna Taft, author of *A Puritan in Voodoo-Land* (1938) suggested a name for the concoction when trying to better identify the origins of the zombie:

Zombies are the living dead; that is persons who are supposed to have died, been buried, then raised from the dead.... As a matter of fact, they

have never really died at all; they were merely in a cataleptic trance during their period of interment. These false zombies are the victims of unscrupulous sorcerers who produce the semblance of death by administering to the unfortunates the leaf of *tuer-lever* (kill-raise up) plant. Thus the wicked wizard is able to bring about an artificial death. The victim in a state of suspended animation is duly buried. As people are buried the same day they die, the victim does not have to be kept in a cataleptic trance for many hours. The “corpse” is restored to life, but the brain remains dulled. It is said that the zombies are given regular doses of a certain narcotic to maintain them in a state of apathy. (257)

After further research in the field, Davis was eager to find out the exact components of the poisons that were able to create zombies. In his search, the anthropologist discovered a broker that he was able to sway by means of financial gain in order to get his hands on the coma-provoking recipe. Through his investigation he determined that the powder was made of a combination of toads, worms, lizards, tarantulas, dried remains of a species of the puffer fish, and human remains, such as bones. Davis noted that the powder was not always compiled of the exact same components, yet after identifying the puffer fish to be a consistent ingredient, the scientist recalled that many species of this fish’s poisonings read the same as zombification, particularly with the case of the *fugu* fish. Many case histories of *fugu* poisonings reported victims that were unable to speak or move for several hours, many of which were able to remember hearing themselves being pronounced dead (Lehmann 330).

The process of inducing a coma by using various poisons may offer an explanation for reanimation, but Davis concluded that it did not offer any logical reasons to the trance-like enslavement that takes place after the individual rises from the grave. From a spiritual standpoint, the explanation resides in that the priest is able to capture the *ti bon ange* or “good little angel” of the victim thus rendering him/her without free will. On the other hand, Davis, much like Taft, suspects that the zombification process may be supplemented by giving the victim a *datura* paste, which causes increased disorientation. Davis adds that these elements only add to the intensity of the deep-seated cultural beliefs that are found in this African community. In Haiti, the fear is not of the zombies themselves, it’s the fear of becoming a zombie, which is worse than death itself (Lehmann 331).

1.2 The Zombie in Film

With today’s horror films the perspective has shifted, the fear is more of the zombie itself, but the zombie has changed quite drastically from its origins in Haiti. Author William Seabrook first brought the term “zombi” into the limelight with his travel book entitled *The Magic Island* in 1929. Shortly after, in 1932, Kenneth Webb’s stage production *Zombie* fell short of success. Although the play did not do so well, the movie production began a month after the play opened, resulting in Victor Halperin’s *White Zombie* (1932) that seemed to remain largely loyal to Haitian belief, although more modern representations tend to differ. Clearly there are some differences as to what most modern film industries define as today’s zombie, especially considering that the modern zombie is not controlled by a sorcerer. Other than the name *zombie* and the fact that both

deal with the resurrection of the dead, Haitian belief does not share much in common with that observed in modern zombie films.

Beginning with George Romero's *Night of the Living Dead* (1968), the undead began to take on other forms and for the first time the zombie looked much like normal, every day people. Unlike previous representations of the zombie, Romero's take on the zombie/ghoul itself broke the mold in many ways. In previous presentations the zombie was under the command of a superior, more intelligent being and was instructed to perform a function assigned to him from his manipulator, whereas with Romero this was not the case. Peter Dendle, author of *The Zombie Movie Encyclopedia* (2001), explains:

Romero liberated the zombie from the shackles of a master, and invested his zombies not with a function (a job or task such as zombies were standardly given by voodoo priests), but rather a drive (eating flesh). He conflated the "zombie" with the "ghoul," a cannibal creature that (despite a couple of 30's movies) had never really caught on itself. Zombies thus become endowed with a highly physical, biological craving; they are no longer robotic machines, but gluttonous organisms demanding representation on the food chain. (6)

For the US, movies such as Romero's *Night of the Living Dead* and *Dawn of the Dead* (1978) set the stage and standard of the zombie in film. *NLD* was released in the United States during the Civil Rights Movement. Throughout this period (1954-1968), discrimination amongst African Americans was extremely high, especially in the South. Although many laws attempted to outlaw segregation, for example The Brown Decision, in 1954 they were unable to stop bigotry or hate groups from continuing to form. Romero

was able to depict the racial difficulties that were present during the time in which his film took place. By establishing an African American as the hero/antihero in his film the director was able to shine the light on racial commentary in 1960s American society. According to author Danél Griffin, Romero's *NLD* is based on stereotypes, as are all social commentaries, which is done in order to establish the social critique at hand. Each of the female characters is portrayed as less dominate, weaker characters that are more capable of nurturing, rather than defending themselves, whereas the male characters are portrayed as domineering and power-hungry. Romero's genius comes from his ability to one-dimensional, black-and-white characters that reflect the diverse mind frames that make the personas in his movies relatable and authentic according to the time period in which they were made.ⁱⁱ Although Romero's approach to racism is subtle, it is also easy to identify in instances such as Harry's (who is easily identifiable as being racist) inability to cooperate with Ben. Griffin also comments on the fact that many spectators would conceivably expect blacks in America to remain submissive bearing in the mind the racial tensions during the era. Yet Ben's relentless will to defend himself and fight back added innovation to a film emerging from a timeframe around the civil rights movement, considering that it came from a white director. In continuing his analysis of the director's work he says that Romero's *Dead* films always involve humans shooting and killing one another while zombies reap the benefits. It could be argued that Griffin was inferring that the mindless humans in these films also fit into the concept of a zombie per se, for they kill one another, while the actual zombies are only acting on their innate instinct to feed. According to the movie critic, these films encompass one thing: social

ⁱⁱAlthough it could be argued that *Night of the Living Dead* was shot in black and white in order to better illustrate the racial tensions between characters during the civil rights movement, it was actually due to shooting the independent film on the low budget of \$114,000 (<<http://www.tor.com>>).

decline. Griffin renders that the truth as depicted in Romero's films is much more offensive than any other gory images because of its familiarity to reality itself. The critic confers that movies like *Night of the Living Dead* have a deeper meaning when one considers the social context to the commentaries: "As the undead fight one another for bits and pieces of human flesh, we are forced to remember that consumers are never satisfied, and that everyday, Americans literally tear each other apart in selfishness and hate" <<http://uashome.alaska.edu>>. Other similar films from the *Dead* series include other classics like *Dawn of the dead* (1978). In this film the survivors are forced to seek refuge in a shopping mall, in which they soon start to feel as if they own. The underlying commentary of this film implies that the need to own things is the element that destroys a culture at its core. As a voice against consumerism, this film suggests that the snowball effect of consumerism masks the ability to see the big picture. Author John Muir says: "If you own a shopping mall and a candy store and a video arcade, it's easy to forget that zombies are taking over the world outside" (171). Continuing with his *Dead* series, Romero produced many other zombie films to follow, these include: *Day of the Dead* (1985), *Land of the Dead* (2005), *Diary of the Dead* (2007), and *Survival of the Dead* (2009). Romero was not the only director to incorporate social commentary into the zombie film. Movie directors such as Danny Boyle was quoted saying that his 2002 film *28 Days Later* dealt with issues like "social rage." Boyle asserts that: "[t]here's a very specific social intolerance of each other ... It's not just road rage. You get it in hospital waiting rooms and you get it in airplanes and airports. It seems to be a speed fixation. When it's not delivered at the speed desired, people just lose it." According to the director, the critique on society's inability to act civil to one another is evident when

survivors are ‘trapped together with this staggeringly fast monster’<<http://cbsnews.com>>.

Many other successful zombie movies have followed Romero’s breakthrough classic *Night of the Living Dead*. A multitude of innovative minds have shown that they too could add a creative flair to the zombie genre. Robert Rodriguez’s *Planet Terror* (2007) was presented as a vintage grindhouse film that featured unique characters, one of which wielded a machine gun in place of a prosthetic leg. Other films such as Edgar Wright’s 2004 *Shaun of the Dead* and Ruben Fleischer’s *Zombieland* (2009) approached the zombie film from a lighthearted, comical standpoint. The zombie is not always approached through film; creator Frank Darabont of the highly successful AMC TV drama *The Walking Dead* (2010-current) has proven that the versatility of the zombie can function as a prime time television series as well. After seeing the transformation from Romero to more current works, it is important to shift the focus to the Spanish film industry, more particularly that of the horror/zombie genre.

1.3 Spanish Horror Films

For many previous decades, the Spanish film industry was not renowned for producing many horror films of high caliber, especially those dealing with zombies. Typically, when speaking of popular Spanish cinema, one would tend to think of drama or even comedy, but generally not horror per se. Although there were very few horror films before the 1970’s, there were a few at the beginning of the twentieth century that had elements of fantasy and terror (García 42). Segundo de Chomón’s 1906 short film *El hotel eléctrico* began to show some of the current elements that make up the horror genre today. A few short decades later, films started to show superior quantities of fantastic

elements such as ghosts, which made Edgar Neville's 1944 *La torre de los siete jorobados* a true point of reference for what the Spanish horror film genre would become.

With only a few films thereafter, it seemed as though horror films were not meant to survive in Spain. That is, until the late 1960s, which became known as The Golden Age (1966-1975) of Spanish horror film. This era was known more for its ability to produce large quantities of films on low budgets resulting in movies of rather low quality. According to movie critique and author Andrés García, cinema in modern day Spain is greatly different from what it was in the 1970s Golden Age. A multitude of the films produced in The Golden Age were not only of less desirable quality due to minuscule budgets, but they contained many Anglo-Saxon elements such as title and location. By raging their own war against oppressive rule of the Franco regime, many directors found it necessary to film their movies abroad; during the period from 1971-1973 Spain was responsible for producing eighty horror film titles. Many of the actors in these films were also non-native Spaniards, and if by small chance they were local actors they used pseudonyms in order to conceal it. An example, according to García are directors such as Jesús Franco who more commonly went by the name Jess Franco in order to better conceal his identity while General Franco still ruled. Beginning in 1976, democracy arrived in Spain, which also signaled a change in the horror film industry; from 1976-1990 a comical-erotic style emerged known as "el cine del destape" thus resulting in the production of far fewer horror films than in previous years. During the years 1991-1999 the Spanish horror film industry had to make a name for itself. A multitude of the films from the late 1960s through the mid-1970s shared many foreign aspects, such as director pseudonyms, as well as the actors casted. After having been part of the European Union

for six years, Spain saw a level of international recognition in 1992 thanks to the Seville Expo, Olympics in Barcelona, as well as Madrid being selected as the European Capital of Culture. According to García, this was the perfect time to revisit the neglected genres such as horror, but one problem remained: Spanish heroes were not credible. The first signs of change came about when director Álex de la Iglesia successfully paired acid humor with violent scenes that take place in a futuristic environment in his 1993 film called *Acción mutante*. This film was able to show the director's ability to create an action movie at the level of any U.S. blockbuster without taking away the natural elements that rendered it a Spanish film such as location and the use of native Spanish actors without the need of aliases. After successfully producing a "Made in Spain" film without losing any of these original elements, de la Iglesia set his goals to another genre: horror. The efforts to make a name for Spain in the horror movie industry began to shine even brighter with Álex de la Iglesia's 1995 film entitled *El día de la bestia*. This film was not short of social critique as well, drugs and the manipulation of the media were amongst a few of the topics seen in the movie <<http://elespectadorimaginario.com>>. Beginning with *El día* things started to look up for what had appeared to become a forgotten genre. Although it had a comical undertone, its success was obvious as both critics and the box office agreed that this film was a step in the right direction. Many other films of similar high caliber were soon to follow. *Tesis* (1996) by Alejandro Amenábar showed its proud Spanish roots by making the central setting *La Universidad Complutense de Madrid*. Just like *El día de la bestia*, *Tesis* also contained commentary yet this time the commentary was much more subtle in nature. Amenábar works to demystify social taboos, like sex, pain and death, by the suggestion of these images rather

than by showing the images themselves. Unlike *El día*, *Tesis* was composed of a serious undertone and proved that horror film did not also have to be comical in order to survive. By the year 2000, directors such as de la Iglesia, Amenábar and Balagueró (*Los sin nombre*, 1999) had paved the way for other directors to unleash a plethora of horror films to a now experienced audience. The years 2000-2009 are known as The New Golden Age, yet unlike its predecessor, the original Golden Age, this age was about producing fewer films but of much higher quality. The New Golden Age of film concentrated on making quality local films without masking the fact that they were made in Spain (Garcia 40-47). Other higher quality titles soon began to form part of The New Golden Age, for example Guillermo del Toro's *El espinazo del Diablo* (2001), a movie set to take place in 1930s Spain that contained social critique based on the Spanish Civil War. Other examples include J.A. Bayona's 2007 success, *El orfanato*, which tackled topics such as dealing with disabilities and death. *El orfanato* gained recognition, not only locally but around the world as well. Another huge success that has gained even higher global recognition is 2007's hit movie [*•Rec*].

1.4 [*•Rec*]

In 2007 directors Jaume Balagueró (Lleida, 1968) and Paco Plaza (Valencia, 1973) shocked audiences with their box office hit [*•Rec*] that grossed €8,763,211 in Spain and \$32,492,948 worldwide (<http://www.imdb.com>). At first glimpse the [*•Rec*] films seem to follow the ever growing mainstream model of popular zombie flicks, but by the end of the first movie it is evident that [*•Rec*] takes a unique stance. Directors Balagueró and Plaza approach the zombie with much of the same ideology as Romero in *Night of the*

Living Dead. Many of these characteristics include the cannibalistic nature of the ghoul, as well as the necessity to cause extreme bodily damage in order to stop them. However Balagueró and Plaza also added back a lost element from the roots of the zombie: religion. By suggesting that the cause of the viral outbreak can be linked to a failed exorcism the directors are also able to expose some social commentary about the importance of religion, which will be discussed in further detail in chapter one.

Film has often served as an active participant when it comes to social critique. It is easy to understand that filmmakers may frequently reflect the world around them subconsciously or consciously through the films they produce. Often, films may serve to raise awareness and help to address local or global issues. Not only can they help dispel misconceptions about culture, they can also help educate in order to broaden religious, social, or political contexts from abroad or locally (Mohammad 1). Movies of all types such as documentaries, narratives or animations may effectively contain social commentary. By looking into the symbolic meaning of many elements one may find that an array of different films offer social critique. Some examples of these may include Disney Pixar's 2008 animated film *Wall-E*, that consists of a robot that tackles many modern issues like the destruction of the environment and the growing reliance on technology, all while still being able to entertain younger audiences (Scheer 1). Other movies include James McTeigue's anti-establishment hit, *V for Vendetta* (2005) that ironically places a terrorist in the role of the hero (Scheer 1). *The Poltergeist* (1982) directed by Tobe Hooper, suggests for the viewer to read into the images such as the white picket fence and national monuments that are seen earlier in the film and then compare them to the destructive end. By observing elements in a less superficial manner

and looking into their possible metaphorical meanings this may facilitate the ability to interpret social commentary in film. According to Muir: “we are all living in a haunted house, says the film, one in which greed may be good at the moment. But the long-term interest rate on soul is one fee most wouldn’t want to pay” (144). Author Stephen King confers that horror films in general offer artistic value to their viewers:

If we say "art" is any piece of creative work from which an audience receives more than it gives (a liberal definition of art, sure, but in this field it doesn't pay to be too picky), then I believe that the artistic value the horror movie most frequently offers is its ability to form a liaison between our fantasy fears and our real fears. (80)

Not only do horror films propose an artistic value to the spectators, but also more importantly, they often appeal to social merit. King affirms: “If horror movies have redeeming social merit, it is because of that ability to form liaisons between the real and unreal—to provide subtexts. And because of their mass appeal, these subtexts are often culture-wide” (80).

The [*Rec*] trilogy is no exception to either of the affirmations made by King. The artistic value is the fear inspired by the movies themselves and how it can be related to real world situations. For example, the more relatable a person’s fears may be in conjunction to the movie, may then result in a more developed level of artistic value and higher appreciation for said film. Understandably, many films, especially horror films, do not always travel the realm of the realistic, which is why filmmakers use subtexts. Subtexts address the implicit undertones of a film that may speak to many topics; directors may use them to acknowledge underlying social content. Though they may be

masked with less realistic elements, such as zombies, subtexts allow directors to create relatable context in their films therefore producing higher artistic values amongst audiences.

Much of the artistic value in the [*Rec*] trilogy relies on its ability to give the impression of being reality itself by using point-of-view shots which is commonly referred to as *cinéma vérité* (King 130). By making the movies imitate life itself, the lines between it and fiction are blended, something that theorist Jean Baudrillard refers to as *hyperreality*.ⁱⁱⁱ Baudrillard's radical approach to postmodernism is what sets him apart from many other postmodern theorists. He links symbolic exchange and an advanced industrial society to his distinctive theory that results in the "proliferation of communications through media" (Poster 1). Baudrillard's concept of hyperreality, when applied to the films, can share many similarities with Balagueró and Plaza's methodology and cinematic techniques. The movie itself represents a false consciousness that Baudrillard refers to as "simulacra," which the theorist believes is used to simulate reality.^{iv} In his approach, Baudrillard says that the postmodern world relies on models, maps, and symbols and that it has lost contact with reality so much to the point that reality begins to emulate the model (Felluga 1). Some movie critics, for instance Roger Ebert, described techniques, as the found-footage subgenre, as being one that creates realistic cinematography and is able to enrich the impression of presenting a true documentary to the audience. In Ebert's review of Daniel Myrick and Eduardo Sánchez's

ⁱⁱⁱ Defined by Baudrillard as "the simulation of something that never really existed"
<www.identitytheory.com>

^{iv} Jean Baudrillard in "The Precession of Simulacra" defines this term as follows: "Simulation is no longer that of a territory, a referential being, or a substance. It is the generation by models of a real without origin or reality: a hyperreal.... It is no longer a question of imitation, nor duplication, nor even parody. It is a question of substituting the signs of the real for the real" (1-2).

film *The Blair Witch Project* (1999) he states that “[t]he films style and even its production strategy enhance the illusion that it's a real documentary.” The critic also states that the production strategies create chilling environments while watching a movie for example, *The Blair Witch Project*: “[a]t a time when digital techniques can show us almost anything, "The Blair Witch Project" is a reminder that what really scares us is the stuff we can't see. The noise in the dark is almost always scarier than what makes the noise in the dark” <<http://rogerebert.com>>.

Muir states that the action in found-footage films feels much more spontaneous in comparison to traditional movies, much like the action is happening ‘directly to the audience without the filter of the script or even the traditional three –act structure’ (366). [*Rec*] added to these elements by containing narrative approaches and techniques commonly seen in television, thus creating a live single-camera horror story that unfolds before the viewers’ eyes. The premise behind the film was to create a contemporary media-culture in the horror genre, such as ‘reality TV’ (Lazaro-Reboll 458). The creators of the [*Rec*] films used techniques such as found-footage and the lack of a musical soundtrack, in order to draw the audience into a more authentic realm that almost blurs the lines between reality and fantasy.^v The way in which these films *play* with their audiences is highly reflective of Baudrillard’s concept of postmodern consciousness in which he says one is “open to everything in spite of himself” while simultaneously “living in the greatest confusion” (133). According to Baudrillard, the confusion that is caused becomes an unpredictable game in which:

^v[*Rec*] and [*Rec*]² of the series do not contain soundtracks and belong to the found-footage subgenre (Muir 366) [*Rec*]³ shows some qualities of the subgenre for the first thirty minutes of the film, however it does have a soundtrack.

[t]he schizo is bereft of every scene, open to everything in spite of himself, living in the greatest confusion He is himself obscene, the obscene prey of the world's obscenity. What characterizes him is less the loss of the real, the light years of estrangement from the real, the pathos of distance and radical separation, as is commonly said: but, very much to the contrary, the absolute proximity, the total instantaneity of things, the feeling of no defense, no retreat. It is the end of inferiority and intimacy, the overexposure and transparency of the world which traverses him without obstacle. He can no longer produce the limits of his own being, can no longer play nor stage himself, can no longer produce himself as mirror. He is now only a pure screen, a switching center for all the networks of influence. (133)

This game, of course, is one in which the audience is submersed into the action of the film, allowing them to take on functional roles as if they are experiencing the terror in real time and watching it on live TV. Yet also, much like life itself, [*Rec*] presents a game that does not allow the participants to predict the outcomes (Arnzen 6). Each element that draws in the attention of the spectator, at the same time takes away from their ability to distinguish from reality; this concept is something Baudrillard refers to as *hyperrealism*. Concurring to the theorist's point of view, hyperreality is a new condition, a condition in which society is absorbed by the simulation of reality and not reality itself. Baudrillard feels that 'the loss of the real' is a persuasive influence in contemporary life due to film, TV and advertising. The distortions caused by media lead to "a loss of the distinction between real and imagined, reality and illusion, surface and depth (Barry 84)."

Not only does the audience experience a loss of perception, but this is also exemplified in the movie as well. Because of María del Carmen's denial that her daughter Jennifer could not only be infected, but also be to blame for the spread of the contagion, the hysterical mother eventually gets bitten by her daughter and later attacked by other zombies, thus converting her into a consumption-driven beast as well. The reality is too much for her to handle, therefore the character herself also blurs the lines between reality and being able to save her child, and distorts them into her own favor which in the end results in her losing her life.

By applying Baudrillard's theory of hyperreality to the [*•Rec*] series zombies become a representation of current mass culture in Spain and, like zombies, this culture focuses on consumption, which converts others into creatures like itself. Baudrillard's radical and unique theory offers insight as to how hyperrealism can play an important and strategic role in films by causing a blur between the lines of contemporary society and fantasy.

Although contemporary societies like Haiti still introduce this fantastical element into their religion, the zombies in current films have departed from their originating roots in Haitian culture. Directors such as Romero were able to achieve their own take as to what the zombie should be in film by making the undead cannibalistic. Balagueró and Plaza took the revisioning of the zombie to whole new level by being able to reintroduce religion into the mix. Even though the origin of the zombies in the [*•Rec*] series remains unclear at this point, unlike Haitian tradition, these films place religion as an opposing force, rather than just a contributor.

Chapter One:

Extra Ecclesiam Nulla Salus: The Church Loosing its Grip in Spain

By the end of the first installment of [*Rec*] it is clear that the contamination was not like that of the typical zombie movie genre because of the implications that somehow the contagion was linked to the Catholic Church.^{vi} The introduction of Tristana, *la niña Medeiros*, brought a unique twist to the movie by offering a distinctive explanation of the zombie's origin for she was also a demon, rather than just a zombie. Although [*Rec*] did not reinstate all of the original elements that date back to their roots in Haiti, it did reestablish one important component that has been lost in contemporary zombie films since Victor Halperin's 1932 film *White Zombie*: the element of religion.

After Ángela's encounter with Tristana (AKA the Portuguese girl), the audience is left unaware of her whereabouts until she reappears in the last twenty minutes of [*Rec*]². By this time, spectators are more informed of the religious theme at hand. Before making her latent appearance in the film, a host of new characters have been introduced that enlighten the audience of the heretical theme. Figures such as Doctor Owen add informative roles to [*Rec*]² that make the religious undertones better understood. At first the doctor is introduced as being a health department technician whose mission is to decipher the current situation in the quarantined apartment building. Later, his true identity is discovered to be that of an American priest sent from the Vatican whose objective is to stop the spread of the virus by obtaining a sample of Tristana's blood and producing an antidote.

Most modern-day cultures see a disease as being associated with a medical

^{vi} It is also important to note that the Catholic Church leads the contention of the contagion as well.

condition that has its own symptoms and signs. However, some cultures (for instance those observed in Haiti) believe that illnesses and diseases are attributed to a spiritual factor, like lack of devotion, for example. The syllogism that is produced from the pastiche of both science and religion being mingled argue that neither (science nor religion) offers an absolute power or truth and that some diseases may be spiritually based. Furthermore, by decrypting the zombie genre, in this context, it becomes an interpretation that means that those who blindly choose religion as their fate and guiding light through life may be seen as mindless zombies rather than fateful devotees. As part of this interpretation, religious fanatics are illustrated as people that are simply led through life (as they know it) to carry out one function: to convert others into those of their own kind. Catholicism is based on the idea to be able to accomplish an unearthly perfection, one in which the motivation of heaven represents something much better than life itself.

Philosopher Jean-François Lyotard explains that postmodernism is “incredulity toward metanarratives” (xxiv).^{vii} In his definition of the meaning of metanarratives, he states that they imply a philosophy of history, and that they are “used to legitimate knowledge” (xxiv). By attempting to validate this knowledge, questions arise that concern the cogency of the institutions that govern the social bond, and by doing so they too must be legitimized as well. Thus he suggests that justice is “cosigned to the grand narrative in the same way as truth” (xxiv). By explaining that there is “incredulity toward metanarratives”, the philosopher is suggesting that there is no one truth or worldview, as well as no single explanation or salvation (Lyotard xxiv).

^{vii} A metanarrative is a grand narrative common to all that is shaped by discourse and an open-ended plot. Historical landmarks (on the basis of a factual connection) determine transitions between stories in attempts to validate the narrative (Munson 20).

The use of metanarratives as a way to justify an absolute truth can be seen upon closer examination of the Catholic dogma. Doctor Owen proves that religion still holds true to these beliefs that suggest an supreme verity and that people should take his word over all others, for he states that he, too, is the only hope for salvation of their lives (by making it out of the apartment building). By choosing to follow orders as mandated by the Vatican, Dr. Owen goes to the apartment building under a false premise, rather than being honest about his mission. By electing to have Dr. Owen deceitfully represent himself, the Vatican elects to commit a direct infringement of commandment number eight, “[y]ou shall not bear false witness.” The act of misrepresenting themselves or their objectives, states that the Church believes that it is above and beyond its own standards. This representation of the Church not following its own rules allows for further criticism of its foundational belief system.

According to Tad Stahnke, director of the Human Rights First committee, as part of a strategy to convert more devotees, most religions, including Catholicism, rely on popularity and a perceived perfection as a means in which to attract potential followers <<http://law2.byu.edu>>. By applying Baudrillard’s theory of simulation to Catholicism, the false illusion that the Church offers is similar to what Disneyland promises to many eager consumers, religion also serves the same purpose: to blur the lines between what is real and what is fantasy. The trickery behind the imagery serves as a point to compare and distort fantasy with everyday life:

The Disneyland imaginary is neither true nor false: it is a deterrence machine set up in order to rejuvenate in reverse the fiction of the real. Whence the debility, the infantile degeneration of this imaginary. It is

meant to be an infantile world, in order to make us believe that the adults are elsewhere, in the "real" world, and to conceal the fact that real childishness is everywhere, particularly among those adults who go there to act the child in order to foster illusions of their real childishness. (Poster 172)

Considering there is only one exit to Disneyland, metaphorically speaking Dr. Owen represents the same by reiterating several times that without his voice command no one may leave the building. By applying this to the Church, it may be interpreted as the common Catholic dogma *Extra Ecclesiam Nulla Salus*, which means that there is no salvation outside of the Church. Dogmas like these can be considered a fundamental principle that permits criticism to the Church's set of beliefs for they are based on an absolute truth. By assuming a great power, much like metanarratives present themselves as bestowing such absolute truths, so does the Church for it is based on grand narratives found from within the Bible and dogmas such as *Extra Ecclesiam Nulla Salus* <<http://patheos.com>>. It is by its use of metanarratives that the Church bases its foundational beliefs and therefore is discredited in postmodern works.

More importantly than Owen's failure to conceal his true identity and collect a sample of Tristana's blood in order to create an antidote, was the fact that he falls short when it comes to the *demonized* Ángela. Dr. Owen, much like the credo of the Roman Catholic Church, represents the *absolute truth* (and the carnal embodiment of *Extra Ecclesiam Nulla Salus*) by stating that he is the only way out. Ángela is able to prove him wrong by morphing her voice into Dr. Owen's in order to gain access to the voice activation settings. By manipulating the priest's means of communication (and telling the

operator, as referring to herself, that there is only one uninfected survivor) Ángela is able to gain access to the outside world where she can further spread the contagion. This scene proves that the Catholic Church assumes authority in both religious and mundane trials, and that it imposes its theological virtue onto all, even those to whom it denies equal power. The scene also demonstrates a struggle between Dr. Owen and Ángela, which symbolically represents a subversion of the traditional role of women in the Catholic Church. Upon closer examination of this scene, it is revealed that only the (perceived) voice of a man may offer salvation, which also holds to be true in the Church as well for women are seen as secondary to men and not allowed the ability to become priests or figures of salvation.

By better understanding the perceived innocuous role played by women in the Catholic Church, the fight between Ángela and Owen becomes much more significant. *El País* journalist Juan Bedoya confirms the existence of the outdated ideology surrounding the Catholic Church and says that it seems to belong to another time for its inability to distribute equality amongst the sexes. Although women make up the majority of religious parishioners, the Vatican is unable to assign a more active role to females. Theologian Margarita Pintos suspects that one reason that more people are less interested in the Church is because of its views of women being dependent on both men as well as the Church itself. Pintos asserts that the Church always places women (unlike men) within the context of 'home and work.' The theologian further adds that the Church prefers to alienate women by seeing them as servers, rather than mediators of its grace and salvation (Bedoya 3).

By introducing modern-day themes and devices such as independent women and

voice-recognition software, the directors show the great contrast between the traditional beliefs held by the Church and contemporary ideology that places women as being equal to men. In his article *Whither the Catholic Church in Spain*, Botey also affirms that the concept of certainty is distorted within the Catholic Church, which also takes a toll on its creditability:

[the] question of the conception of truth, and the Church's absolute conviction [that] is the sole processor of the truth, both religious and civil. This lies at the roots of the Church's inability to understand the modern age. Instead of celebrating the good news that humanity is approaching a secular maturity in terms of science, morality, economics, politics, or peace-building, the Catholic Church sees this as a loss of power, It is increasingly talking in fundamentalist terms, farther and farther away from reality. (3)

To understand the struggle of equal rights (which will be further discussed in chapter two) it is important to consider the timeframe in which the [*Rec*] series took place. Much of the commentary found in the [*Rec*] movies also allude to the friction found between the ruling government's political party and the Catholic Church during the times in which the films were made. José Luis Rodríguez Zapatero's term in office (2004-2011) was the first to offer equality of sexes within his chain of command^{viii} <<http://rtve.es>>. Zapatero represented the *Partido Socialista Obrero Español*, a left-winged Spanish political party commonly known as PSOE. Not only was Zapatero the

^{viii} Fifty percent equality amongst sexes lasted until 2010, a year before the Prime Minister stepped down from his position.

first Prime Minister known for achieving '*paridad*' within his cabinet, but he also created turmoil between state and church in 2010 when he declined to attend a church service in which Pope Benedict XVI was to oversee. By choosing not to go to the mass, many accused the government of being anticlerical (Bedoya 2). The fact that the Pope's visit was not met with the same enthusiasm as previous visits from other popes like Pope John Paul II signaled that the country was now unconcerned with papal visits and that fewer people were worried with organized religion. According to Bedoya, modernized countries are less likely to give into the Church's demands due to the fact that science, politics, and culture have since silenced several previous uncertainties and fears that the Church has often relied on in order to gain more zeal. Although Spain has been officially ruled as being a secular country since 1978, the government and Church have always maintained close ties regardless.

During his term, Zapatero delayed such government regulations as Church-backed laws that made religion classes mandatory for all children who attended public school systems. Instead the government proposed optional religion courses while integrating religion as a topic to address culture in classes like history, music, and Spanish art (Richburg 1). The presidential cabinet did not want to side with one extreme or the other on these issues, rather it preferred to attempt to establish a balance. Spain's education minister, Alejandro Tiana Ferrer said that the government did not want to "impose" its new rules, but that it would seek agreement with the Bishops Conference. According to Ferrer, balancing both the wishes of parents who want religion removed entirely from schools as well as others who want it to stay are the responsibilities of the government. This issue alone is not an isolated situation, Ferrer says, "[t]he debate has not just been

about this issue, but about all the relations between the government and the church” <<http://washingtonpost.com>>. Those opposing the government, particularly those belonging to the right-winged party, Partido Popular, have often accused others such as Zapatero of pursuing anticlerical agendas in order to increase their political support by those who oppose the Church. Gustavo de Aristegui, Foreign Affairs Spokesman for Partido Popular says that he feels insulted whenever the opposing party, PSOE, goes against the Church: “I’m not practicing, but I feel insulted every time these guys go against the Church and the principles of Christianity. They are making militant Catholics more militant, they are making nonmilitant Catholics militant, and they are making non-practicing Catholics practicing.” <<http://thewashingtonpost.com>>. Many others also refuse to accept what they see as the Church’s ‘inability to tolerate those with differing opinions’, and reject its tendency to impose its traditions and practices on others, and mix theory with truth (Bedoya 1).

Bedoya states that according to Catholic Church historian Jaume Botey, from the *Universitat Autònoma de Barcelona*, many Spaniards “...are disaffected and largely uninterested in a papal visit anymore” (2). Botey renders that many Spaniards have not forgotten the close bonds that the Catholic Church had with the forty-year dictatorship of General Franco: “[p]eople still identify the Church with Franco, and it should be remembered that the Vatican has never asked for forgiveness for its association with the military regime. And until it does say it is sorry, then it will continue to be seen as a collaborator that used the terror of those times for its own benefit” (Bedoya 2). In the same newspaper article, Hilari Ragner, reaffirms that Franco not only had the Catholic Church’s support since the onset of his dictatorship, but also that the Church is to blame

for helping spread nationalist hype:

The military coup was effectively made sacred from the first moments of the Civil War. It wasn't the generals who came running to the priests, but the other way around, and they supported Franco to the hilt. It came as a big surprise to the generals, but the Church was soon to play the biggest role in spreading propaganda on behalf of the nationalists. (Bedoya 2)

Bedoya affirms that Spain has survived a time that used to penalize with fines or by beating those who were not able to attend obligatory mass (2). It has also endured the difficult days of Franco's dictatorship, which killed any that was considered anticlerical.^{ix} Although advancements have been made, the Catholic Church Historian, Jaume Botey suggests that Spaniard's lack of interest and trust in the Catholic Church stem from two things: power and truth. Botey states that evangelization is in an alliance with political and economic power, which is contrary to Jesus' approach that was known for condemning both religious and political power. For many, the methods in which evangelization are carried out in Spain, view the Catholic Church as being associated with power and a strong need to control. Some examples include *COPE* radio (*Cadena de Ondas Populares*), which belongs to the *Conferencia Episcopal*, whereas others may include the Church's attempts to mandate education by attempting to make religion classes form part of a mandatory curriculum < <http://diocesisdecanarias.es>>.

Another example of the Church being unable to mesh with the modern age can be

^{ix} According to Bedoya's article: "[t]he plant must be cut at the roots" was how clerics put it in 1931 as the second republic was ushered in, and "after Franco won the Civil War in 1939, anti-clericalists were shot in their droves" <www.elpais.com>

seen again in [*Rec*]³ when it shows its inability to quarantine the contagion once again. After being separated for the majority of the film, Koldo and Clara are finally reunited in the kitchen of the reception hall of their wedding. Their reunion proves to be short-lived because moments later countless zombies invade the kitchen and surround the couple. Just as they are surrendering to the overpowering horde, they embrace to say goodbye, and the zombies suddenly go into a trance. Koldo and Clara discover that by reciting prayers over the Church's P.A. system, the priest is able to subdue the living dead. As the couple makes their way out of their horrendous nightmare, they notice that each zombie is stopped in its tracks as the priest continues to deliver his sermon over the loudspeaker. All of the infected relentlessly experience trances as they are entranced by the priest's Godly words, that is, all besides Koldo's grandfather, who depends on a hearing aid in order to hear. The elderly man lunges and attacks Clara, managing to bite her hand. Even after being bitten, the couple believes they have resolved the issue by removing the infected limb. Unfortunately, shortly after they discover that they were unsuccessful in their attempts. By the end of the film the audience witnesses the police takedown of both Koldo and Clara shortly after they make it to the outside and she infects him.

Commentary such as this can be interpreted as a satirical critique in which the Catholic Church attempts to exert their dogma over the ruling government in order to control its followers. By analyzing these films it becomes apparent that the Catholic Church struggles to mandate and control anything that goes against its principles. Many of the Church's efforts to control the masses in contemporary Spain are focused on scientific-based controversial matters, which also involve educational affairs. Examples

of attempts to silence any contrary ideology include: teaching the polemical debate of evolution as well as technological advancements that include abortion, euthanasia and stem cell research. An even greater multitude of conflicts arise when the Church attempts to impose its moral and ethical standards regarding opposing same sex marriage and teaching subjects like citizenship (Costa 3).

Regardless if Zapatero lead an anticlerical campaign in order to gain political support from those who oppose the Church or not, one thing is certain: the Church's popularity has dropped drastically in the past two decades (Chu 1). Much like de Aristegui, many find the art of 'not practicing' all too appealing. Research says that weekly mass attendance is at an all-time low in Western Europe. The study shows that only one in every five Catholics in Spain report going to a mass service once a week. On the global level, the number of Catholics grew to almost thirty percent (1.2 billion adherents) from the years 1990-2010, according to Vatican statistics. Where one may expect growth Europe, home of the Vatican, was the only region in the world to witness a decline (23.8% in 2010) in its followers (Chu 1).

With sex abuse scandals, as well as reports of Vatican cover-ups and insensitive treatment of the many victims, the Catholic Church has lost much of its moral standing in the eyes of many. Recently the only cardinals in Rome to voice the need for the global Church to address issues such as sex scandals have been Americans. To only allow American cardinals to speak out on these matters reinforces the impression that the Church hierarchy in Europe still refuses to recognize the harshness and severity of any of these problems (Chu 2). By publically acknowledging these situations, the Church could then allow media to perform more accurate investigations without as much speculation.

Author Stewart Hoover, who specializes in religion in the media, says that: “[t]he responsibility of developing deeper and more extensive understandings of the relationship between media and religion is one that should be shared by scholarly and professional practice in both the religion and media fields” <<http://crmc.colorado.edu>>.

Due to Spain’s close ties to the Catholic Church, religion becomes a tradition. According to author R. James Ferguson, “traditions are consciously invented in order to claim the prestige or authority of the past” (17). The author suggests that postmodernism not only attacks earlier modes of criticism, like modernism, but that it is also another move in reaction to tradition as well (21). By suggesting the longevity of tradition itself to be linked with authority (and therefore an absolute truth) it is suggested that tradition is another form of metanarrative. By taking this into consideration, this proves to be one of the reasons that the Church has begun to lose much popularity in Spain. By the state sharing such close ties to the Church, it is understandable why most media is government affiliated and typically shares a political agenda, therefore it is important to acknowledge that statistics offer a non-prejudiced view of the truth. Seeing that it is a Constitutional right of Spanish citizens to not to disclose any information about their religious beliefs, unless they chose to do so, there is no official database dealing with religion in Spain, however, institutions such as *El Centro de Investigaciones Sociológicas* (CIS) do gather data based on religious tendencies each year.

A CIS survey conducted in April 2010 showed that seventy-three percent (73.2%) of the surveyed individuals considered themselves as members of the Catholic faith. Yet fifty-three percent (53.1%) admitted that they hardly ever attended mass. On a national level, the organization, *La Conferencia Episcopal Española* estimates that in 2010 there

were about thirty-five million Catholics in Spain. *La Federación de Entidades Religiosas Evangélicas de España* (FEREDE) calculates the numbers of Evangelical Christians and other Protestants to be around 1.2 million, of which 800,000 are immigrants. According to reports from *la Comisión Islámica de España* (CIE) and *El Ministerio de Justicia*, in 2009 there were around 1.4 million Muslims in Spain, of which about seventy-two percent were Muslim immigrants, not belonging to the Spanish nationality.

The Spanish Constitution takes into consideration the multitude of the many different religions present in the country and guarantees the right to religious freedom. Article Sixteen of the Constitution promises religious freedom to all individuals and groups. It also affirms that there will be no official religion: “*ninguna confesión tendrá carácter estatal*,” however, the latter is not so obvious during tax season; the Spanish government allows taxpayers to contribute 0.7 percent of their household income to either the Catholic Church or any nongovernment association of their choosing. Although the Constitution says that there is no official religion in Spain, it certainly has no issues helping the Catholic Church raise money; an estimated 252 million euro (equivalent to 311 million US dollars) was contributed to the Catholic Church from the 2009 income taxes alone. <https://religious_freedom_spain_2010_sp.pdf>.

Other statistics include those of the annual International Religious Freedom Report, conducted by the United States government reports on the status of religious freedom in each country; it was designed to account for any government policies that violate any beliefs of any religious denominations. Some issues outlined in the 2012 report surrounding religious freedom in Spain deal with the prohibition of wearing burqas and niqabs in certain regions. If one is found wearing one of these items in public

buildings they may be fined up to 600 euros (\$795.50). Other issues find that many Muslim groups are left unanswered, sometimes for years, when trying to obtain building permits in order to construct new mosques. Whereas the government collects money for the Catholic Church, it charges money to other churches: In May of 2012 Badalona Mayor Xavier Garcia Albiol announced that the Muslim community would no longer be able to use public areas to pray on Fridays or during the month of Ramadan. The municipal government did however offer the Muslim community use of a closed school's courtyard for only thirty-one euros per hour (\$40/hr.) plus a deposit fee of 600 euro (\$821).

As seen in this chapter, not only is this an issue concerning contemporary Spain, but it can also be observed in the films as well. By showing the Church as an entity that attempts to assume an absolute power, such as not allowing anyone in or out of the apartment building, one may understand how similar power struggles (such as what may be taught in school) in Spanish society exist as well. By sifting through various statistics, it becomes obvious that although modern-day Spain is secular, the Catholic Church still finds itself associated to many laws and government subsidies. Due to the decline of its popularity, in combination with its close ties to the *non-secular* government, it is easy to see why some citizens of Spain find it difficult to conceive some of the privileges that the Church is still able to receive. Considering these two factors plus the economical issues that Spain is currently facing, it is reasonable to understand the frustration that the Church levies each time it gets a tax break or tries to impose its traditional teachings to everyone. Thus the struggle between remaining secular is highlighted in the film series by showing the Church's attempt to dominate all.

Thus far the story of the contagion has began with Padre Albeda's unsuccessful experiments on a possessed Tristina as well as other children, which somehow led to a contagion. Later the movies depict Dr. Owen that was also ineffective in his attempts to control and obtain an antidote, and finally in [*•Rec*]³ another priest is unable to stop the spread of the infection, which allowed for Clara and Koldo to become infected as well. Here the critique of the Church is very obvious, by attempting to approach zombies from an outdated method, the Church will always remain fruitless in their endeavors.

Chapter Two:

Gender Roles and Sexual Orientation in a Postmodern Society

A common subtext created in the [*•Rec*] series deals with the stereotypical manners in which characters are presented. By simply surveying the cast of characters found in the films, one can identify the essence of social critique pertaining to both sexual orientation as well as the perception of gender roles in Spanish society. By analyzing the ways in which stigmatized groups like homosexuals and women are presented in the films, it gives a better idea of how these groups are portrayed in contemporary Spanish society. By recognizing that the film series was released between the years 2007-2011, it is important to understand how to approach topics concerning gender and the role(s) it plays from a postmodern view.

Regarded as one of the most influential theorists of the postmodern approach on gender, sex and sexuality, Judith Butler offers a unique view of how to approach gender. She claims that the acts that constitute one's gender are similar to performative acts that are found within theatrical (or in this case, films) contexts. Butler suggests that the acts that convey gender are preformed and have been occurring long before said 'actors' began to reproduce it. The theorist concurs that the role of gender has outlasted and endured many performers but continues to be a role that one must perform. In addition, Butler argues that:

[p]erforming one's gender wrong initiates a set of punishments both obvious and indirect, and performing it well provides the reassurance that there is an essentialism of gender identity after all. That this reassurance is so easily displaced by anxiety, that culture so readily punishes or

marginalizes those who fail to perform the illusion of gender essentialism should be sign enough that on some level there is social knowledge that the truth or falsity of gender is only socially compelled and in no sense ontologically necessitated. (528)

By suggesting that gender is merely a historical repetition or act, Butler shows that characters in the film series are diverging from the common (historical) roles expected of them by society. When the character known as César is first introduced, he displays a stereotypical vision of an effeminate homosexual. In the first scene that introduces his character, César shows a great interest in physical appearance. As the camera focuses in on him, he immediately begins to attempt his appearance by adjusting his clothing and jewelry, as well as by fixing his hair. In a later scene, while César is being interviewed by Ángela, similar behavior is again observed. Butler's outlook on gender as a performance brings into question the role that César plays as a homosexual in Spain. In order to understand how César defies the historical role assigned to him by society (from a heterosexual standpoint) yet in order to do so, it is essential to understand the country's historical perspective of homosexuality.

To be able to establish the current viewpoint that Spain takes on issues like gender identity and homosexuality, it is important to first discuss its historical positions on the subjects. Butler declares that one will suffer punishments of both direct and indirect natures if they do not play the gender role assigned to them. Some examples of direct punishments (in regards to homosexuality in Spain) began in July 15 1954. During this time, the Franco government added homosexuals to a previous law that was known as *La Ley de Vagos y Maleantes* and established originally in 1933. The law stated that anyone

determined as “*homosexuales*”, “*rufianes*”, or “*proxenetas*” are declared as dangerous beings that are capable of disrupting social peace and tranquility, and that they therefore need to be treated accordingly. The law states that the following conditions should apply to homosexuals:

- a) [i]nternado en un establecimiento de trabajo o Colonia Agrícola. Los homosexuales sometidos a esta medida de seguridad deberán ser internados en Instituciones especiales y, en todo caso, con absoluta separación de los demás.
- b) Prohibición de residir en determinado lugar o territorio y obligación de declarar su domicilio.
- c) Sumisión a la vigilancia de los Delegados. (BOE 15/1954)

After hardly changing any of the restrictions placed on homosexuals, the direct punishments continued. The government established a different ordinance in 1970 with a new law entitled *Peligrosidad y Rehabilitación Social*.^x Because under this law homosexuality was still considered a threat to society, police officials were still allowed to arrest anyone that they believed was guilty of any homosexual acts.^{xi} Those that were identified as being homosexual were stripped of their rights according to author Stephen Tropiano:

The law prohibited homosexuals from living in a “designated place or territory” and visiting “certain public establishments or places” as well as requiring them to submit to the “vigilance of the deputy.” In addition the

^x This new law was said to attempt to reform and reeducate those in which it pertained, more so than its predecessor.

^{xi} Lesbianism was not considered illegal under Franco’s rule, however many of these women were subjected to harassment by police officials (Tropiano).

law included a reeducation component for those who commit homosexual acts in order to “guarantee the reform and rehabilitation of the dangerous with more technical means of purification.” (158)

However, during the democratic transitional period in Spain (1975-1978), a director by the name of Eloy de la Iglesia (Zarautz, 1944-2006) was able to gain recognition with his gay-themed movies, which finally began to make homosexuality less taboo in film. De la Iglesia gained popularity for his ability to link this marginalized form of sexuality (homosexuality) to the existing sociopolitical matters surrounding the antigay law. De la Iglesia’s best known films, include *Los placeres ocultos* (1976) and *El diputado* (1978), share an emphasis “on the plight of the homosexual living in an oppressive society” (Tropiano 158). By depicting the characteristics of a subjugated society, de la Iglesia was able to open the door for other directors to produce similar films that depicted the injustices against homosexuals. Directors including Imanol Uribe, Jaime Chávarri, Agustí Villaronga, and Pedro Almodóvar were able to follow de la Iglesia’s lead by portraying homosexuals in their films in a positive manner, rather than portraying them as sick or encumbered individuals.

An activist group for human rights and equality know as *Coordinadora de Frentes de Liberación del Estado Español* (COFLHEE) also responded to this oppression by starting a gay rights movement in 1972. The goal of this group was not only to stop the tyranny at hand, but also to abolish all forms of judgment or discrimination that marginalize an individual based on their gender or their sexual identity. According to Tropiano, COFLHEE’s platform states that:

[the government's] maintenance goes hand in hand with the repression of homosexuality. In this sense, we (COFLHEE) propose the abolition of "roles" —whether they be man/woman, masculine/feminine, or active/passive, as they prevent an individual's becoming aware of his/her sexual identity, adding instead to feelings of shame, guilt, and self hatred.

(159)

By setting these standards, COFLHEE also aimed to demolish all legal, semantical, and social barriers that marginalized the homosexual community as a whole. This liberation group believed that its objective could be met when uniting with the same movements that were being developed by other groups, such as feminists and the marginalized. By functioning together with the working-class movement, COFLHEE believed that they could create a "society without classes and with full democratic freedoms for all, including the national minorities" (Pew Research).

In 2005, due to the efforts of these civil rights groups, many of these *democratic rights* were restored to the LGBT (Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, and Transgender) community. In June of 2005, the Spanish Parliament legalized same-sex marriage, which guaranteed identical rights to all married couples, regardless of sexual orientation. In doing so, Congress added new language to the marriage statute that reads: "[m]arriage will have the same requirements and results when the two people entering into the contract are of the same sex or of different sexes" (Pew Research). Other rights rewarded to the LGBT community concern the ability to change one's name or sex on their government issued IDs. The law referred to as *la Ley 3/2007*, allows a person to change their sexual gender as long as they meet the following criteria: [t]hey must have been diagnosed with gender

dysphoria by their medical doctor or psychologist. They must also have been receiving treatments for at least two years in order to accommodate to the physical characteristics of the desired sexual gender. Lastly, the law states that it is not necessary as part of the treatments that they include gender reassignment surgery.

Knowing that these current laws exist concerning civil rights within the LGBT population, it is difficult to conceive why characters like César are presented in a stereotypical manner. In order to understand these questions, it is important to address the stereotypical way in which César demonstrates a priority to physical presentation and aesthetics. A closer look reveals that, within the first few moments that his image was introduced, the personality that César projected went from a warm, concerned nature (9:33) to that of a one whose general concentration was visual beauty and acceptance (9:51). By attempting to adjust or alter his corporeal presence in front of the camera during a time of urgency, it is suggested that his appearance takes on a more superior role than the situation at hand. The moment when the situation only involved an elderly woman falling, this behavior could have been permissible. But considering that his attitude remained the same as the conditions continued to get worse, indicates that his priorities are not the same as the other group members. Bearing in mind that there were already two dead, along with two that were seriously injured, César's concern for physical appearance remained unremitting throughout his interview with Ángela in which he constantly attempted to adjust his appearance. In part, the commentary here implies that, in Spain, homosexuals are stereotyped as those who focus on the aesthetically pleasing; and that roles, such as this, represent them as stereotyped individuals that are distracted by outer beauty.

But, upon a closer investigation into this stereotype, it is revealed that physical appearance is equated to one's sexual preference. Sexuality and corporeal facade have often been intertwined as frequently as the cliché that homosexuals are known for possessing a good fashion sense, whereas heterosexuals typically are not. A heterosexual that does possess good hygiene and a trendy sense of style, is typically labeled as being a "metrosexual," a term that is held separately from heterosexuality (Miles 1). Nancy Rudd, author of the *Journal of Homosexuality* (1996), agrees with this notion and suggests that vendors should market the more "trendy" and "innovative" clothing toward gay men, and the more casual clothing –such as jeans– to straight men (109).

By making this suggestion, she, too, establishes a direct link between sexual orientation and fashion sense. According to author Matt Miles, "this is because media has built up the stereotype that a man's sexual preference for another man makes him a reliable authority on attractiveness and fashion." In his article, *Personal Appearance and its Implications of Sexuality* (2004), Miles mentions that media such as *Queer Eye for the Straight Guy* affirms that it is acceptable to think that personal appearance is directly related to sexual preference. Shows like these indicate that homosexuals use their natural talents and inclinations of high fashion in order to help dress heterosexuals who do not possess the same keen sense of style as they do. He continues by saying that these shows perpetuate the notion that these stereotypes are tolerable (1). Similar examples of these stereotypical TV shows can be observed in modern-day Spain as well. For example, programs like Antena3's *El armario de Josie* (2010) include the fashion savvy persona, José Fernández Pacheco, whose mission is to educate people to dress better. Pacheco, who is better known as Josie, is a flamboyant host that dishes out fashion advice to his

less fortunate heterosexual counterparts in hopes to inspire them to dress in a more fashionable attire. Josie also took part in a similar fashion segment on *TeleCinco's Salvame* later in 2011, where he would hold special events telling celebrities how to dress for red carpet events.

Stereotypes (both positive and negative) are misrepresentative and arbitrary, according to theorist and specialist in queer theory and gender studies, Eve Kosofsky Sedgwick. As a literary theorist, Sedgwick takes an interesting viewpoint when it comes to the assumptions and stereotypes found in the field of queer theory. She believes that stereotypes (concerning non-heterosexuals) are misleading, and that they cause others to believe that they originate from within. On a personal level, she suggests that these misconceptions are actually signaled from the outside, as pointers and labels. The theorist also states that any non-stereotypical characteristics that may be developed typically remain ineffective due to the fascination and repetition of the popular stereotypes (Edwards 68).

Another study shows that positive stereotypes, for example that of possessing a good sense of style and hygiene, also make it more acceptable to generalize when dealing with negative stereotypes as well (Kay et al 286.) These positive generalizations typically are overlooked because of their nature to appear kind and flattering, rather than unfriendly; much as they are in the case of César whose character is that of an Argentinian hairdresser. By suggesting that César has an innate sense of style, his behavior, which appears over the top and only appealing to physical appearance, is seen less as being superficial, rather, it embodies his unique eye for fashion and style. However, the more willing people are to accept or entertain positive generalizations

about groups without questioning or trying to deny them, the more apt they will be to entertain the idea that these differences are the result of something fundamentally and naturally different about the group in question. Once the association has been made that there is something “genetically, biologically, or otherwise ‘naturally’ different”, then the likelihood of applying negative stereotypes increases as well (Kay et al 288). As soon as one aspect of the stereotype is made more accessible or acceptable, the others are more likely to be used and applied in social judgment (Kay et al 288).

Butler’s approach to these themes as a performance that determines one’s gender, speaks of parody, a postmodern tool. The banal yet satirical way in which a homosexual is presented as an effeminate being who places his priorities on attractiveness, is key to understanding why the role of César can also be perceived as a parody. In Literary critic Linda Hutcheon’s book entitled *A Postmodern Reader*, she states that parody is “repetition with critical distance, which marks difference rather than similarity” (6). Hutcheon also says that parody is a form of imitation but that the imitation does not always rely on the expense of the parodied text (6). The critical distance is established by presenting César as “different” in comparison to other heterosexual counterparts (that do not place a high priority on physical appearance), which in turn establishes him as a parody of the stereotypical homosexual. But, according to Butler, César is simply deviating from the male gender role, but not from the (historical) homosexual role that places an importance on physical appearance. By presenting the role of César in such a stereotypical manner the focus becomes placing a satirical ridicule on the contemporary customs in which many Spaniards continue to see homosexuals.

Stereotypes, both positive and negative, are common generalizations that can perpetuate misunderstandings amongst different demographics. Unfortunately, according to *Informe Raxen*, these stereotypes are not isolated situations found in the [*Rec*] series. Here, these films, point to the larger picture and show that some of these stereotypes (such as seeing all homosexuals as effeminate beings) are common in Spain. Just as observed with the role of César in the first film, *Movimiento contra la intolerancia* in conjunction with *Ministerio de Trabajo e Inmigración*, provided data that proved homophobia is a major concern in Spain. The study consisted of 653 surveys in 129 different locations, which were represented in forty-four different provinces of Spain. Amongst some of the information provided in the 2012 report, it was detailed that of the school children that had undergone homophobic bullying, forty-three percent had considered taking their own lives. The *Informe Raxen* also states that a separate study by the *Federación Española de Gais, Lesbianas, Transexuales y Bi-sexuales* shows that forty-two percent of these victims never received any support while at their learning institutions. Out of the forty-three percent that planned to commit suicide, eighty-one percent of them actually planned out how they would do it. This meant that thirty-five percent of all adolescences that had undergone homophobic bullying knew how they planned to kill themselves. Of the remainder, seventeen percent actually tried to kill themselves.

Although these statistics appear frightening at first, many of them pale in comparison to other countries. A study from Pew Research Center reveals that Spain may be the global leader when it comes to the acceptability of homosexuality. In their study “The Global Divide on Homosexuality,” that represented thirty-nine countries, it was

revealed that eighty-eight percent of the Spanish community involved in the survey agreed that homosexuality should be accepted. In their report, Pew Research affirms that the numbers have gone up six percentage points from eighty-two percent to eighty-eight percent since the year 2007. Of course, the age of the groups that are in favor of embracing homosexuality should also be taken into consideration. Of the groups surveyed, ninety percent of those from the age groups of eighteen to twenty-nine say that homosexuality should be accepted. Whereas ninety-one percent of those in the age bracket of thirty to forty-nine were accepting, and only eighty-five percent of the ages fifty and over showed approval to homosexuals (6).

Although many studies do not exist that address homophobia amongst children and adolescences below the age of eighteen, *Grupo Educación COGAM (Colectivo de Lesbianas, Gays, Transexuales y Bisexuales de Madrid)* provides relevant information to meet those demographics. Journalist Laura Rivas Martínez, from the Spanish newspaper *El País*, reports that based on the COGAM report, *Homofobia en las aulas 2013*, eighty percent of all lesbians, gays, trans and bisexual adolescents are too scared *to come out of the closet* for fear of being rejected. Rivas Martínez also reports that thirty-eight percent of these students report feeling discriminated against in their own academic environment.

Regrettably homosexuals are not the only group to feel discrimination in modern-day Spain. Women also represent a large number of the oppressed individuals that do not always play the gender role of submissive caregiver as assigned to them by society. The technique that the directors used to express this concern differed in comparison to their approach on homosexuality that relied on satirical nature of exposing stereotypes (31). Irony typically plays a strategical role in postmodern works, in which its end result serves

to clarify. Arguably, it can be claimed that Balagueró and Plaza used this approach to shine light on gender inequalities within contemporary Spanish society. Author John Winokur explains in his book *The Big Book of Irony* (2007) that postmodern irony is:

...allusive, multilayered, preemptive, cynical, and above all, nihilistic. It assumes that everything is subjective and nothing means what it says. It's a sneering, world-weary, *bad* irony, a mentality that condemns before it can be condemned, preferring cleverness to sincerity and quotation to originality. Postmodern irony rejects tradition, but offers nothing in its place. (34)

One primary example of how irony is implicated in the series can be observed by looking at the character Ángela Vidal. Rather than the heavily armed policeman or an experienced priest surviving the evil hordes of flesh eating zombies, small petite Ángela is the only survivor left standing. Ángela walks out of the historical gender role assigned to her and assumes more versatile characteristics that go against the traditional “damsel in distress”, and places her as a worthy opponent rather than a secondary counterpart. It is discovered that after assuming these less typical traits, Ángela has actually become infected. This pattern is later repeated in *[•Rec]³* with Clara as well. In knowing this, it can be said that as Ángela, as well as Clara, have disobeyed their traditional gender roles, which results in them becoming infected. To deviate from a gender role, as Judith Butler would say, is to deviate from the strategy of cultural survival, which can also be understood as a metaphorical transgression of the scrutiny faced by women in modern-day Spain.

Statistics from *El instituto de la mujer* show that from the years 2007-2011 Spanish women came in second hand to men in various fields concerning education and the labor force. The figures show that although there were more female students in comparison to males, more women remained in the category of illiterate than their male counterparts. The information also provided that more women pursued fields that required higher education and also the data states that females held more doctoral degrees than males. In the work field, women typically made considerably less than men. In the industrial field women's pay ranged from €10.58 in 2006 to €12.89 in 2011, whereas men's wages in the industrial field ranged from €14.18-€16.84. When it came to the construction field, numbers were much closer yet males still remained on top, women ranged from €10.07-€13.16 and men from €10.38-€13.24. The biggest discrepancy of wages between men and women can be observed in the service industry where women gained from €10.62 in 2006 and €13.15 in 2011 and men earned from €13.67 in 2006 to €15.85 in 2011. According to these studies, although women tend to pursue their academic endeavors, they have always remained second best as far as wages are concerned. By attempting to understand the discrimination of sexes in contemporary Spain, it is difficult to perceive when observing strong and important female roles as characters like Ángela or [*Rec*]³'s Clara.

Upon closer observation, although both Ángela and Clara seem to have many things in common such as being strong female protagonists that become infected, yet they represent different sides of the spectrum. Considering groups as 'marginalized' is an invalid term that ceases to exist in a postmodern context due to German philosopher

Nietzsche's famous words from his book originally titled *Die fröhliche Wissenschaft* [*The Gay Science*] (1882). In his book he proclaims (that):

God is dead. God remains dead. And we have killed him. Yet his shadow still looms. How shall we comfort ourselves, the murderers of all murderers? What was holiest and mightiest of all that the world has yet owned has bled to death under our knives: who will wipe this blood off us? What water is there for us to clean ourselves? What festivals of atonement, what sacred games shall we have to invent? Is not the greatness of this deed too great for us? Must we ourselves not become gods simply to appear worthy of it? (Sector 125—*The Madman*, 119-120)

By denying the continued existence of a center, or God, it is no longer possible to refer to *the marginalized* in postmodernism. Although the center no longer exists as a point of reference in a postmodern context, the distinction of these characters remains relevant. In [*•Rec*], irony functions as a satirical reminder that the Church places itself as the “center”, and continues to “marginalize” women, whereas this is inversed in the end (of [*•Rec*]²), where Ángela becomes the central focus by defeating the Church.

Clara also assumes a role derived from postmodern irony that plays an integral part in presenting her as a typical heroine.^{xii} Likewise, by possessing the ability to only kill those that get in the way of her agenda (to leave the building), Ángela fits into yet another category: the anti-heroine. By going against tradition and doing as she chooses, rather than be a submissive nurturer, Ángela defies the gender role set by society, in

^{xii} Irony plays an important part in Clara becoming infected. Because Koldo's infected grandfather's hearing aid malfunctions, he is unable to hear the preacher's sermon. By not being able to hear the biblical scripture, Koldo's grandfather remains unaffected by the trance-inducing words and infects Clara by biting her hand.

doing so she is a postmodern figure that represents the empowerment of women rather than their oppression. Further analysis of the female protagonists reveals that although they may appear to be similar in many ways, their roles are representative of two differing demographics.

Dressed in a white gown, as she gets married to her husband Koldo, Clara is a resilient woman who still holds strong to convention and belief. Tradition dies with Clara as she becomes infected and attacks Koldo, only to be shot down seconds later by police, whereas Ángela's ability to survive through the series sets her apart from other protagonists (like Clara).^{xiii} Ángela is presented as an independent reporter who breaks tradition by not allowing anyone to stand in her way, including the Church itself. By presenting both female characters in similar, yet differing behaviors, directors Balagueró and Plaza are able to call attention to the subtle differences in modern-day Spanish women. Both the conventional and the contemporary are infected by the patriarchal world around them yet only the less traditional that refuse to be governed by religious or other authoritative figures are the only ones to survive. This insinuates a dying of the traditional and a strengthening of a revision that sees woman as equal counterparts rather than secondary individuals.

Although César is the only (admitted) homosexual character in the [*Rec*] series, it says a lot to choose to show the only member of the gay community in such a stereotypical manner. The same can be said for characters such as Ángela who show that in order to be seen as equally strong, they must be infected. Choosing to depict stigmatized

^{xiii} This scene also offers another gender subversion by displaying armor-clad Koldo's failure to come to Clara's rescue. Instead, a chainsaw-carrying Clara takes on the domineering role, as she cuts her dress and battles her way through a crowd of zombies. It is also interesting to note that Koldo willingly kisses an infected Clara who then infects him by biting his tongue off in the end scene.

characters such as homosexuals and women in a stereotypical way so as to enable the audience to better understand the differences in gender roles indicates that the intention was to portray these characters in a way that reflects contemporary Spanish society. Also, by doing this, indicates that even though changes are being made as according to statistics and laws, there is need for much more work in order to bring gender and sexual equality into the realm of possible in present-day Spain.

Chapter Three:

Approaching Xenophobia as New Racism Within Spanish Society

The first installment of the [*•Rec*] series introduced several underlying themes such as the stereotypical role that women play in Spanish society, as well as the role of the gay community and the Catholic Church. With the introduction of the homosexual character, a new topic emerged that almost seemed to pay homage to earlier films like George A. Romero's 1968 film *Night of the Living Dead*. The racially charged statements made by César during his interview not only introduced another common postmodern element, paranoia, but also a new issue of concern: racism.^{xiv}

As Ángela makes her rounds, she finds that César has some arbitrary remarks to make regarding whom he believes may be culpable of beginning the epidemic. During his interview César makes racist accusations about the group of Japanese immigrants that he mistakenly calls Chinese:

Son los chinos estos...que comen...crudo el, el pescado crudo...el pescado crudo, y un olor...siempre tienen la, siempre tienen la puerta, la puer... yo no sé por qué tienen la puerta abierta. Porque si dijéramos que son de estos finos que hacen de *feng shui* y estas cosas que te, que te gustan, pero no. Ellos para (farfullando) pa' así salen y entren gritando todo el tiempo en chino, en japonés...no sé, hablan algo que no se entiende nada...horror, un horror...(33:25)

It is important to note that moments before César's interview, the Japanese tenant Nika Kobayashi was being questioned, she displayed some of the racially prejudiced characteristics that César mentions during his interview, therefore his accusations are

^{xiv} "Paranoia refers to the distrust in a system or even a distrust in the self." <angelmatos.net>.

reinforced by her actions. Some of these fortified actions include Nika's inability to communicate effectively, which resorts to her using hand gestures and single-word phrases in attempts to better explain herself. Other reinforced gestures include a brief argument in which Nika and her husband yell at one another in Japanese. Even though the Kobayashi family does not display all of the characteristics as stated by César, it is logical to assume that the rest (such as having an unappealing smell, etc.) are also true as well, which made César's stereotype of Asians not only feasible but also believable.

Rather than discuss the racist undertones at face value, as a reflection of the current sociological state of Spanish society, it is essential to first approach them from a postmodern perspective. By only accessing racism as a sociological issue, it would not encompass the total array of underlining subtexts that the directors arguably wanted to insinuate. However, approaching racism from a postmodern standpoint offers a solution and a new approach to the world itself: hybridity. Anthropologist Bettina E. Schmidt argues that:

[a] problem with many postmodern cultural theories is that they look on societies as a holistic entity, but forget the individual cases of human culture. Cultural concepts seem to be construed nearly without human beings. [...] Cultures are not homogenous entities, they are full of breaks, contradictions and dynamism. <<http://lasa.international.pitt.edu>>

Therefore, according to Schmidt's interpretation of a polyphonic culture, the series can be seen as an illustration of such. Russian philosopher Mikhail Bakhtin first applied the term to sociological studies in his book *Rabelais and His World* (1968) because he was interested in transgression and the crossing of barriers. The idea of

polyphony is amongst some of the key categories that the Russian philosopher brought into play with his dialogical criticism. In suggesting, “there are no limits to dialogical context” in his book *Speech Genres & Other Late Essays* (1986) it proposes that from his perspective, a polyphonic culture is never stable (170). Theorist Néstor García Canclini builds from the concept of a multi-voiced polyphonic culture in what he calls his *theory of hybridization*.

Canclini states that by moving from biological to sociocultural analysis, new fields of application may be gained, but in doing so they “lose univocal sense” (3). He then offers a definition in which he states the meaning of his theory: “I understand for hybridization socio cultural processes in which discrete structures or practices, previously existing in separate form, are combined to generate new structures, objects, and practices” (3). He then argues that hybridization has led to a “relativizing of the notion of identity” (6). The theorist then states that his theory puts an end to homogenous thinking:

[t]he emphasis on hybridization not only puts an end to the pretense of establishing "pure" or "authentic" identities; in addition, it demonstrates the risk of delimiting local, self-contained identities or those that attempt to assert themselves as radically opposed to national society or globalization. When an identity is defined through a process of abstraction of traits (language, traditions, certain stereotyped behaviors), there is often a tendency to remove those practices from the history of mixing in which they were formed. Consequently, one mode of understanding the identity

becomes absolute, and heterodox ways of speaking the language, making music, or interpreting the traditions are rejected. (6)

Also according to Canclini, “one winds up, in short, sealing off the possibility of modifying culture and politics” (6). The theorist reiterates this idea in his article *La globalización en pedazos: integración y rupturas en la comunicación* (1998) that hybridity does not always fix issues within a multicultural society, due to the fact that they are attributed to racism and xenophobia:

Si hubiera que buscar ejemplos de que la hibridación no siempre reconcilia lo diverso, bastaría recordar la cantidad de fusiones interculturales que estallan cada día en las grandes ciudades. La aceleración de los intercambios y el acercamiento de lo distante aumentan la información sobre los otros, pocas veces la comprensión de sus diferencias y a menudo los vuelve insoportables: la xenofobia y el racismo también crecen con la globalización. (8)

However in understanding that xenophobia and racism are the key elements that do not allow cultural globalization to take place, it is understood that an interpretation of the [*•Rec*] series is showing xenophobia as a means that slows or stops the ability to become a hybrid culture that resonates globally. In [*•Rec*] an example of hybridization world can be appreciated by looking at the residents in the apartment building.

By choosing many different ethnicities to reside in a Barcelonan apartment building, rather than just natives, the directors are able to show Spanish society as one encompassing many different cultures. Because the postmodern approach suggests not local unity, but rather global chaos, one can also infer that by not identifying any

particular Catalán personalities in distinction to other Spanish natives, the films further mesh with Canclini's idea of a hybrid culture because they insinuate a cacophony of cultures rather than a rupture.

To better address the racial undertone from a sociological standpoint, it is first necessary to define the term in question: racism, but before doing so it is equally important to understand its root word, race. Merriam-Webster's online dictionary states that race is "a family, tribe, people, or nation belonging to the same stock, also according to the dictionary, race is "a class or kind of people unified by shared interests, habits, or characteristics." Merriam-Webster's Online Dictionary says that racism is:

rac·ism *noun* \ˈrā-,si-zəm also -,shi-\

1 : a belief that race is the primary determinant of human traits and capacities and that racial differences produce an inherent superiority of a particular race

2 : racial prejudice or discrimination

The remarks coming from César imply cultural differences, rather than a misconception of superiority that is associated with the term itself; these remarks made are more fittingly called 'new racism'.

Marxist professor Martin Barker coined the term 'new racism' in 1981. He justifies this new racism as being part of human nature. Barker states in his book, *The New Racism* (1981) that not only is it human nature to possess new racism, but it is pseudo-biological:

It is a theory that I call biological, or better, pseudo-biological culturalism.

Nations on this view are not built out of politics and economics, but out of

human nature. It is in our biology, our instincts, to defend our way of life, traditions and customs against outsiders — not because they are inferior, but because they are part of different cultures. This is a non-rational process; and none the worse for it. For we are soaked in, made up out of, our traditions and our culture. (23-25)

According to Barker, within one's nature there is a tendency to form limited groups, and these groups are fundamental elements that make one human. He also states that, "to be human, is to have the strength of a tradition around you. And our lives are committed to these traditions" (22.)

Barker's new racism, as well as César's remarks, applies more to the universal term known as xenophobia. "Xeno—" comes from the Greek word *xenos* meaning stranger or foreigner according to Oxford Online Dictionary, and the Merriam-Webster Online Dictionary defines the term as:

xe·no·pho·bia *noun* \,ze-nə-'fō-bē-ə, ,zē-\

: fear and hatred of strangers or foreigners or of anything that is strange or foreign

Sociologist Jens Rydgren also concurs that the new sector in racism is more similar to that of xenophobia, rather than racism itself. He attests in his 2003 study that:

[t]his type of 'new' or 'cultural' racism comes close to the conception of 'xeno- phobia', that is, fear of individuals who are different or 'strange'. Like the new cultural racism, xenophobia also is characterized by a belief that it is 'natural' for people to live amongst others of 'their own kind',

and a corresponding hostility towards the presence of people of a 'different' kind. (48)

Other than Barker's theory, sociological studies offer further insight into xenophobia (and some racism) in modern-day Spain. According to a 1990 survey by *Centro de Investigaciones Sociológicas* (CIS), of those interviewed, sixty-four percent believed that their jobs and economic status were being threatened by foreign migrants, forty-five associated the migrants with urban crime, and fifty-seven percent believed that these non-natives were somehow involved in drug dealing. Not only did this study reveal prejudice but it also revealed that ninety percent had never had any contact with migrant workers and that sixty-three percent did not follow news on any such topic (Graham & Labanyi 414).

Since then, more recent studies like *Evolución del racismo y la xenofobia en España [Informe 2011]* aim to compare statistics collected from the years 2008-2010. In the report, the year 2008 showed that sixty-three percent of the people surveyed would not mind living in the same neighborhood as immigrants. This number dropped to fifty-three percent in the year 2009, and to fifty-five percent in 2010. According to the authors of the report, Cea D'Ancona and Valles Martínez, the surveyed see immigrants as those who typically make more noise: talking louder, listening to music at higher volumes, and having parties at home, which are some of César's initial complaints about the Kobayashi family (345-346).

Interestingly enough, César is not the only character to comment about Nika and her family. As authorities are preparing to allow the health official in the apartment complex, other racially motivated accusations are directed toward the Japanese family.

The fact that racist comments are made by native Spaniards against the Asian family proves that foreigners are not the only ones that are racist. While firemen are checking to see if all the apartment complex residents are present, Nika tells them that her sick elderly father is still upstairs. César (who had just accused them of being the cause) defends Nika's father by saying that he is frail and bedridden. It is during this moment that María Teresa Ortega, the elderly woman from Two A, says that because he is sick perhaps Nika's father is the reason behind what is going on. Shortly after, when Nika asks if it is possible to send for her father, another tenant named Mari Carmen, also accuses the elderly Japanese man of being “*el causante de todo esto*” (36:53).

Another example of ethnic-based stereotypes can be observed in [*Rec*]³ with the Mexican waiter in the scene in which an elderly woman allows Koldo to seek refuge with her and other survivors in the church. Stereotypes that include having the waiter represented by a Latin American are common when it comes to portraying immigrants as being service-based employees like maids, housekeepers and waiters.^{xv} Examples of typecasting can also be seen in the television show *Aida*, where character Oswaldo Wenceslao Huitanco de Todos los Santos de la Virgen de la Cruz also known as “*Machu-Pichu*” is stereotypically represented as an illegal Latin American waiter. Journalist Miguel Muñoz Ortega writes in his article *De “guachumino” a “guachumino”* (2013) that the Spanish are specialists when it comes to inventing derogatory terms to describe Latin Americans.^{xvi} To further prove that there is an ingrained level of racism or xenophobia in Spain, the journalist references a segment entitled “*¿Qué será lo que*

^{xv} Many examples include Rosario, Karen Walker's El Salvadorian maid from the TV show *Will and Grace*, as well as Consuela from the animated show *Family Guy*.

^{xvi} Terms such as: *guachupino panchito*, *payoponi*, *machu pichu*, *guate*, *periguayos*, and *sudaca* are all common (racist) terms to describe Latin Americans

quiere el negro?” from *La Sexta*’s television show called *El intermedio*. During this portion of the show a man of African descent asks several people in the streets for a favor (such as to use their phone to make an important call). In an attempt to reveal the racist attitudes prevalent amongst Spanish citizens, the man dresses up in two different outfits, one elegant and the other common everyday street apparel. When dressed as an airplane pilot, the man is met with respect and allowed to use pedestrians’ phones. However when in street attire, he is met with unwillingness and disrespectful arrogance, if the pedestrian chooses to respond at all. Cohost Beatriz Montañez suggests that rather than racism it is classism: “... parece evidente, los españoles, eh, somos un poquito clasistas.” To that the host José Miguel Monzón (better known as Gran Wyoming) replies: “[y]o creo que no, que no somos clasistas, lo que somos es racistas e idiotas. Creemos que un negro vestido de piloto es menos negro” (El Intermedio, 2011).

Other important issues with immigrants represented in the first movie not only deal with the way they are addressed, but also with the fact that they represent many parts of the world including Japan, Colombia, Argentina, and Portugal. For instance, the Colombian girl is mentioned briefly several times but never has a name, only “*la colombiana*.” The other representative of a foreign entity in [*Rec*] is the Portuguese girl known as “*La niña Medeiros*.” Although she does have a name, *Tristana*, she, too, is given a bad representation as a non-native Spaniard, for she is the cause of the initial contagion. Nevertheless, the racist remarks made by César are the most blatant representation of xenophobia in the film series. Based on Rivas’ report *El 80% de los menores gais en Madrid no se atreve a salir del armario* (2014) seen in chapter two, children of foreign descent were found to be more prejudiced regarding issues like

homophobia. Considering this, it may be argued that characters like César overcompensate by being overly prejudiced against other races in an attempt to mask their own identity. If this is the case, then it suggests there are higher levels of prejudice in children who are not native of Spain (which in this particular case would be César and his prejudiced views against the Asian community). Part of the reason that Asians are targeted in such racist remarks can be attributed to the fact that the other representative areas like Latin America have a deep history with Spain, and are therefore more accepted, whereas Asians do not share this common ground. Considering that Latin America was colonized by Spain, it is easy to understand why both share similar cultural aspects like religion, as well as the Spanish language itself. Even though language varies between countries like Portugal and Spain, they still share many similarities linguistically due to their close geographical locations. However the same cannot be said of Japan. Similarities, like language, religion or geographical proximity cease to exist when comparing Spain to Japan, leaving Spain vulnerable to racism.

Considering that the word *immigrant* (as observed in Cea D’Ancona and Valles Martínez’s 2001 report) may pertain to a multitude of people, it is necessary to further define who these groups are. In order to better identify the races, the surveyed were asked if there was a group of immigrants in particular that they liked better or sympathized with more. The biggest increase observed was the answer ‘None’ which increased from twenty-five in 2008 to fifty-four in 2009, and slightly decreased to forty-nine in 2010. For three consecutive years the generalized term ‘Latin Americans’ received twelve percent of the vote. Following ‘Latin Americans’ was the group of Africans/Sub-Saharanans who were also at five percent all three years. At the other end of the spectrum, in all three

years one percent was attributed to the ‘not answered/do not know’ category, as well as the ‘all’ category. Also, ‘Eastern countries’ and ‘Colombians’ were at the one percentage level for each consecutive year. Another interesting survey question asked was if any particular race seemed less friendly than another. Again, the ‘none’ category saw the biggest growth, growing from twenty-one percent in 2008 to forty-five percent in 2009 and slightly decreasing to forty percent in 2010. Following was the group labeled ‘Moroccan, Moorish, and North Africans; for the first two years of the survey these groups were at eighteen percent and then dropped to seventeen in 2010. Behind this group were the ‘Romanians’ who decreased from seventeen percent in 2008 to fifteen in 2009, then increased to sixteen percent in 2010. At the other end of the chart, other than not answering or ‘other’, Colombians were consecutively at one percent for all the years and Chinese varied between one and two percent (259-361.)

Now that these groups have been better identified as actual ethnicities and races, rather than just the generic term *immigrates*, it is important to see why, other than ‘causing loud noises’, these groups are frowned upon in Spain. A survey within the same report (that compares the years 2009 and 2010) asks why these groups are disliked. The top answer linked these immigrants to delinquency, at seventeen percent in 2009 and twenty percent in 2010. The second most popular answer, at eleven percent both years, was that these groups are seen as violent, aggressive and more willing to cause conflict. Some other popular answers include that these groups refuse to integrate/form ghettos, ten and eleven percent, as well as that they have different customs or ways of life at eight and eleven percent, respectively.

The study shows that many Spaniards tend to put people in categories according to their ethnicity and national origin, which occurs in much of the commentary in the [*Rec*] films: “*la colombiana*,” “*los chinos estos*,” “*la niña portuguesa*.” In order to better illustrate this, the surveyors asked a seventy-one year old retired secretary (who had always lived on the same street) what type of foreigners she liked best and what kind she liked least. To answer their question, she pointed out the pros and cons of Easterners as well as South Americans, blanketing the entire race in stereotypes, but in the end she remained indifferent:

Pues depende para qué. Por ejemplo, la gente del Este yo la veo que es gente inteligente y más preparada, pero yo la veo que es gente más dura. En cambio, la gente sudamericana no está tan preparada, les cuesta muchísimo pues son más perezosos. Pero son más cariñosos. Entonces, si tienen que atender a una persona mayor, entonces dan muy buen servicio la gente sudamericana. Tienen mucha paciencia y son bastante cariñosos. O sea, a mí es que me da igual. (363)

The study also gives other native Spanish citizens the ability to voice their opinion on the matter. Some, such as the twenty-seven year old male that was interviewed, suspected that once Spain was able to regain control of its economic crisis it could then eventually work on being more racially neutral.^{xvii} He concluded his interview by saying that he hopes and believes that things will get better and evolve in a positive way (366.) Others surveyed include an eighteen-year-old Spanish female (who comes from an upper middle class family). She too, has a positive outlook for the future and has acquired her

^{xvii} The twenty-seven year old also said that if the crisis were to last longer than suspected that xenophobia and racism could foreseeably get drastically worse (in Spain).

perspective by traveling; she believes that it should start in grade school by learning to include everyone:

Yo creo que cada vez la gente es más consciente y no hay tanta... Las nuevas generaciones, yo creo que al convivir ya con ello, han vivido así desde jóvenes, no lo ven tan diferente y la gente ahora viaja más y ve cosas diferentes y no, no discrimina tanto. A lo mejor no. Yo creo, y también hay que potenciar, sobre todo en los colegios desde pequeños, hay que inculcar a los niños la igualdad.

According to the interviews, the older generations are those more willing to use stereotypes to classify other races. Also, as the eighteen-year old suggested (much like with the study concerning homophobia) practices to stop racism and xenophobia should be implemented when a child is still in school. According to *Informe Raxen*, it is important to note that Spain is not the only government that is taking a prolonged amount of time to recognize the amount of pain that these related (racist) hate crimes take on the victim (6-7). The importance of the rights of the victim is something that must be recognized to achieve a more balanced, less racially biased society.

The manner in which non-native Spaniards are represented in the films shows that (much like in modern-day Spain) there is much room for improvement when it comes to embracing a multicultural community. By taking a sociological approach within postmodernism one is able to access the current situation found in contemporary Spain. Through producing films, like those in the [*Rec*] series, not only do directors stimulate the economy, (which may also brighten current conditions) but they also heighten

awareness of the inequalities found in today's society. The film series presents these elements by referring to many of the foreign characters by their nationality rather than their names. By mistaking the Kobayashi family for Chinese, rather than Japanese César demonstrates his inability to incorporate himself into a diverse community. By demonstrating an inability to integrate themselves into an ever-growing multi-racial society, other characters such as María del Carmen and María Teresa Ortega reflect the xenophobia as seen in contemporary Spanish society.

Conclusion:

In conclusion, horror movies do not only entertain audiences, they also contain a wealth of subtexts that often reflect society from a critical standpoint. By observing the criticism from a postmodern standpoint one can see the world from a different perspective that allows them to question tradition rather than blindly accept it. The [*•Rec*] films are able to show these subtexts from a postmodern approach that suggests a revision to the outdated traditional methods. In chapter one, as an attempt to assert power over its follows, the Catholic Church (by means of historical seniority) proves to be unsuccessful as reflected in both society as well as the films themselves. By not updating its old traditions, the films show that the Church is unable to exert domination over the people it once had control over. By showing characters as César in stereotypical manners, the film is able to subtly critique the way in which society views such stigmatized individuals. The films also portrays gender subversion to female characters such as Ángela and Clara by proving that women are not secondary characters, rather they can be, and typically are in postmodern approach, the lead role and heroines of the films. Chapter three depicts many characters to be elements of parody. By presenting these characters in an exaggerated manner, the [*•Rec*] films are able to critique the way that these individuals are seen in society. Rather than celebrate the cultural differences as a hybrid society, the films show how many Spanish natives would rather focus on the dissimilarities from a negative standpoint.

By applying what is observed in the [*•Rec*] series to contemporary Spain, statistical information offers that newer generations are not directly affected by the oppression inflicted by the dictatorship. This information can be observed in interviews

and statistics with younger Spanish generations in comparison to the older ones. Considering that Spain takes the lead globally when it comes to the acceptance of homosexuals, for example, suggests that it has come a tremendous way from its condemning past. However, as it continues to become a multicultural nation, there is still much needed room for improvement pertaining to all groups discussed within this study.

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