



Queering Gender: The New *Femme Fatale* in Almodóvar's *La mala educación* (2004)

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ABSTRACT: It is difficult to define film genres in the post-modern cinema, as they are strongly influenced by the conventions of classic genres. Within this context the emergence of transgressive or “dissident” identities have populated such genres and particularly the creation of a modern *femme fatale* has become a popular and polemical character in contemporary fiction. This new transgressive identity deviates from its counterpart in classical cinema-film noir. Pedro Almodóvar's *La mala educación* (2004) reveals that the modern *femme fatale* has become at the turn of the twenty-first century an integral part of the queer community, thus proposing a new filmic platform of queering gender for the vindication of the rights of the (“other”) stigmatized identities.

KEY WORDS: Queer; Gender; *Femme Fatale*; Cinema; Almodóvar; *Bad Education*

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RESUMEN: Es difícil definir los géneros filmicos en el cine post-moderno, ya que están fuertemente influenciados por los géneros clásicos convencionales. Dentro de este contexto, el surgimiento de identidades transgresivas o “disidentes” ha habitado estos géneros y en particular la creación de una nueva *femme fatale* se ha convertido en un personaje popular y polémico en la ficción contemporánea. El filme de Pedro Almodóvar, *La mala educación* (2004), a comienzos del siglo XXI, revela que la nueva *femme fatale* se ha convertido en una parte integral de la comunidad *queer*, proponiendo así una nueva plataforma filmica de género torcido que sirve como vindicación de los derechos de las (“otras”) identidades estigmatizadas.

PALABRAS CLAVE: *Queer*; Género; *Femme Fatale*; Cine; Almodóvar; *La mala educación*

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Queer theory is the theoretical development of sexual dissidence and the deconstruction of stigmatized identities, which, through re-signification of the insult, reaffirms that different sexual options are a human right (Fonseca Hernández and Quintero Soto, 2009: 43).

[The] *femme fatale* [is] an archetypal and iconic constellation of evolved female strategies designed to attain agency and power in a male-dominated world. As such, she indeed figures an on-going crisis

of masculinity in contemporary cultures, representing a threat, a defiant challenge and a necessary warning (Walker, 2006: 23).

FROM THE CLASSIC TO THE MODERN *FEMME FATALE*

It is difficult to define film genres in the post-modern cinema, as they blend and borrow from the conventions of classic genres. Within this context the

emergence of stigmatized identities have populated such genres and particularly the creation of a modern *femme fatale* has become a popular and polemical character in contemporary fiction. This transgressive character emerges as a peripheral and dissident identity, which deviates from its counterpart in classical cinema-film noir. Adopting Carlos Fonseca and María Luisa Quintero's theoretical views on the concept of *queer*, I will refer to "dissident", "peripheral" and "stigmatized" identities as those that diverge from the imaginary circle of "normal" identities and demand their right to proclaim their existence, explaining the causes and consequences of a social system based on separating people and not on what they have in common" (Fonseca Hernández and Quintero Soto, 2009: 43).

Spanish filmmaker Pedro Almodóvar's films represent an eloquent example of queering gender as a way to vindicate the rights of stigmatized identities.¹ In her work on women and film noir, Stables (1998: 164) explains Pedro Almodóvar's films reveal strong influence of Classical Hollywood cinema and that post-modern films have "an unshakeable appetite for film noir". *La mala educación* [*Bad Education*] (2004) is his venture into film noir. While Almodóvar visually and structurally borrows from film noir, *La mala educación* is also male dominated unlike many of his other films. During the Classic Hollywood era, the film noir stood as a narrative for men and about men, and women were given melodrama as the female alternative to noir. The narratives show the female protagonists as sirens with the power to undo and even kill the heroes of the film and expressed "a masculine view of female sexuality" (Martin, 1998: 208). The *femme fatale* was a threat to every man, not just a film's protagonist, because of her overt sexuality, lofty ambitions, and desire for independence and autonomy. Ultimately, the *femme fatale* is nearly always punished or destroyed by her own ambitions.

Traditionally, Almodóvar creates "women's films", not necessarily melodramas but films about women. Some theorists have termed him a "female director" as he does not create from the traditional male perspective, but from a peculiar feminine gendered perspective and it can be argued that he has created a counter gaze to the traditional male gaze. However, while most of his films focus on the lives of women, *La mala educación* features no female leads and only a few, and very minor, female characters. This film is completely male dominated, though Almodóvar recreates the *femme fatale* in his character Juan (Gael García Bernal).

The classic *fatale* has been slowly written out of the film narrative due to "feminism and "sexual liberation" ... reducing her to a quaint fantastical figure produced by repressed male dominated societies" (Stables, 1998: 167). Her original incarnation is no longer a threat to the patriarchal symbolic

order. Almodóvar is not the first to recreate the *femme fatale*, but unfortunately, bringing the character from the 1940s and 1950s into contemporary cinema makes it nearly impossible for an exact replica to exist. For example, many of his past films feature castrating and fatal women, but these women have different desires and ambitions than the classic character. Thus, Almodóvar will have to rethink the traditional *femme fatale* within the twenty-first century global cinema constructs, and in doing so, Enrique Goded (Fele Martínez) transforms Juan into Zahara and kills this alter ego which represents the murder of the transsexual Ignacio (Francisco Boira) who was Juan's brother and Enrique's first love. However, the enlightening part of this transformation, is as Juan's duplicitous and murderous behaviour is revealed, the more he becomes Zahara, the transsexual threatening the priests at the school he attended. In this case, the modern *femme fatale* which is created in the image of the classic figure, can only exist if he is part of the gay, lesbian, bi-, trans-, or intersexed community. Therefore, Juan's character must be "queer" in order to fulfil his role in this new filmic context.

While around the new millennium filmmakers attempt to create a modern *femme fatale* based off of the classic counterpart, it is evident that the *femme fatale* can no longer exist in her classical form. According to Stables (1998: 164–165), most of the modern *fatales* appear as "monster villainesses" or "unnatural mothers" who can be better described as "psycho-femme killers" or the "castrated woman".² The threat of the *femme fatale* is her masculine behaviour, rather than merely her sexuality. While she is a sexualized woman who asserts her right to her body, it is her struggle to create her own identity and independence that threatens masculinity and patriarchal ethos of society. In the post-modern cinema of the late 1990s and early twenty-first century, the new *femme fatale* is inherently more sexual than her predecessor. This transgressive character is the product of excess and sexuality that abound in these films, and therefore are excessive and overtly sexual while her predecessor was not allowed to be. Stables (1998: 170) describes the classic *fatales* as being marked "by their hunger for independence, her unfeminine ambition or unsettling sexuality, the threat she posed to cultural norms were merely that of the woman outside the conventional social structures" and Mulvey (1996: 13) further describes her as having "seductive powers" and beauty that "mask her destructive and castrating powers". However, in the postmodern cinema, these new fatal women do not mask their castrating powers, nor do they threaten men by merely existing, they are physically dangerous.

In contrast with the classical *femme fatale*, who was unable to act on her own and used her sexuality to seduce men, in the modern design of the *femme*

fatale, she no longer needs to seduce a man, now she is able to be agent in her own right. She can now kill and blackmail on her own accord and her sexuality is not used out of necessity³ but because she is a sexual being, with her own desires. As Stables (1998: 167) points out, this change in the *femme fatale* was encouraged by mid twentieth-century feminism, for which the classic *femme fatale* would be obsolete due to “sexual liberation [...] reducing her to a quaint fantastical figure produced by repressed, male dominated societies”. Although she is revamped into a sexually liberated woman, she often continues to be punished for it.

IN-BETWEEN AMBIGUOUS IDENTITIES

In *La mala educación*, much like the stereotypical *femme fatale*, Juan⁴ enters into Enrique’s office and makes the director an offer he couldn’t refuse. He comes to Enrique looking for help, in this case a job. Yet, here begins the twisting story of, “who is Juan?”. Juan introduces himself as his murdered brother, Ignacio, Enrique’s childhood friend, but explains he has changed his name to Ángel. Soon it is revealed he is not Ignacio as he has presented himself as, and figuring out who “Ángel” is becomes a fetish for Enrique. Enrique fulfils the “dominant film noir function of the investigator” (Martin, 1998: 213) as both try to discover who the *fatale* is and the truth behind the murder of Ignacio. Enrique investigates Ignacio’s death but his obsession with Juan is also a “voyeuristic curiosity” (Martin, 1998: 214). However, as Mulvey (1996: 13) notes woman is the fetish in cinema and culture, “for feminist film theory has argued that cinema finds, not its only, but its most perfect, fetishistic object in the image of woman”. Furthermore, women on screen are united as objects because, according to Mulvey’s theoretical view, there is no place for a female gaze in the cinema. In the film noir genre, the *femme fatale*, was the “signifier of sexuality, the image of eroticised femininity ...” (Mulvey, 2000: 13). Women in film can only bear and signify what men create, and the *fatale* is no exception. This places man as the creator of symbolism and meaning, and shoves the gay community onto the fringe of patriarchy as transgressive of the dominant (masculine) norm. This transgressive female exhibits qualities that are more masculine than feminine, threatening male defined gender roles. It is the threat of being ruled unnecessary which explains the fear of the *femme fatale*.

Another way these transgressive-peripheral identities are a threat to patriarchy is through their visibility. Referring to women, Mulvey (1996: 13) states “the image of woman on the screen achieves a particular spectacular intensity” and must passively wait for men to place meaning onto her. While the new narratives may have completely transplanted the *femme fatale* into the modern world, unfortunately,

contemporary fiction has, in essence, bastardized the original character into the psycho-femme. Now in order to revert to the classic *fatale*, “she” has to find a new fringe existence, and the queer community is that new home to the modern *femme fatale*. Dyer (1998) argues that:

(...) queers generally in film noir are not evil just because homosexuality is abnormal or wrong. Nor is it even only because they are ‘like’ women, something which is abhorrent either because they are like the sex they are not supposed to be like, or because, women being on the whole *fatales*, then must be any man like them. Queers are also evil because the aesthetic gives them an access to women that excludes and threatens the normal male (Dyer, 1998: 124–25).

Dyer discusses the many ways in which queer men are portrayed as evil within film noir, but not because of their sexuality, but because their sexuality allows them access to the feminine world, while heterosexual men are not allowed into. Furthermore, homosexuals pose a threat because they can hover in both male and female worlds –something that patriarchy does not allow. Men and women have specific spaces and roles in culture, however, queer men upset this “balance” as they have access to both spaces, but only because they don’t fully exist in either. Taking this into consideration, Juan, in *La mala educación*, has access to both genders as he transforms into Zahara. However, Juan populates a world of queers, and provides few examples, or characters which represent, heterosexuality and the traditional male/female world. Whereas homosexuality was hinted at and the “queer” men in traditional film noir could transgress upon the female world, Juan must transgress in a world full of men who, from Dyer’s theoretical perspective, already have access to this sphere, which is explicitly queer (Dyer, 1998: 45). In this world, Enrique plays the “straight man”. This is not to imply he is in fact heterosexual, but he sets up the society’s ethos that Juan must sail through. Enrique is a combination of many of these traits. He is cynical of Berenguer⁵ as well as Juan, but he becomes obsessed with discovering the truth of Ignacio’s death and who Juan really is, as well as sadistically playing with Juan during his “audition” as Enrique tries to push his new obsession to the breaking point.

However, Dyer points out that the hero of a film noir is never gay, but what about a filmic reality where everyone is gay? In this case, Enrique takes ambiguously on the role of the “straight man” as he knows and is open about his sexuality. In contrast, Juan and Berenguer are never comfortable with their sexuality, and Enrique creates a world where the new norm is being gay or not gay –not gay meaning those who are not open about their homosexuality. Berenguer and Juan are not openly gay

and are ashamed of their homosexual relationships. Berenguer finally feels so guilty over his sexual attraction to the young boys at the school he works at, that he leaves the priesthood and becomes a publisher. However, he marries a woman and later keeps a secret affair with Juan.

Similarly, Juan has two homosexual relationships in the course of the film's narrative, yet insists that he is straight, appears to dislike having sex with Enrique, and makes derogatory comments about homosexuals. He believes that he is only having sex with other men in order to achieve his acting ambitions and eventually marries a woman, yet is literally haunted by Berenguer who blackmails him.⁶ In contrast to Juan and Berenguer, Enrique's sexuality is explicit and he sets the new social order to which the others fail to meet. Both Berenguer and Juan deny their sexuality and repress it. Their greater crime is not that they killed Enrique's childhood sweetheart, but that neither of them fit into the social order Enrique creates. Furthermore, within this new sexual structure Juan commits a worse offence than Berenguer, as Juan uses his sexuality to further his career.

For Enrique either one is "queer" or not, you are either in or you are out—there is no in between option. Instead characters like Juan and Berenguer are constantly flipping between the two systems, like the *femme fatale* who used her feminine aesthetics to mask her masculine tendencies. Berenguer is first introduced as a priest, and although he has taken a vow of chastity, he sexually assaults the children in his care, specifically a young Ignacio. Later, he leaves the priesthood and marries a woman, yet he is still fascinated with "young boys" and begins an affair with Juan. However, if Enrique is the man prescribing meaning to the world around him, then Berenguer refuses to settle into one or the other and instead transgresses between the two.

As the narrative progresses, Juan undergoes a transformation, becoming the drag performer, and involving himself in a sexual relationship with Enrique. He uses his sexuality to his advantage and lures Berenguer and Enrique into his web of lies. However, when he is found out, it is then that Enrique takes sadistic pleasure into recreating Juan into Ignacio's image by transforming him into Zahara. Not only does he "force" Juan into a sexual relationship, but transforms him into a transvestite as Juan becomes more like the transsexual Zahara. Enrique projects meaning, language and anxiety onto Juan. Juan must work within the code and language, which Enrique gives him; he eventually loses himself within Enrique's creation—Zahara. It is eloquent how the characterization is negotiated possessing an in-between or ambiguous status in a social culture that categorizes individuals in a dichotomous or strictly categorical system.

After filming the final scene of the movie, Zahara's death, Juan breaks down, sobbing as the wardrobe girl removes his costume and the rest of the crew shuts down the set. It is in this moment that Juan is most like a *femme fatale*. He has lost himself into the world. Now, Enrique has symbolically killed Juan as he suspects Juan did to his brother, Ignacio. As all *femme fatales* must be punished, often with their own death or incarceration, Juan's punishment is to transform into Ignacio's image and then kill this fictionalized version. Juan has become so much like his brother that shooting the final scene mentally undoes Juan.

Once Ignacio is dead, Juan moves on to the next man who can help him accomplish his goals. He starts seeing Enrique in order to further his acting career. Unfortunately for all *fatales*, the jilted lover rarely stays away for good and Berenguer returns to confront the lovers who betray them. Enrique is suspicious of Juan from the moment he walks into his office and introduces himself as Ignacio/Ángel. He soon realizes that this is not the same boy he loved in school and investigates Ignacio's life; searching for the truth behind Ignacio's death and Juan's personal history. Finally, Berenguer confesses all to Enrique in order to punish Juan for betraying him when he left him for a younger, attractive lover who could further his acting career. Juan had got all he could from Berenguer and promptly left him for someone else he could use.

THE FEMME FATALE VERSUS THE QUEER

Zahara enters the film in a sequin dress designed to resemble the female body, a blonde wig and flower in hand and engages the audience as the camera runs over her body. She is a dazzling spectacle for the eye and a juxtaposition of male and female-ness.⁷ Zahara is performing as female and playing with those conventions. If the physical defines a woman, then Zahara will give the audience a body—albeit made of sequins and fabric. The breasts and vaginal region are placed where they would naturally be on the human body, and the entire actor is covered in the dress, including the hands with gloves that resemble female hands with painted nails. This costume re-genders the actor and creates a female form for the eye to behold. It also designates Zahara as a sexual object and fetish even though physically it is a man the audience is objectifying, which, according to feminist film criticism, is unnatural as men are never the fetish. Furthermore, as Pastor (2006: 7) notes, this body inversion "implies the transgression of a model of conduct that is heterosexual, and therefore, implies the complete negation of that model or norm".

Later in the film, Zahara renders Father Manolo (Daniel Giménez Cacho) impotent even in his designated space—the office of the school where he is

Principal. Zahara invades this space, like the *fatales* “invaded” the male space of the city and left the domestic and feminine space. When Zahara enters Father Manolo’s chapel and office, she overpowers him with her visual image and aggressive personality. She then blackmails him for his past crimes against the young boys in his charge. At the end, another priest does not hesitate and snaps Zahara’s neck to protect the school, the church, and his fellow priests and Father Manolo submit to the women trying to humiliate them as neither can or is willing to do something to stop her. The aggressive women overpower them and reverse the gender roles, creating a physical impotency that keeps the men paralysed and unable to respond. Furthermore, both need to be rescued by other men, as they are unable to control the women in their lives. Since Zahara is “performing”, it adds insult to injury that the priest is unable to protect himself from her. He has the power of the church behind him (and at that time the government’s support as well), yet he can do nothing to stop her. Fonseca Hernández and Quintero Soto (2009: 43) note that “the development of sexual dissidence and the deconstruction of stigmatized identities [...] through re-signification of the insult reaffirms that different sexual options are a human right.

Like the *femme fatale*, Zahara “castrates” Father Manolo. In all respects, Juan bears a striking similarity to the *femme fatale*. He is repressed and resorts to criminal means in order to escape his present situation. He struggles against an oppressive power that wants him to conform to societies’ standards. Being biologically male, it is believed that he cannot be a *femme fatale* as he is already given more in patriarchy than what women can even hope to achieve.

As a counterpoint to the *femme fatale*, theorists created *l’homme fatal*, a destructive male who quite often brings death to his lovers. It could be argued that Juan is biologically male and therefore cannot be a *femme fatale*; however, Juan’s behaviour is not that of *l’homme fatal* as he is subjugated and repressed like the fatal women of the 1940s and 50s film noir. When the idea of a male version is brought up, it usually includes characters such as Don Juan –men who are philanders. Of course, many of these men are also punished –often with death– but the *femme fatale* is punished for what she alludes to rather than what she actually does.

However, Juan bears a stronger resemblance to the classic *femme fatale*. He does not have sex for the pleasure, but in order to achieve her goals through the men he sleeps with: Enrique can offer him a role in the film; Berenguer can give him money and even “freedom” from his brother. Therefore Juan seems to be distanced from the notion of *l’homme fatal* and his position within the queer community in a society that does not acknowledge it, places

him closer to the *femme fatale*. As questioned Butler:

How do drag, butch, femme, transgender, transsexual persons enter into the political field? They make us not only question what is real, and what “must” be, but they also show us how the norms that govern contemporary notions of reality can become instituted (Butler 2004: 29).

Much like the *femme fatale* challenged societal norms, Juan’s dissident sexuality challenges contemporary culture, whereas, *l’homme fatal* primarily threatens the women he seduces and those who defend their honour. Butler describes gender as “a kind of a doing, an incessant activity performed in part, without one’s knowing and without one’s willing, it is not for that reason automatic or mechanical” (Butler, 2004: 1). The culturally dissident and transgressive behaviour breaks away from the cultural constructs and thereby threatens patriarchal norms. As Butler (2004: 28) points out, gender is a set of “forcibly imposed ideals of what bodies ought to be like”. An individual has very little control over his or her own gender, for “the terms that make up one’s own gender are from the start, outside oneself ... and radically contests the notion of authorship itself” –in a sense, there is no “I” in “team” (Butler, 2004: 1). Furthermore, even though “a body is, emphatically, ‘one’s own’ that over which we must claim rights of autonomy” (Butler, 2004: 20). The personal is political, but it can be used by others, and even though it is an individual’s body, gender is assigned to it by others, making it harder for those who feel they do not belong in that body, or that gender, to exist. While queer men and women already upset the gender constructs of patriarchal culture, those who are transgendered can barely exist within it. That being said, a trans- man or woman confuse, and blend, the male and female genders as he, or she, physically are able to work within both genders.

For the queer community, gender is a struggle for autonomy and to create a space for them within society. However, this is not possible because in order to do so they would need their terms to be incorporated into the greater social consciousness. Until then, the queer community still poses a threat to patriarchal society –similarly as many women (specifically the *femme fatale* in the 1940s and 1950s) posed threats to their contemporary society. While Mulvey and a number of theorists discuss the oppression of woman in film and their battle to free herself from her role as fetish and object, the transgendered community is unable to fight at all:

To be oppressed means that you already exist as a subject of some kind, you are there as the visible and oppressed other for the master subject as a possible or

potential subject, but to be unreal is something else again (Butler, 2004: 30).

This is the difference between the struggle of women and that of the queer, and specifically trans-, community. While both groups try to find their place in society, a woman begins one step ahead as she already exists as patriarchal tradition has awarded her specific roles and spaces with which she is supposed to exit. Feminism has battled against such gender constructs which have been assigned to woman and which she must escape and recreate. Unfortunately, it is impossible to recreate or escape something that does not exist, and the queer community is ignored and has no role or space designated. This invisibility and “unrealness” explains the re-gendering that occurs within *La mala educación*. In order for Enrique to figure out Juan, he must place Juan into the boundaries of his own world. Juan is struggling with his sexuality and Enrique is struggling to understand him, as Enrique sees his world in a more structured setting of those who are gay and “not gay,” and Juan is both.

Juan is struggling to separate himself from his brother, who is his opposite, he affirms. He informs Enrique that he is not gay nor transgendered, and repeatedly uses derogatory terms for those who are “queer,” and is disgusted with Enrique’s innuendo and attraction to him. However, while he tries to separate himself from his brother,⁸ he becomes more like him. This is partially due to the fact that Enrique’s obsession with Ignacio forces Juan to become more like the character based upon his brother. This goes on until the end, when Juan breaks down on the set, after living his brother’s life and recreating his own transgressive gender to match his brother’s.

In a sense, feminism has eradicated the *femme fatale*. This does not mean that feminism has achieved all its goals in reducing women’s oppression, but it has transformed a world where women can now openly exist. As mentioned, the *femme fatale* has evolved and is rarely seen in her true form in post-modern cinema. Thus, the psycho-femme found in modern cinema is more acceptable and recognizable than Zahara, Ignacio, or even Juan. Although Juan seems to be more acceptable than Zahara or Ignacio, he is still struggling with his sexuality and walks a line between gay and straight. It is his denial of his sexuality that challenges Enrique’s reality and forces him to place Juan into either the gay or “other” in his mind. In order to understand Juan, he must first “queer” him. He starts a sexual relationship and transforms him into Zahara, for in Enrique’s mind Zahara is more real as she knows who she is and what she wants—her motives are simple. Juan is a puzzle because his sexuality and desires are confusing to Enrique.

Many of the terms Butler uses for describing the queer community’s struggles are much the same to the language used by first wave’s feminists. Both communities struggle(d) for the same objective, to articulate themselves in a world that is defined by heterosexual men. The only difference is that feminism got a head start and was recognized much earlier than the queer movement. Today, the entire population recognizes feminism, but unfortunately the queer rights movement still strives for the same visibility. This shared struggle is what allows for a queer male to take over the role of *femme fatale* in post-modern cinema, for women have begun to adapt the language of patriarchy for themselves and are no longer implicit about their desires—like the *femme fatale*.

CONCLUSION

La mala educación is not Almodóvar’s first venture into film noir and the *femme fatale* aesthetic. However, it is the first one he has specifically mentioned as film noir, and not only does he state that it is noir, it is also the first one that strictly adheres to the conventions of the classic genre, both in narrative and mise-en-scène. While many of his films feature dark narratives and transgressive and peripheral identities, *La mala educación* recreates the genre and offers a modern version. Zahara and Juan are not the only new versions of *femme fatales* to have appeared in Almodóvar’s films; however, they are the most sophisticated and accomplished.

Almodóvar realized that in order to insert the *femme fatale* in his cinema in an evolved form, he needed to rethink gender and sexuality. In *La mala educación*, he gives rebirth to the classic *femme fatale* in male form, for now it is the queer community that is fighting against repression. Juan is struggling with the same issues as the *femme fatale* struggled with in the 1940s and 1950s, the only difference being biological, as he was born male. However, gender is a social construct and sexuality is fluid, and Juan’s crime can only be explained by not adhering to the cultural norms. These representations or culturally “dissident” identities, as Pastor (2006: 15) points out, “never reveal themselves lacking identity; on the contrary, Almodóvar designs a variety of characters, distinctive for their versatile combination of sexuality and gender, in order to illustrate aspects which need to be re-evaluated”.

Unlike the late 20th century versions, this new *femme fatale* is still struggling for the same rights as “her” classic counterpart, and although Juan, and Zahara in Almodóvar’s film, are biologically male, their struggle to identify themselves within patriarchy and the queer community mirrors the struggles of women prior to the mid-20th century feminist

movement. Without a similar formal movement, the queer community remains the “other” in dominant society, much like the classic *femme fatale*. Pedro Almodóvar’s *La mala educación* reveals that the modern *femme fatale* has become an integral part of the *queer* community, thus proposing a novel filmic platform of queering gender for the vindication of the rights of peripheral and culturally stigmatized identities.

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NOTES

1. “Stigma is defined as a discredited or discreditable status that is socially shared and personally relevant” (Ainlay and Crosby, 1986; Goffman, 1963). “Discredited status refers to possessing a stigma where differentness is visible or perceivable in social interaction” (Kahn, 2011: 5).
2. This castrated mother should not be confused with Freud’s female castration. Although related, this castrated mother that Stables refers to is “castrated” because she has lost a husband or child and retaliates upon those she blames for the loss.
3. The *fatale* of the 1940s and 50s used her sexuality as a tool. She had ambitions but was unable to achieve anything on her own and so she bribed men with her sexuality.
4. For nearly the first half of the film, Bernal’s character is called Ignacio or Ángel (Juan’s stage name). However, it is revealed that he was posing as his death brother Ignacio and although he goes by many names in the film, I will refer to him as Juan.
5. Although Berenguer is introduced to the film’s audience as Father Manolo, I will refer to the priest as Manolo and the man who left the priesthood as Berenguer.
6. This is all revealed in the epilogue to the film when the future of the characters is revealed in text before the credits roll.
7. Martínez-Expósito and Fouz-Fernández (2007) offer an enlightening exploration on how contemporary Spanish films have contributed to the reshaping of the complex and diverse notions of masculinity. See also Alfredo Martínez-Expósito (2004: 113–26).
8. It is interesting that as a character who so desperately wants to escape his brother and his past, that he creates the stage name Ángel, would then borrow his brother’s name, story, and life. Juan introduces himself to Enrique as Ignacio, his brother and the director’s childhood friend, but quickly informs Enrique that he has created a stage name. He both loathes himself and his past, yet is unable to fully leave it behind.

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