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## CLICHÉS THAT REMAIN: THE CONSIDERATION OF FEMALE DOMESTIC WORK IN RECENT AUDIOVISUAL PRODUCTION IN SPAIN

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**Abstract:** Domestic work performed by women has traditionally been narrated from an eminently male perspective. Jobs related to the home environment have always aroused interest in cinematographic fiction. In Spain it has been expressed from certain stereotypes that seem to persist to this day. In this work, through the analysis of four productions, the survival of some topics has been verified that are strengthened with the recurring projection in series and films that possibly influence the configuration of our collective imagination. At a time when care and attention are priorities in our social environment, the image conveyed by the selected pieces seems disconcerting.

**Keywords:** Woman, housework, values, stereotypes, gender.

## INTRODUCTION

This work intends to analyze how people who perform domestic work in private homes are represented -especially in fiction programs such as movies or series- from the cultural production offered in Spain through cinema or television.

The starting hypothesis maintains that this representation of domestic work is based on long-standing topics in our country, which seem to persist: for example, the fact that the majority are women, or that they do not know their profession and that they come from a simple social background. or humble. These are recurring a priori perceptions when considering this type of work.

Although the representations made of those who deal with cleaning and care tasks in private homes are analyzed, without distinction of gender, the vast majority of those who perform such jobs are women. For this reason, the gender perspective is highlighted, as well as the influence of other aspects such as social class, whether they are migrants or circumstances such as the level of education achieved.

The object of study is made up of two films and two series, projected in this country that directly address the subject matter under study. The films *Chica para todo* from 1963 and ``Roma`` from 2018 and the series ``La casa de los Martínez`` from 1966 and *Downton Abbey* broadcast on TVE 2022. The aim is to make an approximation from the selected sample, to the vision of domestic work in different social sectors. Jobs related to the home environment have always aroused interest in cinematographic fiction.

It is based on the consideration of cinema as a reflection of a part of society, of cultures, identities and experiences, which helps to improve historical knowledge about certain processes and events of the past. It is about using a descriptive methodology from audiovisual sources for historical reconstruction and to obtain knowledge about this aspect of our culture.

Cultural representation as a category of analysis allows us to draw conclusions related to the evolution of the representation of female identity on screens, which has not been as revolutionary as presumed. Fundamental aspects are collected in the configuration of the social imaginary about gender and domestic work.

## THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK. DOMESTIC STAFF AND TELEVISION

This paper has two major sections. The first is an overview of the clichés or female stereotypes related to domestic work. And the second part analyzes in detail the evolution and persistence of certain stereotypes in today's cinematographic cultural representation.

Addressing the representation of domestic staff in television and cinematographic fiction supposes, in the first place, attending to the characteristics of the historical moment, particularly of the so-called Information

Society. At this stage, as Vivas (1999) points out, we are witnessing a change in the status of knowledge and, on the other, “the radical transformation of the domestic sphere, marked by the telepresence of the public and characterized by the use of interaction technologies distance social.”

Regarding television, Bourdieu pointed out already in 2007 that this medium has profoundly altered the functioning of universes as different as those of art, literature, philosophy or politics and even justice and science. In this regard, and precisely in that same year, Medrano, Cortés and Palacios emphasized that screens, and specifically television, “have been incorporated into our lives, homes, social relationships, and free time, partly modifying our behavior.” (2007). An issue that the authors link to areas of development of the subject and the formation of attitudes, values and norms.

In relation, therefore, to the values that can be extracted from television programming, while researchers such as Bartolomé Crespo (2004) allude to mental agility -fundamentally through contests-, scientific rigor, respect for heritage or the solidarity as some of these parameters, other academics go further and point out directly that it is possible to teach and learn values through television (Medrano, Cortés and Palacios, 2007).

If we start from the conception that the broadcasters are the owners of the television we consume (Quintana, 2005), the opportunity to analyze how people who perform domestic work in private homes are represented –especially in fiction programs such as films or series - based on the cultural production offered in Spain through cinema or television.

In this context, it must be remembered that television stands out as a means of communication that is “omnipresent in family life” (San Martín-Pascal, 2005). Therefore,

the aforementioned author points out, this support, “from its privileged position as a communication channel that reaches millions of people” must fulfill the important role of transmitting content of a formative and educational nature (2005). This if what is sought is to contribute to the strengthening of a better society, to the elevation of culture, to the harmonious development of childhood, to preserve traditions, national identity and affirm family ties, universal principles and values and human dignity. (Núñez-Orellana, 2005).

But it must be noted that television is positioned not only as one of the main sources of information but also of leisure, so that the support reinforces the socialization processes “in the sense that through the representation it offers of society, it modifies the very conception that the spectator has of it” (López and Cuenca, 2005). So much so that it is assumed that television plays an important role in both individual and social development: “We live in a world where everything goes very fast, accelerated, and where television contributes greatly to spreading values and visions of reality that are adopted as behavior guidelines” (Núñez, Benítez and Liébana, 2005).

And this also occurs in the new communication landscape. In this media context, “characterized by the fragmentation and disaffection of audiences towards traditional television, the incorporation of innovative strategies that meet the demands of their audiences and connect with them is urgent” (Crespo, Martínez and Campos, 2017). At a time when the representation of women in the different channels continues to generate research and studies (Regueira, Alonso and Davila, 2020) regarding television and its relationship with education (Torneró and Torneró, 1994).

Precisely in relation to the representation

of women and their roles in television and film fiction, recent studies bring to the table the “coexistence of stereotypes linked to the traditional representations of women’s jobs (jobs related to customer service and care of people) with other highly qualified professions”. However, the empowerment of women with positions of responsibility is frequently associated “with a negative characterization of the character, while the problems of reconciling family and professional roles are systematically avoided” (Lacalle and Gómez, 2016).

This is a question that can also be extended to advertising itself, formats in which the content “of action figures contains a higher percentage of male characters associated with values such as competence, individualism, ability and physical development, creativity, power and strength, as stated by Martínez, Nicolás and Ojeda (2013). However, doll advertisements have a higher percentage of female children’s characters and these are associated with the values of beauty and maternity (Martínez, Nicolás and Ojeda, 2013).

Therefore, the combination of social networks, second screens and television “has led to the appearance of a new relationship between viewers and television in which the usual roles of the communication paradigm have been altered”, according to Quintas and González (2014). ). But if the representation of women in the home is attended through television, “the interpretation of domestic work and care is related to the assignment of gender roles to men and women and to the sexual division of labor”, states Cabrera (2016). Thus, the author maintains that the reproduction of stereotypes and gender roles is evident: women appear dedicated exclusively to the home with the sole desire to satisfy the needs of the family, while personal interest disappears in these visual forms of

communication.

## **REPRESENTATION OF DOMESTIC EMPLOYEES**

### **METHODOLOGY**

In order to analyze how people who do domestic work in private homes are represented -in fiction programs such as movies or series- based on the cultural production offered in Spain through cinema or television, a research methodology has been used. descriptive analysis. Descriptive analysis is a powerful tool that helps to reveal the mental paths followed by researchers. The movement of thought that it reflects forms a basic engine for reviewing the status of one’s own theoretical constructions when it comes to doing science.

In the present work, we wanted to follow the path that would allow us to expand the limits of formal tools and include as necessary the preliminary conditions that descriptive analysis allows us to establish, better delimiting the scope of scientific constructions and verifying the knowledge proposed from of what might be called a standard methodological test.

Common sense, shared knowledge, science, objectivity, are nothing more than ways of placing oneself in the world to try to understand it, but without forgetting that it is done from a particular context, in a given culture and according to the criteria of a scientific community, which says what is qualified and accepted as such to acquire proof value. This methodology is usually used for historical reconstruction and to obtain knowledge, in this case about a very specific aspect of the evolution of our culture.

The starting hypothesis was that the cultural representation of domestic work is based on long-standing topics in our country, which seem to persist: for example, the fact

that the majority are women, or that they are unaware of their profession and that they come from an extraction simple or humble social. These are recurring a priori perceptions when considering this type of work.

The field of study was established after locating the set of audiovisual productions in our country in which the parameters of our study were reflected. As a sample for it, two films were selected (``Chica para todo`` from 1963 and ``Roma`` from 2018) and two series, projected in Spain: (``La casa de los Martínez`` from 1966 Downton Abbey, broadcast on TVE 2022). Based on this sample, an approximation has been made to the vision of domestic work existing in contemporary society that is transmitted through the productions studied.

### **CULTURAL REPRESENTATION OF DOMESTIC WORK IN THE CINEMA (1960- 2022)**

For the representation of domestic workers that our collective imagination preserves, some analysis categories have been established that have been identified later in the detailed study carried out on the four audiovisual products selected as a sample.

From the outset, it is interesting to establish the difference between the concepts of work and employment. When talking about work, reference is made to the tasks that are carried out to survive: washing, cooking, taking care of children, harvesting, producing food, etc. While the reference to employment refers to all jobs in which there is a monetary income, employers, insurance, retirement and labor laws that regulate it.

Usually, domestic work, maintenance of the home, aimed at satisfying multiple needs, has not been valued like other jobs, it has tended to lack social prestige and even many of the housewives themselves do not seem to consider it a job properly. However, since

the middle of the last century, it began to be questioned why society places less value on these activities than on male ones if women contribute to the functioning of society as much as men. The unequal valuation of the activities has led to the establishment of a certain hierarchy, which expressed an unequal distribution of power between men and women, and which was disadvantageous for them.

For a more detailed analysis of the situation reflected in the films and series in the sample, the following template has been followed, which includes some of the items indicated in the working hypothesis:

As it can be seen in the four tabs, the productions of the last century transmit traditional values with an explicit moral, while the most current productions reflect other values without decisively affecting the typification of archetypes that are represented around domestic work.

### **BRIEF DESCRIPTIVE ANALYSIS OF THE FOUR AUDIOVISUAL PRODUCTS**

The most visible results obtained from the descriptive analysis carried out on these four audiovisual products are presented below, as sample buttons of two cultural stages with a large intermediate time lapse.

The two movies:

a) ``Chica para todo`` (1963)

The '60s were marked in Spain by the visit of President Eisenhower. The Economic Stabilization Plan was going to lead to a new stage beyond the internal economic model and the autarky of the Regime, with the revaluation of the currency, the liberalization of trade and investment in the foreign market as hallmarks; With the doors open, Spain began to get rich and the first foreigners began to land, responsible for the most important

TITLE: CHICA PARA TODO YEAR: CINEMA 1963	
Woman/	Yes
Humble origin/	Yes
No qualification/	Yes
ignorant/	Yes
Migrant/	No
Social progress/	Yes
Secondary character/	No
Plot line/	Yes
Social borders/	Yes
Role to which it responds/	Easy woman to fool
values /	Traditional, with a moral
Dramatic importance of the character	Protagonist
Spatial situation	Out of home

Table 1 Source: own elaboration

TITLE: ROMA YEAR: CINEMA 2018	
Woman/	Yes
Humble origin/	Yes
Without qualification /	Yes
Ignorant/	Yes
Migrant/	Yes
Social progress/	Yes
Plot line/	Yes
Secondary character /	No
Social borders /	Yes
Role to which it responds /	DFamily care
values /	Hope, friendship, trust
Dramatic importance of the character	Protagonist
Spatial situation	Home

Table 2. Source: own elaboration

TITLE: DOWNTON ABBEY YEAR OF ISSUE: SERIE TVE 2022	
Woman	Yes
Humble origin/	Yes
No qualification/	No (with the exception of kitchen helpers)
Ignorant/	Yes
Migrant/	No
Social progress/	Yes
Plot line/	No
Secondary character/	Yes
Social borders/	Yes
Role to which it responds/	Housekeeper, maid, cook, kitchen helper/family care
Values /	Gratitude, solidarity
Dramatic importance of the carácter	Main
Spatial situation	Home

Table 3. Source: own elaboration

TITLE: LA CASA DE LOS MARTÍNEZ YEAR OF ISSUE: SERIE TVE1965	
Woman/	Yes
Humble origin/	Yes
Without qualification /	Yes
Ignorant/	Yes
Migrant/	No
Social progress/	Yes
Plot line/	No
Secondary character/	Yes
Social borders/	Yes
Role to which it responds/	Family care
values /	Traditional, with a moral
Importancia dramática del personaje	Main
Spatial situation	Home

Table 4. Source: own elaboration



source of income: tourism.

On the other hand, there are other types of migrations. Those that, in constant growth, are carried out from small towns and municipalities to the capital; many went to try their luck. In this context, Mariano Ozores, with a script by Ramón Pujante, made a film about the situation, starring Gracita Morales, an actress who, thanks to her charisma and her inimitable voice, began her career on the cinematographic scene.

“Chica para todo “ begins, like many subsequent films, in a traditional town with the march to the city of a girl: the arrival in the capital and the non-adaptation to its rhythm and atmosphere. It takes up the concept that Ozu had developed ten years earlier in “Tokyo Tales”. The journey begins with Petra, ready to make her way in life, who has the help of her friend Adela to do so, and Javier, a friend from town who is going to do military service and who is secretly in love with her.

As soon as she arrives in Madrid, Petra, like all those like her, is dazzled, without noticing the dangers that she entails. The illusion is quickly undone by the classic cheeky scammers, who manage to swindle her, and a middle-class couple, who take advantage of her naivety to turn her into a servant: as it turns out, not even the place is as safe as it seemed not one is enriched upon arrival; The plot follows the steps of the innocent village girl, who begins a series of adventures which will show her the reality of the authentic environment into which she has thrown herself.

Petra shows up, like all emigrants, with high hopes; a girl in the crowded streets of the city who discovers new customs to conform to if she wants to be recognized, how to adopt the liberal ways of being of the young, who drink and smoke, who dress provocatively in the foreign style. And she allows herself to be charmed by deceitful banalities: her friend

Adela hers, the ease with which she earns money and dates boys; the same society, with television, the glamor of nightclubs, etc.

The film includes as the only real element, in a cynical and superficial environment, the love of Javier, who realizes before she does the mistake that has been to leave the humility and warmth of the town; the only possible solution to so much sadness will be to flee again. Scenes are included in which the upper-middle class is ridiculed with a scathing look at the society of the moment.

Somewhat irregular, both in plot and in tones, “Chica para Todo” meant the first important role for a Gracita Morales. She is funny, nice and naive, she repeats the role of the long-suffering maid that made her famous in the country. Throughout the film, employers are presented as victims who suffer the whims and whims of their housekeepers.

#### b) *“Roma” (2018)*

“Roma” is a film by Alfonso Cuarón that premiered in Venice and soon won a Golden Lion. Purely minimalist, all silence, everydayness and even trifle. You could say that nothing happens in “Roma”. Apparently. Because what happens in “Roma” is a person’s childhood. And, around that vital time, the reflection of his family, his mother and the people who care for him are noticed.

Cuarón builds the story from his experiences as a child in the Roma neighborhood, in Mexico City, and the key role that three women played in his life; her mother, her grandmother and Chloe, a young caretaker who helps with the housework and who, as in so many cases, is a second mother. Chloe’s character is the big find in this movie.

Roma presents, in the midst of the insignificant details of ordinary life, the feeling, the emotion, the meaning that turns a fight, a caress, a small accident or a hug into something epic, into something big. Because



children live their history on a History scale. Their games in the schoolyard are Champions League finals and their fights between brothers, world wars. A snub can break their hearts and a piece of candy can reconcile them with the Universe. To reflect childhood with realism and without sweeteners, sensitivity, talent and humility are needed to shoot with the heart at the level of the child.

On the other hand, this childhood that Cuarón describes is full of difficulties... but also daily difficulties. We have seen on the big screen children facing crime, abuse, or at least death. There is little of this in ``Roma``. Pain and drama slip through the cracks of the familiar, of the intimate, of what is accepted as a toll by those who know that to get to paradise you have to go through this valley of tears. For this reason, and because it is full of love and company, the pain of ``Roma`` is not aggressive, it does not scream, it is a dull pain, quiet, and, in a certain way, hopeful.

And there is hope because there are women. ``Roma`` is a hymn to women. To the strong woman who, being a mother or not, unites people, sustains the family and is capable of protecting innocence even at the cost of her own blood. A woman who is capable of healing a wound, comforting a cry or saving a life. A woman who, as one of the protagonists says – “disabuse yourself, women are always alone” – can be alone, but she is always accompanying.

In ``Roma`` men are secondary characters, they are just shadows; consistency, the soil where childhood takes root always has a woman's name. And as if that were not enough, this lesson in humanity, really, in understanding what it means to live, Alfonso Cuarón wraps it in authentic cinematographic poetry, in frames that are art, in sequence shots that are narratively worth what a good novel, in a absolutely expressive black and white. It is understood that Cuarón says that

``Roma`` was thought for the big screen. It is not for nothing that it is a majestic, wise, eternal film –like the city.

In both films the migrant and rural origin of the employees coincides. It reflects very well their cultural origin and the topics from which they start as a priori concepts (woman, immigrant, humble origin, submissive...) are collected and persist, and traditional values are present in both.

In these films there is a different exaltation of national identity. The representation of Spain as a bulwark of Christian and feminine morality in the face of foreign cultures is a proven fact in both films. These stereotypes of what is Spanish as opposed to what is foreign show the concern that both directors have for their own cultural identity, which they see as threatened after the openness produced in the sixties.

The two series:

a) *La casa de los Martínez (1965)*

The series constitutes a faithful portrait of the Spanish society of those years and serves as a chronicle on television made in Spain. Naivety and ignorance come together in the new decade in the cult of television. In most homes, it is part of the uses and customs of society. The protagonists of the series were actors, presenters and singers who slipped into the lives of ordinary families: Martínez, Fernández, García etc. Tourism was beginning to balance the balance of payments and there was talk of speaking Spanish and learning from the stars of American cinema.

It describes, with little luck, various episodes starring the Martínez. The greatest interest of the series was possibly presenting episodic appearances by celebrities of the time. Gracita Morales, Tip and Coll (separately), or Tony Leblanc, as himself, surrounded by his large family.

It had the merit of offering the public of

that time a situation comedy in which the inevitable role of the domestic worker appears, caricatured on occasions and interpreted as usual by Gracita Morales in the role best played by her. Once again the clichés are reproduced one by one and the female figure that embodies them is stigmatized.

#### b) *Downtown Abbey* (2021)

This is a stylish, well-written and well-acted British series that received six Emmy Awards in its first season. Well received by critics and the public. With a quality cast in which the elderly Maggie Smith stands out, who turns each of her scenes into little jewels, true recitals of pouting, fussing. TVE replaced it in 2022. The script twists, with very careful plots for each of the characters, ensure that interest does not wane. And the great merit is that the resources (the triggers, the twists) are original and well worked.

The plot focuses on the life of lords and servants in a mansion in the English countryside, in the days before World War I. A palatial house, inheritance, arranged marriage, honor, the heir, classism, arrogance, true class... are concepts that refer to clichés and commonplaces that are presented at a good level in each chapter. Romantic love stories develop where the class difference is not an obstacle to what is considered the goal of every woman: marriage.

*Downton Abbey* is a series about the imposing palace decorated with exquisite taste, and elegant and varied costumes worn by its characters. But above all, the portrait of its characters is luminous. Its director Fellowes subtly outlines the many faces of the human soul. The characters and plots are believable and human, something that makes the series elevate the dignity of the story.

Certainly much of this greatness is due to clever dialogue. And in that sense, it is smart that none of the multiple plots started is

closed.

The opposite representation, present in both series, the exotic culture against the Spanish one, both on a moral, religious or economic level, is one of the typical manifestations and reactions to contemplate when a social group confronts other cultures.

In all the products analyzed, fundamental aspects are collected in the configuration of the social imaginary about gender and domestic work. Using cultural representation as a category of analysis has allowed us to obtain conclusions related to the evolution of the representation of female identity on screens, which has not been as revolutionary as presumed.

## DISCUSSION

Precisely in relation to the representation of women and their roles in television and film fiction, recent studies bring to the table the “coexistence of stereotypes linked to the traditional representations of women’s jobs (jobs related to customer service and care of people) with other highly qualified professions”. However, the empowerment of women with positions of responsibility is frequently associated “with a negative characterization of the character, while the problems of reconciling family and professional roles are systematically avoided” (Lacalle and Gómez, 2016).

The combination of social networks, second screens and television “has led to the appearance of a new relationship between viewers and television in which the usual roles of the communication paradigm have been altered”, understand Quintas and González (2014). But if the representation of women in the home is attended through television, “the interpretation of domestic work and care is related to the assignment of gender roles to men and women and to the sexual division of labor”, states Cabrera (2016). Thus, the author

maintains that the reproduction of stereotypes and gender roles is evident: women appear dedicated exclusively to the home with the sole desire to satisfy the needs of the family, while personal interest disappears in these visual forms of communication.

Faced with these options, the work developed in previous pages allows us to glimpse the persistence of the topic. It seems that there are concepts established a priori and the investigation finds what it intends to find. In 2022, presumably outdated stereotypes continue to be maintained as a domestic, ignorant, rural, humble and submissive woman.

## CONCLUSIONS

The representation of domestic care workers present in the analyzed audiovisual products is constructed based on very generalized topics. What has been interesting in the descriptive observation carried out is the persistence, intended or not, of topics against which contemporary society seemed to be immunized. And in some cases such persistence is even worrying.

\*In all the productions, reference is made to traditional domestic work exclusively represented by internal workers, a modality that was in clear decline in development Spain, while despite the proliferation of external or “temporary” employees, they are barely mentioned.

\*Domestic work is reflected from an internal vision, when they appear as protagonists, with the personal and emotional problems of these workers. When they are presented as main characters but not protagonists, the archetype is supported that someone falls in love with them and changes their social situation.

\*The classic roles assigned to each sex

are reproduced, which contributes to perpetuating the feminine domestic ideal that is very present in Spanish society. The ultimate goal of every woman was to get married and start a family, to dedicate herself body and soul to household chores. A recurring topic is to present domestic workers as young people, who conclude their activity when they get married.

\*These employees present themselves as being discriminated against because they work in multiple households, and they are basically poor women. Thus, caring for the domestic environment is decontextualized as professional work that allows personal development and improvement.

\* Domestic workers are represented as characters from emigration, with little initiative, easy to influence and manipulable. This intimate representation of the social drama of emigration falls on these employees, with a traumatic effect.

\*Another archetype that remains is the ignorance of the profession of these workers when they arrive in the urban world. This disqualification may originate from the reiteration with which the rural world is represented as a backward and ignorant space.

\*The products analyzed offer two very different ideas or representations of domestic service. One corresponds to the bourgeoisie and the wealthy class who portray the profession from an external approach based on their own ideological precepts; and another with the professional middle classes that present a modernizing impulse.

\*When domestic care workers appear in public spaces, they appear in their

clothing or uniform, which may be in contradiction with being ashamed of their profession or hiding it, as can be seen in some cases (``Chica para todo``). The brief tour carried out in these pages

allows, however, to verify the historical value of these productions that come to corroborate the role of cinema in the transmission of some stereotypes about this work when it is made by women.

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