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## Music and Migratory Subjects in Almodóvar's *Todo sobre mi madre*, *Hable con ella*, and *Volver*

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Since the end of Francisco Franco's dictatorship (1939–1975), Spain has transformed itself from an isolated, fascist state dominated by the promotion of *hispanidad* and national Catholicism (Corkill 49) to a country that hosts nearly 5.7 million international residents (Deveny, *Migration* 4). Pedro Almodóvar, who began his film career at the time of Spain's transition to democracy, has steadily responded to the country's changes through his examination of identity, sexuality, repression, and desire (Acevedo-Muñoz 1–2). The director has distinguished himself partly by his continuous use of international music in his films, in a way that corresponds to Spain's development into a more tolerant, liberal, multicultural state (Kinder, "Pleasure" 37). *Todo sobre mi madre* (1999) stands out among Almodóvar's films as the first one to take place in Barcelona and for his incorporation of African music. Considering the director's unprecedented recognition of regional Spanish and international culture, it may appear that after *Todo sobre mi madre* he retreats into familiarity by continuing to film in Madrid. However, this paper argues that *Todo sobre mi madre* serves as the director's point of departure for an ongoing portrayal of a transnational Spain that he continues in *Hable con ella* (2002) and *Volver* (2006). Through a focus on Almodóvar's use of music and the portrayal of migratory subjects, this paper will examine the cultural interfaces that Almodóvar highlights to represent Spain's fluid identity.<sup>1</sup>

*Todo sobre mi madre*, *Hable con ella*, and *Volver* are unique for the director's portrayal of transitory subjects and how he accentuates their journeys with international music. *Todo sobre mi madre* narrates the experiences of the Argentinean immigrant Manuela who, after the tragic loss of her son, travels from Madrid to Barcelona in search of Esteban-Lola, her ex-husband, now a transvestite.<sup>2</sup> She needs to inform Esteban-Lola of their son's death. In the interim, she reunites with her old friend Agrado and establishes bonds with the ailing nun Rosa and the actress Huma Rojo. Almodóvar's use of the Senegalese song "Tajabone" at critical moments in the film communicates to the audience that Manuela finds herself in a much-changed Barcelona.

The portrayal of such diversity continues in *Hable con ella*, a film that presents a series of encounters that includes the friendship between an Argentinean immigrant and travel writer, Marco, and a nurse, Benigno; the romantic relationship between Marco and the bullfighter Lydia; and the obsession that Benigno has for his patient Alicia. The title of



the movie comes from the advice that Benigno offers Marco when he expresses his desire to communicate with Lydia, who remains comatose after a near-death accident in the bullring. Marco must also contend with his discovery that, shortly before the accident, Lydia had returned to her former lover, El Niño de Valencia. In this film, the characters' defiance of gender roles and the incorporation of Mexican and Brazilian music problematize traditional Spanish identity.

*Volver* narrates the protagonist Raimunda's struggles as a working-class mother, a typical urban subject who often travels throughout Madrid and makes frequent visits to her hometown in Castilla-La Mancha. Almodóvar further emphasizes Raimunda's migratory identity when we see her mopping floors at Barajas Airport, a site that conveys mobility and the underlying instability of her life as she struggles to support her family. The murder of her husband Paco at the hands of her daughter Paula, in self-defense, initiates a series of events, including the "return" of her mother, Irene. The lyrics of the eponymous song "Volver" highlight Raimunda's reunion with her mother, and the music's origins reveal a melding of Hispanic cultures.

Néstor Canclini defines this blending of cultures as hybridization: a process that begins with a delocalization of a culture's natural relation to a specific geographic territory and results in the re-localization of that culture to a new setting (229). The displacement and repositioning of music outside of its place of origin parallel the migration of Almodóvar's characters, all of whom have left their homes to relocate. When subjects migrate, they bring traditions to new places that soften borders between countries and help redefine antiquated perceptions of nation, citizenship, and identity (10). Almodóvar has always striven to problematize identity, and he challenges the notion of Spanish tradition by referencing international cultures.

The migration of Almodóvar's characters facilitates cultural hybridization and resonates with the constant movement of the postmodern subject. The director first introduced internal migration in *¿Qué he hecho para merecer esto?* (1984) and *La flor de mi secreto* (1995), in which the characters return to their *pueblos* to recuperate from city life. However, Almodóvar's more recent films demonstrate the impossibility of such homecomings as characters negotiate multiple identities and roles that require them to travel. Iain Chambers's notion of migrancy sheds light on the experience of Almodóvar's characters in that it addresses the fluidity of identity that arises from constant movement:

Always in transit, the promise of a homecoming—completing the story, domesticating the detour—becomes an impossibility...to come from elsewhere, from "there" and not "here" and hence to be simultaneously "inside" and "outside" the situation at hand is to live in the intersection of histories and memories. (4)

In *Todo sobre mi madre*, *Hable con ella*, and *Volver*, all characters migrate in some form, regardless of whether they are native Spaniards or immigrants, because in the postmodern world travel has become an inevitable necessity. All subjects have different roles and responsibilities that require them to journey between locations, whether it is within a specific region or from one country to another.



Along their migratory paths, Almodóvar's characters find themselves in locations known as contact zones: "[P]laces where cultures meet, clash, and grapple with each other" (Pratt 11). In her study *Imperial Eyes*, Mary Louise Pratt utilizes this term to describe encounters between the colonizers and the colonized; I borrow the concept to analyze how Almodóvar unites subjects of discordant identities and juxtaposes different cultures and customs. Characters find themselves in contact zones—both likely and unlikely—as they migrate for work, for love, or to escape persecution, poverty, or a former identity. The director's concentration on such encounters brings to the forefront the interactions of what would otherwise be dismissed or overlooked characters (e.g., prostitutes, transvestites, single mothers, and psychopaths). Likewise, the consideration that Almodóvar gives such characters draws the viewer's attention to the places, or contact zones, in which they intermingle; as a result, he converts apparently insignificant locations (e.g., a cemetery, restaurant, or patio) into important areas of encounter.

Almodóvar's incorporation of music heightens the significance of contact zones by imparting meaning on the narrative according to the way the characters or spectators experience it. In her study *Unheard Melodies*, Claudia Gorbman identifies two types of film music: diegetic music (which the characters hear or play) and non-diegetic music (which the characters do not hear or play). Gorbman contends that the technical apparatus of non-diegetic music must be invisible and remain subordinate to the dialogue and visuals, "the primary vehicles of the narrative" (73). Almodóvar uses both diegetic and non-diegetic songs in *Todo sobre mi madre*, *Hable con ella*, and *Volver* that are "compiled music," music that existed previous to the film (Kassabian 2). If we follow a traditional interpretation of the use of film music, it would not be possible to consider non-diegetic songs ("Tajabone" from *Todo sobre mi madre*, "Por Toda a Minha Vida" from *Hable con ella*, and "Las espigadoras" from *Volver*) as part of the film narrative because they are "external to the story world" (Chion 73). However, as Anahid Kassabian argues, "the distinction between diegetic and non-diegetic music...obscures music's role in producing the diegesis" (42). For Kassabian, the "dichotomous schema" of music being "in or outside of" the diegesis is insufficient, and she argues that all music in film, whether diegetic or non-diegetic, serves three purposes: to identify, set a mood, or make a commentary (56–59).<sup>3</sup> Ben Winters also argues against the diegetic versus non-diegetic categorization of music and suggests that critics employ the use of the terms "extra or intra-diegetic" rather than non-diegetic (230–232). Winters states: "[S]o-called non-diegetic music is often just as essential to the identity of the fictional narrative space...therefore, we must recognize that such music also contributes to a film's 'creative arsenal'" (230, 232). I incorporate the term extra-diegetic in my analysis of "Tajabone," "Por Toda a Minha Vida," and "Las espigadoras" to show how these songs, despite their placement "outside" the film, inevitably enrich the diegesis. This interpretation elevates the songs' significance to the same level of importance as all the other elements of the *mise-en-scène* in Almodóvar's films.

Thus, I will analyze *Todo sobre mi madre*, *Hable con ella*, and *Volver* in terms of how the director incorporates music while depicting migratory subjects as part of his cinematic interpretation of contemporary Spain.



## *Todo sobre mi madre*

The first twenty minutes of the film introduce Manuela and Esteban and establish the circumstances that will lead to Manuela's departure from Madrid. Esteban's fatal accident occurs on the night that he and Manuela attend a performance of *A Street Car Named Desire*. The *mise-en-scène* of streets and moving vehicles anticipates Esteban's tragic death, which occurs immediately after mother and son exit the theater at the end of the performance. When Esteban sees the actress Huma Rojo enter a taxi, he immediately runs after her to get her autograph, but his recklessness causes him to be fatally struck by the vehicle. One of the most memorable scenes of *Todo sobre mi madre* occurs when Manuela runs to her wounded son, whose body has crashed into the windshield of the taxi. The absence of sound, with the exception of the voice-over of Manuela's screams, accentuates her horror as she runs towards Esteban's body. The day of the accident marks one of Manuela's final days in Madrid before she sets off to Barcelona to tell her former husband what has happened.

Manuela's arrival in Barcelona constitutes a turning point in the film because the city becomes a place of reunion and recovery. To accompany Manuela on her train ride, Almodóvar uses the song "Tajabone" as a sound bridge that connects the train tunnel to an aerial shot of the city. Almodóvar explains his reasoning for selecting this particular song: "I didn't know what the lyrics meant but from the moment I heard it, I knew that that song was the perfect cloak with which the city of Barcelona would cover and protect the broken woman."<sup>4</sup> Almodóvar's use of "Tajabone" functions to create a "mood" (Kassabian 56), a particularly aesthetic atmosphere that has elicited much critical attention. However, few critics have investigated the cultural significance of the song. Kathleen Vernon observes that the song lyrics in the Senegalese language of Wolof combine with the familiar sounds of the harmonica and guitar to form a hybridization that resonates with the transsexual bodies of Esteban-Lola and Agrado (55). Mark Allinson gives brief details of the song's context and explains that "Tajabone" refers to a Muslim celebration for children (198). In fact, "Tajabone" commemorates the Muslim New Year, when both children and adults dress in clothes of the opposite gender and visit neighboring homes in search of sweets.<sup>5</sup> Although Almodóvar did not know about the song's references to gender performance, a common theme in his films, certainly its meaning would not be lost on the film's entire audience, which itself would be multi-ethnic and global. In this instance, music establishes a contact zone between different members of Almodóvar's audience. The beauty of "Tajabone" draws spectators' attention regardless of their familiarity with the song, but for those who celebrate the Muslim New Year, the motif of cross-dressing becomes evident.

The ready access that the director has to international cultures allows for music, in either deliberate or inadvertent ways, to disseminate traditions and customs from other countries. The song's presence represents two different forms of cultural hybridization.<sup>6</sup> First, the use of a Senegalese song within a Catalanian context unites historically incongruous cultures. Manuela, who has been absent from Barcelona for seventeen years, returns to a city that differs greatly from the one she left. While the nature of Barcelona as a port city has always brought people from different cultures together, the arrival of African immigrants to Spain beginning in the 1980s (Corkill 51) displaced the Eurocentricity that predominated up until that time. Second, the aural marker of "Tajabone" and the visual marker of the Sagrada Familia temple contrast Muslim and Christian tradition. A shot/



counter-shot establishes this distinction when the camera moves from Manuela's taxi to the temple and then back to the taxi window that reflects an image of the structure. The aural-visual juxtaposition presents a hybridization of cultures that reflects Spain's diversity. The presence of music from another country represents the loss of the "natural" relation of culture to a geographic territory and the territorial relocalization of cultural production (Canclini 229).

Familiarity with the meaning of "Tajabone" draws the viewer's attention to the subtle but meaningful presence of African immigrants in two additional scenes, one in a public square and another in a hospital waiting room.<sup>7</sup> Soon after settling in Barcelona, Manuela befriends Rosa, a nun who knows Esteban-Lola through her charity work with local prostitutes and drug addicts. Rosa soon reveals to Manuela that, even though she knew Esteban-Lola was HIV positive, she slept with him and now carries his child. As the camera follows their interaction, it also captures the city's multi-ethnic character through the presence of extras. In the first example, Manuela and Rosa walk through the city's Barri Gòtic, in which various other subjects from diverse cultural backgrounds encounter one another (Amago 15). Samuel Amago describes this scene as a "collage" because Almodóvar combines the image of two Spanish *señoras* with the presence of several presumably African immigrants (17).<sup>8</sup> The combination of international subjects (a rebellious Spanish nun, an Argentinean immigrant, and several African immigrants) in a European city suggests an "appropriation of the streets of the master" (Chambers 23) because the historically dominant subject, the European male, is absent (24).

Almodóvar continues his exploration of marginalized subjects in an additional scene that takes place in a hospital waiting room, in which Manuela's and Rosa's physical location in the foreground of the shot frames the image of a pregnant African woman in the immediate background (Amago 16). The African woman and Rosa carry babies that represent Spain's increased birthrate due to the number of female immigrants having children after their arrival.<sup>9</sup> The African woman's child will presumably be born in Spain but will retain his or her foreign roots. Although Rosa is Spanish, her baby, who will also be called Esteban, has Argentinean roots from his father. We can also presume that Manuela, who will raise the young Esteban, will reinforce this heritage. These children will be part of a multi-ethnic generation that, because of diverse backgrounds, will problematize predetermined codes of nationality and citizenship.

The young Esteban and the anonymous African child represent what Gonzalo Navajas refers to as the "a-national self," a term used to describe individuals whose presence disrupts the division between insiders and outsiders (22). These "new" Spaniards born in Barcelona will identify with several cultures as children of immigrants and will additionally negotiate Spanish and Catalan culture. Almodóvar's use of "Tajabone" and the two scenes that depict the migratory presence in Barcelona address the heterogeneity that exists in large cities throughout Spain and, at least for the director, such diversity is a welcome change from Spain's previous history of exclusion. The city of Barcelona functions as the contact zone for many diverse subjects (transsexuals, nuns, immigrants, single mothers, and babies), and Almodóvar's focus on such marginalized figures legitimizes their presence, bringing the overlooked spaces that they occupy to the forefront.



## *Hable con ella*

Following *Todo sobre mi madre* in 1999, Almodóvar's next film, *Hable con ella*, continues the exploration of diversity with references to Latin American culture. Critiques of *Hable con ella* have focused on the use of music (Deveny, "'Déjenme llorar'"; Vernon) and melodrama (Kinder, "Mad Love"; Kakoudaki), but much can be said about migrancy and hybridization as well. Cultural hybridization is stressed with the diegetic song "Cucurrucucú paloma" and the extra-diegetic song "Por Toda a Minha Vida," while Marco, the Argentinean immigrant who makes a living in Spain as a travel writer, embodies the "flux and fluidity of metropolitan life" (Chambers 92).

When we first see Marco in his apartment, the *mise-en-scène* emphasizes his transitory state with objects that evoke movement: an elliptical machine, a large world map hung on the wall, and a glass table that has bicycle wheels instead of traditional legs. Unlike Lydia and Benigno, who have professions that limit them to specific spaces (the bullring and the hospital, respectively), Marco remains in a constant state of movement. His first journey begins shortly after he sees Lydia on television speaking about her upcoming *corrida*. Her appearance and demeanor immediately intrigue him, and he quickly arranges to interview her. Marco's initial attraction instigates a series of trips, both within Madrid and beyond, that includes pauses or "rest stops" at the bullring where he watches Lydia perform.

Almodóvar establishes the bullring as a significant contact zone between Latin American and Iberian culture and traditional versus contemporary Spain. The director uses the Brazilian song "Por Toda a Minha Vida" during Lydia's bullfight, thus displacing the traditional *paso doble* (Deveny, "'Déjenme llorar'" 77). Similar to "Tajabone" in *Todo sobre mi madre*, "Por Toda a Minha Vida" in *Hable con ella* does not accentuate the tradition or culture associated with the *mise-en-scène*. The placement of a Brazilian song within a Spanish context displaces customary practice and the authority that a particular country holds concerning bullfighting. A bullring need not be an exclusive space reserved for the proliferation of a particular culture but can exist as a site where various cultures intermingle.

As an extra-diegetic song, "Por Toda a Minha Vida" functions to "engage the audience" (Winters 232) rather than the characters in the scene. Nonetheless, the song accentuates the love triangle between Marco, Lydia, and El Niño de Valencia. The lyrics about sacrifice and surrender underscore Lydia's perspective on love and, as a consequence, the music "captures character subjectivity" (Winters 234). Almodóvar explains in the film commentary that he wanted to use an unexpected song to create a more intimate sequence: "No quería mostrar los toros como un espectáculo masivo, sino un juego brutal, extremo, definitivo entre ese toro, esta torera y los hombres que vamos a ver después." The director achieves his goal by choosing "commentary music" (Kassabian 57) that communicates Lydia's atypical presence in the bullring and her self-sacrificing passion.

Just as "Por Toda a Minha Vida" displaces Spanish tradition, the presence of a female bullfighter in the bullring demystifies the *machismo* associated with this Spanish national pastime (Deveny, "'Déjenme llorar'" 77). Rosario Flores, who plays Lydia, has a lean figure and a gaunt face that Almodóvar compares to the famous bullfighter Manolete when the camera cuts from Lydia to an image of the historic figure. This brief but intriguing sequence establishes a similarity of appearance between the two bullfighters and also recalls the director's commentary on the film *Matador* (1986) about the contradictions he sees in



the *torero*. Almodóvar explains in an interview with Frédéric Strauss that although many Spaniards consider the bullring a masculine space, the bullfighter appears female: "The costume is very tight-fitting, the way he moves in it isn't entirely masculine, he hops about like a ballerina...he teases the bull, seduces it. It's a typical feminine role" (55). Unlike his earlier film *Matador*, in which the femme fatale resembles a bullfighter in the way she kills her victims (by piercing them with a comb), Almodóvar presents an actual female bullfighter in *Hable con ella* to demonstrate the hybridization of gender in this traditionally male role. The scene exhibits the fluidity that exists in contemporary society, where neither gender nor a particular culture dominates a given space.

Almodóvar continues to portray cultural fluidity in another scene in which the Brazilian performer Caetano Veloso sings the Mexican song "Cucurrucú paloma." Almodóvar introduces the song as a sound bridge to connect the hospital room where Marco keeps vigil over the comatose Lydia to a party scene in which he recalls his emotional experience during a musical performance. As the camera travels from the hospital to the party, it first focuses on Veloso's face to provide context, then pans the guests before finally concentrating on Marco and Lydia to establish the parallel between the couple and the sentiment of the song. "Cucurrucú paloma" is a song of identification and mood that creates a romantic ambiance while referencing the recurrent theme of love imbedded throughout *Hable con ella*. The guests, but particularly Marco, appear genuinely moved by the lyrics and the delicate sounds of the violoncello.<sup>10</sup>

The diegetic nature of "Cucurrucú paloma" engages both the characters and the spectators of the film. In this party scene, Almodóvar unites actors and performers from Spain, Argentina, and Brazil in a specific space that celebrates Mexican music. However, the cultural hybridization represented in this scene extends beyond the heritage of the party guests. We have a Brazilian performer singing a *huapango* from the region of Veracruz, Mexico. Veloso's rendition removes "Cucurrucú paloma" from its native mariachi-style rhythm by singing it in a slower tempo that makes the song "more characteristic of the modern Western art song" (Vernon 57). Furthermore, Veloso's presence as a performer known for his fusion of "cultivated and popular traditions" (Canclini 2) reinforces the cultural hybridization. The variety of subjects in this scene and the atypical delivery of this Mexican song emphasize the process of deterritorialization and relocation that brings different subjects together and transforms cultural production (229).

"Cucurrucú paloma" provides a brief respite from the plot before Marco redirects the audience's attention by leaving the party. As he walks away from the gathering, Lydia follows him and asks why he cried the night they first met. He tells Lydia that her emotional reaction to seeing a snake during that evening reminded him of a similar experience when his ex-girlfriend Ángela behaved similarly while traveling through Africa. In a later scene, Marco continues to talk to Lydia about his travels with Ángela as they drive through Andalusia (Lucena and Córdoba) for a wedding and another *corrida*. The moving vehicle accentuates the instability of Marco's previous relationship with Ángela and his present relationship with Lydia. Marco explains that he and Ángela were only compatible while traveling because Madrid was an *infierno* that aggravated her drug habit. Although they spent a total of five years abroad and he wrote seven travel books, their journeys did not resolve their issues. He then decided to bring Ángela home to Spain to live with her



parents in Lucena, but Marco, as an immigrant who makes a living abroad, does not have a “home” and continues to occupy himself with travel. His life remains in a constant state of transition as he adapts to the customs of each host country to be able to advise others on how to negotiate new environments.

In *Hable con ella*, Almodóvar often depicts Marco driving a car. At the end of the film, he sits at the wheel—in a literal and figurative sense—with respect to his friendship with Benigno. The two men first meet when Marco visits Lydia in the same hospital in which Benigno works as a private nurse for the comatose patient Alicia. In contrast to Marco’s mobility throughout the film, Benigno remains isolated within the hospital walls where his growing obsession with Alicia culminates in a deluded belief that they should marry. When Benigno tells Marco about his plans, Marco becomes enraged. Once again, conversations about relationships take place in a moving vehicle, and Marco’s position as the driver emphasizes his authority over Benigno, who clearly needs guidance. Almodóvar’s choice to end the scene before we, as spectators, see them arrive at their destination conveys the uncertainty in the characters’ lives.

Benigno, now in prison for having raped the comatose Alicia, finds escape by reading Marco’s travel guides, in particular his book about Cuba. The last scenes with Benigno resonate with previous moments in the film that reference travel or the blurring of gender roles. Benigno tells Marco that he identifies with the woman shown on the book cover: “[C]uando describes a una mujer apoyada en una ventana frente al Malecón esperando inútilmente viendo como el tiempo pasa sin que pase nada, pensaba que esa mujer era yo.” Given Benigno’s previous display of feminine behavior in caring for Alicia, it is not a surprise that he would identify with a woman. The camera movement during Benigno’s final scene reinforces his identification with the Cuban woman when it pans downward to reveal Marco’s book on Havana. Benigno does not conform to traditional gender roles, and when in crisis, he escapes his present condition with fantasies about an alternative life in a different country.

Benigno, as the principal Spanish male figure in *Hable con ella*, defies the image of the *macho ibérico* with his nurturing personality and lack of sexual experience. Similarly, Lydia contradicts masculine stereotypes with her role as a bullfighter, although she exhibits a certain feminine weakness with her fear of snakes. In contrast to Benigno and Lydia, Marco is the most stable and independent of the three characters, and like his name, which means “frame,” he provides structure for the other characters in the film (Fiddian 143). In *Hable con ella*, Almodóvar represents the immigrant character far more positively than the native Spaniards, Benigno and Lydia, who often depend on Marco. As such, Marco functions similarly to Manuela in *Todo sobre mi madre* because both of these immigrant figures come to the aid of Spaniards. *Todo sobre mi madre* and *Hable con ella* function together to exemplify the director’s inscription of music to depict Spain’s multicultural identity, a theme he continues to explore in *Volver*. However, *Volver* differs from the previous two films in its depiction of xenophobia towards Russian and Chinese immigrants.

## ***Volver***

Of the three films analyzed in this study, *Volver* concentrates the most on regional Spanish culture, but it also maintains a transnational focus through the Cuban immigrant Regina



and the use of a hybridized rendition of the song "Volver." The universal topics of mother-daughter relationships and female friendships make this film widely accessible, while the pan-Hispanic cultural references give spectators who know the music a deeper insight into the diegesis. The film begins with a celebration of traditional Spain with the song "Las espigadoras," from the zarzuela *La rosa de azahar* (1930), which provides a sound bridge between the opening credits and the introductory scene. This extra-diegetic song, like "Tajabone" and "Por Toda a Minha Vida," enriches the film narrative with the director's intention to create an affective mood that draws the audience's attention towards the characters. Also, for those that know the zarzuela, it creates a moment of nostalgia for the music's association with early twentieth-century Spain. The song lyrics ("Ay, ay, ay, qué trabajo nos manda el Señor, levantarse y volverse a agachar todo el día a los aires y al sol") identify the topic of women's labor in the fields, and although Almodóvar depicts women villagers polishing headstones in a cemetery, the sentiment of the song resonates with the film's focus on female subjects. Additionally, the setting of the scene in Castilla-La Mancha and the classic Spanish music underscore the continuing presence of traditions within contemporary society.

The cemetery is an unlikely site of interaction, but the local custom of cleaning burial plots unites the female residents of the village, making this place yet another contact zone. Almodóvar juxtaposes three generations of women in this scene: the elderly villagers, the middle-aged sisters Raimunda and Sole, and Raimunda's teenage daughter Paula. In response to Paula's confusion about the purpose of cleaning headstones, Raimunda and Sole explain that the village women often outlive their husbands and maintain their families' plots to pass the time. The young character, a *madrileña* who occupies herself with her cellphone, represents contemporary Spain, while her mother Raimunda and aunt Sole form part of a generation that grew up in a rural environment before settling in Madrid. The division between rural and urban spaces will fade during the course of the film as Raimunda travels in between both locations to negotiate her dual identity.

Paula's indifference to Raimunda quickly dissipates when she must call upon her for help after killing Paco (the man that she thinks is her father) in self-defense when he attempts to rape her. Raimunda wastes little time in reacting to Paco's death and immediately takes action to move the body to a local restaurant with the help of her neighbors. During her struggle to maintain order, she seeks the help of her neighbors, including the Cuban immigrant Regina. The conniving Raimunda views Regina as the perfect accomplice to help her bury Paco's corpse because, as an undocumented immigrant and prostitute, Regina does not have the power to incriminate her. Almodóvar portrays Regina differently than Manuela in *Todo sobre mi madre* and Marco in *Hable con ella*, whose physical appearance and polished manners help them to blend into the metropolitan atmosphere of the films. Unlike the two Argentinean characters who are both educated and hold "respectable" jobs, Regina works as a prostitute and her strong Cuban accent causes her to stand out more than Manuela and Marco in *Todo sobre mi madre* and *Hable con ella*.<sup>11</sup> Despite her marginalized status, Regina does not fall victim to Raimunda's schemes. Instead, she quickly negotiates a business arrangement whereby she will bartend for Raimunda and collect all the income. Regina's *joie de vivre* diffuses the underlying tension between her and Raimunda, but a subsequent scene in the film reinforces the theme of xenophobia.



Xenophobia becomes evident when Sole and her mother Irene discuss how to best conceal Irene's true identity from Sole's hair salon clients. Sole suggests that her mother disguise herself as a Russian woman: "[A]lgo raro que no hay en el barrio." As they consider the possibilities, Irene squints her eyes to convince her daughter that she could pass for a Chinese woman. Such a gesture conveys not only their sense of superiority but also their condescending attitude towards Asian culture. When Sole introduces *la rusa* to her customers they respond with mistrust and warn her that all Russians have connections to the mafia and criticize Russian models who, according to them, live more comfortably in Madrid than many Spaniards. Ironically, although Raimunda has benefited greatly from Regina, she too expresses alarm about Sole's decision to hire a Russian woman and warns her sister not to let her employee abuse her generosity. Almodóvar's recognition of xenophobia works towards a more realistic portrayal of immigrant relations in Spain.

The brevity of Almodóvar's examination of immigrant presence in *Volver* contrasts with the attention he gives to the juxtaposition of traditional versus modern Spain. The most memorable scene in *Volver*, Raimunda's performance of "Volver," establishes a contact zone through music and camera movement. On this evening, Raimunda hosts a party for a film crew and calls upon her family and neighbors to serve food and drinks. The popular song "A Good Thing" by the British group Saint Etienne introduces the scene as the camera pans the mojitos on the bar. The music pauses before the opening guitar chords of "Volver," which remind Raimunda of her past, begin to play. The contrast between "A Good Thing" by Saint Etienne and the song "Volver" presents another juxtaposition typical of contemporary society in which different cultures coexist. Furthermore, the presence of three generations of women from the same family (Irene, Raimunda/Sole, and Paula) embodies the notion of encounter.

This generational and geographical intermingling of women comes to a climax as the sounds of a flamenco guitar remind Raimunda of how she sang this song as a child. This story surprises Paula, and Raimunda, feeling nostalgic, wants to give her daughter an opportunity to hear her sing. Similar to the "Cucurrucucú paloma" scene in *Hable con ella*, the diegetic music of "Volver" engages both the characters and the audience, allowing both groups to "participate" in the performance. The camera shots during Raimunda's performance of "Volver" establish connections between grandmother, daughter, and granddaughter as the camera pans from right to left to focus on Raimunda. At this point in the film, Raimunda has yet to learn that her mother Irene is still alive, but the song lyrics underscore the theme of homecoming. Irene watches her daughter from a distance as she hides in a car, the same vehicle that Raimunda drove at the beginning of the film; the car's stationary position throughout this entire scene confirms Irene's return home.

Raimunda's passionate performance makes this segment one of the pinnacle scenes of the film and is equally important for the way the song "Volver" evokes the hybridization of Hispanic culture. "Volver" originated as a tango sung by the Argentinean performer Carlos Gardel. Almodóvar chose the flamenco singer Estrella Morente's rendition of this tango and placed it in the Castilian context of the working-class neighborhood of Vallecas. The use of Andalusian-style music in a film largely focused on Castilian culture erases the cultural divide between the two regions and illustrates how culture transforms as it travels from one location to another. Similar to what he does in *Todo sobre mi madre* and *Hable con*



*ella*, Almodóvar references his love for regional Spanish culture in *Volver* while continuing his celebration of Latin American music. The presence of gypsy culture in *Volver*, a movie set in Madrid and Castilla-La Mancha, represents the internal migration patterns within Spain, in which people have traveled from their villages to major cities in search of work. After their relocation in a metropolis, people such as Raimunda and her family travel between the city and their hometown to maintain connections with their origins. *Volver* depicts a hybridization of both traditional and contemporary Spain.

## Conclusion

Almodóvar has always distinguished himself by his use of music, but as I have intended to show, the music of *Todo sobre mi madre*, *Hable con ella*, and *Volver* extends beyond an affective purpose to represent Spain's multi-ethnic identity. The majority of the songs examined in this study would traditionally be considered non-diegetic. However, a reconsideration of such music as extra-diegetic invites an interpretation of how the origins and culture of certain songs enrich the film narratives. The Senegalese song "Tajabone" in *Todo sobre mi madre* alludes to the significant African population in Spain and symbolizes the ready access that all listeners, including the director, have to international cultural production. In *Hable con ella*, the use of "Por Toda a Minha Vida" during the bullring scene displaces tauromachian tradition. Additionally, the Brazilian Caetano Veloso's performance of the Mexican song "Cucurrucú paloma" displays cultural hybridization that develops as subjects migrate and combine different traditions. In *Volver*, Almodóvar acknowledges the hybridization that results from internal migration when he uses Estrella Morente's flamenco-style recording of "Volver" within the geographic setting of the working-class neighborhood of Vallecas. As he weaves together pan-Hispanic cultural markers, the director also gives nod to his Castilian roots with the inclusion of a zarzuela during the opening sequence of *Volver*.

As music migrates in Almodóvar's films to represent Spain's heterogeneity, his characters also travel, creating both external and internal migratory paths. I have explored the director's portrayal of migratory subjects who are both native Spaniards and immigrants. Migration, life in transit, constitutes an inevitable part of postmodern subjectivity whereby one abandons his or her origins to negotiate new identities. Along their paths, migratory subjects create contact zones when they interact with people of different nationalities, sexualities, and generations. In *Todo sobre mi madre*, the Argentinean Manuela's travels lead her back to Barcelona, a city that Almodóvar portrays as a multi-ethnic contact zone in which the presence of marginalized subjects displaces Eurocentricity. The film *Hable con ella* juxtaposes the portrayal of the static Spanish figures Lydia and Benigno with the mobile Marco to exhibit how, just as in *Todo sobre mi madre*, native citizens often call upon the immigrant figure for support. Almodóvar's portrayal of working-class Madrid in *Volver* allows for a more realistic depiction of immigrants' struggles, as we see with the Cuban prostitute Regina. The director also acknowledges the discrimination that immigrants confront by depicting Spaniards who fear that "outsiders" will take advantage of their country.

The presence of music and migration in the film narratives symbolizes the circulation of subjects and culture in contemporary society. Just as Almodóvar at times uses music to



connect scenes, subjects journey from one location to the next as they negotiate different roles and identities. The notion of permanence or rest belongs to the past, and individuals now live between worlds of divergent cultures, traditions, and histories. *Todo sobre mi madre*, *Hable con ella*, and *Volver* reflect the argument that all cultures are border cultures due to the continuous movement of subjects and their interactions with others.

## Notes

<sup>1</sup> The study of music in Almodóvar's films is not new. However, this paper distinguishes itself by focusing on music along with migration. See Vernon, Deveny, and Laferl for recent examples of scholarship on Almodóvar's use of music.

<sup>2</sup> Cecilia Roth (who plays Manuela) is from Argentina and worked with Almodóvar in previous films.

<sup>3</sup> Identifying music references different characteristics such as danger (e.g., *Jaws*) or time period (e.g., *American Graffiti*); mood music functions to evoke specific emotions from the audience; commentary or countermood music tells the audience that a scene is different than how it appears (e.g., music conveys that a romantic scene is actually humorous) (56–59).

<sup>4</sup> Almodóvar speaks about "Tajabone" in the notes that accompany the compact disk *Viva la tristeza*, a collection of songs that he listened to while he wrote the script for *Hable con ella*.

<sup>5</sup> I would like to thank my colleague Dr. Anene Ejikeme, associate professor of history at Trinity University, for explaining New Year customs in Senegal. After my discussion with Dr. Ejikeme, I discovered that Linda Craig also relates the song "Tajabone" to gender performance.

<sup>6</sup> Almodóvar's use of "Tajabone" resonates with an anecdote that Iain Chambers includes in his study on migrancy. He recalls, while living in Naples, hearing the singer Youssou N'Dour perform a song in Wolof (15). He interprets the presence of African culture within an Italian context as the dispersal of Eurocentric voices (15).

<sup>7</sup> See Amago for further information on the portrayal of immigrants in Almodóvar's *Todo sobre mi madre*.

<sup>8</sup> I would add that although Rosa's and Manuela's physical appearance might suggest that they are "traditional" women and therefore privileged, they are indeed marginalized subjects. Despite Manuela's assimilation to Spanish culture, she remains "other" due to her Argentinean roots and suffers the burden of abandonment by her husband and the death of her only child. While Rosa's veil may suggest conformity to Catholic dogma, her revelation to Manuela that she is pregnant with Esteban-Lola's baby erases any complicity with the patriarchal code.

<sup>9</sup> For information on childbirth patterns in Spain, see Roig Vila and Castro Martín.

<sup>10</sup> As Veloso begins his performance, the overhead shot of a man swimming in a pool evokes Gael García Bernal's erotic pool scene in *La mala educación*, which came out two years after *Hable con ella*. Almodóvar also references his previous film *Todo sobre mi madre* by including the actresses Marisa Paredes (who plays Huma Rojo) and Cecilia Roth among the party guests.

<sup>11</sup> This difference in portrayal between Argentinean and Cuban immigrants displays the social hierarchy that exists in Hispanic culture due to Argentina's more cosmopolitan status in comparison to other parts of Latin America. In her analysis of *Todo sobre mi madre*, Linda Craig identifies Manuela's presence as a "Europeanized image of middle-class Argentina" (167).

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