# A Place to Finally Rest: reading national shame in Spanish ‘crisis’ cinema

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**Abstract**

This article argues that economic crisis and austerity ruptured how many young Spaniards understand their place in the world by disrupting their sense of what makes home ‘home.’ It analyses two Spanish films in the emergent sub-genre of ‘crisis’ cinema, *Techo y comida* (2015) and *Hermosa juventud* (2014), and argues that crisis cinema not only viscerally depicts the Spanish economic crisis as a failure of late capitalism, but it also challenges us to think about what ‘a place to finally rest’ may mean during times of economic crisis. The article argues that both films articulate narratives of shame that can be read on both a national and individual level, suggesting that the emotional resonance of shame is a potent emotion that weakens the individual connection with the nation-state during times of economic crisis.

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In February 2018, Spanish pop star Marta Sánchez received much opprobrium from large sections of Spanish society for her rendition of the Spanish national anthem. The anthem, *Marcha Real*, originally titled *Marcha Granadera*, is one of the world's oldest, composed by Manuel de Espinosa de los Monteros in 1761, and adopted by the Spanish state in 1770. *Marcha Real* is one of only four national anthems that does not have any official lyrics (alongside Bosnia and Herzegovina, Kosovo and San Marino), though it has had official lyrics in the past, notably during Alfonso XIII's reign (1886–1931). At the Teatro de Zarzuela in Madrid, along with a collection of her biggest hits, Sánchez sang the anthem with her own self-penned lyrics:

> Vuelvo a casa, a mi amada tierra,
> la que vio nacer un corazón aquí.
> Hoy te canto, para decirte cuanto orgullo hay en mí,
> por eso resistí.
> Crece mi amor cada vez que me voy,
> pero no olvides que sin ti no sé vivir.
> Rojo, amarillo, colores que brillan en mi corazón
> y no pido perdón.
> Grande España, a Dios le doy las gracias por nacer aquí,
> honrarte hasta el fin.
> Como tu hija llevaré ese honor,
> llenar cada rincón con tus rayos de sol.
> Y si algún día no puedo volver,
> guárdame un sitio para descansar al fin

It is not surprising that a pop star dubbed the Spanish 'Madonna' would be criticised for putting her own spin on the national anthem. Yet in the context of the 2017 Catalan referendum for independence and the tortured history of Spanish nationalism, Sánchez's rendition provoked equal amounts of celebration and scorn. Widely derided by the left and by regional nationalists on the one hand, she was equally cheered on by many of her fans and the traditional bastions of Spanish conservatism on the other. The *Guardia Civil* (Civil Guard) tweeted:

> Nuestra felicitación a Marta Sánchez @Martisima_SoyYo por una iniciativa que busca unir y sumar, no restar ni dividir #OrgullososDeSerEspanoles

Ex-Popular Party Prime Minister, Maríano Rajoy, also thanked Sánchez:

> Como a muchos de vosotros, me llega este vídeo. Muy buena iniciativa de @Martisima_SoyYo. La inmensa mayoría de los españoles nos sentimos representados. Gracias, Marta.

Conservatives rallied around her pride in 'Spanishness'—in the yellow and red flag, in God and duty. But what I find intriguing is how she frames 'Spain' as an eternal monolith in which she can return home to; the idea that Spain represents something timeless, a feeling that only intensifies when she is away from Spain. If one day she cannot return, she pleads her country to save a place for her, to bury her remains in the depths of her homeland.

It is this sense of 'place' that I want to unpack in this article; of how we may conceive a homeland in an era flummoxed by multiple mobilisations—migrations, capital flows, crises--that disorient a sense of national identity, of self. How might we understand 'home' in an era

when economic and political crises have the capacity to upend lives, for young bodies to *affect* and to be affected? And where can we locate the stories that may serve to delimit the ensuing chaos? This article is an attempt to tell such a story by reading narratives of 'shame' in two films from the emerging subgenre of crisis cinema in contemporary Spanish film culture(s): *Techo y comida* (Food and Shelter) (2015) and *Hermosa juventud* (Beautiful Youth) (2014). These films not only viscerally depict the Spanish economic crisis as a failure of late capitalism, but they narrate the nation in crisis when the 'tension between unity and disunity, home and homelessness' becomes a fundamental antagonism.[1] The films in question allow for multiple readings. In this article I focus on one particular reading: how economic crisis might be embodied in narratives of shame, a reading that inevitably highlights the cultural dissonance at play when the nation-state can no longer deliver the security that a homeland is expected to provide. I posit that the economic crisis ruptured how young Spaniards understand their place in the world by disrupting their sense of what makes home 'home.' This rupture, I argue, can be read as a narrative of (national) shame. Whereas *Techo y comida* can be read as a text that shames the failure of the Spanish nation-state to take care of its most vulnerable members of its society, *Hermosa juventud* inverts this narrative by representing a neoliberal ethos of 'personal responsibility,' where characters often blame precarity on their own poor life choices.

In reading shame in these films, there is an inevitable engagement, as Gikandi argues, with the nation-state, not only its history, but also its 'foundational mythologies' and 'quotidian experiences.'[2] *Techo y comida* and *Hermosa juventud* portray intimate portraits of two young mothers, one in Jerez de la Frontera and another on the outskirts of Madrid and are thus hyperlocalised. As I suggest below, however, their narrative arcs can be read as allegorical '*historias de vida*' that have the potential to reconfigure the individual experiences of the protagonists into a larger social commentary.[3] These films transcend their hyperlocality by

subverting and transforming our understanding of how we might conceive of the ‘nation’ and a ‘homeland’ in the face of brutal economic crisis and austerity.

In dialogue with anthropologist Henrik Vigh’s conceptualisation of crisis as ‘chronic’ and a ‘pervasive context’ instead of an ‘aberration and particularised phenomena,’[4] I argue that *Techo y comida* and *Hermosa juventud* represent the normalisation of a *crisis culture*. As Vigh argues, chronic crisis ‘may become normal in the sense that this is what there is most but does not become normal in the sense that this is how things should be.’[5] As the protagonist of each film traverses their local spaces and familial relationships, it becomes evident that the crisis culture that they embody is the new normal. Olga Bezhanova argues similarly in her recent book *Literature of Crisis: Spain’s Engagement with Liquid Capital*.[6] Framing the economic crisis as a temporary event, she contends, not only ignores the permanent changes that the economic crisis has wrought on contemporary Spanish society but is used to justify unpopular austerity measures.[7] According to Bezhanova: ‘Those who have been impacted by the transformations experienced by the global economy in recent years have to content themselves with assurances that the crisis is over and there is nothing left to discuss.’[8] For many Spaniards who lived through the worst of the economic crisis (and for many it is ongoing), the seeking of material security and comfort is still out of reach. Spain’s crisis cinema is one avenue for artists to make sense of the increasing ‘fluidity of existence.’[9] When the nation-state fails to provide basic material security it also undermines, according to Mary Zournazi, our sense of home and belonging.[10] As I argue below, shame is one emotion that is manifested in situations of prolonged crisis when subjects are forced to reorient their understanding of the social terrain.

## Crisis and the nation

Spain has often been described as a European success story. Plagued by a dark history in the early twentieth century (civil war, dictatorship), Spain emerged in the 1980s as a surprisingly open, forward-thinking, nation-state. Spain became a convenient poster child for the European Union (it joined in 1986) as it represented the 'civilising' values of the European integration project. Here was a country that had seemingly abandoned its caliginous history and forged a new reimagining of its national narrative that was underpinned by economic development facilitated by generous EU funds, a boom in its culture industries (cinema, music) and unremitting tourist fascination with its coasts and landmarks. By 2007 the Spanish economy had become the eighth largest in the world and the average Spaniard was wealthier than ever.[11] That modernising narrative hit a brick wall with the Global Financial Crisis that hit Spain especially hard. In his book *Todo lo que era sólido* Spanish novelist Antonio Múñoz Molina provides a scathing analysis of his country's recent past, as he suggests via Marx, that the Spanish miracle was anything but solid.[12] Elvira Vilches similarly argues that those boom years were built upon reckless spending by local and regional governments on projects aimed to promote *la marca España* and inspire national pride.[13] The self-image of a country that was the architect of a model transition to democracy and a modernising success thus took a battering as its international image became tied to the denigrative PIIGS moniker.[14] With the onset of the economic crisis, thousands of young Spaniards fled Spain in search of work. Some headed north to the United Kingdom and Germany, others sought refuge in Latin America, while a few reached as far as Australia and New Zealand.

If a superficial analysis of the crisis as a 'temporary' event allowed successive Spanish governments to implement EU-sanctioned austerity measures, Bezhanova argues that the crisis 'shattered Spaniards' confidence in the stability of their position as valuable participants in the European project and removed the obstacles to questioning the results of

the Transition.'[15] A deeper analysis of the crisis highlighted that Spain was not simply at the mercy of the global flows of liquid capital but that the Culture of the Transition that facilitated the championing of the state by Spanish intellectuals had somehow failed to live up to its promise. Bezhanova takes particular aim at Múnoz Molina's long essay by suggesting that although he recognises that the economic crisis is a global phenomenon, he cannot avoid blaming Spaniards' failure to adapt to the exigencies of a fluid world.[16] Implicit in his argument, then, is a neo-liberal ethos whereby it is up to individuals to ensure that they are competitive in the marketplace by ensuring that their time and energy is not wasted on superfluous identity politics. The implication is that once again in history Spain languishes behind cognate Western states as it remains mired in its murky past, incapable of truly modernising. Lucía Etxebarria is another celebrated Spanish novelist who utilised the essay form in *Liquidación por derribo* to probe into the causes and effects of the economic crisis.[17] Although she historicises the crisis and explores the legacy of Francoism on contemporary Spain, she too accepts a neoliberal framework by calling for a 'constant refashioning of the self' in order to fit within the parameters of the market.[18]

Evidently the so-called 'economic crisis' quickly morphed into a deeper and more troubling narrative of existential angst that could be traced back to the age-old 'problem of Spain' and 'Black Legend' myths. As Bezhanova put it: 'at any given moment, the country can be said to be experiencing an especially severe crisis' and it was inevitable that despite the efforts of successive governments the economic crisis could not be divorced from the legacy of the past.[19] That the culture of the transition began to be widely and openly questioned by some politicians and media commentators pointed, perhaps, to a deeper rupture than perhaps anybody had first anticipated. As Múñoz Molina's and Etxebarria's books demonstrate, it became a juggling act attempting to unpack the burden of Spain's traumatic history with the realities of global finance and its demands for constant self-realisation.

Yet there was no denying the material reality of the economic crisis. In an important article published in 2014, Dean Allbritton argues that the precarity that economic crisis provokes 'heightens the sense of physical vulnerability of its citizens and creates a spiralling system of increasing physical peril.'[20] Physical vulnerability is an embodied experience and Allbritton suggests that it can be read as a metaphor in Spanish films that engage with what it means to live in 'crisis.'[21] He argues: 'a thin line of hope runs through the sort of crisis cinema now being made in Spain, and it is predicated on the desire for recognition and the sharing of vulnerability toward something like a collective of suffering.'[22] The acknowledgement of vulnerability and suffering, he contends, points to the kind of community that can be formed when facing the brunt of a crisis and that can be mobilised against state institutions.[23] Cinema is thus a prime site to explore the emotive capacity of community and relationality when politics and economics has failed.

*Techo y comida* and *Hermosa juventud* were released just after the publication of Allbritton's essay when the crisis had been underway for more than five years, suggesting that perhaps it was not an isolated phenomenon and had transmuted into something potentially chronic. The 'optimistic sharing of vulnerability' and 'sympathetic gesture' that Allbritton perceived in earlier films of the crisis cinema subgenre such as in *La chispa de la vida* (2011) and *5 metros cuadrados* (2011), appeared to have been erased; both *Techo y comida* and *Hermosa juventud* are marked by the absence of such shared optimism and hope.[24] The few small gestures of empathy are relegated to minor characters but countered by the many instances of humiliation and shame that precarity has wrought on the main characters' lives.

Yet, in my reading of the films below, I also share with Allbritton his argument that in the telling of these stories we can witness what Labrador Méndez calls a shared historical experience of the crisis,[25] in that viewers can recognise the impact of precarity when it touches the body, making physical vulnerability a normal part of everyday lived experience.

In his well-known essay 'Las vidas *subprime*,' Labrador Méndez posits that *historias de vida*, the construction of narratives that become mediatically paradigmatic, not only illuminate the larger structural problems that cause physical vulnerability but can also transform individual narratives into a wider social commentary.[26] He argues that *historias de vida* is a technology of the political imaginary that puts into circulation stories that were previously invisible or unrepresentable.[27] *Historias de vida*, he suggests, introduce a human scale to larger processes such as economic crisis and have the potential to reconfigure the hegemonic narratives that emerge from these processes.[28] According to Labrador Méndez:

> estas *historias de vida subprime* adquieren representatividad, capacidad de encarnar biográficamente una experiencia colectiva, como mecanismo de *representar la crisis*, de hacerla visible al reducircla a las dimensiones concretas de una vida.[29]

In my reading of the films below I suggest that both *Techo y comida* and *Hermosa juventud* present viewers two different *historias de vida* that individuate the crisis. By reducing the dimensions of the crisis to the scale of the story of two young women, it allows for the films to be read allegorically. But whereas Allbritton was primarily concerned with the physical vulnerability of precarity in Spanish crisis cinema, my reading of *Techo y comida* and *Hermosa juventud* is about shame and how the respective films propagate two distinct iterations of how shame might be embodied, narrativized and experienced.

In *Writing Shame*, Elspeth Probyn suggests that 'shame is a painful thing to write about. It gets into your body. It gets to you.'[30] In her analysis of how writers like Primo Levi have written about shame, she intimates that putting shame into words can generate 'new ways of thinking about how we are related to history and how we wish to live in the present.'[31] The etymological roots of shame trace back to the Goth word *scham*, which refers to covering the face.[32] Many philosophers such as Nietzsche have touched on the concept of shame in their

work but it was not until the twentieth century when it became extensively studied, particularly in the disciplinary areas of anthropology and sociology.[33] Shame can be notoriously difficult to define because it could refer to anything from mild embarrassment through to humiliation.[34] As Sara Ahmed argues: shame is an 'intense and painful sensation that is bound up in how the self feels about itself [...] shame feels like an exposure [...] it involves an attempt to hide, a hiding that requires the subject turn away from the other and towards itself.'[35] Avoiding the gaze of others is thus a common response to feeling shame because individuals typically are ashamed of having their shame witnessed.

Martin Raba categorises theories of shame into two broad strategies: external and internal. External strategies tend to position shame socio-culturally as a means to punish individuals who do not conform to collective moral standards.[36] Internal strategies focus on the introspective aspects of shame where the individual is concerned not about moral standards, but about how the self is perceived by others. But as Raba rightly argues, both approaches simplify the relationship between the individual and the social context in which they are situated, and he suggests that shame should be considered as *both* an individualistic and collectivist emotion.[37]

Raba contributes two innovations to understanding shame as an emotion. First, he posits that we should analyse shame as a process of totalisation since when a subject experiences shame, he or she is intimately related to the whole social community.[38] In my analysis below, I likewise take this approach in order to highlight how the protagonists in each film both reflect and succumb to such (imagined) moral standards. Second, he argues that shame can be understood as an experience of lack: 'I feel shame not because of what I have but because of what I lack (in order to meet the ideal standards).'[39] I also view shame through such a lens because the narratives of precarity that both films articulate point to the social isolation precarious subjects experience when the body is hit by the lack of material security. Yet my

analysis extends beyond the individual subject, tracing what Ahmed refers to as a 'double play of concealment and exposure' that underlines how shame may be articulated during economic crisis.[40] In my analysis below I explore what occurs when we read shame beyond individual experience and read it as a broader national narrative.

## Embodying shame

*Techo y comida* is a heartbreaking portrayal of the vicissitudes of economic crisis in contemporary Spain. Released in 2015, the film is a low-key but potent punch-in-the-guts that shames the Spanish state for its failure to take care of the most vulnerable members of its society. Taking a leaf out of the filmmaking school of Ken Loach, director Juan Miguel del Castillo puts a human face on the crisis in a sort of 'history from below' of the underclasses. The film follows the story of jobless Rocío, a young single mother, and her daily rituals of survival. The audience is immediately thrown into her tumultuous world in the opening scene where Rocío is being interviewed by a social worker. During the brief interview we discover that Rocío has an eight-year-old son, has not paid her rent in eight months and has been out of work for three and a half years. She has got no family or financial support and survives by handing out flyers two or three times a month for 20 euros a day. Rocío's face lights up when the social worker indicates that she is eligible to apply for a social benefit wage (550 euros a month for six months) and for food stamps (120 euros a month for six months). But the social worker is quick to break the spell: 'the benefit payments are taking ages […] The stamps are taking six months and the benefit wage can take anything up to a year.' In a country where the family still plays an important social role in minimising the worst excesses of economic hardship, it is perhaps surprising that Del Castillo has opted for his protagonist to have no

family at all. This narrative device serves to individuate the economic crisis and inscribe it onto the body of Rocío. She *is* the crisis.

Details of this political situation that may have led to the crisis are scant, limited to a small number of comments from Rocío's neighbours ('Things have gone to the dogs'; 'All these cut-backs… I don't know where it's all going to stop'). Early scenes set up the insurmountable mountain that Rocío faces as the list of indignities is endless. When she leaves her CV at the bakery where she buys a loaf of bread, she watches from the outside window as the bakery owner tears it into shreds. At the supermarket she buys six packs of frankfurts for three euros and smells the basic bathroom products she cannot afford to buy only to be caught shoplifting a bottle of shampoo minutes later. Her running shower turns cold when the gas bulb she cannot replace runs out. When the water in her apartment is cut off, she and her son Adrian need to fill plastic bottles at a public drinking fountain. She rummages through the garbage in the middle of the night to salvage a packet of unopened biscuits. When her landlord comes knocking on her door demanding his money, the situation tenses up: 'you've no shame,' he shouts from behind the door. In that moment, we witness Rocío's 'apartness' that is felt 'in the moment of exposure to others, an exposure that is wounding.'[41] As Ahmed puts it, 'to have one's shame witnessed is even more shaming.'[42]

It becomes evident that Rocío is doing her utmost to conceal the extent of her precarious existence lest she be exposed. When her son Adrian asks her why she is not eating she typically replies that she is not hungry or that she has already eaten. 'You're going to end up like a skeleton,' he tells her. When she drops him off to school she tries to avoid contact with other mothers and deflects their questions. She declines an invite to have breakfast at the corner bar, quickly dashing off to ensure the other mothers do not perceive her shame in not being able to afford a coffee. María, her kindly neighbour who lives alone, catches on to Rocío's desperate situation. María brings over extra food, careful not to humiliate Rocío,

never acknowledging the reality of her precarity. But Rocío is always visibly uncomfortable with María's kindness, always cutting short their encounters as Rocío projects her own imagined view of shame onto her neighbour's actions.[43] Throughout all these indignities, Rocío maintains a stoic front as she balances the responsibilities of motherhood and social isolation. That front is only broken when one day Rocío finds Adrian passed out on the floor. At the hospital the doctor asks: 'Does he have a balanced diet?' as he advises Rocío to buy supplements for him that are not covered by social security. At that point, both Rocío and the audience are made aware that the internalised shame that Rocío has been carrying has inadvertently led to Adrian's malnourishment. The next day we see Rocío waiting in line at a soup kitchen run by a local parish and we witness what Ahmed calls the 'physicality of shame' when a mother from Adrian's school 'turns away' from Rocío when she spots her, thus 'de-forming and re-forming […] bodily and social spaces.'[44] In an ethnographic study on foodbank usage in the United Kingdom, Kayleigh Garthwaite argues that 'stigma, fear and embarrassment were everyday realities for people who used a foodbank' and that people would only use the service when they had run out of alternatives.[45] Similarly, it took Adrian's illness to force Rocío to accept charity, filling up her Tupperware containers with chickpeas, San Jacobos and yoghurt.

The film's third act shifts to the material reality of the economic crisis in what has been, perhaps, the most controversial aspect of the Spanish economic crisis: housing evictions. Rocío has not paid her rent in months and she is being sued by her landlords who are also struggling to make ends meet in retirement since their own son has also been laid off work. So disorienting is Rocío's situation that she avoids addressing her predicament until it is too late. When she finally meets with a lawyer he firmly tells her: 'the term for filing an appeal has run out. … There's nothing I can do to help you.' Between 2008 and 2013 alone, almost 320,000 evictions took place across Spain.[46] Ada Colau, mayor of Barcelona and former

spokesperson for the Platform for People Affected by Mortgage (PAH), describes evictions as ‘a civil death, the inability to have a social life and a public life.’[47] Rocío is functioning in this ‘civil death’ zone, her apartness deepening with each day she cannot make ends meet. Iker Barbero asks: ‘What kind of rights remain […] when people lose the fundamental social rights they once had?’[48] *Techo y comida* flips that question by asking its audience: what *remains of a homeland* when people lose the fundamental social rights they once had?

In the film’s third act, Del Castillo cleverly foregrounds Rocío and Adrian’s eviction against the backdrop of the EuroCup final of 2012 when Spain beat Italy 4-0. Football, according to Shobe, ‘is one of the many cultural institutions inextricably wrapped up in the economic and political processes that shape places and societies worldwide.’[49] In Spain, football has a long tradition of reflecting ‘place-based’ identities and constructing ideas about place and nation.[50] It is fitting, then, that Rocío’s displacement from her home is mirrored against her community’s collective identification with ‘place’ that the Spanish national team represents.[51] Rocío’s social isolation and ‘apartness’[52] excludes her from that identification and she therefore cannot share in that expression of national identity. It is at this point that individual and national experiences of shame conjoin because as Sara Ahmed argues, ‘individuals become implicated in national shame insofar as they already belong to the nation, insofar as their allegiance has already been given to the nation, and they can be subject to its address.’[53] The individuated shame that we witness during the first two acts is thus transferred to the ‘national’ level in the third act underlining how the individual often takes on the failure of the nation when that identity fails to embody or live up to an ideal.[54] The night after the final, Rocío and Adrian, now homeless, walk away luggage in hand, the road strewn with rubbish from the revelling of the night before. Adrian takes his jersey of the national team off; their shame cannot compete with the ‘hot’ nationalism of the night before.

**The shame of *shame***

*Techo y comida* invites audiences to reflect on the shame that the Spanish state has disavowed its social responsibility to its citizens. Rocío is paralysed by her inability to protect herself and her son from precarity and there is no escaping the weight of the state as it pushes her further and further into poverty. In *Hermosa juventud* Jaime Rosales takes an altogether different approach in a more complex narrative whose main protagonist Natalia is granted more agency in deciding *what* and *whom* should be shamed. In *Hermosa juventud* characters take on the neoliberal ethos of 'personal responsibility,' often blaming precarity on their own poor life choices, underlining again how shame may be individuated, though this time the nation-state is elusive, remaining in the shadows, as individuals seek to adapt to the exigencies of economic crisis and hopelessness.

*Hermosa juventud* follows the story of young couple Natalia (22) and Carlos (23) and the ins and outs of their relationship as they struggle with joblessness and an unexpected pregnancy. Whereas *Techo y comida* zooms in on Rocío as an embodiment of the economic crisis, *Hermosa juventud* decidedly widens its scope to include the intricacies of familial relationships. Natalia lives with her mother Dolores and two younger siblings. Dolores is separated from her husband and although she works full-time, she struggles to pay for the upkeep of the apartment and three children. Her ex-husband now lives with another woman and contributes little to the family's finances. Natalia and Carlos, who have been dating for almost three years, both embody the 'generación ni-ni' (neither work nor study). The economic crisis, according to José Luis Barbería, accentuated uncertainty in younger generations due to the living standards of young people becoming inferior to those of their parents' generation.[55] *Hermosa juventud* thus traces the realities of the ni-ni generation and examines what happens when the youthful spirit of nihilism that economic crisis activates is taken to its logical conclusion.

Natalia and Carlos's existence consists of sleeping in, occasionally doing the odd job for meagre income, loitering in public spaces with friends and reluctantly taking care of family members. They occupy an in-between zone—they are not primary caregivers, yet young enough to need the support of their respective family structures. The very fact that they have a family means that they are not at risk of eviction or hunger, allowing them to at least imagine a life beyond their current predicament—'When I'm rich, I'm going to buy you a house on the beach. … with a swimming pool. And a huge living room,' Carlos tells Natalia. Natalia is never caught shoplifting the expensive beauty products that she uses to make herself look attractive, never experiencing the sort of exposure that comes with shame that Rocío experiences in *Techo y comida*. But when she leaves her CV at a store, she also receives the familiar, 'nothing available at the moment.' When Carlos does work at a construction site clearing up the debris, it is for ten euros a day, enough to pay for some joints. To supplement their poor income, they decide to shoot an amateur pornographic film for 600 euros. Carlos is elated with the cash that he can use to pay for his driver's license, but Natalia warns him: 'And what do you do with 300 euros? It doesn't go very far … It doesn't last long. You spend it fast.'

Natalia and Carlos thus 'dream of excess' in what Ross Abbinnett refers to, via Marx, as 'the obsession of non-property-owning citizens and the *petit bourgeoisie* with the unlikely chance that some day they will get rich.'[56] He considers the dream of individual excess a powerful symbol of hope during times of precarity. It is not surprising, then, that Natalia and Carlos, as representatives of the ni-ni generation, feel a moral entitlement to the excess that fluctuates all around them and of which they cannot partake. When Carlos convinces Natalia to have a night out it consists of a botellón (drinking in public spaces) in an industrial area, reggaetón music pumping out of some parked cars. On the way home, Carlos gets into an altercation with another young man, leading to him being stabbed in the neck. The tragic event becomes

an opportunity as Carlos seeks seven thousand euros in compensation and we witness him dreaming up schemes to invest that money to buy a utility truck that he could use to make more money. This sub-plot is striking as it punctuates the potency of the ideology of hope that neo-liberalism promises. Natalia's pregnancy, however, disrupts that narrative and despite her mother's wish to get her to abort ('What are going to do? You have no job, I have no money'). Natalia opts to have the baby and Carlos is back at the construction site as his hopes for a compensation settlement fall through.

The trauma of economic crisis in *Hermosa juventud* is framed as a narrative of personal failure.[57] Natalia is ashamed of her and her family's poverty, but that self-loathing is framed in neo-liberal terms: poverty is the result of poor life choices. In Pemberton et. al.'s study of narratives of personal failure in austerity Britain, many individuals blamed their precarity on their failure to study and get qualifications in their youth or to take advantage of opportunities to 'better themselves' when they were presented.[58] Similarly, Natalia tells her brother Pedro to study hard and pass his classes lest he follows her and Carlos's lifepath that leads to being broke and without a high school diploma. In the film's third act, Natalia is finally disillusioned with Carlos's plans to get rich that get him nowhere, telling him that he is supposed to work and that he is not 'trying hard enough.' This is echoed by a scene at the park where Natalia and Carlos are with a group of friends, the young men discussing Japanese ads and Google while the young women work through the logic of economic crisis in this neo-liberal frame. One young woman whose dad and brother are 'bummed out' by the crisis suggests that 'they just sit around, they're not looking, not trying,' while another adds: 'I think they feel worthless, like they have no value. They get that idea into their head, why bother looking?' When Natalia enters the conversation she further reinforces that trope: 'you need the right attitude if you want to work, your karma gets you a job.'

If precarity is a result of personal failure, the logical response is for Natalia to take control of her situation and change her circumstances. Her decision to move to Germany is not only to escape the material reality of economic crisis but to 'perform' neoliberalism.[59] According to Hoggett:

> Performativity is about doing, not being: it conjures that imagined world in which the so-called 'empowered' self goes about 'making a difference'. It is the world of the active voice, of imaginary control over one's environment and over one's self, of shaping one's destiny […] Caught in the grip of performativity, the modern self hardly ever feels itself to be enough, it never measures up, it always falls short before the imagined gaze of the Other.[60]

Natalia is thus left out of this neoliberal symbolic order. The economic crisis has taken away her ability to perform, to shape her world, to measure up. But instead of directing the blame at the systemic failure of the Spanish economic system, she feels empowered to make a difference by transplanting herself from the nihilistic Madrid suburbs to the well-oiled German city-machine because, as she sees it, 'everyone's moving to Germany and finding jobs.' Once in Germany it is difficult for Natalia to find steady work until her German improves. The film ends with Natalia coming full circle in an unsettling scene where she is being interviewed by a lascivious middle-aged German man in yet another pornographic film. Her face remains impenetrable, suggesting that there is no escaping shame. Shame is, perhaps, what the losers of neoliberal capitalism have in common.

## Shaming *shame*

In my reading of shame in *Techo y comida* and *Hermosa juventud*, it becomes clear how both Rocío and Natalia's stories function as *historias de vida*.[61] In their telling, the films zoom in

on the human scale of the economic crisis and in so doing global processes are not necessarily erased but hidden, as if they were Greek gods that control the fates of their subjects, blurring the boundaries between fate and free will. Whereas *Techo y comida* firmly places fate out of Rocío's hands, *Hermosa juventud* toys with Natalia's blind acceptance of free will and her internalised shame propels her to relocate to Germany to dig herself out of a life of precarity. In *Techo y comida* the effect is to underline a nation in crisis, to underscore the failure of the nation-state to provide a 'place to finally rest' for its subjects. In *Hermosa juventud* the neoliberal narrative of personal responsibility might, on the surface, suggest that the nation-state has been displaced and that individual subjects have inevitably internalised the deep-rooted ideology of personal failure. But on a deeper level, it is the very absence of the nation-state in *Hermosa juventud* that makes it so very present.

*Techo y comida* and *Hermosa juventud* also implicitly disrupt two common assumptions: 1) that economic crisis is a temporary event; and 2) that economic crisis is fundamentally about the material impact on one's standards of living. By reading the films as *historias de vida*, Rocío and Natalia's journey reconfigure those assumptions, representing Spain as a nation-state caught in a *crisis culture*, where economic crisis is not only the new normal, but a political reality that destabilises many deeply held beliefs about what makes home 'home.' Taken together, both films highlight, via Ahmed, how shame is not only a 'mode of recognition,' in the sense that the materiality of economic crisis cannot be denied, but that shame is also a form of nation building as shame allows us 'to assert our identity as a nation.'[62] But the logic of economic crisis means that asserting one's identity as a nation is problematic when the nation-state is becoming, for many victims of economic crisis, elusive and brutal in its affect.

Rocío and Natalia's forced deterritorialization highlights a shift away from the materiality of 'place,' making their attachment to their homeland tenuous. In their embodiment of national

shame, Rocío and Natalia overload their sense of what a homeland may mean for them, its absent presence simultaneously negating and reinforcing their lived experience of material poverty. A homeland cannot, therefore, be strictly located in a geographical territory, occupying instead a contested space between the material and the discursive. In naming *shame*, my reading of the films underlines the tensions between different meanings of a homeland, particularly when the trauma of economic crisis serves to disorient the losers of neoliberal capitalism. *Techo y comida* and *Hermosa juventud* are thus incompatible with the celebratory idea of the Spanish nation-state that emerged with Spain's transition to democracy. They tell the stories of displaced subjects in a world where the idea of a homeland might not have the same resonance as it once did. The films demonstrate the power that economic crisis has to materially upend lives, while at the same time discursively undermine attachments to ideas about what makes a home 'home.'

Crisis cinema can therefore act as a much-needed project of recognition of the voices that are often occluded during times of national and economic crisis. As Ahmed puts it, 'recognition works to restore the nation or reconcile the nation to itself by 'coming to terms with' its own past in the expression of 'bad feeling.''[63] This new, emergent crisis sub-genre, is perhaps one site where the failure to maintain the social contract can be made visible. In the context of the fragmented bipolarism currently underway in the Spanish political system, and the emergence of new radical right party Vox, this is a pertinent conversation to have. By destabilising a sense of 'home,' the crisis has more than disrupted the economic well-being of Spanish citizens. It has also undermined the trust that individuals place on the nation-state to provide the security of home. *Techo y comida* and *Hermosa juventud* highlight that the broader emotional resonance of shame, be it on a national or individual level, is a potent emotion that etiolates the individual connection with the nation-state during times of economic crisis. Rocío and Natalia's affective identities are, to use Amanda Wise's words, 'now experienced

as resentful nostalgia surrounding that lost *place* identity (my emphasis).'[64] Yet, as Ahmed argues, 'the recognition of what is shameful in the past—what has failed the national ideal—is what would allow the nation to be idealised and even celebrated in the present.'[65] Rocío and Natalia's stories are the vehicles for overcoming that shameful past.

Marta Sánchez's self-penned lyrics for the Spanish national anthem were excoriated on social media in an age-old battle over different conceptualisation(s) of what Spain is and what it might mean in the twenty-first century. The economic crisis added one more layer to that complexity. Sánchez, with her privileged mobility, is free to travel and return to her homeland where she can find that restful place she imagines. For many other Spaniards, the trauma of economic crisis still lingers on more than ten years after its initial onset; security is still a pressing issue and some remain scattered across the globe, unsure if they will have the economic security they need upon their return. Whether one day they will also share Sanchez's sense of a homeland—*amada tierra*—is a question that all Spains should take a moment to consider. In reading shame in these filmic texts, the Spanish economic crisis becomes not a story of poverty but rather a story about what is promised and taken away; about how nations fulfil and transgress individual desires and hopes. It is a story that we can all share.

## NOTES

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[21] Ibid., 2-3.
[22] Ibid., 4.
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[24] Ibid., 11.
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