Mónica García Fernández, “Gender Metaphors and Representations of the Biological Body: An Analysis of Popular Medical Literature Published in Franco’s Spain”, *Cultural History*, vol. 6.2 (2017), pp. 209-226. https://doi.org/10.3366/cult.2017.0150. WINNER: 2016 ISCH ESSAY COMPETITION

Gender Metaphors in Representations of the Biological Body: An Analysis of Popular Medical Literature Published in Franco’s Spain

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Metaphors permeate our language and knowledge and, by extension, shape our experiences and interactions with our surroundings and other human beings.[1] Thus, in acting as an interpretative means through which we make sense of the world, they can reveal power relations. As George Lakoff and Mark Johnson argue, the act of apprehending certain concepts in terms of others can potentially reinforce hegemonic discourses and reproduce prejudices and social disparities.[2] Furthermore, if hierarchies can be well disguised in metaphorical thinking, then it follows that they can sustain gender biases. In fact, not only does figurative language play a role in the construction of gender, but gender itself could be regarded as a powerful metaphor, one that denotes polarity and infuses a dualistic meaning into many other concepts.[3]

Gendered symbolic meanings are engrained in all sorts of discourses, including those of science, often thought of as incompatible with non-literal language.[4] However, scientists’ tireless efforts to unravel the true nature of the body, along with the claim that their results are objective and neutral, have been contested by a wide range of feminist scholarship.[5] Many of these studies demonstrate that scientific rhetoric is saturated with figurative connotations that uphold cultural beliefs about the roles that men and women are supposed to perform in a given society, thus refuting the perceived neutrality of science.

The purpose of this article is to analyse how metaphorsare used in representations

of the sexed body and how these contain gender meanings.[6] To do so, I will look at popular scientific or pseudoscientific literature published in Spain during the Franco dictatorship (1939–75). In the process, I pay attention to how knowledge about sex differences is disclosed to the general public. In particular, I discuss two case studies that rely on both textual and visual metaphors. On the one hand, I explore the concept of menstruation as a cyclical defeat, which conveys and reinforces assumptions about women’s bodies and roles. On the other hand, I assess the depiction of the egg and the sperm through the simile of fertilization as a wedding. This image reflects widespread preconceptions about love, marriage and sex.

It must be emphasized that these representations are by no means unique to the Spanish or Francoist context. On the contrary, similar imagery can be found in a myriad of historical situations. Following one of the arguments that Ludmilla Jordanova makes in her book *Sexual Visions*, I view the stereotypes analysed here as myths that are deeply rooted in scientific and philosophical thought but also ‘perpetually put to work in different, historically shifting ways’.[7] As this author argues, gender imaginaries are composed both of those characteristics that are ‘given currency in the immediate historical setting and of those more abstract ones of mythic proportions’.[8] Hence, the persistence of cultural ideas about gender should not prevent us from drawing attention to the variable terms in which they are defined, the individual contexts in which they are deployed or the specific purposes they serve. Thus, by acknowledging that the two examples under scrutiny in this article are not immediately linked to a specific time and place, I do not mean to consider them as if they existed in a vacuum. In fact, I shall argue that a contextual analysis gives us the opportunity to look into not only the constructedness of gender but also into its contingent significance.

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In addition to limiting the chronological and geographical scope of the discussion to Franco’s Spain, I evaluate a very specific set of sources: medical manuals intended to disseminate information and advice about sexuality to non-specialist audiences. I believe that a review of popular medical literature is essential, as it can tell us a great deal about how and why gender is constructed in a specific way. While figurative language is present in all stages of knowledge production, the informative nature of the texts under study here makes them an interesting source for the analysis of gendered metaphors. After all, the intention to educate the laity is apparent in language that uses clear analogies and familiar associations that appeal to common sense and are supposed to be effortlessly grasped by the intended audience. Language prejudices are unveiled, so to speak, for the sake of simplicity. Whereas these texts are published and self-legitimized under the label of science – and their authors are usually, albeit not always, doctors who also write to professionals – the literary status of these texts is singular. Although I do not want to suggest a complete dichotomy between the discourse of science and literature, prescriptive manuals can be considered as a hybrid genre in that they replicate medical or scientific language while also openly using a variety of registers from other sources. This hybridity, in turn, interrogates long-standing divisions between scientific and literary discourse.

Having briefly hinted at some of the theoretical and methodological premises of this article, in the following sections I seek to explore the gendered nature of two tropes that are used to explain menstruation and fertilization, focusing on their contextual significance. Since symbolic representations play a crucial role in shaping gender inequalities, I argue that an enquiry into such discourses helps us identify those symbols that naturalize stereotypes; consequently, it allows us to problematize strategies that

perpetuate power relations.

Menstruation as waste

I will start by exploring the representation of the ovulation cycle, which was described using highly metaphorical and negatively loaded language. This process was portrayed as 'an eternal doing and undoing like Penelope's fabric' which would necessarily influence women's skills, physiology and psychology.[9] It culminates with the menstrual bleeding, often referred to as a cyclical defeat. Menstruation is understood as the destruction of the perfect habitat for fertilization and pregnancy, hence the use of pejorative terms like *decay*, *loss*, *waste*, *regression* or *breakage* in the descriptions. This idea is also expressed in the form of analogies such as a tower of cards or glasses that collapses at the end of the cycle. This metaphor can even be found in the form of an illustration in Drs José Antonio Rodríguez Soriano and Rafael Domeque's *Vida sexual de la mujer y parto sin dolor* ('Women's sexual life and painless childbirth') (Fig. 1).[10]

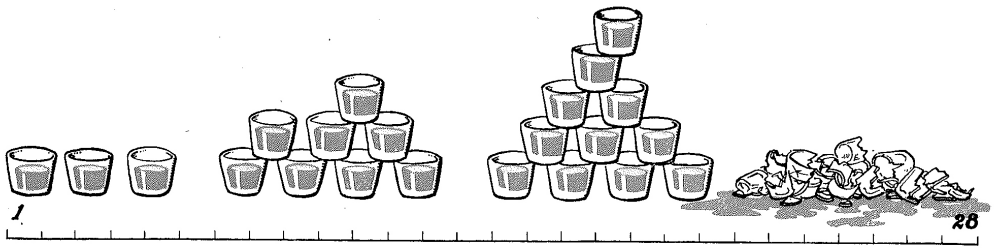

Fig. 11. La menstruación, consecuencia del desprendimiento del endometrio, puede parangonarse al derrumbamiento de una pirámide de vasos llenos de sangre que se ha constituido en el transcurso del ciclo (cada división de la escala representa un día del mismo)

Fig. 1 Visual representation of ovulation and menstruation. José Antonio Rodríguez Soriano, 'Vida sexual', in *Enciclopedia de la mujer*, vol. 1 (Barcelona: Vergara, 1961),

578.

Accordingly, menstruation is portrayed as ‘the manifestation of the failure of the generative process that had barely started’ or as ‘the *abortion* of an unfertilized *egg*’.[11] Some go so far as to suggest that the best-case scenario would be one in which women never had to go through that process, since this would entail the optimization of all eggs released by the ovary:

> [I]n a healthy married woman, who did not oppose fertilization and whose husband was also fruitful, the eggs would not be lost. In fact, this woman would get pregnant from the very first moment. During pregnancy and most of the breastfeeding period she would stop producing eggs. Then, when another egg matures, it would also be fertilized; she would become pregnant again, and so on. That is, such a married woman would never menstruate. Therefore, it seems evident that repeated menses, in the married woman, are, indeed, a consequence of modern life, more or less unnatural, and of the limitation of pregnancies.[12]

Likewise, Dr José P. Oliveras mentions that, for some, ‘the physiologically perfect woman is the one who does not let any of her procreative possibilities go to waste’, namely the one in whom ‘not a single menstruation occurs from puberty to menopause’.[13] Even though these authors were not entirely serious about upholding this possibility, it certainly rendered menstruation as a waste of procreative capacities, which was not free from political meanings, as I explain below. These ideas also helped to reinforce the construction of women’s bodies as essentially reproductive. Menstruation was perceived, at least symbolically, as a deviation from the most natural and most important assignment of the female body: reproduction.

Interestingly, such metaphors of waste did not apply to sperm production. In fact, as I shall elaborate in the next section, the spermatozoon is provided with aggressiveness, vitality and self-action, that is, typical human capacities. This depiction is actually very recurrent in the representation of bodily events, as noted by Emily Martin.[14] In her book *The Woman in the Body*, she delves into the biases underlying the use of figurative language with negative connotations to explain female reproductive processes, while pinpointing that masculine ones are generally described from a positive standpoint. As Martin argues, the expressions chosen to account for biology not only have to do with cultural conceptions of sex difference but are also partial, for they leave unexplained the diversity of functions that evolve around physiological mechanisms. Furthermore, they often hide the fact that menstruation cannot be a purely biological phenomenon, since it is also shaped by sociocultural factors such as diet and exercise, and even by the discourses that circulate around it. Consequently, it is important to take into account that while menstrual bleeding is a physiological occurrence that can affect women physically and emotionally, this process is also closely tied to cultural ideas and circumstances that strongly influence the way women experience and interpret it.[15]

In this regard, it should be noted that the aforementioned beliefs about menstruation have to be understood in light of a very specific political setting. On the one hand, we are talking about a dictatorial regime that politicized motherhood as women’s duty to the nation, since the authorities envisioned doubling the population as a target of crucial political relevance.[16] Thus, the absence of pregnancy in a married woman, and ergo the presence of menstruation, was politically and socially loaded. On the other hand, we should bear in mind that not only abortion was severely penalized but also the distribution and sale of contraceptives. Both abortion and birth control had truly dreadful

connotations at the time, so equating menstruation with abortion, as seen above, was not meaningless. In the context of the Francoist pronatalist policies and discourses, repeated menses were, indeed, a failure, if not a suspicious sign that a married woman was resorting to illicit means to have fewer children than required by the country.

Yet comparing this process to a defeat concealed the fact that for many women menstruation might have felt like a relief – if not a triumph – considering the multiple obstacles to the use of safe and effective contraception. This was not ignored by some of the authors discussed here, who acknowledged the existence of what they called ‘waiting anxiety’ (*ansiedad de espera*), a feeling related to the onset of the menses and derived from the constant fear of pregnancy that must have overwhelmed many women.[17] In this regard, we might wonder how the pronatalist discourse and the definition of motherhood as women’s unavoidable fate, greatest achievement and most important obligation, coupled with the prohibition of birth control, affected their identity and bodily experiences. Although I have not come across any study on this issue in the Spanish context, the notion of waiting anxiety certainly opens avenues for future research. Nonetheless, from indirect references we can infer that women kept controlling their fertility,[18] but we know very little about the suffering that such a repressive environment may have caused.

Besides, biological cycles often served as a means to justify relegating women to second-class citizenship. In this sense, reproductive female processes were often seen as energy-draining, making them incompatible with higher education or waged labour. Dr Antonio de la Granda, for instance, emphasizes the irreconcilability of menstruation and any kind of intellectual or manual activity:

The fine and delicate shape of the woman is not the one that best fits the hard

> labour and freedom of movement required by modern industry; and the rhythmicity of her menstrual functions prevents her from constant work. We should bear in mind that there is no organ or physiological function that remains unaltered by menstruation; the circulatory system changes its rhythm, and so do the metabolism and the nervous system; almost all physical and psychological humours are altered, the capacity for mental work, the acuteness of the senses, the attention, the memory. The female singer, worker and lawyer do not work as safely and wisely. There are even real menstrual psychoses and other serious disorders.[19]

The quotation above dates back to 1948, and, certainly, such ideas about women’s incapacities and weaknesses became less popular towards the end of the 1960s. Gender politics in Spain were by no means unchanged or immutable. In fact, and despite the persistence of too many inequalities, the central decades of the Franco regime brought important changes, as well as a proliferation of contradictions and identities.[20] Explaining in detail these transformations, which are related to the evolution of the political, social and economic circumstances of the country, is beyond the scope of this article, but, overall, the 1960s witnessed greater visibility of women in the public sphere. Along with some laws that improved women’s civil and labour rights,[21] there was a more favourable opinion towards women pursuing higher studies or practising different professions than in the decades that followed the civil war.[22] Moreover, even though birth control was not decriminalized until 1978, the pronatalist rhetoric was manifestly less aggressive, and some surveys even suggest ‘a growing acceptance of contraceptive methods by women during the 1960s’.[23] The legal obstacles did not prevent the rise of a public debate about the pill, which became increasingly popular after its introduction in 1964.[24] Around this

time, some individual voices and an emerging second-wave feminism shyly began to claim rights, although the movement would not be consolidated until the 1970s in the context of the country's struggle for democracy.[25]

Nevertheless, these changes did not fundamentally transform the belief that women's main destiny was marriage, that their place was the home and that their greatest glory, obligation and responsibility was motherhood. And it left essentially unaltered some attitudes with regard to the incompatibility of motherhood and labour. Although these opinions were not as belligerently stated as in the late 1930s and 1940s, even in the mid-1970s married women's work outside the home was frowned on, especially if they were mothers.[26] Furthermore, the fact that some transformations were noticeable, despite the limitations, stirred up high levels of anxiety in the most conservative authors, who kept drawing on women's reproductive abilities to disapprove of their emancipation. One of the most renowned gynaecologists of the time, José Botella Llusiá, objected to the increasing number of female university students and wage earners, but what he perceived as most threatening was the reduction in the birth rate and the fact that many women were avoiding pregnancy but not sexual encounters, and therefore were using birth control. Thus, even as late as 1975 he kept insisting that modern life, with its demands in terms of socializing outside the home and higher education, imposed an extra effort for which women were not biologically fit. While most of men's vital energy was meant for social life, women's bodies already consumed too much reproductive energy, leaving very little for other tasks.[27] In short, women's reproductive abilities served as the perfect excuse to oppose women's rights.

If we now consider some of the warnings and recommendations that were given on the issue of menstrual hygiene, we might be prompted to think that they strongly

contradict the pejorative metaphorical representation of menstruation. As a matter of fact, many authors were concerned about the pernicious or non-existent education regarding sexual hygiene, so they urged mothers to stop inculcating negative ideas about reproductive sexuality in their daughters. Underlying this piece of advice was the fear that women would neglect their bodily functions, giving way to unhygienic behaviours, anxieties and phobias that would have damaging consequences for their procreative capacity. They also warned about the need to banish false prejudices, emphasizing that the menstrual period should not provide an excuse to simulate illness or interrupt everyday household tasks:

> Although menstruation adversely affects the personality of the woman, causing a reduction of her organic activities, a change in the affectivity and a depression of the intellectual faculties, these manifestations are not so relevant as to lead her to consider herself *ill*. She should, therefore, keep doing her chores and continue with her daily life. She should do away with misconceptions and superstitions that oppose the only useful hygienic practice during menstruation: washing. The fear of water during the menstrual period is totally unfounded.[28]

By ‘chores’ and ‘daily life’, the author of the above lines did not mean waged work or higher education, which he believed to be at odds with women’s ‘physical and mental capacity’.[29] Women therefore received seemingly conflicting messages regarding menstruation. On the one hand, there was a great concern about the survival of beliefs and practices that were contrary to hygiene and hence potentially harmful to reproduction. Certainly, efforts were made to dismiss some myths and superstitions that relied on a view of the menses as a pathological event. On the other hand, metaphors of menstruation as abortion or a defeat persisted, together with the use of women’s reproductive capacity

as the strongest excuse to resist their full emancipation.

I do not want to close this section without making two important points in regard to the symbolic depiction of menstrual bleeding and its significance in the context of both the pronatalist rhetoric and the aforementioned hygienic concerns. First of all, by framing the trope of menstruation as a failure within the Francoist pronatalist strategies, I do not mean to imply that there is either a hierarchy or a causal relation between the two. Different levels of discourse are therefore involved here.[30] While one takes place in the realm of the symbolic and has mythic dimensions, the other plays a role in the more immediate political sphere. Even so, the reception and success of such hegemonic discourses cannot be generalized; by no means was there a homogeneous ideology that impregnated society unproblematically and remained unchanged or uncontested. Although in this article I focus on the abstract representation of the menses, and on a specific analogy, I am convinced that different levels of discourse can be analysed together. In this case, they are synchronically put into play to underpin a particular construction of femininity. While each has individual characteristics, the sociopolitical and the symbolic should not be dichotomized as totally distinct spheres, for they influence each other. Legislation and narratives that aim at nationalizing and controlling motherhood cannot be separated from the mythical representation of women’s sexuality.

My second contention has to do with the contradictions between the portrayal of menstrual blood as waste and the hygienic claims. Different levels of discourse are again involved here. Whereas the idea of failure or defeat works on an abstract level, when it comes to a more explicit description, menstruation was not judged as pathological but rather as a telltale sign that the reproductive system was working properly. Nor was it regarded as something embarrassing, filthy, ignoble or sordid, at least not in sex advice

manuals. On the contrary, it was understood as a dignified manifestation of the noblest function of women’s bodies: motherhood. In this sense, the allegorical representation of menstruation as waste (of reproductive capacities) is not inconsistent at all with descriptions from a sex-education viewpoint. Both serve the purpose of constructing women’s bodies as essentially reproductive.

My interest in this metaphor does not lie in exploring the scientific truthfulness of the description in light of today’s biological knowledge. Yet Martin argues that this representation, which is deeply rooted in the twentieth-century medical literature, is actually partial: it entails a choice of vocabulary that stresses some aspects while hiding others. It is, then, a biased interpretation of the transformations that take place in the body and, above all, an obliteration of the experiences of women and of the cultural context that defines them. Furthermore, it is revealing that, either consciously or unconsciously, the privileged narratives are those that echo stereotypical images of femininity and masculinity. This is particularly obvious in the example I discuss next: the representation of fertilization.

The romance between the egg and the sperm

As we go farther inside the body, we can see how the partial portrayals of menstruation are complemented by descriptions that attribute passivity to the egg and an aggressive personality to the male gametes. Thus, as corroborated again by Martin, stereotypes about the sexual performance of men and women are mimicked in the portrayal of the behaviour of male and female cells at the moment of conception.[31] In the case at hand, it must be said that the laudable purpose of educating people, making biology more understandable

and stripping scientific language of its opaqueness, can reinvigorate both the allegorical and the stereotypical tone of the representations. These are certainly a mirror of common ideas at the time about femininity and masculinity, and also about love, marriage and sexuality.

Here I will analyse Dr Carlos Barrio Cuadrillero’s suggestive story about fertilization that is included in a book aimed at disseminating the rhythm method of birth control.[32] To instruct his readership on this matter, the author imagines ovulation as the bride’s preparation for the wedding. The image is that of an egg-girlfriend who patiently awaits the big moment while walking down the aisle, in reference to the path of the ovum through the fallopian tubes, hoping the arrival of a sperm-groom. With luck, one sperm will go in search of his future ‘wife’, overcoming all the obstacles that separate ‘him’ from impregnation:

> Metaphorically, I can tell you that [the egg] got dressed as every bride does by covering itself with a *membrane or zona pellucida layer*, beautiful and fleeting ceremonial dress that it exhibits in its journey through the *inner third of the path of the tube*. As it advances, perhaps because it is cold or maybe hungry, it covers itself with an *albuminous layer* … that gets thicker as it moves.
>
> However, its beautiful primitive dress is no obstacle for the access of the gentleman. Upon the arrival of thousands of them, which surround the egg like a crown, one, God only knows why, is smarter and penetrates inside, fooling the others.[33]

The description is complemented by an illustration showing the union between a very well-dressed egg and sperm (Fig. 2). Therefore, what is at issue here is the construction

of a fictional narrative, a ‘phallic fable’ or ‘spermatic romance’ in the words of Barbara Tomlinson,[34] that mirrors broader ideas about gender. This trope attributes human personality traits and impulses to gametes and cells that actually lack human cognitive abilities, while at the same time reflecting beliefs about the roles that men and women are supposed to play in romantic relationships. For example, the courtship of the woman by the hero is here expressed in the image of an egg that waits for the male initiative. In addition, the gendered preconceptions in these kinds of discourses not only reveal socially attributed differences but also speak volumes about the hierarchy between the feminine and the masculine. For example, Dr Barrio’s wedding scene depicts the sperm as much bigger than the egg, a liberty taken by the author that contradicts the actual proportions of the male and female gametes.[35] The duo formed by the sperm and the egg thus resembles the ideal modern couple, in which a difference in height is envisioned as more harmonious and acceptable.[36]

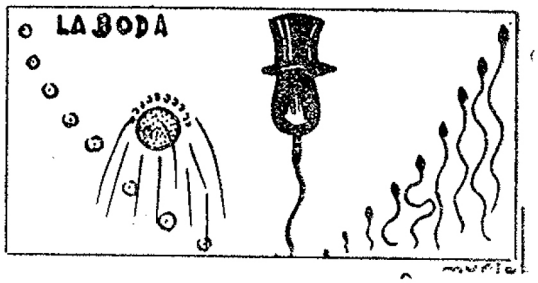

Fig. 2 The wedding. Carlos Barrio Cuadrillero, *Hijos a voluntad. Cómo regular la procreación al modo de Ogino-Knaus, admitido por la Iglesia* (n.p., 1954), p. 30.

Although drawings like this are as rare as they are exceptional, the correlation between men and women’s comportment and that of their respective gametes was explicitly

acknowledged by many authors. For example, Dr Jesús Noguer Moré assures the reader that the attitude of the sperm indicates ‘the path the adult male will follow’.[37] Here we can see the influence of one of the biggest names in the twentieth-century Spanish scientific scene, namely the endocrinologist Gregorio Marañón,[38] who had already made explicit these sort of analogies:

> [T]he *ovum* or female gamete and the *sperm* or male gamete, from whose fusion will emerge the egg, already show a clear typical structure, in conjunction with a specific function, which reproduces, schematically, the future differentiation in the occupation of the woman and the man. The ovum is a passive cell, equipped with vast food reserves: a nest furnished with abundant food to nourish the new being. In contrast, the sperm is an aggressive cell, endowed with great mobility, but without any supplies: a guerrilla fighter, all action, barely carrying a succinct backpack. The backpack is the genes.[39]

These sources portray the sperm as an element gifted with high mobility which struggles to overcome all obstacles in its path and swims upstream to meet the egg, penetrate it and fertilize it. The sperm that fuses with the egg is described as the chosen one, the best among its comrades, the bearer of the best genes, all ideas typically found in Darwinian narratives. Meanwhile, the ovum waits for the sperm to come, as the bride-to-be awaits her future husband at the altar. The waiting nature of femininity was already suggested in discourses about ovulation and menstruation, where they were compared to Penelope’s actions in Homer’s famous fable. Just as the *Odyssey*’s heroine weaves on her loom and undoes her work, female physiology reiterates its cycles. And as the former expects her long-lost husband’s return, the egg waits for the spermatozoon, and the woman anticipates either a wanted pregnancy or the blood that confirms its absence.

The narratives I am describing in this section provide the sperm with a great capacity for transformation. This fits the idea that the man is responsible for the progress of humanity in social, economic and political terms, which is extended to a genetic perspective. In contrast, both women and their reproductive cells are held accountable for securing tradition. The influence of Marañón, whose work draws on the theories of Patrick Geddes and Arthur Thompson, is evident here as well. In *The Evolution of Sex*, a book first published at the end of the nineteenth century, Geddes and Thompson stressed the anabolic character of the female cells, characterized by the economization of supplies, as opposed to the catabolic nature of the male cells, which can afford to use energy.[40] In a similar vein, as seen in the above quotation, Marañón argues that the male body is prepared for the struggles of the outside world, while the woman ‘is made for energy-saving, to centralize it in herself, not to release it around’.[41] This functional difference was also apparent at the level of the cells, according to the endocrinologist. A similar logic was, in fact, behind the already mentioned idea that women’s energies should be saved for reproductive tasks instead of being misused in the public sphere.

Moreover, once again female processes were depicted from a negative point of view. In a book of premarital advice, the leading figure of Francoist post-war psychiatry and eugenics, Antonio Vallejo Nágera, went so far as to consider the human ovum as a ‘Pandora’s box, which contains all the evils and assets that the new being inherits’.[42] Therefore, while the sperm was supposedly the element that sets the process in motion, generates changes and enables the formation of an embryo, the egg was a static container that waits to be activated to start its development.

In any case, compared to the human energy attributed to the male gamete, the ovum is presented as lacking the will and capacity of the sperm. In fact, ovaries are

commonly described as less evolved and more rudimentary organs than the testes. This notion again resembles Marañón’s theories, which shaped the understanding of sex difference for most of the twentieth century. This endocrinologist understood sex difference in an evolutionary scheme that ranged from childhood to complete masculinization, the latter being understood as the utmost state of evolution. Femininity could be found halfway between adolescence and manhood; hence, the female body would remain underdeveloped in order to guarantee its reproductive tasks.[43] Following this notion, Dr Noguer Moré claims that ‘in its developing process and differentiation, the testicle gives the perfect impression of maturity, according to the current histological and endocrine knowledge’. In contrast, he asserts, ‘[I]n the ovary one can see a perennial state of evolutionary indecision and a lower morphogenetic activity’.[44]

The descriptions of the cells’ performance in reproduction cannot be separated from the dichotomies used to make sense of romantic and sexual relationships between men and women. More specifically, the dualism of submission and domination is recurrent in the representation of fertilization, for instance through metaphors of assault that are similar to those employed to describe courtship and intercourse. In this respect, it must be highlighted that the egg is consistently labelled as a passive cell that receives the action and waits to be attacked by several spermatozoa so as to eventually be fertilized by one of them, a process often described using very violent language. For example, Dr Noguer contends that the egg ‘presents itself to the male gamete as an appetizing delicacy, and lets itself be attacked and penetrated’.[45] There is no doubt that this image of an egg being chased, surrounded and finally penetrated reflects general ideas about the supposedly natural feminine and masculine sexual attitudes. As a matter of fact, the same sources that explain how conception occurs are also intended to educate the lay public

about expected male and female erotic behaviour.[46] Hence, we are also told that it is men’s role to ‘wake up’ female sexuality, which remains asleep until it is ‘activated’. Moreover, men are encouraged to ‘overcome’ all the physical and spiritual obstacles that women intuitively oppose. This is repeatedly explained using warlike allegories. Thus, women are commonly portrayed as ‘passive and recipient’, which stands in opposition to the ‘attack-and-conquer’ male instinct.[47] In a little book for newly-wed women, Dr Maldonado argues, for instance, that the man can be represented as the ‘besieging army’ and the woman as ‘the assaulted fortress’.[48] Examples of such comparisons are endless:

> Above all, the man has a belligerent tendency that leads him to conquer the female, to look for her, to require her, to chase her, to corner her and, in general, to adopt a more or less aggressive attitude towards those of his own sex. This feature is related to his own muscular build, with his strength and with a defined orientation to procuring his own sustenance and making his way into the social structure.[49]

It is paramount that we note how these narratives support men’s power over women’s bodies and legitimize rape. Paradoxically, sexual violence is explicitly condemned but is naturalized as biologically understandable through the use of such symbols and analogies. This figurative language evokes clichés and shared assumptions that would be straightforwardly understood by the reading public. Our interest in these discourses lies less in finding out how accurate the information on certain physiological mechanisms was than in understanding how they convey socially and politically relevant meanings. As we have just seen, representations of fertilization reflect and reproduce particular constructions of sexuality and truths about the body. But they also promote, in the guise of biological knowledge, relations of power based on a naturalized conception of male

aggressiveness versus female passivity.

Conclusions

Metaphors used to account for sexual difference and biology expose and reinforce a specific interpretation of gender, that of those who have the authority and the influence to transmit knowledge about the body. In the case of the Francoist dictatorship, both doctors and Catholic clerics – the latter were often listed as censors or even co-authors of medical sex-education books – had the power to regulate what was conveyed to the lay public. Visual and textual metaphors in advice books or popular medical books serve to defend the notion that women and men are different and therefore should play opposite roles. For instance, some comparisons used to clarify the reproductive functions, such as explanations of the behaviour of the egg and the sperm, contribute to naturalizing not only the notion of complementarity between the sexes but also the hierarchy within the family, which was also supported by the legal codes. Likewise, the biopolitics of the moment, materialized through pronatalist discourses and laws that banned contraception, reached the general public as well through representations of menstruation as a waste or a failure.

Far from being mere rethoric devices, metaphors are ways of (re)producing biased knowledge. Visual images and illustrations that represent bodies should not be overlooked either as a way of communicating cultural ideas. The prejudices underlying these analogies become naturalized and inevitable, regarded as common sense. They are not neutral, for they generate expectations about human behaviour. Since gender equality does not depend only on laws or acquired rights but also on what gender means in the

realm of the symbolic, we must not forget that discourses conveyed through visual or textual metaphors are political. Therefore, it is essential to analyse and denaturalize them.

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[1] My research is funded by the Foundation for the Promotion of Applied Scientific Research and Technology in Asturias through the Severo Ochoa predoctoral fellowship programme to promote the teaching and research training of graduate students. In addition, this essay is part of the project Motherhoods and Families: Continuities, Changes, and Ruptures in History; From Ancient Societies to Contemporary Realities (Ref. HAR2013-42371R), funded by the Spanish Ministry of Economy and Competitiveness. An earlier draft of this paper was presented at the PhD workshop The Body in Cultural History (University of Oslo, 4–6 November 2015). I would like to thank the participants of this event for their insightful comments and suggestions. I am also indebted to Andrea Fernández-García for the initial proofreading of the text.

[2] George Lakoff and Mark Johnson, *Metaphors we Live By* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2003).

[3] Helen Haste, *The Sexual Metaphor* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1994); and Ludmilla Jordanova, *Sexual Visions: Images of Gender in Science and Medicine between the Eighteenth and Twentieth Centuries* (Madison: University of Wisconsin Press, 1989).

[4] Mary B. Hesse, *Models and Analogies in Science* (Notre Dame, IN: University of Notre Dame Press, 1966); Andrew Ortony (ed.), *Metaphor and Thought* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1993); Evelyn Fox Keller, *Refiguring Life: Metaphors of*

Twentieth-Century Biology (New York: Columbia University Press, 1996); and Emily Martin, *The Woman in the Body: A Cultural Analysis of Reproduction* (Boston: Beacon, 1990).

[5] Just to mention two among the most influential, see Evelyn Fox Keller, *Reflections on Gender and Science* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 1995); and Sandra Harding, *The Science Question in Feminism* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 1986).

[6] Here I use ‘metaphors’, ‘tropes’, ‘analogies’, ‘allegories’ or ‘similes’ interchangeably as broader terms to refer to figurative or symbolic expressions, without adressing the specific characteristics of different types of rethorical devices, and without discussing them with the analytic tools typical of literary studies or linguistics.

[7] Jordanova, *Sexual Visions*, p. 9.

[8] Ibid. p. 42.

[9] José P. Oliveras, *Guía médica sexual* (Barcelona: De Gassó Hnos., 1963), p. 75; and José Botella Llusiá, ‘¿Vamos hacia un tercer sexo?’, *Separata de Archivos de la Facultad de Medicina de Madrid*, 13:3 (1968), pp. 263-274 (268). Translations of Spanish quotations are my own and are lighly edited for spelling and grammar.

[10] José Antonio Rodríguez Soriano and Rafael Domeque, *Vida sexual de la mujer y parto sin dolor* (Barcelona: Vergara-Círculo de Lectores, 1963). The same text had already been published in a multivolume encyclopaedia for women, *Enciclopedia de la mujer* (Barcelona: Vergara, 1961).

[11] A. Clavero Núñez, *Antes de que te cases* (1946; Valencia: Tipografía Moderna, 1953), p. 68; and César Fernández-Ruiz, *La natalidad dirigida* (Madrid: Editorial Plus Ultra, 1952), pp. 36–7.

[12] Adrián Vander, *Enfermedades y trastornos en la vida conyugal* (Barcelona: Ediciones Dr Vander, 1958), p. 36.

[13] Oliveras, *Guía médica sexual*, p. 75.

[14] Martin, *Woman in the Body.*

[15] See also Ruth Hubbard, *The Politics of Women’s Biology* (New Brunswick, NJ: Rutgers University Press, 1990), pp. 124–7; or Lynda Birke, *Feminism and the Biological Body* (New Brunswick, NJ: Rutgers University Press, 2000).

[16] Mary Nash, ‘Pronatalism and Motherhood in Franco’s Spain’, in Gisela Bock and Patricia Thane (eds), *Maternity and Gender Policies: Women and the Rise of European Welfare States, 1880s–1950s* (London: Routledge, 1991), pp. 160–77; and Mónica García Fernández, ‘“Parir para la patria”: El control del embarazo y el parto en las primeras décadas del franquismo (1939–1955)’, in Sonia García Galán et al. (eds), *Nacimientos bajo control: El parto en las edades Moderna y Contemporánea* (Gijón: Trea, 2014), pp. 129–48.

[17] Clavero Núñez, *Antes de que te cases*, pp. 200–4; and García Fernández, ‘“Parir para la patria”’.

[18] Inmaculada Blasco Herranz, ‘Actitudes de las mujeres bajo el primer Franquismo: La práctica del aborto en Zaragoza durante los años 40’, *Arenal*, 6:1 (1999), pp. 165–80; and Nash, ‘Pronatalism and Motherhood’.

[19] Antonio de la Granda, *Ginectasia, La mujer de treinta años* (Madrid: Instituto Editorial Reus, 1948), p. 114.

[20] Aurora Morcillo, *The Seduction of Modern Spain: The Female Body and the Francoist Body Politic* (Lewisburg, PA: Bucknell University Press, 2010); and Mary Nash, ‘Mass

Tourism and New Representations of Gender in Late Francoist Spain: The Sueca and Don Juan in the 1960s', *Cultural History*, 4:2 (2015), pp. 136–61.

[21] On the legal discrimination of women during the dictatorship, see Ángeles Moraga García, 'Notas sobre la situación jurídica de la mujer en el franquismo', *Feminismo/s*, 12 (2008), pp. 229–52.

[22] María del Carmen Muñoz Ruiz, 'Modelos femeninos en la prensa para mujeres', in Isabel Morant (ed.), *Historia de las mujeres en España y América Latina*, vol. 4: *Del siglo XX a los umbrales del XXI* (Madrid: Cátedra, 2006), pp. 277–97; and Julia Hudson-Richards, '"Women Want to Work": Shifting Ideologies of Women's Work in Franco's Spain, 1939–1962', *Journal of Women's History*, 27:2 (2015), pp. 87–109.

[23] Teresa Ortiz-Gómez and Agata Ignaciuk, '"Pregnancy and Labour Cause More Deaths than Oral Contraceptives": The Debate on the Pill in the Spanish Press in the 1960s and 1970s', *Public Understanding of Science*, 24:6 (2015), pp. 658–71 (664).

[24] Ibid. p. 664; and Agata Ignaciuk et al., 'Doctors, Women and the Circulation of Knowledge of Oral Contraceptives in Spain, 1960s–1970s', in Teresa Ortiz and María Jesús Santesmases (eds), *Gendered Drugs and Medicine: Historical and Socio-Cultural Perspectives* (Farnham: Ashgate, 2014), pp. 133–52.

[25] Gloria Nielfa Cristóbal, 'El debate feminista durante el franquismo', in Gloria Nielfa Cristóbal (ed.), *Mujeres y hombres en la España franquista: Sociedad, economía, política, cultura* (Madrid: Universidad Complutense, 2003), pp. 269–97; and Mónica Moreno Seco, 'Cristianas por el feminismo y la democracia: Catolicismo femenino y movilización en los años setenta', *Historia Social*, 53 (2005), pp. 137–53.

[26] Celia Valiente Fernández, ‘La liberalización del régimen franquista: La Ley de 22 de Julio de 1961 sobre derechos políticos, profesionales y de trabajo de la mujer’, *Historia Social*, 31 (1998), pp. 45–65 (56).

[27] He expressed these opinions in various books aimed at the general public, such as *Cuestiones médicas relacionadas con el matrimonio* (Barcelona: Editorial Científico-Médica, 1966) and *Esquema de la vida de la mujer* (Madrid: Espasa-Calpe, 1975).

[28] Clavero Núñez, *Antes de que te cases*, p. 70.

[29] A. Clavero Núñez, *Maternología profiláctica* (Madrid: Editora Nacional, 1943), p. 54.

[30] I use the concept of levels as suggested by Jordanova in *Sexual Visions*, p. 3.

[31] Emily Martin, ‘The Egg and the Sperm: How Science Has Constructed a Romance Based on Stereotypical Male-Female Roles’, *Signs*, 16:3 (1991), pp. 485–501. However, as Emily Martin explains in her illuminating article, discourses that take for granted the passive role of the egg and the aggressive nature of the spermatozoon are not based on clear scientific proof, which sometimes even contradicts this notion. She also proposes an alternative account and a different vocabulary that allows the description of the same biological processes without drawing on stereotypical images. Likewise, feminist biologist Ruth Hubbard contends that the belief that the egg is passively fertilized by a sperm does not fit reality. Both authors agree that scientific evidence indicates that both cells actively fuse. Hubbard, *Politics of Women’s Biology*, p. 110.

[32] Carlos Barrio Cuadrillero, *Hijos a voluntad: Cómo regular la procreación al modo de Ogino-Knaus, admitido por la Iglesia* (n.p, 1954). The Ogino-Knaus, or rhythm, method was the only contraception allowed by the powerful Catholic Church, which had censorship privileges in Spain.

[33] Ibid. p. 71.

[34] Barbara Tomlinson, ‘Phallic Fables and Spermatic Romance: Disciplinary Crossing and Textual Ridicule’, *Configurations*, 3:2 (1995), pp. 105–34.

[35] Martin, ‘Egg and the Sperm.’

[36] Sabine Gieske, ‘The Ideal Couple: A Question of Size?’, in Londa Shiebinger (ed.), *Feminism and the Body* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2000), pp. 375–94.

[37] Jesús Noguer Moré, *Psicobiología de los sexos: Estudios sobre su diferenciación psicofísica* (Barcelona: Librería de Ciencias Médicas, 1952), vol. 2, p. 61.

[38] Marañón’s theories were incredibly influential and in fact inspired a transformation of ideas about sexual difference during the interwar period. He was also a relevant personality in the Spanish sexual reform movement of the 1920s and 1930s. See Nerea Aresti, ‘“Be Cautious, Not Chaste!” Gender Ideals and Sexuality (1920–1936)’, in Mari Luz Esteban and Mila Amurrio (eds), *Feminist Challenges in the Social Sciences: Gender Studies in the Basque Country* (Reno: University of Nevada and Centre for Basque Studies, 2010), pp. 71–83; Mary Nash, ‘Un/Contested Identities: Motherhood, Sex Reform and the Modernization of Gender Identity in Early Twentieth-Century Spain’, in Victoria Lorée Enders and Pamela Beth Radcliff (eds), *Constructing Spanish Womanhood: Female Identity in Modern Spain* (Albany: State University of New York Press, 1999), pp. 25–50; Thomas F. Glick, ‘Marañón, Intersexuality and the Biological Construction of Gender in 1920s Spain’, *Cronos*, 8 (2005), pp. 121–38; and Richard Cleminson and Francisco Vázquez García, ‘Breasts, Hair and Hormones: The Anatomy of Gender Difference in Spain, 1880–1940’, *Bulletin of Spanish Studies*, 85:5 (2009), pp. 627–52.

[39] Gregorio Marañón, *Ensayos sobre la vida sexual: Sexo, trabajo y deporte* (Madrid: Espasa-Calpe, 1951), p. 69. This book was first published in 1926 and was reissued several times.

[40] Patrick Geddes and J. Arthur Thompson, *The Evolution of Sex* (London: Walter Scott, 1889).

[41] Ibid. p. 69.

[42] Antonio Vallejo Nágera, *Antes que te cases* (1946; Madrid: Editorial Plus Ultra, 1965), p. 15.

[43] Gregorio Marañón, *La evolución de la sexualidad y los estados intersexuales* (Madrid: Morata, 1930).

[44] Noguer Moré, *Psicobiología de los sexos*, pp. 36–7.

[45] Ibid. p. 61.

[46] I analyse this issue in detail in ‘Sexualidad y armonía conyugal en la España franquista: Representaciones de género en manuales sexuales y conyugales publicados entre 1946 y 1968’, *Ayer*, 105:1 (2017), pp. 215–38. On love and sexuality from a gendered perspective in the Franco regime, see Carmen Martín Gaite, *Usos amorosos de la posguerra española* (Madrid: Alianza Editorial, 1981); Raquel Osborne (ed.), *Mujeres bajo sospecha: Memoria y sexualidad, 1930–1980* (Madrid: Editorial Fundamentos, 2012); or Rosa María Medina-Doménech, ‘“Who were the Experts?” The Science of Love vs. Women’s Knowledge of Love during the Spanish Dictatorship’, *Science as Culture*, 23:2 (2014), pp. 177–200.

[47] Vander, *Enfermedades y trastornos*, p. 55.

[48] Maldonado, *El libro de la recién casada* (Barcelona: Rodegar, 1963), p. 52.

[49] Oliveras, *Guía médica sexual*, p. 29.