

WARRIORS AND MYSTICS: RELIGIOUS ICONOGRAPHY, EROTICISM, BLASPHEMY AND GENDER IN PUNK FEMALE ARTISTS

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This paper discusses the relationship between the use of religious iconography related to eroticism by Spanish punk artists, and the gender stereotyping that the appropriation of these symbols aims to destabilize. The desire to shock and disturb the audience places these artists in a position where they have to challenge established values, such as religious and identity ones. There are many examples of male punk bands that openly rebel against organized religion, but the critique of these bands is direct, whereas women use eroticism to expose the patriarchal strategies of the church, as well as to project an image of themselves that breaks all expectations. Religious iconography becomes the tool for the ironic reevaluation and eventual destruction of cultural and gender structures as part of their artistic program.

KEY WORDS: punk, religion, blasphemy, eroticism.

Guerreras y místicas: Iconografía religiosa, erotismo, blasfemia y género en las artistas punk

Este artículo estudia la relación entre el uso de la iconografía religiosa y el erotismo en el punk español y los estereotipos de género que la apropiación de dichos símbolos busca desestabilizar. El deseo de epatar y desconcertar al público sitúa a estas artistas en una posición en la que pretenden cuestionar valores establecidos, principalmente religiosos e identitarios. Existen numerosos ejemplos de grupos de punk masculinos que se rebelan abiertamente contra la religión organizada; sin embargo, la crítica que hacen estas bandas es directa, mientras que las mujeres utilizan el erotismo para exponer las estrategias patriarcales de la Iglesia, así como para proyectar una imagen de ellas mismas que rompe las expectativas del público. La iconografía religiosa se convierte de este modo en una herramienta para la reevaluación irónica y la destrucción de estructuras culturales de género, como parte de su programa artístico.

PALABRAS CLAVE: punk, religión, blasfemia, erotismo.

The death of Spanish journalist Paloma Chamorro in January 2017 was a shock for many who had watched her host the TV show *La edad de oro* (The Golden Age) on Spanish TV between 1983 and 1985. The program, which “captured Spain’s cultural awakening” (Cantor-Navas, 2017) after the dark years of the

Francoist dictatorship, was addressed to a young audience eager of change, and included reports on literature, painting, cinema and visual arts in general with live performances by both national and international bands.¹ The aesthetics of Chamorro, reminiscent of those of Siouxsie Sioux, the British punk frontwoman, were especially transgressive for the times, as was the idea of a TV program on underground culture, where the audience could drink and smoke in the studio. However, although extremely successful among the Spanish youth, it was cancelled when Chamorro was accused by the Catholic Church of blasphemy and profanity after the release of a video by the band Psychic TV, “Moonchild” —which included a crucifixion featuring the head of an animal (a pig)—, and on the same day they performed a Catholic mass on stage with a naked couple in a coffin.² It took almost ten years to declare Chamorro innocent of all charges, but the program was cancelled due to the pressures of the Church and some sectors of society which considered it a potential threat to social order.³

The reaction of the Church against what they consider socially and politically dangerous, especially in relation to gender issues, is not exclusive to Catholicism. The recent case involving the group Pussy Riot in Russia shows the power of the Orthodox Church in this context, and their attempt to control any artistic form they deem destabilizing.⁴ It is in this sense that John de Gruchy indicates that “churches and other religious communities, along with their respective theolo-

¹ Among the artists who performed live in the show were Tom Verlaine (from Television), Elliot Murphy, Aztec Camera, Mark Almond, The Sound, Johnny Thunders, Violent Femmes, The Lords of the New Church. Others recorded exclusive gigs for the program: The Smiths, Lou Reed, Nick Cave, Echo and the Bunnymen, The Psychedelic Furs, Spandau Ballet. Among the Spanish groups who played there were Kaka de Luxe, los Nikis, Parálisis Permanente, Almodóvar y MacNamara among others.

² “‘Moonchild’ was originally broadcast in 1984 on the Spanish television show *La Edad De Oro*, alongside interviews with Genesis P-Orridge, filmmaker Derek Jarman, and musician and conceptual artist Jordi Valls, and performances by Psychic TV and Vagina Dentata Organ, which caused a forced shutdown of the network by the government at gunpoint” (Jacqueline Castel qtd. in Delaney 2016). The video is available at <<https://www.nowness.com/series/video-art-visions/moonchild-genesis-p-orridge-moonchild>>.

³ See Lázaro (1990), “La presentadora Paloma Chamorro, absuelta de un delito de blasfemia”, *El País*, 04/10/1990, <http://elpais.com/diario/1990/10/04/radiotv/654994808_850215.html>.

⁴ There was a wide coverage of this case in the media. The documentary “Pussy Riot: A Punk Prayer” (2013) by Mike Lerner and Maxin Pozdrovkin shows the power of the Orthodox Church in Russia. The Pussy Riot members recognize themselves as a punk feminist band, and declare, as artists, that their mission is to change the world. For more information on their views, see Elena Volkova, “Mater Nostra: The Anti-blasphemy Message of the Feminist Punk Prayer”; Joachim Willems, “Why ‘Punk’? Religion, Anarchism and Feminism in Pussy Riot’s *Punk Prayer*”; and the articles included in volume 4.2 of *Religion and Gender. Pussy Riot as Litmus Paper: Political Protest and Religious Culture*, a special number dedicated to the Pussy Riot case edited by Anne-Marie Korte, Katya Tolstaya and Heleen Zorgdrager.

gians, have [at times] initiated, aided and abetted ... denunciation, without any genuine attempt to understand ... However, the church should be careful not to act as self-righteous, but ill-informed moral guardians of the aesthetic and of the artistic creativity” (qtd. in Johnson, 2014: 4). Paradoxically, by reacting in such a way, the Church often gives credibility and recognition to what they want to annul. This is the case of the relationship between punk and religious iconography, as I intend to prove in this paper. The use of the religious iconography of churches and graveyards, especially images of Christ’s crucifixion, the recurrent allusions to the Virgin Mary and the saints, or the inclusion of religious references with a profane sense in the lyrics of the songs, which possibly started in Surrealism and Dada (from which punk took much inspiration) and, after punk, developed as a strategy and made it into the mainstream through those who, like Madonna, borrowed from punk in the 1980s. In this article, I focus especially on the use of religious iconography related to eroticism by Spanish punk artists, and the gender stereotyping that the appropriation of religious symbols aims to destabilize.

The idea of art as provocative is central to punk, and said provocation is reached by presenting an attitude, a message and a presence that disturbs the audience. The interest in *épater les bourgeois*, as the French avant-garde artists proclaimed, is found in Baudelaire’s *flâneur*, and, as Kristeva pointed out, has many connections with punk: “the Baudelairian beauty worship is a worship of sublimation itself—a process that neutralizes the body, passions, and everything that recalls, more or less closely, the family/cradle of desires” (Kristeva, 1987: 326). Provocation is achieved not only by the disturbing message that the artist wants to transmit. The external appearance is part of an artistic project. However, this external image is often a farce: “[p]utting together for oneself an aspect—an image—as artificial as it is shocking; an image that, on the one hand, signifies an absence of signification, and on the other a strenuous joke, a furious challenge to those naïve advocates of authenticity who let themselves be impressed by such silly antics” (Kristeva, 1987: 337). Female punk artists reenact this idea by adopting very sexual and purposely blasphemous symbols as part of their aesthetics as a challenge to those who see this image as authentic. For Lucy O’Brien this implies that punk values are about identification with the disadvantaged, the dispossessed, the subcultural, and as such, it offers women permission to explore gender boundaries, to investigate their own power, anger, aggression, —even nastiness (1995: 65).

In other words, the desire to shock and disturb the audience places these artists in a position where they have to challenge established values, such as religious and identity ones. In order to do so, the artist must project outside of themselves their worst fears and desires. As Dave Laing points out, “the musician’s strategy of provocation must include pleasure in the awareness of how the other, ‘traumatized’ listener will be discomforted” (qtd. in Whiteley, 2000: 97).

The emphasis on the punk woman as “warrior and mystic” (Bracewell, 1996: 18) reinforces the idea of the revolutionary artist as projecting the unconscious (repressed) forces to disturb the social order.

In “Daughter of Chaos: Patti Smith, Siouxsie Sioux and the Feminization of Rock”, Sheila Whiteley applies Julia Kristeva’s model of the semiotic and symbolic affective modalities as a theoretical framework for explaining the tension between pleasure/unpleasure, which characterize the punk discourse (2000: 96). In her text, the British critic studies the cases of Patti Smith and Siouxsie Sioux, which were instrumental and extremely influential among the punk women in Spain, providing a role model which went beyond the merely aesthetic. Speaking of Smith she says:

In general her musical style can be interpreted as a clash between the symbolic and the semiotic, using the language of ecstatic religion, the power of the word, struggling with the certainties of the disciplined faith she’d learned as a child, through an often musically undisciplined semiotic babble, the uncensored traces of the unconscious. It is in Kristeva’s words, paragrammatic. (Whiteley, 2000: 99)

Kristeva’s ideas on the revolution of poetic language and the eroticism of religion are present in songs such as “Break it Up”, which mixes violence and sexual images with salvation:

Snow started falling,
I could hear the angel calling.
We rolled on the ground, he stretched out his wings.
The boy flew away and he started to sing.
He sang, “Break it up, oh, I don’t understand.
Break it up, I can’t comprehend.
Break it up, oh, I want to feel you.
Break it up, don’t look at me.”
The sky was raging, the boy disappeared,
I fell on my knee
Atmosphere broke up, the boy reappeared.
I cried, “Take me please!”
Ice, it was shining.
I could feel my heart, it was melting.
I tore off my clothes, I danced on my shoes.
I ripped my skin open and then I broke through.
I cried, “Break it up, oh, now I understand.
Break it up, and I want to go.
Break it up, oh please take me with you.
Break it up, I can feel it breaking,

I can feel it breaking, I can feel it breaking,
 I can feel, I can feel, I can feel, I can feel.”
 So break it up, oh now I’m coming with you.
 Break it up, now I’m gonna go.
 Break it up, oh, feel me, I’m coming.
 (Patti Smith, “Break It Up”, 1975)

The scene is charged with sexual references (feel, touch, come) and with an insistence on salvation being attained by force (tore off the clothes, rip the skin open, break through). The use of these verbs, which indicate passion and violence, to narrate the encounter between boy/angel and the poetic persona reminds us of the erotic tension of other religious poems by Saint Therese or John Donne. Desire is channeled through violence, a necessary state to reach the sublime, projecting all eroticism in the I-figure, who longs for a physical experience with a (traditionally sexless) angel. Sexual ambiguity is thus reinforced while also put to the forefront.

According to Whiteley, Smith’s play with vocal and physical sexual ambivalence in her attitude, and the lyrics of songs such as “Gloria”, subvert previous stereotypes: “this is no song of praise to the patriarchal father, but rather an exaltation of sexual desire which focuses on possession —“make her mine” (2000: 101). In this song, there is a refusal to believe in salvation through sacrifice: “Jesus died for somebody else’s sins but not mine”, demonstrating a personal acceptance of one’s errors, and the vindication of free will.⁵ As she said:

I wrote the first lines of “Gloria” when I was 20 ... I recorded it some years later for *Horses*, but really, it was a declaration of self, not so much about Jesus. He is the vehicle, but I was declaring my existence, my right to make my own mistakes, my right to make my own choices. I was defining the type of artist that was entering the domain of rock & roll and the type of artist that I was, one who was going to make her own decisions. I’m not groomed by anyone. (qtd. in Grow, 2014)

When years later Smith was asked to perform in the Vatican invited by Pope Francis, the echoes of this line caused a small Italian ultra-Catholic group to

⁵ Patti Smith was raised in a very religious family. She grew up as Jehova’s Witness, but left organized religion at 12 or 13 (Grow, 2014). As she explains in her autobiographical book *Just Kids*, she has a strong biblical knowledge, and remains, to this day, very interested in religious subjects. Recently, she participated in the film *Noah* (2014), whose song “Mercy Is” she composed. According to Jim Farber, “[t]he poet-rocker has often used religious imagery in her work, for a variety of purposes. She titled her most popular album, 1978’s ‘Easter’, and included in the disc lyrics that quote Psalm 23. On the cover, a cross was placed on the credits below each band member’s name. The last sentence of the liner notes quotes the Second Epistle to Timothy: ‘I have fought a good fight, I have finished my course...’” (Farber, 2014).

oppose to her presence, accusing her of blasphemy, and asking for the concert to be banned.⁶ However, the accusation was dismissed, and Smith performed before the Pope on December 13, 2014.

Smith's firm defense of her personal views, reasserting her beliefs while refusing to adjust to a single credo, has been very influential in the way punk was conceived.⁷ She was, according to some critics, the focus of the New York scene that anticipated punk (Savage, 1991: 90-91). Smith shared the emphasis on shock tactics with avant-garde artists, and, with Siouxsie Sioux, an idiosyncratic and disruptive use of music (Whiteley, 2000: 106). As she has acknowledged many times, her style and artistic project owes much to the French poet Arthur Rimbaud.⁸ For Carrie Jaurès Noland, Smith introduced Rimbaud's aesthetics to punk practitioners providing musicians with a persuasive model of antisocial innocence (1995: 584). However, it was not only the myth of the man that she was attracted to, but also the poetry. Smith, in Noland's words, referred to his work as her major poetic influence, and "participated in a hermeneutic activity, as she transformed Rimbaud's texts into her own" (1995: 585). She established, according to Noland, a "hybrid genre she dubbed 'rock poetry,' which implicitly aligned the techniques of poetry with a socially deviant lifestyle involving drugs and the performance of gender ambiguity" (1995: 587).⁹

In fact, punk musicians from the Slits, the Raincoats and the Au Pairs, complained that Patti Smith and Joan Armatrading were more of a threat than wom-

⁶ See Bacchi (2014), "Pope Francis Gets Patti Smith Singing For Cardinals at Vatican Christmas Concert" <<http://www.ibtimes.co.uk/pope-francis-gets-patti-smith-singing-cardinals-vatican-christmas-concert-1474736>>.

⁷ Paloma Romero (Palmolive) is said to have met Ari Up at a Patti Smith's concert, and decided to form together the female band The Slits. Before that, Paloma, who was a Spaniard living in the London squats and the girlfriend of Joe Strummer from The Clash, had been playing briefly with Sid Vicious and Viv Albertine in The Flowers of Romance. Palmolive's rejection of punk to look for a more spiritual way of life led her to leave England. She currently lives in the United States, where she is very active as a Christian. She explains her conversion on her webpage <www.palmolive2day.com>.

⁸ For a full discussion of this, see Noland (1995). Smith dedicated her 1976 album *Radio Ethiopia/Abyssinia* to Rimbaud, and the album *Easter* (1978) contains many intertextual allusions to the poems by the French writer.

⁹ However, despite mentioning the influence Smith exerted, Noland acknowledges that the relationship of poetry and rock preceded her, and could be found in Bob Dylan, Jim Morrison, or Lou Reed, among others, not to mention the Beat generation (Ginsberg and Kerouac among others). Dylan's connections with Smith are very evident, but the bard's little interest in the poetry of the Avant-garde was, according to Noland, the reason why he was less influential than Smith in the development of punk.

en who openly sold their sexuality in rock, because they had denied they were feminists (O'Brien, 1995: 115).¹⁰

For many female bands, however, sexual provocation was a way to project their feminist discourse, albeit a non-traditional one by feminist standards. Vivienne Westwood encouraged women performers to act out their sexual fantasies appropriately dressed (Whiteley, 2000: 108-109). Sexual performances, theatricality and outrage were at the heart of the most scandalous performances of the time, and religious offense was also a part of it, often linked with sexual scandals. For instance, the first time that Siouxsie and the Banshees performed, it was in the 100 Club on September 20, 1976 at a punk festival organized by Malcom McLaren. Since they had no songs of their own as yet, the idea behind the performance of this amateur band was to mutilate and destroy the things they hated (Savage, 1991: 250). Among these things was "The Lord's Prayer", which Siouxsie read aloud for twenty minutes with future Sex Pistols member, Sid Vicious, playing on drums. This performance was well received, and "with her stark white face, jet black hair and icy stare, lead singer Siouxsie Sioux was immediately hailed as the queen of the dark side" (Arnold, 1988). This moment is considered by some reviewers "a major punk landmark, featuring stream-of-consciousness lyrics that digress in every imaginable direction from the basic devotional text" (Cleary, n.d.). Here is a fragment from the lyrics of the version that was included in her 1979's record *Join Hands*:

Run and hide.
 No escape.
 Run and hide.
 You do-gooders will never get to heaven.
 You do-gooders will never get to heaven.
 Still safe in your
 Still safe in your house
 O god —but you'll never
 You'll never, never, ever get to heaven.
 You'll never climb the ladder to heaven.
 So just shake it, shake it, shake it,
 Shake it baby —and twist and shout.
 Our father which art in heaven.
 Hallowed be thy name.

¹⁰ This discussion on feminism was held at a roundtable titled "Women in Rock" organized by the *New Musical Express* where, according to O'Brien, members of the Slits, Raincoats and the Au Pairs participated. Smith's relation with feminism was controversial, especially when she decided to retire to Detroit's suburbs to raise her children: "It seemed as if all her adolescent angst had been expressed and spent, that the warrior had retreated. 'I have no longer the need for angels' She wrote in 1993. They have all been internalized" (qtd. in O'Brien, 1995:117).

Thy kingdom come, thy will be done.
(Siouxsie Sioux, "The Lord's Prayer", 1979)

Siouxsie's image as "queen of the dark side," and pagan priestess became a model for Spanish women such as Paloma Chamorro and Ana Curra. The performative project of the band Parálisis Permanente emphasized this dark side by adopting a black leather outfit and posing on an altar on the cover of their only album *El Acto* (*The Act*, Tres Cipreses, 1983). The sexual references of the title are obvious, as is the idea of a pagan celebration or ritual. The illustration on the CD for the deluxe edition shows a crucified naked woman who is being flogged by another woman also naked with the exception of tights and high heels.¹¹ Moreover, the song "Quiero ser santa" ("I Want to Be a Saint"; lyrics by Ana Curra) included in the album explores the desire to transcend, and to reach *jouissance* through pain, which could be observed in previous mystic models. The lyrics of "Quiero ser santa" transmit a subversive idea of religion where *eros* is connected with God through suffering, and transcendence is reached through pain:

Quiero ser carbonizada
azotada , flagelada
levitar por las mañanas
y en el cuerpo tener llagas
quiero estar acongojada
alucinada y extasiada
tener estigmas en las manos
en los pies y en el costado

quiero ser santa
quiero ser beata
quiero ser santa
quiero ser beata

quiero estar mortificada
y vivir enclaustrada
quiero ser sacrificada
viajar a roma y ver al papa

¹¹ A reference to sadomasochism is to be found, for instance, in Alberto García-Alix's photograph of Ana Curra in lingerie and bondage on a chair on the cover of her LP *Volviendo a las andadas* (1987). The eroticism of the photograph is associated with the title of the work, going back to one's old ways. With this, Ana Curra presents herself as a destabilizing factor by voluntarily putting herself in an objectified sexual position. However, she does it in an ironic, subversive and intentional way.

quiero que cuando me muera
 mi cuerpo quede incorrupto
 y que todos los que me vean
 queden muertos de susto

quiero ser santa
 quiero ser beata
 quiero ser santa
 quiero ser beata.¹²

(Ana Curra, “Quiero ser santa”, 1989)

The sadomasochistic connotations are obvious.¹³ Also, the image on the cover of the single of this song is a picture of Saint Eulalia, a young Christian martyr who suffered thirteen martyrdoms, as many as years she was old, for not renouncing to her Christian beliefs before the Romans. She was crucified on a cross with the form of an X, hence the representation on the cover of the single.¹⁴ There is a perception of Christian martyrs as punk in the sense that they confronted the establishment, and were radicals, ready to die for their own beliefs. Therefore, punk finds in those martyrs an analogy for what they were doing: “Christianity as underground —Christians as the underdogs of punk rock culture” (Roessler, 2016: 181).¹⁵ This interest in martyrdom is also evident in another band, Desechables, whose singer, Tere, appears on the cover of their second LP, *Buen Ser-Vicio* (*Good Ser-Vice*, 1985), in a photograph by Ana Torralva repre-

¹² “I want to be a saint / I want to be burnt, / scourged and flogged, / I want to levitate in the morning, / I want to have blisters in my body / I want to be anguished / Hallucinated and in ecstasy / To have stigmata/ in my hands, / at the feet and on the side. I want to be a Saint / I want to be a beata. I want to be mortified / and to live cloistered. / I want to be sacrificed, / Travel to Rome and see the Pope / I want that when I die / My body remains incorrupt / And everyone that looks at me / to be frightened to death” (my translation).

¹³ The connections between sadomasochism and punk have been the subject of an important debate. The song “Oh, Bondage, Up Yours!” by X-Spex, whose frontwoman was Poly Styrene, is considered to be one of the hymns of punk. Lydia Lunch’s work is also often associated with SM, as she herself declared: I’m a musical schizophrenic and a contrarian. I consider my body a hotel where many monsters live. Who you get to play with depends on who wants to come out. On stage, it’s important for me to represent the shadow side, the obsessions, the extremes. It doesn’t mean I’m living them every minute... Pleasure is the ultimate rebellion. I’m a fucking *hedonist*. I want my own utopia outside of the killing zone, which is where I go into to create what I do, hoping some people will find fucking relief and beauty in it. (qtd. in Nastasi, 2015; emphasis in the original)

¹⁴ Ana Curra, who was educated with the nuns until she was 18 years old, has often acknowledged the influence of Catholic religion in her imagination. For a time she wanted to be a nun herself and even got a habit made, which she later used to perform with the band.

¹⁵ Gerrit Roessler uses this phrase discussing conservative policies and Punk Rock in the 2000s.

sented as Saint Lucy, but replacing the gouged eyes of the Saint with her breasts on a tray. Her provocative attitude, changing the word “servicio” (service) by “ser-vicio” (“to be vice”, as “ser” means “to be” in Spanish) implies that she presents herself as a service to the audience, combining the religious iconography with the idea of woman as temptation, as servant of men by offering herself as an erotic object. The parodic connotations of this pose are reminiscent of postmodernist practices, such as the photographs by Cindy Sherman.¹⁶ Tere’s performances became famous for their high erotic charge and angst: “gritos, aullidos, bramidos guturales, susurros, gemidos, movimientos espasmódicos y gestos lascivos y una belleza cautivadora que contrastaba con su actitud extrema. Sadomasoquismo y cuero”.¹⁷ Their first single, “La oración” (“The Prayer”, Tres Cipreses, 1983) is an excellent example of this. The singer/priestess invokes the devil in a black mass ritual:

Aquí estamos esta noche, esperando que aparezcas...
 por la sangre de este cabrón, reclamamos...¡tu presencia!
 Aquí estamos esta noche, esperando que aparezcas...
 ¡Reclamamos, reclamamos tu presencia!
 ¡Reclamamos, reclamamos tu presencia!
 Haz que fluya por nuestra sangre, todo tu odio, todo tu horror
 Que los hijos devoren a sus padres en el momento de nacer
 Que nadie escape a tus iras, señor del odio, señor del mal
 ¡Reclamamos, reclamamos tu presencia!
 ¡Reclamamos, reclamamos tu presencia!
 [...]
 ... Quema tu iglesia...¹⁸
 (Desechables, “La oración”, 1983)

Radical savages, Desechables wanted to confront all possible established values, including religious ones.¹⁹ References to black masses were also frequent in

¹⁶ Susan Suleiman discusses Sherman’s photographs and female eroticism in relation to feminism in *Subversive Intent: Gender, Politics and the Avant-Garde* (Harvard UP, 2012).

¹⁷ “Screams, howls, death growls, whispers, sighs, spasmodic movements and lewd gestures, and a captivating beauty that contrasted with an extreme attitude” (my translation). <<http://lafonoteca.net/grupos/desechables/>>

¹⁸ “Here we are tonight, waiting for you to show up... / Through the blood of this goat, we claim... your presence! / Here we are tonight, waiting for you to show up / We claim your presence! / We claim your presence! / Make it run through our blood, all your hate, all your horror / May the newborn children devour their parents / May nobody escape from your wrath, Lord of Hate, Lord of Evil, / We claim your presence! / We claim your presence! [...] Burn your church!” (my translation).

¹⁹ Pictures and videos of Desechables show them walking in a cemetery. Graveyards were very popular in the imagination and aesthetics of bands such as The Cramps, The Damned, or The

their performances. The photo session for the album *Golpe tras golpe* (1983) showed a seemingly crucified member of the band, arms extended with candles on them, and the two other members in a Mary Magdalene/Virgin Mary position at his feet.²⁰ Again, the associations between religion, divine love, *eros* and suffering are purely performative, and meant to reflect on a Catholic practice whose iconography relies on martyrdom, death, crucifixion and suffering.

For punk women, the expression of this sensitivity was a way to transcend and reach a climax in which they were active participants. Apparently anti-feminist, the discourse of submission to a patriarchal God is an ironic parody of the paraphernalia of the Church with a subversive and revolutionary purpose.²¹ As said before, with reference to Smith's song "Break it Up," the connection of religion with *eros* has been the subject of numerous studies and is evident in the poetry of Spanish mystics (Saint Therese, Saint John of the Cross) and of metaphysical poets such as John Donne. However, as opposed to the mystics, the use that punk makes of the religious experience is purposely defiant, atheist and interested in shocking and challenging established values, as well as exploring connections between spiritual and physical pleasure/unpleasure and gender stereotypes.

This is the case of the all-female band Las Vulpess, (in Latin, "the foxes", the equivalent to the English "bitches"). Their song "I Like Being a Bitch" caused an important upheaval after it was released on Spanish TV, with the consequent retaliatory termination of the director of the program that had the band live on TV on a Saturday morning, and a little later, the ending of the band. The song was a recreation of the Stooges' "I Wanna Be a Dog", from the perspective of a woman, with very explicit references to sex and drugs. Everything in the Las Vulpess had been designed to shock the general audience. This included the use

Cure, very influential groups among Spanish punk bands. The documentary on the story of this band also has plenty of religious references, from the title, *El peor Dios* (*The Worst God*, 2013), to the image on the cover with a dark cross on top of a mountain of stones.

²⁰ Alaska y los Pegamoides also took a session of photos at the local graveyard of La Almudena in Madrid.

²¹ Ouka Leele, one of the most prominent visual artists in the 1980s, also used religion to question female representations. For instance, she took a portrait of herself, characterized as the Virgin Mary, with an apple reminiscent of Eve. Roberta Ann Quance considers this photograph as an example of postmodernist parody, which does not aim to venerate the Virgin so much as to demythologize her. According to her, "[t]his is not a denial of the Virgin Mary, but a sort of suspended judgement about her reality, which viewers can see according to their own beliefs" (2011: 271). Also, by making reference to Eve's apple, that brought sin to the world, Ouka Leele fuses the image of the Virgin with that of Eve, the mother of mankind, who sinned and brought humanity and sexuality to the world.

of the SS insignia (with sig runes) in their names.²² But it was not the use of Nazi symbols that caused the scandal, or the second song included in the single, “Inkisiación”, which included allusions to the methods used by the Catholic Church to control the population, especially women, and references to the punishment of what they consider amoral sexual practices (“Se llevan a la monja / atada por el cuello / se dirigen a la hoguera / follaba con Satán”).²³ This passes completely unnoticed. What caused the scandal about the Las Vulpess was the fact that young women sang publicly on TV at a time considered “children’s schedule”, about how they liked being promiscuous. In his defense of the Las Vulpess, Carlos Tena, director of the program “Caja de Ritmos”, where the band had performed, declared that the song was not new and had been played on the radio for two years already before it made its appearance on TV. It never caused any trouble until then. The State General Attorney filed a case for “ofender al pundonor y las buenas costumbres” (“offense to honor and good manners”); Loles Vázquez, author of the lyrics, was accused, and so was Mamen Rodrigo, the singer.²⁴ The case was dismissed three years later, but it was the end of the band.

Since bands such as Desechables and Parálisis Permanente did not suffer censorship after the performance of religious/erotic songs such as “Quiero ser santa” or “La oración”, and little attention was paid to “Inkisiación”, we can assume that it was the fact of the self-proclaimed promiscuity of the young women on public television in an “inappropriate” schedule what caused the scandal.²⁵ However, the schedule was not the problem with the previously mentioned program, “La edad de oro”. The show was scheduled at night, and addressed an adult

²² The symbol of the *Schutzstaffel* was eliminated, as well as the word bitch in the title of the song, when the band reunited in 2005 to record “I Like Being” (Munster Records) which dropped the offensive “zorras” and had a little girl dressed like a princess (or a fairy) with military boots.

²³ “They have arrested the nun / tied her by the neck / they are going to the bonfire / she had fucked with Satan” (my translation).

²⁴ The conservative paper *ABC* published the lyrics of the song, and dedicated a full page to the case, including interviews with relevant personalities in Seville, such as the Vice-President of the *Consejo General de Hermandades y Cofradías*, the President of Amnesty International in Seville, a Professor of Civil Law, and even Antonio Cortés, “Chiquetete,” a popular singer. The Association “Family Action” addressed a letter to President Felipe González saying: “[m]anifestamos enérgica protesta por repugnante canción emitida por TVE. Pedimos urgentemente medidas garanticen imposibilidad de nuevas agresiones al buen gusto inmensa mayoría pueblo y familias españolas, así como las sanciones que correspondan a responsables intolerable emisión” (*ABC*, 1983: 25).

²⁵ Pedro Almodóvar’s movies were also shown on TV, together with others with high erotic content that could be offensive for religious standards, as part of a cycle titled “Cine de Medianoche” (Midnight Cinema) (1985-1988). Thirty-eight movies by directors such as Fassbinder, Passolini, or Bigas Lunas were part of this cycle.

audience. The problem in that case was the pressure of the Catholic Church, which considered the performance by Psychic TV blasphemous and aired with the complicity of the director of the program, Paloma Chamorro.

In conclusion, punk performers use religious iconography as a means to question and challenge established values which have dominated the cultural imaginary of the western world for centuries. It is part of an artistic program. In the case of punk women, this challenge is often linked to eroticism, foregrounding the physical in a spiritual relationship, and questioning gender stereotypes. The fierce oppositional reaction of the Church ends up validating the aesthetics and ideological program of the punk artists. A situation which continues nowadays, as exemplified in the case of the punk feminism of the Pussy Riot. There are many examples of punk bands that openly rebel against organized religion (Dead Kennedys, Crass, Bad Religion, Psychic TV, La Polla Records in Spain), but the critique of these bands is direct, whereas women use eroticism to expose the patriarchal strategies of the Church, as well as to project an image of themselves that breaks all expectations.²⁶ In their hands, religious iconography becomes the tool for the destruction and ironic reevaluation of cultural and gender structures as part of their artistic program.

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²⁶ For more on this, see Ian Ellis (2014), "The Fascination with Fundamentalism in Hardcore Punk", *Popmatters*, 20/06/2014, <<http://www.popmatters.com/column/182783-hardcore-punk-and-fundamentalism/>>.

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