

Chapter 5. Transfigured families

In Chapter two, I addressed the dominance of questions my research partners are confronted with by people curious about sexual matters; that is to say, intimate questions that focus on the trans person as an individual. However, the ‘interest’ of some people shifts to the topic of family and partner. *¿Cómo se lo tomaron tus padres?* (“How did your parents take it?”) was a question Magdalena was often asked. A question that bothered her. Diego, too, recounts an embarrassing moment in a bank when he was about 20. He had undergone one and a half years of hormonal treatment, wore a beard, and already looked like a man. When the bank clerk saw the female name on the documentation Diego provided, he expressed pity for Diego’s parents, and was curious if Diego had been operated on. In the case of Anabel, people who knew about her legal family status (husband and father) confronted her by asking what would happen to her wife after surgical reassignment (due to the missing penis). They also wanted to know what her daughter says about Anabel’s gender transition (because her father is turning into a mother).

In addition, I observed a situation while attending the procession of the Virgin in a village outside of Seville on Assumption Day with some friends. The village is famous for this procession, which turned out to be a huge, crowded (and for many people, a very emotional) event. It happened that there were two young trans women among the people who were walking just in front of the *Virgen* while she was being carried through the streets. They were chanting and expressing their admiration for her in chorus: “*Reina ... Reina, Reina, Reina ... Guapa ... Guapa, Guapa, Guapa*” (*Reina* means ‘Queen’, and *Guapa* means ‘Beauty’). I was told that it was the first time that these two young people were seen dressed in women’s clothes and expressing their trans identity during such a public event. Among my companions, their performance provoked expressions of admiration for their courage (“*Mira, que coraje tienen*”), because, as they remarked, they would definitely be insulted and would have to listen to negative comments. Yet, it also provoked statements regarding possible consequences. “*Que fuerte*” (“how hard”) it must be for their families, presenting themselves like this, coming out as transsexual on such an important day, so that everybody will know, one of them comments. “*Traumático*” (“traumatic”) adds another.

Noteworthy in all these statements is the shift of interest from the individual to the family. As sons or daughters, partners or parents, they are embedded in a kinship system. Gender transition is no longer an individual process, but involves the close social environment as well. Based on a literature review, Dierckx et al. (2016) conclude that research on the transgender population often disregards the social and family environment in which a gender role transition takes place. They point out that “[...] a transition is never just an individual process” (Dierckx et al. 2016: 41). The narrations of my interlocutors reveal that weighing the consequences of disclosing their gender nonconformity within the family as well as an initial rejection from one or both of the parents, are often linked to the uncertainty of the impact this will have on the family. Additionally, prolonging disclosure is sometimes coupled with preoccupations of burdening the family (‘I don’t want to distress my parents’), as the following case of Bittor will reveal.

This chapter broaches the issue of the family that, in one way or the other, has to deal with the transition of their family member and illustrates possible implications. To begin with, I concentrate on Bittor, a female-to-male trans person, who was 22 when we met in 2015. Contrary to those trans individuals who experience rejection from part of their family, Bittor’s example is characterised by complete support.

5.1 Of parents and siblings

Bittor

I got Bittor’s phone number from Ronaldo, who was a friend of his. Bittor agreed to contribute to my investigation, so we arranged a meeting in the *Parque María Luisa* in Seville on a Sunday afternoon. He asked me in advance if I minded if he brought his family along. I did not. When he showed up, he was accompanied by his father, his mother, his sister, four years his senior, and his sister’s boyfriend.

Bittor studies biology and lives with his parents in a village south of Seville. He was born in a female body, but as far back as he can remember, it was always clear for him that he was a boy. However, he never dared to mention it – until the age of seventeen. He remembers these seventeen years of his life as a big burden, because he had to live as someone he felt he was not: “[...] tú llevas una vida que no es la tuya.” (Bittor, 2015)¹

Although he always tried to avoid dressing like a girl, he felt forced to do so in order to avoid comments from the others. His mother vividly remembers Bittor’s reluctance to wear girls’ clothes. Thus, for example, at the age of nine, when they

1 “You lead a life that is not yours.” (Bittor, 2015)

went to buy the clothes for his communion day, he always went over to the boys' department and she had to call him back to the girls' section. His father remembers that when he was younger, Bittor liked to go hunting with him, which Bittor confirms. 'She' had 'her' own hunting clothes and 'her' own rifle.

"Pero vamos yo, nh que iba pensaba hay mujeres que le gusta la caza. Pero claro yo no pensaba que pudiera ser por allí. Él le gustaba él venía me acompañaba estaba siempre conmigo, pero claro, eh que que quería ser hombre." (Bittor's father, 2015)²

It can be argued that dressing in (men's) hunting clothes meant Bittor could live the role of the opposite sex without provoking any questions. Today, he no longer goes hunting, which Bittor explains by having to concentrate on his studies. However, maybe it was less his keenness for hunting and more his desire to live as a man, which he now does openly. (By the way, the subject of the hunt as a gender marker emerged in Garmina's narrative as well. However, in her case it was just the opposite. Her father wanted 'him' to join him in the hunt, and bought 'him' a complete set of hunting equipment. The journey remained a single event. The painful blow to the shoulder with the first shot, together with her refusal to kill animals, forced her to declare to her father that she was not interested in hunting. On the way back, she threw her hunting equipment out of the car. According to Carmina, her father could never accept that his only son showed traits which were attributed to the female sex. This also led to punishment.)

Bittors' discrepancy between the felt and attributed sex/gender, demands in school, having to deal with his peers and the prospect of living such a conflicting life until he died, provoked such insurmountable pressure and anxiety that he lost consciousness twice during class and had to be taken to hospital by ambulance. The second time he was hospitalised for twelve days, and underwent a wide range of thorough testing, including an analysis of his spinal fluid to look for infection or illness. His parents were afraid that he had something in the brain. However, the analyses revealed nothing unusual and the doctors stated: "*No tiene nada. Está sano*" ("He has nothing. He's healthy"). In retrospect, his father suspects that Bittor was weakened by his inner pressure concerning his sex/gender and his reluctance to come out to his parents.

It is striking to note that these explanatory models (that of the doctors, as well as that of Bittor's father) remain fixed in a scientific and Cartesian mode of thinking. The medical examinations, with their focus on the physical, found no clinical causes, thereby declaring Bittor healthy. This non-explanation dominated any other

2 "But well, I thought, well, there are women who like hunting. But, of course, I didn't think it could be that way. He liked it, he always accompanied me, he was always with me, but of course, he wanted to be a man." (Bittor's father, 2015)

explanatory model. Only later (after Bittor had had his coming out) did his father resort to a psychological explanation (body and mind). Here, phenomenology could add a third way to understand Bittor's fainting and offer an approach to overcoming this dualism. In his analysis, Plessner (1970) provides a different view of the relation of the person to their body and tries to overcome a Cartesian dichotomy. He describes the phenomena of laughing and crying as a kind of uncontrolled eruptions of a somehow autonomous, but not escapable body:

Man falls into their power; he breaks-out laughing, and lets himself break-into tears. He responds to something by laughing and crying, but not with a form of expression which could be appropriately compared with verbal utterance, expressive movement, gesture, or action. He responds-with his body as body, as if from the impossibility of being able to find an answer himself. And in the loss of control over himself and his body, he reveals himself at the same time as a more than bodily being who lives in a state of tension with regard to his physical existence yet is wholly and completely bound to it. (Plessner 1970: 31)

In this sense, Bittor's fainting in school was a response of his "body as body" (in neither a medical nor a psychological sense), and of "the impossibility of being able to find an answer himself" (Plessner 1970: 31). Moreover, it was an expression of his living "in a state of tension with regard to his physical existence" to which he is "completely bound". Taylor (in reflecting the work of Merleau-Ponty) addresses the boundedness of the body to its worldly environment as well. He argues: "Das Bewusstsein der Welt, in der ich mich leiblich befinde, kann nicht nach Belieben an- und ausgeschaltet werden" (Taylor 1986: 205).³ And he continues:

Natürlich können wir sie [die Wahrnehmung als eine Art Tätigkeit] nicht ausschalten, noch können wir sie – wie das Zähneputzen oder das Spazierengehen – bloss zeitweilig und vorübergehend vollziehen. Selbstverständlich kann ich Augen und Ohren schliessen. Doch ich bleibe *in* der Welt, habe eine Welt um mich herum, stehe auf etwas und in der Nähe von etwas, obgleich unter diesen Bedingungen die Konturen der Welt unscharf werden. Wie unscharf die Welt auch gegeben sein mag, sie behält eine bestimmte Kontur für mich, ausser wenn ich die Orientierung [...] ganz verliere oder in Ohnmacht falle. Doch wenn ich Augen und Ohren öffne, bestimme nicht ich das Aussehen der Welt. (Taylor 1986: 205)⁴

3 "The consciousness of the world in which I am bodily (leiblich) cannot be switched on and off at will [own transl.]" (Taylor 1986: 205).

4 "Of course, we cannot turn it off [perception as a kind of activity], nor can we – like brushing our teeth or going for a walk – merely execute it temporarily. Of course, I can close my eyes and ears. But I remain in the world, have a world around me, stand on something or near something, even though, under these conditions, the contours of the world become blurred. No matter how unsharp the world may be, it keeps a certain contour for me, unless I lose

From a phenomenological point of view, Bittor could no longer endure the perception of the world, the awareness that he cannot escape from his female sex. He fainted, thus, losing his bearings. However, when he regained consciousness, he had to realise that the world had not changed. Bittor isolated himself more and more and only left his room for college and meals, although his mother tried to motivate him to go out with his school-companions. He developed suicidal ideation: “Y estaba en mi cuarto ya comiéndome la cabeza, digo o bien salgo y lo cuento, me tira por una ventana, por así no puedo más.” (Bittor, 2015)⁵

Thus, one night he saw no other possibility than to tell his parents. He explained that he had waited so long for this, not because he feared that they would react in a negative manner, but because he did not want to burden them. He knew they would have to deal with a new life. His mother describes in detail how very lost Bittor looked that night, how he cried and explained to them that he had something very worrying to tell them. Her first thought was that Bittor was pregnant, or that ‘she’ had been forced by teachers or peers to do something ‘she’ did not like. For his parents, the information their youngest was about to give about her male gender identity was unexpected. Less so, for his sister. The father remembers: “[...] yo no me lo esperaba. Mi mujer tampoco. Nadie. Mi hija tenía idea.” (Bittor’s father, 2015)⁶

Bittor’s sister explained that she had quarrelled a lot with Bittor about the clothes he was wearing because he only wanted to wear trousers. She had called ‘her’ a “macho” and told ‘her’ that she dressed like a man. Eventually she thought that ‘her sister’ might be into women. When Bittor disclosed himself that evening, she said: “[...] yo lo primero que hice fue le di un abrazo y le dije: ‘Aquí no pasa nada. Esto es algo normal’. Y se acabó.” (Bittor’s sister, 2015)⁷

His family supported him from the beginning. His mother explained how they proceeded, first going to the family doctor to inform themselves about their next steps. The doctor sent them to the psychologist at the hospital in their town. At first, the psychologist thought he would have to evaluate Bittor for one year before being able to send him to the UTIG in Malaga. However, by the second session, the psychologist was so convinced of Bittor’s transsexuality that he sent him directly to Malaga, where he continued psychological and endocrinological clarifications at the UTIG for one year. Bittor’s mother sounded proud when she recounted all this,

my bearings completely or faint. But when I open my eyes and ears, I do not determine the appearance of the world [own transl.]” (Taylor 1986: 205).

5 “And I was in my room, racking my brains about it, then I say, I either go out and tell it, or I jump out a window. I can’t go on like this.” (Bittor, 2015)

6 “I didn’t expect it. My wife didn’t either. Nobody. My daughter suspected it.” (Bittor’s father, 2015)

7 “[...] the first thing I did was give him (her) a hug and I said: ‘Here, nothing happens. This is something normal’. And that was it.” (Bittor’s sister, 2015)

which gave me the impression that the feedback from their local psychologist had given her strength to manage the new situation and support Bittor.

He has been on hormones for three years. Regarding the surgical interventions, Bittor speaks of three surgeries he is entitled to ("*las tres que me corresponde*"), and he wants them all. The first one is the mastectomy, the second, the hysterectomy and the third, the genital reassignment. Having the possibility to undergo these medical gender affirmation procedures in Malaga, covered by the *Seguridad Social*, is not only something he thankfully welcomes, but something he demands in return for his cooperation with the UTIG:

"Entonces yo he seguido todos los pasos, y quiero de Málaga, como derecho que tengo por haber estar siguiendo en Málaga, hacerme las operaciones." (Bittor, 2015)⁸

He underwent the first operation, the mastectomy, one year ago and is very pleased with the result (also aesthetically): "Entonces a mí no me marca ni una marquita si quiera. Y me lo he hecho en Málaga." (Bittor, 2015)⁹

He considered the mastectomy to be both urgent and important due to the problem of hiding his breasts. Before surgery, he felt limited in taking part in activities, such as swimming, in order not to draw attention to his sex/gender incongruence:

"Yo la que me corría prisa era la del pecho, porque es que me ya muchísimo tiempo para eh que no ir a la playa, no podía ir a la piscina por el tema de tener que ir hm llevar camiseta, llevaba dos camisetas o tres, para que no se me notara a la playa. Y ya pues dejaba de ir porque yo ... yo eso no lo quería." (Bittor, 2015)¹⁰

When we met, he was on the waiting list for the second surgery, the hysterectomy. Bittor was looking forward to this operation, because he hoped that this would solve his discomfort with menstruation. His father thinks that the menstruation cycle is quite a burden for Bittor because he has to inject himself with hormones every two or three months. There are many types of hormones to avoid menstruation and he has tried them all, Bittor states. His father mentions patches and creams, but remarks that the injections serve Bittor best. When he feels that the menstruation cycle is starting (and he considers it especially disruptive when it starts in periods

8 "So, I've followed all the steps, and what I want from Malaga, as a right that I have for having been followed in Malaga, is having the operations done." (Bittor, 2015)

9 "I don't even have a mark. And I did it in Malaga." (Bittor, 2015)

10 "I was in a hurry for the one with the chest, because for a long time I didn't go to the beach, I couldn't go to the pool because of having to wear a t-shirt. I wore two t-shirts or three, so that it wouldn't be noticed at the beach. I stopped going, because, eh, I did not want that." (Bittor, 2015)

of stress, like exams), he calls his endocrinologist at the UTIG who prescribes the injections. For his mother, it is an achievement and a relief that the *Seguridad Social* pays for this treatment, which would otherwise put a heavy strain on their budget.

With regard to the third operation, the genital reassignment, the fact that the UTIG stopped offering this intervention due to bad results, gave him a bit of a backlash. Although he is determined to have this last operation done one day, he comforts himself by saying:

“Ya la última, bueno, no me corre tanta prisa porque bueno es necesaria pero no tanta como la mastectomía o la histerectomía. Entonces pues si tengo que esperar un tiempo, pues esperaré, me la hago bien para no- para tener menos riesgos posibles. Porque ya que es complicado en sí.” (Bittor, 2015)¹¹

Yet, he is discussing the possibility with his parents of having it done in a private clinic, should it take too long until new techniques convince the UTIG in Malaga to resume this kind of operation. For the moment, it is a question of money. I got the impression that Bittor would not hesitate to have this surgery immediately (in spite of the many critical reports), if the funding were possible:

“Entonces me han dicho que las dos [refers to micropenis and phalloplasty] que hacen, tanto por lo privado como las que hacían antes, tienen mucho riesgo, además que seguramente hay que estar sondada toda la vida porque la uretra se parte, nh muchísimos problemas. Entonces, con la explicación que me dio, casi me quita hasta la gana, pero yo lo tengo tan claro que si estuviera que esperar unos años que mejore pues yo opero, pero esa cirugía me la quiero hacer. Lo tengo muy claro.” (Bittor, 2015)¹²

Obviously to Bittor, to be a man means not only to be socially and legally accepted as a man, but to use all available surgical possibilities to adapt him anatomically as closely as possible to a biological man. He even seems willing to risk lifelong bodily inconveniences involved in genital reassignment.

Disclosing his transsexuality to his family, having their support and living publicly the felt sex/gender liberated Bittor, and helped him concentrate on his future

11 “And the last one, well, I'm not in such a hurry because, well, it's necessary but not as much as the mastectomy or the hysterectomy. So, if I have to wait, I will wait, so that it will turn out well, to have fewer possible risks. Because since it's complicated in itself.” (Bittor, 2015)

12 “I've been told that the two [kinds of genital plastic surgeries] they do, as much for the private as for the ones they did before [in the UTIG], are very risky. Moreover, you will probably be probed all your life, because the urethra splits ... a lot of problems. So, with the explanation they gave me, it almost took my mind off it, but for me it's so clear that if I were to wait a few years until it improves, I will operate. But I want to do that surgery. It's very clear to me.” (Bittor, 2015)

(see Chapter 4). After two years of taking hormones, the gender identity law (approved in 2007) allowed him to change his identity documents without having to undergo complete gender reassignment surgery. Despite this legal improvement compared to the situation during my first field research period a decade ago, this time span of two years is still a topic Bittor would change, that is, reduce most urgently: “No veo justo que haya que esperar dos años de hormonación.” (Bittor, 2015)¹³

Furthermore, he complains about the long waiting list in the UTIG that does not do justice to the many transsexuals asking for treatment:

“Que hay gente que llevan años en lista de espera, y años y años y no siguen par’alante. Y hay muchísimas personas transexuales que va que la UTIG, la unidad de allí, te atiende una vez a la semana. La cinco, seis horas en un día a la semana. Y hay muchísim- parece que no, pero hay muchísimas personas. Eso va muy lento.” (Bittor, 2015)¹⁴

He agrees with the medical practice of clarifying the psychological and endocrinological state of the person concerned beforehand. However, he thinks that once the hormone treatment has been prescribed and started, it should be proof enough for the legal authorities to permit changing the identity documents. In his case, the psychologist gave him the papers needed to change the documents seven months after initiating hormone treatment. However, although his appearance was masculine (his parents helped him to apply by even adding photos to draw attention to his masculine look), the judge refused. He said that the law requires a waiting period of two years and he would not enter into the topic: “Y llevaba yo barba, la voz cambiada, y no llevaba los dos años, me denegaron el cambio.” (Bittor, 2015)¹⁵

Appearance male, documents female. It would have spared Bittor some trouble if he had had the possibility to change his name before starting his university studies. Bittor notes that this obstacle is exactly the reason why some trans people stop their studies or their work.

Eventually (after waiting two years), he has now changed all his documents. His mother even managed to have his baptism certificate and the communion certificate changed by the Church. This was easier than she imagined, because she expected: “[...] con la iglesia hemos topado dice el refrán.” (Bittor’s mother, 2015)¹⁶

13 “I don’t see how it’s fair to have to wait through two years of hormonation” (Bittor, 2015)

14 “There are people who have been on the waiting list for years. Years and years, and they don’t go on ahead. And there are a lot of transsexual persons. The UTIG, the unity there attends you once a week. Five, six hours on one day a week. And there are many ... it doesn’t seem so, but there are so many people. That’s going too slow.” (Bittor, 2015)

15 “I wore a beard, my voice was changed, but because it wasn’t two years, I was denied the change.” (Bittor, 2015)

16 “With the church we have met, says the proverb.” (Bittor’s mother, 2015)

Figuratively, that means that the structures of the Church are perceived as an insurmountable obstacle. Thus, most of my interlocutors did not even try to change their documents with the Church because they expected great resistance, which would not be worth the hassle. Not so Bittor's mother. Bittor's mother went to the parish priest who was two months from retirement, with the court order showing that Bittor was allowed to have his legal documents changed. She did not ask him to find a solution, just to tell her how to proceed. For the parish priest, this was the first time in his fifty years as priest to encounter such a case. He told her to do nothing, that he would arrange everything, and he went himself to the Archbishop of Seville. It took only twenty days and Bittor's church registration was changed (his mother remarks that it normally takes one year until they start to move papers). She was not sure beforehand whether he would have to perform baptism and communion again, which he agreed to do if necessary. However, the priest provided this interesting answer:

"No se tiene ni que bautizar, ni hacer la comunión. Porque su hija se lo recibió por Dios como persona, no como eh nh como hombre o como mujer." (Bittor's mother, 2015)¹⁷

An understanding of this attitude can be found in Marcel Mauss' reflections on the category of the 'person' and the 'I'. He shows that the concept of the 'person' and the 'I' is not something given, but is something that has gradually emerged. In the course of history, it was the Christians who turned the moral person into a metaphysical entity (Mauss 2010). Mauss refers to a passage in the Epistle to the Galatians (3:28) which reads: "There is neither Jew nor Gentile, neither slave nor free, nor is there male and female, for you are all one in Christ Jesus [translated]" (Mauss 2010: 247). This understanding of the entity has been debated and dismantled over time. Mauss concludes:

Ausgehend also vom Begriff des *Eins* wird der Begriff der *Person* geprägt, wie ich seit langem glaube: mit Rücksicht auf göttliche Personen, aber gleichzeitig auch bezogen auf die menschliche Person als Substanz und Modus, Körper und Seele, Bewusstsein und Akt. (Mauss 2010: 248)¹⁸

Bittor's pastor seems to be in the tradition of the entity of the person who is perceived independently of origin, social position, or sex.

17 "He/she has neither to baptise nor make the communion. Because your daughter received it from God as a person, not as a man or a woman." (Bittor's mother, 2015)

18 "Thus, starting from the concept of the One, the concept of the person is coined, as I have long believed: with regard to divine persons, but at the same time also related to the human person as substance and mode, body and soul, consciousness and act [own transl.]" (Mauss 2010: 248).

Restoring normality

Meeting Bittor, accompanied by his family, gave me an idea of how important it was for the family to demonstrate how seriously they stand by their son. This impression was strengthened during our conversation. They emphasised that many transsexuals are not accepted by their family and stressed that they, however, judged this situation as normal: “*Es normal*”. This statement, that it is normal, emerged several times and in unison. For me, there was almost too much agreement and too much emphasis on normality. However, in the course of our conversation, the statements became more differentiated and showed that there was a process which had led to the actual perception of normality: “*Hay que hacer que sea normal.*” (Bittor’s mother, 2015)¹⁹

To conform to ‘the norm’ facilitates everyday life. As Villa states: “[N]ormal’ zu sein hat kaum zu überschätzende rechtliche, politische, ökonomische und kulturelle Vorteile. Und normal zu sein hat, soziologisch oder kulturwissenschaftlich betrachtet, immer zu tun mit normativen Prozessen der Normalisierung” (Villa 2008a: 11).²⁰

There was no given normality from the beginning. Bittor’s father described his changing sensations as follows: “*Yo al principio ... luchó. Yo no lo esperaba, yo me encontré ¡hu! No, no me entraba en la cabeza. No, no lo asimilaba.*” (Bittor’s father, 2015)²¹

Initially, they often made the mistake of saying *hija* (daughter) instead of *hijo* (son). Today, this does not happen. For Bittor’s father, it was helpful to accompany his ‘son’ to the UTIG in Malaga and to see all the other individuals who were in the same situation. This was helpful to find his way back to ‘normality’:

“*Sera que como yo estoy metido ya en este mundo, lo veo muy normal. Al principio me costó mucho. Desde entonces a hoy ha cambiado cien por cien. Ya lo veo muy diferente, lo doy muy normal.*” (Bittor’s father, 2015)²²

He also notes a general change in society in how transsexuality is talked about today, compared to his youth, and tells of an uncle, who has made the gender transition only now, at the age of over sixty years, and who left his wife and his three

19 “One has to make it normal.” (Bittor’s mother, 2015)

20 “Being ‘normal’ has legal, political, economic and cultural advantages that can hardly be overestimated. And from a sociological or cultural-scientific point of view, to be normal always has something to do with normative processes [own transl.]” (Villa 2008a: 11).

21 “In the beginning ... I fought. I didn’t expect it, I felt ‘huh!’ No, it didn’t enter into my head. No, I didn’t assimilate it.” (Bittor’s father, 2015)

22 “As I find myself put in this world, I already look at it as very normal. In the beginning, it cost me a lot. From then to today, it has changed one hundred percent. Now, I see it very differently, I consider it very normal.” (Bittor’s father, 2015)

adult children to live with a man. This uncle had been forced to marry against his will during the times of Franco. Bittor's father understands that this uncle sacrificed his entire life because he could not live his felt sex/gender:

"[...] toda la vida ha sacrificado. Toda su vida, por no haber dado eso paso antes. Y ahora ya, a la viejez, ha dado el paso. Y ahora es cuando está viviendo de verdad, ahora. Ahora con sesenta y picos años." (Bittor's father, 2015)²³

They also mention a cousin of Bittor's mother, also over sixty, who was thought to be homosexual, but now states that he always felt like a woman. He calls Bittor lucky to have parents who support him, and that he would have liked to grow up in a time like now "*que la mentalidad está tan abierta*" ("where there's such an open mentality"). This is all in contrast to his growing up during the dictatorship and having been subject to his father's mentality that did not permit this.

Thus, Bittor's father concludes: "Ahora hay mucha libertad, y se comprende mejor." (Bittor's father, 2015)²⁴

There are more laws in this respect, says Bittor, more help, says Bittor's father, and adds, there is the hospital in Malaga that did not exist before, and that helps the transsexual people. They welcome you there with open doors, says Bittor.

Lindeman (2011) holds that the opinions of non-involved third parties can be important for the construction of a new confidence for the non-transsexual people within the circle, which helps to bring order to a possible confusion in one or the other direction:

Erst externe Dritte erzeugen eine objektivierende Perspektive, die die Verworrenheit klärt, die durch das Zusammenspiel von leiblicher Realisierung und "ich"-bezogenen Realisierungseffekten entstanden ist. Gegen die Subversion der Geschlechterordnung durch Einzelne [...] steht der durch Dritte objektivierter und damit institutionalisierte Sachverhalt des wirklichen Geschlechts des Namens und des Körpers. (Lindemann 2011: 194)²⁵

A third party may include private persons as well as physicians, experts and judges, the latter reflecting institutional structures:

23 "He has sacrificed his whole life. His whole life for not having made this step before. And now, in old age, he has made the step. And it's now that he's really living, now. Now, at the age of sixty and something." (Bittor's father, 2015)

24 "Now there's a lot of freedom, and it's better understood." (Bittor's father, 2015)

25 "Only external third parties generate an objectifying perspective that clarifies the confusion that has arisen through the interplay of the effects of bodily realisation and "I"-related realisation. Against the subversion of the sex/gender order by individuals [...] stands the fact of the real gender of the name and the body, objectified and thus institutionalized by third parties [own transl.]" (Lindemann 2011: 194).

Letztlich muss auch die Einbeziehung von Gutachtern, der Medizin und des Rechts in diesem Sinn als Einbeziehung Dritter verstanden werden, durch die ein Konflikt zwischen Personen anerkanntermaßen durch eine sachliche Erkenntnis und die Überwachung der Einlösung des Zukunftsversprechens bearbeitet wird. (Lindemann 2011: 194)²⁶

This insight might be applied to Bittor's parents. Third parties, for example in the form of relatives with similar experiences, or seeing other trans people attending the UTIG, relativised the uniqueness of their situation. Furthermore, medicine and law offered a solution that comes close to a 'monitoring of the fulfilment of the promise for the future'. Additionally, even the Church was willing to help them get back to 'normality'.

The fact that Bittor's sex/gender transition is not exclusively an individual matter, but is tightly linked to the nuclear family, also becomes apparent when his mother uses 'we' while speaking of Bittor's transition and the efforts they all have been involved in. Maybe it is also a sign of regret that she did not realise his dilemma earlier and an expression of the process they all underwent in saying goodbye to a former existence and welcoming a new one:

"Por tú [refers to Bittor] has pagado diecisiete años. Y es por ahora, ya llevamos cinco, ya llevamos cinco años que vamos- que en fin coño nos conseguimos muchísimo. Porque esta puesto el tratamiento, se ha operado, hemos cambiado todo, él ya él ya no existe como su anterior esto. Nosotros hemos llevado unos meses corriendo de un de un departamento a otro de de juzgado, de notaría, de todo, porque él ha dejado de existir, como una hm de una persona y ha nacido otra." (Bittor's mother, 2015)²⁷

Bittor's parents always accompany him to his appointments at the UTIG in Malaga (about 200 km one way). In case they should be hindered, his sister and her boyfriend, who live about one hundred kilometres further south, take on this task. In addition to this organisational support, there is also psychological support from the family to strengthen Bittor's self-confidence. His mother reminds him

26 "Ultimately, the involvement of experts, medicine and law in this sense must also be understood as the involvement of third parties, through which a conflict between persons is dealt with in a way that is recognised by objective knowledge and the monitoring of the fulfilment of the promise for the future [own transl.]" (Lindemann 2011: 194).

27 "You [refers to Bittor] have paid seventeen years. And now, it's been five years that we ... well, we have achieved a lot. There is the treatment, he has undergone surgery, we have changed everything, and he, he no longer exists as his former self. We have spent months running from one department to the other, to the judge, to the notary, everything, because he has stopped to exist like, hm, as the former person, and another one has been born." (Bittor's mother, 2015)

regularly that he does not have to be ashamed: “Yo siempre le dije tú con la cabeza muy alta, mi alma.” (Bittor’s mother, 2015)²⁸

Moreover, in case a former friend would turn away, she points out that he would not be losing a friend, instead this friend would be losing *him*:

“[...] por ejemplo alguien que (lengthened) que era tu amigo. O ... y te hablaba y ahora no te habla, pues se lo pierde. Él se pierde tu amistad, y él se lo pierde. Porque tú eres la misma persona.” (Bittor’s mother, 2015)²⁹

However, they were all glad that there was no such incident. They all agreed that Bittor did not have any problems with anybody and that he is a respected person. This predominantly positive experience could be related to the openness with which the family decided to handle the situation. Upon my question of whether the laws in Spain are more advanced than the mentality of the people, Bittor’s mother answered that it depends on how you approach it. They chose the strategy of accepting Bittor’s transition as something natural and not hiding it in their social environment, and conclude that the people accepted it as well. They follow the philosophy: “Tú eres la misma persona. Hija, tú eres la misma persona. Entonces tú te das a respetar. Por lo demás te respeta.” (Bittor’s mother, 2015)³⁰

In addition, they think that it must first be accepted in the family (however difficult that may be), before you can expect society to accept it:

“[...] los primeros que tienen que aceptarlo somos nosotros que somos sus padres. Si tú no lo aceptas, como vas a esperar tú que la sociedad lo acepte. Entonces como tú lo aceptas por lucha, para que los demás lo acepten. Que es muy duro. Sí, porque te cambie una vida un esquema que tú has tenido diecisiete años una hija. Y ahora tienes un hijo.” (Bittor’s mother, 2015)³¹

Following Erving Goffman’s theory about interaction and stigma, he shows in detail how the self is constructed in the interaction with others and how stigmatisation leads to a “damaged self” (Goffman 2012). Hence, due to stigmatisation experiences, the self of gender non-conforming persons runs a high risk of being spoiled. Thus, the support Bittor receives in interaction with his family strengthens

28 “I always told him, you, keep your head up, my soul.” (Bittor’s mother, 2015)

29 “For example, someone who was your friend, or ... who used to talk to you, and now he doesn’t speak with you, well, he loses *you*. He loses your friendship, and it’s he who loses it. Because you are the same person.” (Bittor’s mother, 2015)

30 “You are the same person. So, you have to respect yourself. For the others to respect you.” (Bittor’s mother, 2015)

31 “We are the first who have to accept it, as his parents. If you don’t accept it, how are you going to expect that society will accept it? So, you accept it, fighting, so that the others will accept it. Which is very hard. Yes, because it changes your life, a strict idea that you have had a daughter for seventeen years. And now you have a son.” (Bittor’s mother, 2015)

him to confront stigmatisation, and at the same time illustrates how the interplay of an ensemble like the family is necessary to restore a “spoiled identity”, helps the presentation of the “new” self, and maintains normality.

Bittor's gender transition also brought with it material and organisational implications for the household. He formerly shared the bathroom with his sister, now he shares a bathroom with his father. All his clothes, pictures on the walls, photos and personal belongings that pointed to his female past were removed. His mother states: “[...] ya no hay cuadros de él, fotografías, ya no hay ropa suya, ya no hay recuerdos suyo de la vida anterior. Ya no hay nada.” (Bittor's mother, 2015)³²

Previously she asked Bittor if the photos bothered him. He did not ask them to be taken away because he knew that this would be hard for his mother. Instead, he answered: “Mama, esa no soy yo.” (Bittor's mother, 2015)³³

She remembers that taking down all the pictures of her former daughter and removing all the photo albums was the most difficult moment. It was also the only moment she cried, because she felt that a piece of her life was gone. She even had tears in her eyes when she recounted this story: “Cuando estaba quitando sus sus ... sus cosas porque entonces parecía que estaba quitando un trozo de mi vida.” (Bittor's mother, 2015)³⁴

However, she knew this was an inevitable step to accepting Bittor as male and their son: “[...] tengo que cerrar la p- ... para que él venga. Ella se fue, pero ha venido él.” (Bittor's mother, 2015)³⁵

Bittor's parents see their task in helping their son wherever they can: „Nosotros estamos para apoyarlo. Y lo que haga falta. Porque estamos con él, encantado.” (Bittor's father, 2015)³⁶

They accept his wishes, because: “Es que vivió una vida que no es la suya.” (Bittor's mother, 2015)³⁷, and: “Está en un cuerpo que no es el suyo.” (Bittor's father, 2015)³⁸

Expressing this kind of explanatory models for Bittor's situation (having lived a wrong life, being in the wrong body) once again reflects their sympathy and helps Bittor to talk to them openly. However, his parents' understanding and compassion

32 “There are no more pictures of him, photographs, there are no more of his clothes, there are no more memories of his previous life. There's nothing left.” (Bittor's mother, 2015)

33 “Mama, that's not me” (Bittor's mother, 2015)

34 “When I was removing his ... his things, it seemed that I was removing a piece of my life.” (Bittor's mother, 2015)

35 “I have to close [the past] ... for him to come. She left, but he has come.” (Bittor's mother, 2015)

36 “We are with him to support him. Whatever he needs. Because we are delighted with him.” (Bittor's father, 2015)

37 “It's just that he lived a life that wasn't his.” (Bittor's mother, 2015)

38 “He's in a body that's not his.” (Bittor's father, 2015)

(be they rational or emotional) are limited. They do not replace the kind of understanding from the people with whom he shares bodily (*leiblich*) experiences. This might be the reason why Bittor emphasises the exchange with ‘people like him’ (referring to other trans individuals): “[...] porque te sientes bien hablando si es una persona que me entiende.” (Bittor, 2015)³⁹ (See also Chapter 3.2)

As for the future, Bittor’s life plans are not something to worry his parents. On the contrary. It seems that the above-mentioned ‘normality’ they attribute to his sex/gender transition, their support and their efforts to maintain the family ties are reciprocated by Bittor’s socially valued life plans. These are to finish the sex reassignment process, to concentrate on his studies, to pursue a working career, and, “*si Dios quiere*” (Bittor, 2015) (“if God wills”) to find a partner and raise his own family.

5.2 Of partners and children

So far, I have dealt with how Bittor’s parents and sister dealt with the sex/gender transition of a family member. Although not explicitly emphasised, there already emerged some consequences with regard to same-sex and different-sex arrangements, especially the use of the bathroom that has been rearranged. With regard to tensions emerging out of changing same-sex and different-sex relations, Lindemann considers non-transsexual people to be as vulnerable as the trans person themselves concerning their sex/gender:

Bezüglich der Relation von Gleich- und Verschiedengeschlechtlichkeit werden Nichttranssexuelle durch ihre Beziehung zu Transsexuellen ebenso verwundbar, wie es bei Transsexuellen hinsichtlich ihres Geschlechts der Fall ist: Nicht-transsexuelle sind genauso auf das Verständnis anderer für die sich am neuen Geschlecht orientierende Relation von Gleichheit und Verschiedenheit angewiesen wie Transsexuelle, wenn sie ihre Selbsterkenntnis offenbaren. Aufgrund der Tatsache, dass Personen ihr Geschlecht nicht allein, sondern nur im leiblichen Ineinanderverhaktsein sind, löst die Realisierung des transsexuellen Wunsches ein regelrechtes Kuddelmuddel aus, das alle Beteiligten zumindest vorübergehend um ihre leibliche Sicherheit bringt. (Lindemann 2011: 193)⁴⁰

39 “Because you feel good talking if it’s a person who understands me.” (Bittor, 2015)

40 “With regard to the relation between same- and different sex/gender, non-transsexuals, through their relationship to transsexuals, become just as vulnerable as transsexuals with regard to their sex/gender: Non-transsexuals are just as dependent on the understanding of others for the relation of equality and difference oriented to the new sex as transsexuals are when they reveal their self-awareness. Due to the fact that persons are not their sex alone, but exist only in the interlocking of their bodies (*Leib*), the realisation of the transsexual de-

Although every kind of relationship is forced to deal with such changing same- or different-sex/gender relations, an intimate partnership that involves sexuality and gender transition occurring within an existing partnership take on a whole new dimension.

Anabel and Inés were married and had a little daughter when Anabel started to disclose her sex/gender feelings to her wife. Inés remembers that at first Anabel tried to indicate that she (Inés) should leave her, because she (Inés) would have less trouble and less confrontation with people. When Anabel decided to start gender transition and undergo treatment, Inés eventually decided to stay with Anabel. She declared: “Sigue este proceso, pero yo voy a seguir contigo.” (Inés, 2015)⁴¹

Moreover, it was not a revelation that came unexpectedly. They used to talk about Anabel's gender feelings long before Anabel eventually decided to start treatment (see Chapter 3.1). Furthermore, Anabel had sometimes secretly dressed herself as a woman at home, which Inés was well aware of: “Entonces a mí de sorpresa no me pilló por eso porque lo habíamos hablado ... habíamos hablado mucho.” (Inés, 2015)⁴²

However, initially, Inés had some preoccupations because of their daughter and the family *per se*. Therefore, they decided that Anabel should delay starting transition officially until after their daughter's communion day. Today, Inés perceives their relationship as even better than before. She notes that prior to Anabel's gender transition, they had more problems in their relationship, which she relates to the fact that Anabel did not feel comfortable with herself.

Before Anabel started gender transition, they were perceived as a heterosexual couple. Now they are two married women. Inés no longer feels the need to fit a defined sexual orientation. She comments:

“Es que tú te sientas ni lesbiana ni heterosexual, ni nada. Simplemente tú conoces a esta persona. Yo ... yo cuando me casé, me casé con un hombre, claro.” (Inés, 2013)⁴³

However, after starting gender transition (and before she underwent genital surgery) Anabel had difficulties entering into sexual contact with her wife. She thought that during these moments, Inés still perceived her as a husband. Yet, Inés seems to have adapted to the changing situation right from the beginning and considers Anabel's perception as misconceived and unfounded. She calls Anabel

sire triggers a real muddle, which at least temporarily deprives all participants of their bodily (*leibliche*) security [own transl.]” (Lindemann 2011: 193).

41 “Follow your way, but I will stay with you.” (Inés, 2015)

42 “So, I didn't get caught by surprise, because we had talked about it ... we had talked about it a lot.” (Inés, 2015)

43 “You feel neither lesbian nor straight, nor anything. You just know this person. When I got married, I married a man, sure.” (Inés, 2013)

a little bit 'paranoid' in this respect, and emphasises that for her, once Anabel decided to 'go forwards', the 'other' person ceased to exist: "Entonces yo ... la otra persona no ... para mí no existe." (Inés 2013)⁴⁴

Today, having been together longer as two women than as man and woman, she remembers her former life with Anabel as husband much less clearly than the current situation:

Inés: "Si yo echo la vista atrás ahora, si te digo la verdad, la recuerdo más ahora que antes."

Christoph: "¿Más a mujer que a hombre antes?"

Inés: "Sí. Claro. Porque yo, por de hecho que llevo más tiempo con ella de mujer que el de hombre, entonces por eso (amused). Entonces yo, para mí, es como la veo. Yo como la veo, como es. Pero bueno, para mí es una mujer." (Inés, 2013)⁴⁵

In general, Inés does not care much about what people say (in contrast to Anabel). However, if she is directly attacked (and this includes attacks against her family), she is prepared to shoot back. She remembers a situation some years ago when she was working in a fruit store. One evening, when Anabel arrived by car to fetch her, five temporary day-labourers started to insult Anabel. Inés got upset and started to insult the men back, with the effect that they turned on Inés. She was prepared for them to start to hit her, hoping that one of the staff of the fruit company would interfere. To avoid further excesses, Anabel made her run to the car: "Ellos estaban ofender a una persona, que era mi pareja, y yo la estaba defendiendo. Punto. Igual que cualquier pareja defiende a la suya." (Inés, 2015)⁴⁶

Their daughter, Vanessa (she was studying medicine when we met during my second field research trip) turns out to be a 'fighter' as well. She remembers, amused, how back in school nobody dared to provoke her because she defended her mother (Anabel) "*a caballo y espada*" ("with horse and sword"). She once had a fight with a schoolmate who labelled her mother (Anabel) as gay: "Me decía que mi madre ... dice, 'tu padre es maricón', no sé qué, y yo, me cabré." (Vanessa, 2015)⁴⁷

A similar situation occurred years later when she was at secondary school, a time which spans the years of 12 to 16. Similar to Luisa (see Chapter 2.1), whose

44 "So, for me ... the other person doesn't exist." (Inés, 2013)

45 Inés: "If I look back now, to tell you the truth, I remember her more as she is now than before."

Christoph: "More as a woman than as a man before?"

Inés: "Yes. For sure. Because actually, I spent more time with her as a woman than as a man. That's why (amused). So, for me, that's how I see her. I see her as she is. For me, she is a woman." (Inés, 2013)

46 "They were offending my spouse, and I was defending her. Period. Just like any couple defends theirs." (Inés, 2015)

47 "He said that my mother... he says 'your father is a fag', I don't know what, and I was pissed off." (Vanessa, 2015)

discomfort with her schoolmates increased as they entered puberty, Vanessa perceived this age span as “very bad”, because assumed weaknesses were exploited: “La adolescencia es muy mala, como yo digo. Entonces los niños pues empiezan a cualquier cosa por donde te ven débil es por donde te atacan.” (Vanessa, 2015)⁴⁸

However, these were the only occasions where she encountered problems. She is not sure if it is because people just pretend to accept this kind of family constellation, or if they really do not care: “Ya siendo más mayor no tenía problema nunca. No sé si porque la gente es muy falsa, o porque de verdad, no le importa.” (Vanessa, 2015)⁴⁹

However, she is well aware that there are people out there who do not understand and might one day try to harm her.

Concerning the times when Anabel was her ‘father’, and concerning Vanessa’s sensations when Anabel started gender transition, Vanessa has very few of her own memories, which she justifies by having been “quite young”. However, her mothers have told her anecdotes over and over, so that her memories may actually stem from their narratives rather than her own sensations. Thus, she was told that at the age of ten, after communion, Anabel informed her about her planned gender reassignment. Apparently, Vanessa started to weep. When asked why she was weeping, it turned out that she was worried because Anabel would have to undergo surgery: “[...] y como yo era tan pequeña a mí la palabra operar era como, te va a pasar algo y yo no quiero que te pase nada [...].” (Vanessa, 2015)⁵⁰

The same happened when Anabel went to the UTIG for genital surgery. Vanessa, fourteen years old, clearly remembers this situation:

“Y además cuando ella la llamaron para que se operase en Málaga, yo eso sí me acuerdo porque ya era más mayor, y yo no me quería venir del hospital. Yo llorando porque se quedaba ella allí en Málaga y yo me tenía que venir, y además era el día que yo tenía una excursión, y yo me pasé toda la excursión en Cádiz, llorando. Porque yo no quería.” (Vanessa, 2015)⁵¹

48 “Adolescence is very bad, as I say. So, the kids start to-, anything where they see you are weak is where they attack you.” (Vanessa, 2015)

49 “When I was older, I never had a problem. I don’t know if it’s because people are so fake, or because they really don’t care.” (Vanessa, 2015)

50 “Because I was so young, for me the word operation was like, something will happen to you [refers to Anabel], and I don’t want anything to happen to you.” (Vanessa, 2015)

51 “And when they called her from Malaga for the operation, yes, I do remember that, because I was already older, and I didn’t want to leave the hospital. I was crying, because she had to stay there in Malaga, and I had to go, and it was also the day I had an excursion in Cadiz. I spent the whole excursion crying. Because I didn’t want this.” (Vanessa, 2015)

Vanessa's account reveals that Anabel's gender reassignment, which also reassigned her 'father' to 'mother' has never been a problem in itself. Her only preoccupation was the fear of losing one of her parents:

"A mí, a mí me preocupaba esto porque ¡que es mi madre! Que yo no quería que le pase nada a mi madre. Yo no... a mí a mí operar antes era como... es que la gente cuando se opera siempre se muere y a mí eso me preocupaba." (Vanessa, 2015)⁵²

Anabel is thankful for her family's support and guesses that she would probably not have achieved her present wellbeing without her wife and daughter.

Vanessa's more or less unproblematic way of dealing with the non-normative gender of one of her parents might reassure one of my FtM research partners, Diego, who was living together with his female partner and their little son of eighteen months when I met him in 2015. To produce a child, they relied on artificial insemination by an anonymous donor with Diego's characteristics. He is somehow worried about how his son will grow up and how he will deal with his father's non-normative sex/gender history. Diego's preoccupations reflect societal prejudices. As a psychologist counselling parents of trans children, he knows, in theory, the way he must behave. However, being directly affected, there are emerging fears. He does not think that his son will have problems with him as a 'transsexual' father *per se*, and he intends to be open: "[...] porque él va vivir en un ambiente de diversidad [...]. [...] creo que no lo voy a ocultar nada." (Diego, 2015)⁵³

However, Diego is worried how people in society in general will react because Diego does not disclose his trans history. In society, he passes as a man, yet "[...] yo no voy a ir contando que soy transexual ¿no?" (Diego, 2015)⁵⁴

He mistrusts society. Thus, the dilemma is that, on the one hand, he will have to explain to his son that his father's transsexuality is something natural, on the other hand, he will have to advise him not to tell other people.

"¿Cómo lo explicas tú a un niño? Que es algo natural y que no pasa nada, y sin embargo le tienes que decir que no se lo puede contar a todo el mundo. Entonces es complicado. Pues dice 'bueno Papa, ¿pero si esto es algo natural porque no se lo puede contar a mí amigo?' 'Porque tu amigo a lo mejor no le sienta bien'. Y

52 "I was worried, because, she is my mother! I didn't want anything to happen to my mother. To me... operating before was like ... that people who have surgery always die, and I was worried about that." (Vanessa, 2015)

53 "Because he will live in an environment of diversity. I think I will not hide anything." (Diego, 2015)

54 "I'm not going to go telling everyone that I am transsexual. Right?" (Diego, 2015)

(lengthened) me parece muy duro explicarlo a un niño desde muy temprano que no toda la gente admita a todo el mundo." (Diego, 2015)⁵⁵

As already mentioned above, Diego lives in a partnership with a gender conforming (biological) woman. The same applies to Ronaldo. Like Anabel, both experience support from their partners. In regard to sex reassignment aspirations, it is striking to note that their wives (similar to Inés) express a less 'disciplined' (Foucault 1976) sex conformity than their husbands do. They seem to focus on the wellbeing of the person rather than the anatomical congruence expected (until some years ago) from legislation. They do not expect an anatomy congruent to biological men or women, and are rather cautious concerning sex surgery. Ronaldo states:

"Ella [referring to his partner, Emilia] me lo dice muchas veces, se ... mh a mí no me importa que tú no te operes o que tú no termines la operación." (Ronaldo, 2003)⁵⁶

Diego also recounts that his partner is reluctant to see him undergo genital surgery. She prefers his actual state of being to his taking the risk of losing sensitivity.

5.3 Who first to tell

Many of the male-to-female research partners mentioned that mothers and sisters adapted more easily to the new situation and had more understanding than the male members of the family. This is congruent with the findings of the quantitative study conducted by Dominguez Fuentes et al. (2011) in Spain that showed that of those transsexual persons who indicated having first spoken to a family member about their transsexuality, in almost half of the cases (48%) it was the mother. (Approximately one third of the participants in their study were FtM). The next person of trust within the family was the sister (13%), or both parents together (10%). The father as the first person of trust was the least mentioned (3%). This corresponds to a common sense notion of gender that depicts the mother as more understanding and caring.

Even where the mother was not the first person to tell, many of my interlocutors felt more supported by their mother than by their father, like Luisa, who, towards

55 "How do you explain it to a child? That it's something natural and nothing happens, and yet, you have to tell him that he can't tell it to everybody. So, it's complicated. Well, he will say, 'Dad, but if this is something natural, why can't I tell my friend?' 'Because it might not suit your friend'. So, I find it very hard to explain to a child from a very early age that not everyone accepts everyone." (Diego, 2015)

56 "She [referring to his partner, Emilia] often tells me ... I don't care if you don't operate or if you don't finish surgery." (Ronaldo, 2003)

the end of the 1990s first came out towards an aunt she trusted very much. She did not address her mother at that time because her mother had been preoccupied with problems of her own. Thus, Luisa did not expect any help from her at that moment. She had a bad relationship with her father and had never really had a confidential conversation with him. Therefore, he was not the person to confide in, although she knew that she could rely on him in case of an urgency. After a while, her mother started to support her. Her father had more difficulties accepting the situation and it took several years before they managed to find their way back to a relationship which, though distanced, was less conflictual.

Carmina (a generation older than Luisa), whose family belonged to the upper society, and whose father (an official under Franco) never accepted the feminine behaviour of his (only) son, was supported by her mother as well. Her mother's support was complicated, due to her socially expected loyalty towards her husband. Carmina describes her father as an authoritarian person and her mother obedient to his authority. She describes both of them as man and woman of their time:

“Mi padre era un hombre de su época. Con putas, con queridas, con juegos de cartas, todos los vicios. [...] [Mi madre] como mujer de su época. [...]. No decía nada. Ella lo que él decía era misa. Ella no se metía en nada, porque ... era una mujer que la criaron para que ... fue eh para que eh acatar las ordenes de su marido.” (Carmina, 2015)⁵⁷

Her father wanted ‘him’ to study in Madrid to become an official, to enter into politics, and commented: “Y ya tienes un sueldo de por vida” (Carmina, 2015)⁵⁸

Yet, Carmina was interested in painting and decoration, and wanted to study the fine arts. Her opposition to his will provoked such nasty verbal conflict that Carmina remembers this as the moment when they ceased to speak to each other. It was her mother who financed her studies. During different periods in her life, her father's rejection went so far as to distance her from the family (like hiding her). For example, at the age of ten, she was put in a Catholic boarding school run by curates, where she stayed until she finished her bachelor at around the age of eighteen. Or, another example: when she was called to do her military service, instead of using his influence to exempt her, he arranged for her to do the service in Ceuta (a Spanish enclave on the north Coast of Morocco), not least to hinder her mother from intervening. Thus, at his funeral, she made a striking appearance as a woman, and people asked who she was. Carmina sums it up:

57 “My father was a man of his time. With whores, with lovers, with card games, all the vices. My mother, a woman of her time. She didn't say anything. What he said was ‘the word’. She didn't go into anything, because ... she was a woman who was raised to ... it was for her to obey her husband's orders.” (Carmina, 2015)

58 “And you'll have a lifetime's salary.” (Carmina, 2015)

“Yo contacto con él ... poco. Porque no (lengthened) él no quería nada conmigo. Porque se avergonzaba de mí. [...] Bueno, cuando él murió, no me conocía nadie. Conocían a mis hermanas, a mí no. Porque nunca me presentó a nadie.” (Carmina, 2015)⁵⁹

5.4 Without familial support

Most of my informants emphasise the importance of familial support, especially because self-awareness and the urge to disclose non-conforming gender feelings often happen at a vulnerable age (that is, adolescence). Paquita, for example, judges the backing of the family (especially the parents) as the most important kind of support; a support that helps to master all the emotional and social obstacles to which the affected individual is exposed to:

“En nuestra vida los padres son muy importante. El apoyo de unos padres, sí, porque cuando tú te ves ... que no tienes apoyo y hay una edad en que es muy difícil cuando tú tienes una edad que tú no (lengthened) no sabes lo que te ocurre, ni asimilas muy bien las cosas, entonces ... el el ... lo que piensan los demás, en ese momento, no te importa. Lo que te importa es lo que piensan las personas que te quieren. Que en este caso son tus padres. Si tú no tienes un buen apoyo de tus padres ... si lo tienes, todo lo demás, puedes con ello. Ahora por mucho que tú tengas en la calle, mucho apoyo. Si no lo tienes en tu casa, no te vale para nada. [...] No te vale para nada porque (lengthened) porque yo he conocido amigas que no tenían apoyo en su casa, y lo pasaban fatal.” (Paquita, 2015)⁶⁰

Among my informants, Yolanda was one who lacked familial support. When we met in 2014, she had neither economic nor social resources (e.g. close friends), and had hardly any possibility to retreat to a private place. She lived in a shelter for homeless people in Seville. Being homeless and transsexual, she felt doubly marginalised:

59 “I, contact with him ... little. Because he didn't want anything to do with me. Because he was ashamed of me. Well, when he died, no one knew me. They knew my sisters, not me. Because he never introduced me to anyone.” (Carmina, 2015)

60 “Parents are very important in our lives. The support of your parents, yes. Because, when you're at a difficult age, when you're at an age you don't know what is happening with you, when you can't grasp it, so ... at this moment, you don't care what other people think. What you care about is what those persons who love you think. Which, in this case, are the parents. If you get no backing from your parents ... if you get it, you can handle everything. Now, for all the help you receive in the street, if you don't have it in your home, it's worth nothing. [...] It's worth nothing, because I've known friends, who didn't have help in their home, and they had a terrible time.” (Paquita, 2015)

“[...] es muy mal muy mal muy mal. Para una persona transexual. Estar en la calle. Y no tener ayuda familiares, ni tener ningún recurso. Nada.” (Yolanda, 2014)⁶¹

She was born in the middle of the 1960s, growing up in a marginalised neighbourhood of Cordoba together with two sisters. Her father was *un castellano* (a Castilian), her mother *una gitana* (a gypsy); thus, she labels herself *gitana* or *mez-tiza*. Yolanda describes her parents as having been marked by the dictatorship and remembers her father as a closed and stern man. He did not tolerate a son who behaved like a girl, that is to say, like her sister. He did not permit ‘him’ to play with dolls (like her sister did); instead he wanted ‘him’ to play football. Yet, Yolanda wanted to wear girl’s clothes (like her sister), and adorn her hair (like her sister). She cried when her father forbade her to play with her sister. Her mother was a little more tolerant. Nevertheless, she scolded ‘him’, when ‘he’ “painted” his face and looked like a girl. “Me sentía más niña, no niño. Yo pensaba así. Y entonces pues mi vida pues surgió mh muy mal.” (Yolanda, 2014)⁶²

Because of this parental reprehension, she suppressed her gender feelings. In retrospective, she felt psychologically abused:

“[...] dicen que claro, hay personas que nacen así, nacen así. Pero ... es según también en el ámbito que te críes. Y como te críes. Aunque tú quieras ser así, si tu ... tu padre rechaza eso, se vuelve loco, te mata, y te hace ... no puedes. Tienes miedo. Tienes miedo a expresar.” (Yolanda, 2014)⁶³

Yolanda led an unsteady life. She also recalls that for a long time, she did not feel like a “person”, but like something “abnormal”. She was imprisoned for four years due to a drug offence. Two years ago she came to Seville, where she went to see a doctor. After telling him that she felt she was a woman, he referred her to an endocrinologist, who, in turn, referred her to the UTIG in Malaga. However, this was not the first time that Yolanda had intended to start transition. Sometime before, when Yolanda lived in Cordoba, she had already gone to a doctor to tell him about her gender feelings. This doctor also referred her to an endocrinologist. However, due to the long waiting time and emerging “problems”, which forced her to leave Cordoba, she missed the appointment.

In Yolanda’s case, the definite decision to start transition intersected with her move to Seville and her being homeless, all of which had happened only two years

61 “It’s very bad, very bad, very bad. For a transsexual person. To live in the streets, with neither familial help nor having any resources. Nothing.” (Yolanda, 2014)

62 “I felt more like a girl, not a boy. I thought that way. And so, my life, well, it turned out very badly.” (Yolanda, 2014)

63 “They say, for sure, there are persons who are born like that. But ... it also depends on the environment you grow up in. And how you grow up. Even if you want to be like that, if your ... your father rejects that, he goes crazy, it kills you, it makes you ... you can’t. You’re scared. You’re afraid to express yourself.” (Yolanda, 2014)

before we met. Although leading an unsteady life, she nevertheless seemed to have had some shelter in her parents' house. After the death of her parents, one of her sisters claimed the house and bought out her siblings. Yolanda considered this an opportunity to start a new life:

"[...] y entonces yo firmé y me fui. Y yo me ... y yo entonces fue cuando yo me fui, yo pensé, yo pensé que yo (lengthened) quería vivir otra vida. Y la vida que quería vivir que yo yo me sentía yo, me sentía incomoda, me eh mi vida de hombre me sentía ... no sabía, que no sabía lo que yo lo que yo era. [...] Hasta que me descubrí por mí misma, que yo, lo que quería ser es una mujer, lo que yo era una mujer. Y entonces pues me reconocí y me estoy reconociendo y (lengthened) y me (lengthened) me identifico como una mujer. Y yo desde que yo empecé hacer el paso de mujer, yo soy diferente." (Yolanda, 2014)⁶⁴

Yolanda has no contact with her sisters and depends on professional assistance, like social workers or the persons in the shelter where she lives. An NGO enables the trips to the UTIG in Malaga. She also finds personal and emotional support in the ATA.

Yolanda has not yet been admitted (by the UTIG) for hormonal treatment. She is tall and has a strong, stringy body, which reveals her anatomical male sex. Nevertheless, this does not stop her from showing skin and dressing up in a miniskirt, commonly attributed to women who like to call attention to themselves. Her gender performance, indeed, calls attention. In this sense, Yolanda has not yet obeyed society's call to "[...] return for the confusion [she] cause[s] [...] to create a morally and aesthetically appealing form of gender difference that is experienced as affectively necessary [own transl.]" (Lindemann 2011: 194). (See Chapter 4.5). Yolanda is well aware that her gender performance attracts attention, which sometimes provokes reactions she interprets in a contradictory way. Hence, when men in cars or on motorbikes honk their horns when they see her, she feels perceived as a woman and not as a transsexual person. This makes her proud. On the other hand, when the kids in the street stare at her, she is well aware that her physical traits and gender appearance are a mismatch, that the kids know she is "a man". Because she causes this confusion, Yolanda experiences problems due to her gender non-conformity and sometimes feels threatened in public. This limits her access to public space. Occasionally, she takes detours to avoid groups of young men, who tend to

64 "And then I signed and left. And I ... it was when I left, I thought, I thought I wanted to live another life. And the life I wanted to live ... I felt, I felt uncomfortable, I felt my life as a man ... I didn't know, I didn't know what I was. Until I discovered for myself, that I, what I wanted to be is a woman, that I was a woman. And then I recognised myself and I'm recognising myself, and I identify myself as a woman. And ever since I started to make the step to be a woman, I'm different." (Yolanda, 2014)

hurt her. However, she does not avoid confrontation in general, quite the contrary. She is prepared to defend herself (a characteristic she attributes to her term of imprisonment), which led then to physical confrontations. Yet, she learned that an emerging violent group dynamic is hard to stop:

“A uno solo le digo ‘¡Vente pa’ acá! Vamos hablar y tú’. Que me voy a cambiar. No habla. Y se caga. Pero cuando hay tres o cuatros y están de aquí, es cuando ya se fortalece. ¿Me comprende? Y ya ... ¿me comprende? se pone chulo. Y porque hay ... está protegido. Porque a mí ha pasado eso. Cuando me veía con un había dos o tres, se han liado. Cuando han visto que yo respondo, se han liado a otro. ¿Me comprende? Por yo respondo. Yo estaba cuatro años en preso. En mi vida anterior, estaba cuatro años en la cárcel.” (Yolanda, 2014)⁶⁵

Legal improvements for trans individuals in Andalusia (and Spain) over the last years have helped Yolanda pursue her gender transition aims. Access to treatment for her and others with little or no economic resources, fewer obstacles to changing the legal documents according to the ‘new’ identity (although in Yolanda’s case she must officially be permitted hormonal treatment, which is not done yet), and the establishment of a supply centre like the ATA, all point to a modern and progressive state. Yolanda is well aware of this. Nevertheless, her everyday experiences reveal that these structural improvements have not yet reached society in general. Yolanda, who, during her life, seems to have mastered serious personal and societal confrontations, perceives her environment as still violent and backward, with a lack of respect towards trans persons:

“Hay mucha violencia eh a una persona transexual. Mucha violencia. Físicas, psicológicas, de todo. Esta, esto, yo no sé, yo no sé porque, porque en un (lengthened) en un país como estamos ya tan avanzado, como estamos en España, en un país como vivimos, que vivimos con burros catetos, porque esos son cateto burro, las personas que no comprendan a otra persona su forma de vivir, su forma de ser. Que no que ... que se la rechace. Y haciéndole daño. Haciéndole daño. Porque a mí eso me hace daño. A mí lo que más me duele la vida, lo que más me duele la vida, si una persona se ría de mí. Eso no aguanto nunca. Una persona que se ría de mí, eso me da la puñala y (lengthened) y me duele. ‘¿Tú te rías de mí?’, yo por

65 “If there’s only one, I tell him ‘Come here! Let’s talk’. That I’m going to change. He won’t say anything. He’s scared. But if there are three or four, he already feels stronger. Do you understand me? And then ... do you understand me? he gets pumpy. Because he feels protected. This has happened to me. One saw me, but there were two or three, and they get involved. When they’ve seen that I talk back, they hook up with someone else. Do you understand? Because I respond. I was four years in prison. In my previous life, I was four years in jail.” (Yolanda, 2014)

no puedo callar. '¡No me ríes de mí! ¡No!' Y no. Porque yo me gusta es respetar. ¡Y que me respeten!' (Yolanda, 2014)⁶⁶

I do not intend to generalise the problematic outcome a lack of familial support might have on the trans individual, as in Yolanda's case (e.g.: no familial support results in living on the street). From an intersectional perspective, which emphasises the need to consider the impact of diverse social categories of disparity, the social class where Yolanda grew up (a marginalised neighbourhood) must surely be included in the analysis. Nevertheless, my interlocutors made clear that the authoritarian suppression of a non-conforming gender expression of a family member and the lack of familial support were not helpful and had a long lasting negative impact.

5.5 Concluding remarks

My interlocutors experienced different kinds of family support. Some experienced complete familial support. Some could rely only on one parent, mainly the mother. Others found support in their partnerships, and still others had no support at all on the part of the family. Tendentially, where support was anticipated, transition was started earlier. However, due to the different age groups among my informants, it might be risky to generalise because the capacity to start transition was related to societal hegemonic norms as well, which have been liberalised in the last decades. Family support entailed different kinds of coping strategies on the part of the family members. As the case of Bittor shows, the available medical support seemed to strengthen his parents in their conviction to support their son. In other cases, professional medical support was important mainly for the trans individuals themselves. Inés, for example, (Anabel's partner) did not rely on professional medical guidance. Her support was motivated by her affection for her partner as a person, and not for her partner as a clearly defined sex/gender. Where support was denied, gender non-conforming individuals experienced repudiation, which can be titled a coping strategy on the part of family members as well. Not one of my interlocutors spoke of being 'kicked out of the house', and, thus, of experiencing a

66 "There's a lot of violence towards a transsexual person. A lot of violence. Physical, psychological, everything. This is ... I don't know why, because in a country where we are already so advanced, such as in Spain, in this country we live with jackasses. Because these are jackasses, these persons who don't understand that other people have their way of life, their way of being. They reject them. And are hurting them. Hurting them. Because this hurts me. What hurts me most in life is when a person laughs at me. I can't stand that. A person who laughs at me, that's like a stab, and it hurts me. 'You laugh at me?' I can't shut up. 'Don't laugh at me! No!' Because what I like, is respect. To be respected!" (Yolanda, 2014)

forced spatial dissociation. However, in Carmina's case, after her father's threats and punishments failed to have the desired effect, there happened a 'privileged' spatial dissociation (in addition to the emotional one), by putting her in a Catholic boarding school. For the sons of the upper classes (this applies to Carmina) it might have been usual to get an education in a boarding school. Yet, for her father, this proved to be a convenient strategy to hide her from his friends and acquaintances. Finally, Yolanda's case reveals that the lack of familial understanding of her gender non-conformance did not prepare her (maybe even hindered her) to adequately confront an array of everyday life situations (including the delay in starting gender transition).

5.6 Summary

This chapter showed that the well-being of some trans individuals is closely related to family and law. Legal improvements and the availability of public supportive structures not only serve these trans persons on the individual level (i.e. the psychological and biological aspects), but may also facilitate familial acceptance and support. When parents and partners are confronted with the gender transition process, as kin, they themselves experience a transition. The topic is new, unexpected and not of their own choice, and they have to deal with it. Encountering supportive structures (in one case, even the acceptance of the Church) may help family members in this process. This, in turn, has a positive effect on the self-esteem of the trans person concerned. In the opposite case, family members who refuse to accept the new gender status of their trans kin risk disrupting the family system and charging their trans kin with an additional burden of guilt. Thus, to improve the daily lives of trans people, attention should not only be focussed on the individual, but should also consider the importance and involvement of family members.

