

# GENDER VIOLENCE AND THE EMPOWERMENT OF WOMEN IN POST-FRANCO SPANISH FILM

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Faculty Adviser: Dr. Loly Alcaide Ramirez

Essay completed in partial fulfillment of the requirements for graduation with Global Honors,  
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## **Introduction and Methodology**

In 2011, the total number of victims of gender violence recorded in the Spanish Register<sup>1</sup> was 32,242, and all of them were women; during this same year, 61 women were murdered by their partners (“Statistics” 1). These alarming statistics suggest that strong patriarchal attitudes still remain within Spanish culture. Gender violence and patriarchal attitudes were prevalent during Francisco Franco’s dictatorship, which lasted from the end of the Spanish Civil War in 1939 until his death in 1975. Within his regime, Catholicism was vital in shaping the lives of Spanish citizens. Laws were passed, ideologies were cemented, and patriarchy ruled society. The husband was the head of the household, and women were obedient, subservient wives. Domestic violence was a ‘don’t ask, don’t tell’ concept that was all too often swept under the rug and ignored. Women were possessions of their husband; they were not allowed to participate in civil life without the permission of their spouses. Since the death of Francisco Franco, there has been a vast amount of social change as Spain has transitioned out of its dictatorship. Within this transition, cinema has played an important role in adapting and implementing new gender role ideologies, which include changing attitudes toward gender violence. Free from the strict Francoist censorship laws, Spanish film directors are now using cinematic art to denounce domestic violence by bringing more awareness to the situation and by empowering women to leave their abusive partners. Through character and mise-en-scène analyses paired with feminist theories by Andrea O’Reilly, Adrienne Rich and Laura Mulvey, this paper will explore the empowerment of domestically abused women in three post-Franco films- Benito Zambrano’s *Solas*, Javier Balaguer’s *Sólo mia*, and Iciar Bollaín’s *Te doy mis ojos*- and argue that Spanish cinema’s shift away from patriarchal traditions in the post-Franco era is indicative of the nation’s increasing awareness and condemnation of domestic violence within Spain.

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<sup>1</sup> The Central Register for the protection of victims of domestic and gender violence

### **Literature Review and Background Information**

Domestic violence is a pressing issue that affects society on a global level. This act not only perpetuates gender inequality, but it also leaves countless women severely beaten, bruised, and even dead every year. According to American authors Randal W. Summers and Allan M. Hoffman, “domestic violence refers to the abuse by one person of another in an intimate relationship. These relationships can involve marriage partners, partners living together, dating relationships, and even former spouses, former partners, and former boyfriends/girlfriends. The abuse may take the form of physical violence, emotional abuse, sexual abuse, and even stalking” (xii). However, their definition differs slightly from that of Spaniard Miguel Melguizo, who states that “la violencia de género, la expresión más frecuente y grave de la violencia doméstica, se refiere a la violencia contra las mujeres, utilizada como instrumento para mantener la discriminación, la desigualdad y las relaciones de poder de los hombres sobre las mujeres”<sup>2</sup> (77). It is important to note the differences between these definitions, as cultural perspectives toward this issue vary widely across the globe. The term ‘violencia de género,’ or gender violence, is used much more frequently in Spain, as most cases of domestic violence are specifically “understood to be all physical and psychological acts of violence, including attacks on sexual freedom, threats, coercion or arbitrary denying of freedom carried out against a woman by a man who is or has been her spouse, or who is or has been linked to her by a similar sentimental relationship, even if without cohabitation” (“Statistics” 20). Altogether, domestic violence is an act that has been committed “throughout recorded history,” but is a much newer concept that has only just recently- within the last 40 years or so- been presented publicly as an issue (Summers

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<sup>2</sup> “Gender violence, the most frequent and grave expression of domestic violence, refers to violence against women, utilized as an instrument in order to maintain the discrimination, the inequality and the relations of power of men over women”-my translation

xiii). In fact, “in Spain, it was not until the reform of Penal Code 1989 that family violence was considered a crime” (García-Perales 143). One of the reasons that this reform took such a substantial amount of time can be traced back to the nineteenth century, in which the civil codes prohibited women from owning property, “or engaging in any activities without her husband’s permission”; essentially, the wife was considered property of her husband and “this inferiority of women...with respect to the husband...existed in the civil code until as late as 1981” (García-Perales 145). Domestic violence remained a silenced subject until 1984, when the first women’s shelter was opened after Spain became conscious of the problem (García-Perales 145). Ever since this topic emerged as a social problem, the Spanish government has implemented new initiatives and forums, including the Spanish Reform Against Violence Toward Women, Action Plan Against Domestic Violence, both in 1998, as well as a Victims Assistance Office in 2000 (García-Perales 150). Although the Spanish government has implemented these new tactics to prevent this problem and raise awareness, it has not been completely effective. Violence against women is a tragedy that is embedded much deeper within Spanish culture, rooted within a strong patriarchal society that flourished under Francisco Franco’s dictatorship.

After the Spanish Civil War, Francisco Franco came into power and ruled Spain under a strict dictatorship, which lasted from 1939-1975. Within the near forty years, Spanish society regressed as the role of Catholicism was vital in shaping the ideologies within the culture. Because Catholicism was so important during Franco’s regime, “civil marriage and divorce were abolished...the use of contraceptives and abortion were also prohibited...inside wedlock, wives had to obey their husbands and the husbands had the option to punish them if they did not” (Ferrer-Pérez 510). Along with these rules was the notion that once a woman was married, she was not allowed to work, therefore confined to the home and subjected to the domestic sphere of

housekeeping and motherhood. Franco's regime perpetuated the ideologies of strict gender roles in which men were the providers and women their property (Ferrer-Pérez 510). Because of these ideologies and rules regulated by the Church, domestic violence was a 'don't ask, don't tell' subject. Without any visibility to this problem, the general attitude toward domestic violence was that there was no problem. According to Victoria A. Ferrer-Pérez, "attitudes play an important role in shaping social settings, which may both contribute to perpetuating and reducing the levels of this violence in our societies" (517). Francisco Franco's strong patriarchal regime maintained the silencing of gender violence and the attitude of acceptance within Spain.

Not only did Franco's dictatorship rely heavily on the influences of Catholicism, but it also supported an intense censorship in which film "almost ceased to function except as the state's chief means of legitimizing the Franco regime and defending its ideology" (Higginbotham 8). In her book, *Spanish Film under Franco*, Virginia Higginbotham explains the censorship laws implemented and maintained by Francisco Franco, how violence was often omitted, and how Spanish culture was influenced by these censorship laws. She states that "film in Spain plays a more important role than anywhere in Europe. Interviews and surveys about reading habits there confirm that film provides the only source of consistent cultural information for the vast majority of people" (135). By censoring all films produced, and even imported, into the country, Franco was able to control the content and shape the patriarchal attitudes and ideologies that plagued Spain for four decades: "Franco's censors seemed to want to return to the eighteenth century when books by French philosophers and deists...were banned in hopes that the virus of free thinking might be kept out of Spain" (Higginbotham 9). The Comisión Clasificadora, the Spanish censors during this regime, compiled a list of subjects prohibited from being shown in these films; this list included rape, birth control, and films favoring divorce (Higginbotham 12).

Domestic violence was not portrayed within these films, therefore perpetuating the silencing of the issue; patriarchal and Catholic ideologies cast women in very traditional roles. In his book *Cinema on the Periphery: Contemporary Irish and Spanish Film*, Conn Holohan further explains the development of Spanish national cinema and the prominence of conservative attitudes toward women within Francoist films. In post-civil war Spain, there was the ideology within film that “the patriarchal family was seen as representing the state in microcosm. As an institution, the family was unthreatening to autocratic Francoism” (Holohan 68). Because the idea of a traditional family was so important within Francoist film, the representation of the woman as the conservative, docile wife was the perfect way to symbolize the conservative nation, as a whole.

Marsha Kinder in her book *Blood Cinema: The Reconstruction of National Identity in Spain* explains in great detail how violence has been represented within Spanish film, both during Franco’s dictatorship and after Franco’s death in 1975. Kinder describes the phases of Spanish film, including the effects of the political transitional period from dictatorship to democracy on strategies implemented by filmmakers. Kinder states that “the film medium has always been an important vehicle for constructing images of a unified national identity out of regional and ethnic diversity and for transmitting them both within and beyond its national borders” (7-8). Within Francoist film, many ideologies were being portrayed to regulate the patriarchal practices of Spanish residents. Kinder also explains how the death of Franco led to the death of censorship within Spanish film and how directors during this transition used their liberation from censorship as a means towards the “reconstruction of national identity through the production, promotion, and reception of popular culture” (9). Within this freedom, directors started implementing the portrayal of domestic violence, a concept that had no visibility prior. Once again, it is evident that film plays a crucial role in implementing and maintaining ideologies within Spanish culture,

from the repressed Francoist society to the freedoms and violence associated with post-Franco films.

Susan Martin-Márquez describes different types of feminist theories within Spanish film in her book, *Feminist Discourse in Spanish Cinema*. Martin-Márquez remarks on the amount of work that has been done on this topic in Spain when she mentions that “in general, Spanish cinema has not been an object of study among leading feminist film theorists, and at the same time, it would seem that a feminist film theory has not been practiced by critics within Spain...and gender issues have only very recently and very tenuously percolated their way into Spanish film journals and books” (10). Because there is not a substantial amount of information on feminist film theory on Spanish film, she acknowledges that she must use different approaches to feminist practices within Spain specifically, and that they should be addressed differently because Spanish feminism is largely politically based off of women’s rights groups and the historical context of oppression in which they have lived (Martin-Márquez 11). Martin-Márquez draws on views from pioneering feminist film theorist Laura Mulvey’s article ‘Visual Pleasure and Narrative Cinema’ which describes the male gaze of the female image. Mulvey says that “narrative cinema is structured on two gender-specific components which reinforce the patriarchal division between active and passive roles: spectacle and narration” (cited in Martin-Márquez 13). Later in *Feminist Discourses*, Martin-Márquez explores the importance of the role of mother-daughter relationships within the post-Franco film *Cría cuervos*. By analyzing this film, she concludes that this mother-daughter relationship “begins to explore the oftentimes painfully contradictory experiences and behavior of a woman who is both product and agent of patriarchal socialization” (220). This concept is very important within the following three films,

as each protagonist struggles to accept that her mother has chosen to stay in an abusive relationship, which took place during Franco's dictatorship.

Within the following three film analyses, listed chronologically, I implement feminist theories from Andrea O'Reilly, Adrienne Rich and Laura Mulvey to analyze how each protagonist is empowered enough to reject the pattern of abusive relationships, break the traditions of a patriarchal family, and leave her abuser. Each film reflects a changing attitude toward gender violence between the Francoist generation and post-Franco generation, while simultaneously denouncing gender violence.

### ***Solas (1999)***

In 1997, Spanish media was flooded with the news of 60-year-old Ana Orante's horrifying murder. After denouncing her abuse on national television, Ana was beaten, thrown over a balcony, and lit on fire by her husband. This event caused a national outcry and an awareness of gender violence as a severe crime, setting the stage for the release and wide acceptance of Benito Zambrano's *Solas (Alone)* in 1999 (Wheeler 22). Not only was the film popular in Spain, winning five Goya Awards, but it was also widely received in other countries (Wheeler 22). *Solas* was one of the first Spanish films to denounce gender violence, and although no actual scenes of violence are depicted within the film, it remains one of the underlying themes as the plot progresses, and the audience is able to see the effect that this violence has had on the two female protagonists. The film focuses on one Andalusian family, the father (Paco De Osca), the wife Rosa (María Galiana), and the daughter María (Ana Fernández), and on the reconciliation of mother and daughter after years of separation caused by the mother's acceptance of abuse. Motherhood is one of the key themes within this film as María becomes pregnant and decides to keep her baby, which has caused many differing opinions from feminists

over the years. According to Gerard Dapena, “because Zambrano emphasizes women’s caring and nurturing capacities, some feminists may argue that his perspective reduces women’s purpose in life to their biological destiny as mothers and their socially constructed function as caregivers” (7). However, Zambrano actually uses motherhood as a source of empowerment for María to escape her violent past and break the traditions of the patriarchal family by befriending Don Emilio (Carlos Alvarez-Novoa), who embodies character traits that are opposite to those of the father and María’s lover.

The film starts in a Seville hospital, where an elderly Rosa watches after her sickly husband, who has been abusive to her throughout their marriage. María comes to visit, and it is obvious that these two women have been disconnected for several years. Rosa stays with María in her apartment in a poor working-class neighborhood in the city until her husband recovers from his surgery. It is obvious that Rosa is uncomfortable in this dangerous part of town, as she is used to a very rural and traditional setting and avoids going into the local bar because there are too many men inside, the bar is a masculine space in which decent women do not enter. María disagrees with this patriarchal oppression and their differences in personalities become more evident as the film progresses, a more modern angst-filled daughter in contrast to a loving, gentle mother. Because María is undereducated and poor, she works as a cleaning lady at a local business and spends her free time drinking or having an affair with her lover, Juan. As Rosa tries to make her daughter’s life more comfortable, from bringing plants home, to offering to buy her food, María appears ungrateful and almost resentful. It is apparent that she disapproves that her mother is still putting up with her father’s abuse. The plot continues to the discovery of María’s unplanned pregnancy, and with this, “the narrative turns away from its concern with the rapport between mother and daughter to refocus on María’s impending motherhood. Having discovered

that she was pregnant, she turns to her boyfriend for moral support and encounters instead indifference and humiliation” (Dapena 4). Juan insists that she get an abortion, and she makes an appointment. However, because she sees the love a mother has for her ill son on the city bus, as well as in the waiting room of the abortion clinic, she changes her mind and decides to keep the baby. In the meantime, the audience is introduced to María’s kindly neighbor, Don Emilio, as Rosa meets him in the grocery store. The two become friends, and it is clear that he is the opposite of both Rosa’s husband and María’s boyfriend. Rosa takes care of Don Emilio by cooking for him, and even cleaning him after he soils himself. María gets to know him more as well as they have dinner and drinks one evening. She admits that she is pregnant and is debating on an abortion, as Don Emilio tries to change her mind. He persuades her by offering his assistance, financially and paternally for the expected baby. After María’s father recovers, Rosa is forced to say goodbye to Don Emilio and return to her life in the country. The movie concludes at the cemetery, where María is holding her baby, also named Rosa, while a voice over summarizes the last six months of her life, how she has found hope within Don Emilio. She gently places a rose on her father’s grave.

By implementing Andrea O’Reilly’s feminist theory on mothering and using a film character analysis of María, the audience can see how she is being empowered by deciding to become a mother. According to O’Reilly, feminist mothering “practices mothering that seeks to challenge and change the norms of patriarchal motherhood that are limiting and oppressive to women. For many women, practicing feminist mothering offers a way to disrupt the transmission of sexist and patriarchal values from generation to generation” (290). Within this theory of feminist motherhood, women are empowered by changing the traditional values of the patriarchal family. O’Reilly further explains that “while patriarchal motherhood limits family to

a patriarchal nuclear structure wherein the parents are married and are the biological parents of the children...the formation of feminist families are many and varied to embrace single, blended, step, matrifocal, same-sex, and so forth” (11). This is very evident within *Solas*, as María decides to keep her unplanned baby and raise it without Juan, her violent boyfriend. María contemplates getting an abortion after Juan suggests it; however, after various moments of doubt and the befriending of her elderly neighbor, Don Emilio, she realizes that motherhood would be a path to happiness, especially if she has the companionship of Don Emilio. During the first half of the film, it is evident that María is a very bitter woman. She drinks, smokes, and cannot hold a steady job. She is always at odds with her mother, and makes it obvious that she resents her father for many reasons, especially for his violence. Although she disagrees with her mother’s docility within her marriage, María herself is in a relationship with a violent, aggressive man. Zambrano gives her the courage to leave her lover after he verbally abuses her, saying that a mistake is not a child, but a woman like her. María refuses to stay in that relationship that could have very well progressed into physical violence. Juan’s character resembles the father of María in terms of patriarchy and aggression, and the fact that María walks away from that relationship is indicative of the changing attitudes toward gender violence and through this, she is being empowered. Another aspect of Zambrano’s denouncing of gender violence is through the character of Don Emilio, who is essentially the antithesis of María’s father and Juan. He is an example of a true gentleman, and at one point, when he admits he never hit his late wife, María’s mother calls him “a good man,” something she could not call her own husband. Because María decides to raise her child in the company of Don Emilio, she is choosing to break out of the pattern of a patriarchal family model. Don Emilio is a kind man, a much better choice than Juan to fulfill the role of a father, or even grandfather. This unconventional portrayal of a family

replaces an aggressive Juan with a kind Don Emilio, which is exactly what O'Reilly was describing when she discusses the mother who breaks out of the traditional family. María's character exemplifies the need for change within Spanish society. As O'Reilly states, "Mothers, by way of maternal activism, use their positions as mothers to lobby for social and political change" (11-12). María's dynamic character removes herself from the patterns of abusive, patriarchal relationships and steps into a safe and healthy environment in which she will be treated with dignity and respect. After she decides to continue her pregnancy, María's bitter, alcoholic character transforms into a new, loving woman who will become an example of feminist mothering.

Benito Zambrano's *Solas* empowers women to break the patterns of the Spanish patriarchal family unit by portraying María's character change from a bitter alcoholic to loving mother. Her disapproval of Rosa's abusive marriage and her choice to become a mother after leaving Juan exemplify the changing attitudes toward gender violence and the need for better role models in a child's life.

### ***Sólo Mia (2001)***

Javier Balaguer's *Sólo mia (Only mine)* was released in 2001 as an approach to raise awareness of gender violence in Spain. This film was nominated for four Goya awards, for best lead actor, best lead actress, best new director, and best original song (Zanzana 388). Because the film is very graphic, Zanzana suggests that Balaguer uses this intense physical violence to "saturate the screen and to provoke the viewer into action" (388). Although this movie grossed significantly less than the other two movies discussed in this paper, earning a mere € 662, 993, and only being released domestically (Wheeler 441), *Sólo mia* still plays an important role in empowering women to break out of the bonds of patriarchal attitudes and domestic violence. In

preparation for the film, extensive work was done by the new director and lead actress, Paz Vega. According to Mabel Galaz, “*Sólo mia* es algo más que una película sobre los malos tratos, es una historia que permitirá a víctimas reales de la violencia de género contar su experiencia y aportar ideas a Javier Balaguer” (‘*Sólo mia*’).<sup>3</sup> With help from over twelve Spanish organizations, including la Federación de Mujeres Separadas y Divorciadas, a webpage, [www.Sólo-mia.com](http://www.Sólo-mia.com), was created for these victims to offer their ideas and to contribute to the plot of the film (Galaz). In addition to the webpage, Paz Vega lived in a home for recuperating victims of gender violence, and there she learned firsthand the stories of seventeen women in order to truly exemplify her role as a battered woman onscreen (Galaz). Balaguer also wanted to highlight other aspects of the social problem that had not been brought to light yet, such as focusing on an upper middle-class family because he noted that often times press reports focused exclusively on working-class families and had the tendency to blame the use of drugs and alcohol (Wheeler 464). However, Balaguer states that it is normal for “un señor considera que su mujer es de su propiedad y que tiene derecho a maltratarla. Es un problema educacional. No olvidemos que hace 30 años una mujer no podía abrir una cuenta corriente ni salir del país sin permiso de su marido o su padre” (cited in Wheeler 464).<sup>4</sup> Marital rape is another issue represented within this film, a concept that had not been made legally important until 1989. Balaguer also incorporates lack of protection provided by the judiciary system and develops a strong female lead that ends up fighting to defend herself, which, can lend itself in one of two ways: it may draw focus from the factors that create and maintain gender violence, or it could

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<sup>3</sup> “*Sólo mia* is something more than a movie about mistreatment, it is a history that will permit real victims of gender violence to tell their experiences and contributing ideas to Javier Balaguer” (my translation).

<sup>4</sup> “A man considers that their wife is their property and has the right to mistreat her. It is an educational problem. We don’t forget that 30 years ago a woman could not open a current account or leave the country without permission of her husband or father” (my translation).

“provide a counterforce to patriarchal values, fostering recognition of women as people with the full rights and responsibilities accorded to all people” (Wheeler 468). Within this film, Paz Vega represents the latter of the two options, empowering Spanish women to fight for their safety.

The film opens with a distorted black and white scene in which Angela (Paz Vega) is tormenting a man, Joaquín (Sergi López). He is tied to a chair and gagged, as Angela repeatedly asks him if he is afraid. Flashbacks of these black and white scenes are intermittent throughout the film, building curiosity and suspense as the storyline progresses through the couple’s relationship. On Angela’s first day as a receptionist at an ad agency, she meets Joaquín, an employee for the same company. The film jumps to their wedding day, in which they both appear to be very happy and in love. During the reception, Angela’s mother pulls Joaquín aside and thanks him for marrying her daughter, stating that she is still very immature and needs a man like him to take care of her. Soon thereafter, Angela becomes pregnant and Joaquín’s possessive attitude becomes apparent. He demands that she quit smoking, quit working, and stay at home where she belongs. During her pregnancy, the couple goes to see a movie in theaters; this movie shows a woman being hit, Angela cringes when she sees this, and Joaquín retorts that she probably had it coming to her, reinforcing the notion that women need to be put in their place. His aggression culminates as Angela’s due date approaches, and the first instance of violence happens when he discovers that Angela has been sneaking cigarettes. As he pulls the pack out from under the couch cushion, Angela begins to apologize, but Joaquín immediately slaps her in the face. The next scene shows her confiding in her mother about what had happened, only to have the patriarchal attitudes of that generation reinforced as she assures her that Joaquín is a good man, that the baby should not be without a father, and that the best course of action is to forgive and forget; Joaquín promptly arrives at the mother’s house with a bouquet of flowers and

an apology, and Angela accepts, but this only leads to more acts of violence throughout their relationship. During Joaquín's work party, Angela meets Andrea (Elvira Mínguez), the wife of Joaquín's business partner. The two become fast friends, and it is clear that Joaquín becomes jealous of this. When Angela gives birth to her baby girl, Joaquín is not even present, and is evidently disappointed in the sex of their child. As their relationship becomes ails, Joaquín tries to convince Angela to have more children, and be a stay-at-home mother, although she desires to go to the university. As the plot continues, not only is it obvious that Joaquín is threatened by Angela's newfound friendship with Andrea, but he is also threatened by her wanting an education instead of remaining in the domestic sphere. His insecurities fuel his rage, and the movie shows multiple scenes of violence in which Angela is raped, beaten, and verbally abused. Andrea becomes a source of refuge as Angela tries to seek help from the law. During the couple's separation, Andrea not only provides her best friend a job, but she also provides a strong moral support system in which she urges Angela not to return to Joaquín, and not to tell him of her new pregnancy from being raped. Joaquín persists in stalking Angela, leaving her threatening messages, and even takes their child from daycare one day without permission. The Spanish legal system is of no help to Angela as she fears for the safety of her daughter, and herself. She decides to take matters into her own hands at the end of the film by having Andrea drop her off at Joaquín's apartment. Desperate to calm him down, she offers to try the relationship once more, with the promise that he will never harm her again. In this black and white scene that has been alluded to throughout the film, the couple gets into another fight and Angela knocks Joaquín unconscious, ties him to a chair, and taunts him. She is tempted to torment him the way he had abused her the last couple of years, but she refrains. He eventually frees himself from the chair and subsequently ties her up. Minutes later, he cuts her loose with a

knife, but, when Andrea enters the apartment and sees him holding the weapon, she grabs a gun on the ground, and the three fight over it until a shot is fired. The movie concludes with Angela and her two children visiting a braindead Joaquín at an institution. They walk away, free from the torment and abuse that Joaquín had implemented in Angela's life.

Adrienne Rich's feminist theory essay, "Compulsory Heterosexuality and Lesbian Existence," and Timothy Corrigan's *A Short Guide to Writing about Film*, help explain how Angela's character is developed and empowered enough to reject the traditions of patriarchy and gender violence through her friendship with Andrea. According to Corrigan, "Characters are...the individuals who populate narrative and nonnarrative films...they normally focus the action and, often, the themes of a movie" (47). Because a theme of the film is the empowerment of a woman to break free from a violent relationship, it is fitting to examine how the character of Angela changes, as she is a dynamic character who learns to fight back. Aiding her in this change is her female friend, Andrea, whose relationship with Angela exemplifies Rich's theory that "Woman-identification is a source of energy, a potential springhead of female power, violently curtailed and wasted under the institution of heterosexuality" ("Compulsory"). Their friendship also is an example of Rich's theory that "women's passion for women, women's choice of women as allies, life companions- and community" can provide security and empowerment ("Compulsory"). Although Rich uses her theory mostly in regards to lesbianism, she also describes in great detail how heterosexual women rely on each other in secure friendship to break out of the ideologies of patriarchy. Throughout *Sólo mía*, Joaquín makes it very evident that he is threatened by Angela's developing friendship with Andrea. One reason could be that Andrea insists that Angela step outside of the domestic sphere and become more social, by going to school and eventually leaving Joaquín. Rich continues explaining the importance of strong

female bonds by stating that, “we [should] expand it to embrace many more forms of primary intensity between and among women, including the sharing of a rich inner life, the bonding against male tyranny, the giving and receiving of practical and political support” (“Compulsory”). At the beginning of the film, Angela is timid and never fights back against the first verbal then physical abuse from her husband. Her character is passive, and she accepts Joaquín’s apologies after her mother reassures her to stay with him. Once Angela meets Andrea, she becomes more empowered. She is more independent and eventually seeks help with ending her marriage with Joaquín. Rich also states that there are “situations male ideologies have not perceived as revolutionary for example, the refusal of some women to produce children, aided at great risk by other women” (“Compulsory”). This is evident within the film when Joaquín repeatedly asks Angela to have more children, and is disappointed when she replies that she is unsure of that happening. After she becomes pregnant by rape from her husband, Andrea is the one at the doctor’s office when she receives the news. She urges Angela not to tell her husband, because that would only give him more leverage over her. By keeping this secret from her abusive husband, Angela is realizing that she needs now, more than ever, to leave Joaquín. Her character is changing and becoming stronger because of her female ally. Andrea is protective and supportive of Angela, providing her with a job at her retail clothing store during the couple’s separation, and demanding that Joaquín immediately leave the premises when he comes in to confront Angela. Adrienne Rich cites Kathleen Gough’s “The Origin of the Family” to give insight to the many ways in which men perpetuate patriarchy, such as “men's ability to deny women sexuality or to force it upon them... to control or rob them of their children... [and/or] to withhold from them large areas of the society's knowledge and cultural attainments” (“Compulsory”). All of these actions are depicted in *Sólo mia*, as Joaquín rapes Angela multiple

times, kidnaps their daughter from daycare, and prevents Angela from attending classes at the university. However, with moral support and a loving friendship from Andrea, Angela's character transforms and she is enabled to fight back against her abusive husband. Balaguer allows this transformation of Angela's character from passive and accepting of the attitudes toward gender violence within her mother's generation to active and fighting against this oppression and violence. This change in character within *Sólo mía* serves as a role model for Spanish women to band together to break the ideologies and traditions of patriarchy. This film also refutes domestic violence as acceptable and exemplifies the changing attitudes toward this subject.

### ***Te Doy Mis Ojos (2003)***

Icía Bollaín's *Te doy mis ojos (Take my eyes)* was released in 2003 as an attempt to bring awareness to the problem of domestic violence in Spain and to empower women who suffer this abuse by portraying a relationship in which the protagonist eventually gains enough confidence to break out of the patriarchal traditions and leave her husband. According to Isabel Santaolalla, what prompted Bollaín to make this film was "the awareness of statistics revealing that women are prepared to endure an average of ten years with a violent partner before ending the relationship" (141). This trend had already inspired Bollaín to produce other works that portray domestic violence, such as the short *Amores que matan* (2000), however, *Te doy mis ojos* took much more preparation and research by both the director and co-script writer (Alicia Luna) in which they spent several days in contact with victims of domestic abuse, and counselors involved with the abusers (Santaolalla 141). Although *Solas* and *Sólo mía* both portray the empowerment of women within violent relationships, it is important to note that *Te doy mis ojos* is the only one of the three films produced by a female. Specifically, this film "is one of a

handful of Spanish films seen by over one million spectators, and was the first film made by a woman to ever receive a Best Film Goya Award” (Santaolalla 2). Not only was this film awarded over forty prizes and awards, but it also has been praised by institutions monitoring gender violence within the country, and “has become a token film in discussions of domestic abuse in nongovernmental organizations, schools, universities, police departments and other organizations” (Santaolalla 143). *Te doy mis ojos* is an important film within post-Franco Spanish culture that helps to break the patriarchal patterns that perpetuate gender violence.

The movie begins with a frightened Pilar (Laia Marull) packing a few belongings and fleeing her home with her son in hand. As they board a late night bus to a historic part of Toledo, Pilar realizes that she left her house in such a hurry that she was still wearing her house slippers. Pilar and her son arrive at her older sister, Ana (Candela Peña)’s house, and it is obvious that Pilar is in distress, as something is wrong with her marriage. Ana insists that Pilar and her son, Juan, stay with her and her fiancé, John, and that she would love Pilar’s help with planning their upcoming wedding. It is revealed that Pilar fled from her abusive husband to whom she has been married for nine years. Her violent husband, Antonio (Luis Tosar), maintains a mundane job at a local appliance shop, where he feels he has not accomplished as much as his older brother, who resides in a much bigger house in the countryside. While Pilar and Juan take refuge at Ana’s house, Ana helps Pilar find a job at the ticket office of the church San Tomé, home to multiple famous paintings. This opportunity allows Pilar to be introduced to the public sphere, in which she begins to gain self-confidence and befriends her boss, Rosa, and three colleagues, Lola, Carmen, and Raquel. Not only does this job provide Pilar with a strong support system, but it also provides her economic independence and the gateway to the world of art. During this time period, Antonio realizes that he needs Pilar in his life and leaves tokens of affection at her desk

at work, and even starts attending therapy sessions for abusers. Eventually, Pilar agrees to resume life with Antonio, and she brings Juan back to their home; however, Antonio continues his fits of rage. When Pilar confides in her mother, Aurora, she perpetuates the ideologies of the patriarchal society in which she lived, reassuring Pilar that Antonio is a good man and that “a woman is never better off alone” (Santaolalla 140). Aurora, who suffered through an abusive relationship with her late husband, still maintains the Francoist gender role attitude that a woman should never be independent from her husband. As Pilar continues to propel her career forward by becoming a tour guide for famous pieces of art within the Museo de Santa Cruz, her increasing self-esteem threatens Antonio’s pride, which, in turn, causes him to become even more jealous and insecure, leading to more intensive abuse of Pilar. These outbursts culminate in the most horrific event in which Antonio, insecure about Pilar taking a business trip to Madrid, forces her to reenact her tour guide performance, and then strips her naked and locks her out on the balcony for all to see. She begs to be let in, and when he finally opens the door, he grabs her by the throat; Pilar is so terrified that she urinates herself. This event is the last straw for Pilar as she leaves Juan in the care of Ana, walks out of the home with Rosa and Lola, destined for work in Madrid. The film ends with Antonio watching the three women walking away from the apartment and toward Pilar’s ultimate freedom and rejection of the patriarchal captivity in which she was held under for ten years. According to Habib Zanzana, “Pilar's decision to leave her abuser at the end of the film and to close the cycle of violence permanently reflects a deep social and political commitment on the part of the filmmaker” (387).

The concept of art is very important to Pilar because through it, she is allowing herself to be a part of the external hemisphere, leaving her domestic domain and gaining confidence in herself. This is very evident within a scene when she is at work, presenting a painting to her

audience. Through composition, lighting, and spatial elements of *mise-en-scène*, and Laura Mulvey's "Visual Pleasure and Narrative Cinema" theory on male gaze, it is evident that Pilar is being empowered by art, while simultaneously distancing herself from her husband, who is secretly watching her from the audience. The scene is exactly one minute long, but it speaks for how much art is empowering her. As Antonio enters the museum, he searches for Pilar and catches sight of her from a higher floor. He sees her in a dark room, in the center of the projected image on the wall. He walks down the stairs, but his eyes never leave her. She is unaware of his presence as she continues her presentation. The lighting of the scene emphasizes the power she has over her audience. Even though Antonio is watching her intensely, with what Laura Mulvey would refer to as the 'male gaze,' in which "the character in the story can make things happen and control events better than the subject/spectator," Pilar does not allow herself to be sexualized (Mulvey "Visual"). She controls the room with her knowledge of the piece of art. She interacts with the audience and they know she is a reliable source, as they are taking notes from her lecture. Every time she makes the audience laugh, Antonio appears almost frightened as he looks around at the people in the crowd, realizing that Pilar is in control. The camera zooms in on her face, as she dons a look of confidence and passion while she explains the details of the projected painting. Her position of authority allows her to have a voice, something she has not had throughout the entire movie up until that point. Pilar's newfound confidence shakes Antonio's power over her. According to Mulvey, "the image of woman as (passive) raw material for the (active) gaze of man takes the argument a step further into the structure of representation, adding a further layer demanded by the ideology of the patriarchal order as it is worked out in its favorite cinematic form" ("Visual"). By Pilar refusing to be held as a sexual object of Antonio's

gaze, she is breaking the pattern of patriarchal order, making Antonio extremely jealous and uncomfortable.

Art is not the only way in which Pilar is empowered. Once again, Adrienne Rich's theory on "Compulsive Heterosexuality and Lesbian Existence" can be applied to the empowerment of the female protagonist. As aforementioned, Pilar's character starts out as weak, docile and almost mute. She is unable to speak for herself in various situations and begins the film with no support system until she reaches out to Ana. Through Ana, she is able to join the workforce and create a support system, her coworkers Rosa, Lola, Carmen and Raquel. When she first begins her job at the church, Pilar is awkward and shy, but she eventually starts accepting their invitations to grab lunch together and gossip. As Rich points out, "Woman-identification is a source of energy," and through these blossoming friendships with her coworkers, it is evident that Pilar is gaining self-confidence and self-esteem ("Compulsory"). She begins spending more time with her friends, even though Antonio becomes enraged one evening when Pilar arrives home late from having dinner with her girlfriends. It is obvious that these newfound friendships are intimidating to Antonio as he realizes that Pilar is transforming into a stronger woman, capable of speaking her feelings and making new connections. Her character is evolving, from a helpless, child-like girl to an empowered woman, with newfound friends and an aspiring career. Through the support and love from her best friends, Pilar musters up enough courage and confidence to leave her abusive husband of ten years. When Lola and Rosa enter the home with Pilar to quickly grab her belongings and leave, they are protecting her from Antonio while simultaneously exemplifying "the bonding against male tyranny [and] the giving and receiving of practical and political support" (Rich "Compulsory"). Antonio realizes his defeat as he silently watches them walk away. Pilar is now a stronger woman.

Bollaín's *Te doy mis ojos* is an influential film that represents that changing attitudes toward gender violence within Spain. Pilar's character is empowered through her love of art, and her newfound friendships, and she is eventually strong enough to walk away from her abusive marriage. Although Antonio is seeking help for his problem, it is not enough, and therefore Bollaín implies that gender violence is never an issue that should be tolerated.

### **Conclusions and Opportunities for Further Research**

All three films represent the changing attitudes toward gender violence from one generation to the next. Each mother of the protagonist was raised during Franco's dictatorship, which resulted in them continuing in an abusive relationship, and in *Sólo mía* and *Te doy mis ojos*, the mothers try to persuade their daughters to stay with their abusers. Each protagonist disagrees with her mother's decision to stay with an abusive husband, and in all three films, each protagonist becomes empowered through different methods to leave her abuser and begin a new life by breaking away from the traditional patriarchal gender roles. In doing this, each protagonist denounces gender violence, an issue that needs more awareness. Although a few post-Franco directors are now incorporating the theme of gender violence into their films, it needs more representation. Zambrano, Balaguer and Bollaín all use the empowerment of their female protagonists to denounce gender violence and bring more awareness to the situation within Spain. However, gender violence still remains as an immense concern within the country.

Through these films, it is clear that there is a change in attitudes within the transition from Francoist patriarchal families to more modern, post-Franco families. As aforementioned, there is not a substantial amount of research that has been done on gender violence in Spanish film, especially from a feminist perspective. Feminism within Spanish film, especially on the theme of violence, is a topic that needs more visibility and research in order to truly understand

how the representation of women within film has an effect on society. Since the transition from Francisco Franco's dictatorship, gender violence has become a public issue in response to which the government has implemented new programs, opened more shelters, and issued new advertisements. However, more awareness needs to be given to the severity of the issue.

Because patriarchy has been deeply embedded into Spanish culture, especially during Franco's regime with the influence of Catholicism, gender violence is not an issue easily resolved. However, with more films denouncing gender violence and empowering women to leave their abusers, a change is happening. According to McDonnell et al, "if [Spanish] society as a whole believed and acted in ways that expressed willingness to assist women experiencing IPV<sup>5</sup> and proactively assisted those who experienced IPV, and social norms around IPV in turn clearly rejected such violence, the incidence and prevalence of IPV would in turn lessen" (quoted in Ferrer-Pérez 517). With more awareness, less tolerance, and a stronger push to emphasize the severity of the issue, the frequency of gender violence will decrease, not only in Spain, but globally.

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<sup>5</sup> IPV (Intimate Partner Violence) is synonymous with gender violence.

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