

BERNÁRDEZ, A.; GARCÍA, I.; GONZÁLEZ, S. *Violencia de género en el cine español. Análisis de los años 1998 a 2002 y guía didáctica*. 1st ed. Madrid: Editorial Complutense, 2008. 261 p. ISBN 978-84-7491-923-1

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The relationship between the cinema and gender violence from the causes

Asunción Bernárdez is a full-time lecturer at the Department of Journalism III of the Universidad Complutense de Madrid and director of the project “Gender violence in Spanish cinema (1998-2002)”, financed by the Department of Women's Affairs of the Community of Madrid, while Irene García and Soraya González were researchers for this project.

This is a significant book, not only for its theoretical interest but also because it tackles two themes of great relevance to society, namely gender violence and media literacy. The importance of violence against women has been recognised in Spanish law, as well as at other levels, in the Organic Act 1/2004, of 28 December, on measures for the complete protection against gender violence, which urges the media to further the protection of equality between men and women. It has also been recognised in specific policies by the central government, such as the *Strategic Plan for equal opportunities 2008-2011*, which states the need to investigate the imaginary concerning women that is created by the media and to study the content that might reinforce sexist roles and stereotypes and ultimately violence. On the other hand, in December 2008 the European Parliament adopted a resolution on media literacy in a digital world, asking for media literacy to be included as the ninth key competence in the European reference framework for lifelong learning and emphasising that it must form part of the formal education to which all children should have access and which should form a part and parcel of the curriculum at every stage of schooling. This work therefore has two large related parts: one more theoretical, with three chapters on violence in general and gender violence in particular, also including an analysis of a sample of films, and another more practical in nature, where we find both a didactic guide proposed by the authors and also files on these films. The authors wish to “carry out a practical application of the theoretical categories in the representation of violence in the cinema” (p. 12) and believe that its analysis can help us to reflect on “how cine-

ma helps to disseminate, create or question the social inequality of the sexes” (p. 12) and thereby encourage a change in attitude and mindset that helps to transform this inequality.

For Bernárdez, García and González, violence is something implicit in narrative structures. To study how this violence takes shape in the cinema, the first chapter talks about violence and society. After introducing some debates concerning the definition of violence, the authors explain that violence is social, it is not constitutive of social organisations and, unlike power, it has an instrumental aspect. They also comment (in a more provocative tone) that, today, women suffer from a kind of invisibility because their representation shows an excess of violence but not the existing subordination. That's why they criticise the media's sensationalist treatment of cases of gender violence and call for the need to present and to think of this within the context of gender relations. Based on these initial reflections, the researchers review feminist studies of cinema and their critique of this representation to tackle the complexity of the phenomenon of violence. This is where they bring together a series of categories subsequently used in an analysis focused on semiotics, psychoanalysis and a feminist critique of cinema: the distinction between narrative, story and diegesis, the consideration of point of view and the clash between desire and law as a fundamental factor of narrative and identification. They conclude, as a preamble to the second chapter, that cinema can provide both progressive and reactionary representations and therefore agree with De Lauretis in denying that “the narrative pleasure of the cinema [is] the exclusive property of the dominant codes and it [can] do no other but serve oppression” (p. 78-79).

The second chapter, entitled “Analysis and interpretations of gender violence”, is the central chapter, presenting the analysis carried out, and permits both the practical application of the categories defined through the theory as well as the production of what will afterwards be the files and the part with the didactic guide activities. It studies the representation of different types of violence (personal, institutional and structural) and symbolic violence is emphasised, as well as the role of

women in narration, the stereotypes attributed to men and women, relations between women, between men and between genders, and identities. It's an analysis that aims to quantify violence and present it in all its complexity, taking into account not only stereotypes and the representation of men and women but also questions of gender relations. It is therefore a significant contribution to an area where, habitually, most research restricts itself to determining and describing the acts of violence and the image of men and women, without entering into how the interactions and relations between them are constructed. As a result of this analysis, which takes a total of 18 films as its case studies, the authors present numerous ideas. I will highlight four here due to their innovative value: (1) cinema uses narrative strategies - such as an event presented as anecdotal or, also, making the aggressor become the victim of his own pathology - to strip importance from the violence suffered by women; (2) gender violence is not explicitly represented and, when it appears, it is usually justified by negative characteristics of the victim or because the victim does not see it as aggression; (3) relationships between women don't have much weight in the sample analysed and are particularly marked by rivalry and jealousy, and (4) the relations between genders do not show sexism or friendship (only romantic relationships) and, in the whole sample of films, only one case was found of an equal romantic relationship between a woman and a man.

These two chapters go to make up more than half the book and are concluded with a third chapter (of only six pages), which introduces the fourth (the didactic guide). After an initial reflection on the importance of media education, a brief guide is presented designed for secondary education that aims to help to prevent gender violence. A few dynamics are presented (only eight) and, unlike other materials for working on communication education, a large part of the activities proposed are designed for group work, focusing on the definition of violence, and are carried out without audiovisual material, more in line with materials that are not specifically for communication education and that can be found in other areas. However, there are guidelines for teachers, the objectives are defined, work files are provided and an assessment is proposed. The last 62 pages are devoted to the film files. These pages go to make up the fifth and last chapter, which is more like an appendix, or a proposal integrated within the rest of the work. This means that this practical part is a little unbalanced, in spite of the many different elements presented in the first chapters in order to work on the subject.

Although this, the authors provide important contributions to tackle a theme - gender violence - that is contemporary (and urgent) but not extensively studied to date. And they do so by referring to the causes (thereby overcoming a narrow view of violence that focuses on its manifestations), analysing the films through gender relations and without limiting themselves to the representations between men and women and applying the theoretical concepts, not only in the form of analytical categories but also as an educational tool.