Gender-based violence and the challenge of visual representation

La violència de gènere i el repte de la representació visual

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ABSTRACT:

Considering the efforts to resolve the societal phenomenon of violence against women (VAW), universal in all countries, information, awareness-raising and the role of the media are regarded as key targets. According to the European Commission (2010), the audiovisual sector is the most important source of information. Consequently, this paper aims to discuss the attitudes towards and the manifestations of the visual representation of violence against women. The discussion is based on existing findings about depictions in the mainstream media and on the analysis of visuals provided by the anti-violence against women movement.

KEYWORDS:

gender-based violence, violence against women, representation, symbolic violence, visual communication, media.

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RESUM:

Tenint en compte els esforços per resoldre el fenomen social de la violència contra les dones, universal en tots els països, la informació, la sensibilització i el paper dels mitjans de comunicació es consideren com un dels objectius clau. Segons la Comissió Europea (2010), el sector audiovisual és la font més important d'informació. En conseqüència, aquest treball té com a objectiu analitzar les actituds cap a i les manifestacions de la representació visual de la violència contra les dones. L'article es basa en treballs que examinen les representacions dels mitjans tradicionals i l'anàlisi dels efectes visuals de les representacions dels moviments de lluita contra la violència de gènere.

PARAULES CLAU

violència de gènere, violència contra les dones, representació, violència simbòlica, comunicació visual, mitjans de comunicació.

Considering the representation of gender-based violence in the media, we can observe how different genres and formats depict rather similar (visual) narratives with the clichéd imagination of the physical masculine act of a monstrous or insane perpetrator against the weak and helpless woman, whereas the systemic nature of violence against women remains mostly hidden (Bonilla Campos, 2008; Boyle, 2005; Carter and Weaver, 2003; Eiter, 2006; Frus, 2001; Geiger, 2008; Guarinos, 2003; López Díez, 2005; Lorente Acosta, 2003; Taylor, 2009). These types of media narratives in fiction and news formats tend to represent an imagery of gender-based violence through repetitive stereotypes, myths and victimisation. Thus, this article aims to outline the visual patterns deduced from a literature review of visual studies and then proceed to discuss the results of the author's visual analysis of representations provided by organisations in their effort to eradicate violence against women.

# 1.	Introduction: the imaginary world of gender-based violence

The beginnings of awareness-raising and the public discourse on male violence against women within society are closely related to the second-wave women's movement at the end of the 1960s. The recognition of the worldwide dimensions of this societal phenomenon finally gave rise to the Declaration on the Elimination of Violence against Women (DEVAW) by the United Nations in 1993. Since then, enormous efforts have been made to overcome VAW. Despite the acknowledgment of gender-based violence as a societal problem by international and European declarations, rates continue to be high in all countries (Bloom, 2008; Schröttle and Martinez, 2006). Worldwide studies have shown that 10 to 70 percent of all women have reported being physically assaulted by an intimate male partner at some point in their lives, and intimate partners commit 40 to 70 percent of femicides (Bloom, 2008; UNIFEM, undated; WHO, 2005). The 2010 Euro-Barometer study indicates that one in every four European women experience domestic violence (European Commission, 2010). The United Nations has gone as far as to deem it a "problem of pandemic proportions" (UNIFEM, undated).

Information, awareness-raising and the role of the media are key targets in precluding an end to violence against women,[2] therefore the importance of images and information becomes obvious. According to Euro-Barometer, the mass media account for the most important source of information regarding domestic violence against women among European Union citizens (European Commission, 1999*b*, 2010). Consequently, the media play a crucial role in shaping public awareness and opinion with regard to victims and perpetrators. Representations of gender-based violence against women in news reports are criticised by the feminist academia and

by women's NGOs engaged in helping. The women cited by news reports as having been maltreated by their (former) partners are represented as weak, helpless and vulnerable. Moreover, they often seem to be blamed for their own victimisation. The crime of intimate partner violence is determined as being limited to a 'family tragedy', somewhat individualised and cut off from its societal contexts. Intimate partner violence as a form of violation of human rights is misused for sensationalistic media representations.

Besides mainstream representations, information is provided by NGOs, governments and by the European and international human and women's rights organisations through an enormous range and variety of materials: flyers, brochures, posters, video spots, exhibitions and web portals. However, activities in the sectors of media art, films and documentaries, art for political change to put an end to violence against women also play an import role as a source of information and awareness-raising, and may be regarded as a potential alternative source to commercial news based on andocentric and hegemonic (Meyers, 1997) values and selection criteria.

This paper, based on my explorative study *Gender Violence and the Visual* (Wolf, 2010),[3] discusses the issue of representations of intimate partner violence in different media formats, as well as the analysis of depictions found in visuals provided by governmental and non-governmental organisations in their efforts to eradicate intimate partner violence. The objective of this pre-study to my PhD thesis is (*a*) to provide a synopsis of existing findings on imagery of violence against women and (*b*) to analyse an explorative sample of the visual material provided to prevent and/or put an end to intimate partner violence. A sample of visuals from Spain and Austria have been selected for this visual research, as both countries have similar and progressive anti-violence legislations,[4] and examples of international and European campaigns are also used.

Research into the subject is rather fragmented, examining certain films or advertising, or representation in newspapers or television channels, and there is a clear research gap concerning the visuals provided by awareness-raising and information activities and the eradication of gender-based violence in different media, genres and formats to obtain a more comprehensive view of how intimate partner violence is represented in visual culture.

1.1. Objective and methodological approach

The study aims (*a*) to explore the major tendencies in depicting gender-based violence in the media by state-of-the-art on visual representations in news reporting, advertising and films, i.e. representations driven by a more or less economic background. Thus, to contrast the findings of the state of the art, a visual analysis (*b*) to obtain insights on the visual material provided by initiatives to end violence against women is carried out. This visual research into anti-violence images focuses on the questions of whether these visuals (1) portray gender stereotypes, (2) use images of victimisation of women, (3) represent intimate partner violence as more of an

individual problem, lacking any societal complexity. As a hypothesis, I propose that visuals provided by the anti-violence initiatives depict victimisation and stereotypes of the battered woman rather than a vision of a life free of violence for every woman and girl.

The methodological approach to answer these questions consists of three steps: firstly, I encompass the complexity of the societal problem, showing its interpersonal and structural dimensions as the basis for the examination of visual information on the subject of gender-based domestic violence in the media. This is followed by (*a*) an explorative synopsis deduced from the findings of the Spanish and Austrian research, as well as the Anglo-American empirical literature and cross-national research on the representation of gender-based violence in the news, advertising and films. After this approximate summary of the state of the art, (*b*) I go on to discuss the findings of my visual research, the analysis of an explorative sample of 14 visual units (video, film, documentary, poster, artwork) with a total of 30 images disseminated by the anti-violence women's movement at international and European level, as well as in Austria and Spain between 2005 and 2010. Limitations have to be considered in the context of the different research traditions in the Anglo-American and Spanish academic community, as well as in the feminist communication sciences of Austria and Germany.

2. The phenomenon: theorising violence against women

In order to examine how news, advertising and films, as well as the women's anti-violence movement, represent the imagery of gender-based violence, we need to have a deeper understanding of the problem and clarify the complexity and real contexts of this global phenomenon. Violence against women is subject to different disciplines, with multiple theoretical approaches and definitions, a preference towards multidimensional theories (Barnett *et al.*, 2011; Jasinski, 2001), and no common definition or coherent agreement as to what actually constitutes violence against women (DeKeseredy and Schwartz, 2011; Jasinski, 2001). The next section expounds and contextualises common definitions, terms and approaches derived from feminist theory and practice to illustrate the complexity of the phenomenon of violence against women, as feminist theory had a major impact on sociological study (DeKeseredy *et al.*, 2005, Dekeseredy and Schwartz, 2011) and constitutes the most important theoretical approach (DeKeseredy *et al.*, 2005).

2.1. Notes on terms, definitions

The World Health Organisation states: "Intimate partner violence refers to behaviour in an intimate relationship that causes physical, sexual or psychological harm, including physical aggression, sexual coercion, psychological abuse and controlling

behaviours." (WHO, 2011). The Council of Europe regards violence against women as a form of gender-based violence, a violence committed against women because they are women, and contains the following definition in the Convention on preventing and combating violence against women and domestic violence from 2011;

"violence against women" is understood as a violation of human rights and a form of discrimination against women and shall mean all acts of gender based violence that result in, or are likely to result in, physical, sexual, psychological or economic harm or suffering to women, including threats of such acts, coercion or arbitrary deprivation of liberty, whether occurring in public or in private life (CoE, 2011: 8).

The terminology on the phenomenon of violence against women (VAW) consists of a rather broad range of expressions such as family violence, domestic violence, wife battering, partner abuse and so on. In studies on representations or in representations of the anti-violence movement the terminology used to denominate specific violence against women in intimate relationships is rarely clarified in any depth, but rather is mixed up with more general terms such as domestic violence. Sandra Bloom, in her article on domestic violence, refers to the Family Violence Prevention Fund, defining IPV:

as a pattern of assaultive and coercive behaviours that may include inflicted physical injury; psychological abuse; sexual assault; progressive social, physical, or financial isolation; stalking; deprivation; extreme jealousy and possessiveness; and intimidation and threats perpetrated by someone who is, was, or wishes to be involved in an intimate or dating relationship with an adult or adolescent, and are aimed at establishing control by one partner over the other. (Bloom, 2008)

More specifically, intimate partner femicide is in fact one of the leading causes of premature death in women (Bull, 2003; Campbell, 2008; UNIFEM, undated), and thus as a notion makes it possible to designate gender indicated violence as a serious public health problem. The term *femicide* has been promoted by several authors (Caputi and Russell (1992); Boyle (2005), in a more general comprehension of all forms of *violence against women*, and Campbell (2008) especially for *intimate partner violence)* for it to be appropriated, denominated and to render the veiled misogynistic murder of women visible. Accordingly, I have defined intimate partner violence or intimate partner femicide interchangeably with gender-based or sexist violence (Bloom, 2008; Caputy and Russell, 1998; Campbell, 2008) as appropriate terms for my work.

2.2. Gender discourse: en-gendering the problem

Concerning the gender perspective in VAW and its (visual) representation as the selected field of research, we have to consider the repeat use of terms like woman,

female, man, male as rooted in heterosexual dichotomy. This indicates a clarification based on a feminist perspective to provide a profound comprehension of sex and gender, as well as to reveal the implicit limitations in reflecting the complexity of the field of violence against women and gender theory.[5]

> Terms such as 'masculine' and 'feminine' are notoriously changeable; there are social histories for each term; their meanings change radically depending upon geopolitical boundaries and cultural constraints on who is imaging whom, and for what purpose (Butler, 2004: 10)

Women as a societal category initiated feminist interest and constituted (and still do) the subject for pursuing political representation and gender equality. On the other hand, the term woman is still problematic, it is not exhaustive, misidentifying the intersection of the social category of gender with racial, ethnic, sexual and regional modalities of discursively constituted identities; "gender is impossible to separate from political and cultural intersections" (Butler, 1999: 6). In other words; "Being a woman can mean many different things, at different times and in different circumstances" (Ang and Hermes, 1994: 122).

Judith Butler (1999: 12) concludes; "there is no recourse to a body that has not always already been interpreted by cultural meanings; hence sex could not qualify as a prediscursive anatomical facticity". This very determination of the category of women is to be understood as constituting the gendered subjects represented in language, legal systems and politics. According to Butler (1999: 3), representation serves as an operative term within a political process, and as a normative function of a language. So, whenever we use en-gendered determinations, perceiving representations of gendered subjects, they should be considered within these acknowledgements of the non-existence of a pre-discursive, natural foundation of any sex or gender. Thus, we have to acknowledge performative gender doing processes within certain cultures and juridical systems and their intersections with other social categories such as class, ethnicity, religion, and different sexual practices. Thus, gender-based violence, as well as its representation in visual culture, must always be considered and acknowledged within the matrix of a discursively en-gendered legal, political and societal system. Consequently, Rachel Jewkes (2002: 253) is right when she states, according to her review of the international literature, that domestic violence is "substantially a product of gender inequality and the lesser status of women compared with men in society."

2.3. Complexities: contextualising gender-based violence

Besides explaining the social construction of the sex/gender system we need to comprehend how gender-based violence is built in social structures in order to encompass the complexity of intimate partner femicide as a societal problem. In the following pages, gender-based violence will be discussed more deeply in the contexts of culture, power relations and the symbolic sphere.

The distinction between direct and structural violence is particularly important in the context of intimate partner violence. If there is a sender, a protagonist pursuing these consequences, we may call it direct violence; otherwise we may talk about indirect or structural violence (Galtung, 1996: 2). Referring to representation and the correlation of direct, structural violence and the patriarchal formation of society, Galtung (1996: 40) explains patriarchy as "an institutionalisation of male dominance in vertical structures", highly correlating with gender and position, "legitimised by culture (e.g. in religion and language), and often emerging as direct violence with males as subjects and females as objects".

> Patriarchy [...] combines direct, structural, and cultural violence in a vicious triangle. They reinforce each other in cycles starting from any corner. Direct violence, such as rape, intimidates and represses; structural violence institutionalizes; and cultural violence internalizes that relation, especially for the victims, the women, making structure very durable. (Galtung, 1996: 40)

On an individual level, abusive behaviour and economic/structural violence support the maintenance of male power and control over women; moreover, physical and/or economic abuse or threats harm women's ability to work or escape, so dependence on resources and economic dependence lead to the probability of women remaining in a violent relationship. Religious beliefs, cultural ideals, moral dilemmas may additionally aggravate this amount of hindering constellations, apart from institutional barriers that prevent women from obtaining sufficient help. The powerful fear element caused by physical and emotional threats and abuse leads to death, anxiety, fear of another beating, fear of revenge, mixed up with ideas of hope that the situation may change through behavioural and psychological changes in the victims, creating a chronic low-level fear and affecting women's decision-making (Barnett and LaViolette, 1993; Thorpe and Irwin, 1996). A woman living in or leaving a violent relationship generates self-doubts as to her capability, her self-blame is frequently reinforced by family members, friends and institutions (Schechter, 1982: 19). Male perpetrators are often better-accepted and excused for their responsibility than female victims (Shepard, 1990; Adler, 1927; cited in Barnett and LaViolette, 1993: 77). The insensitive behaviour and personal beliefs of victim-blaming are also to be found in the media, in public services such as the police force, legal and criminal systems, etc. and are responsible for a secondary victimisation, causing the victim further trauma (Campbell and Raja, 1999; Barnett and LaViolette, 1993: 76).

On a societal level, structural and symbolic violence is inherent in society, invisible and naturalised in its violent and dominant character. Moreover, symbolic violence "is instituted through the adherence that the dominated cannot fail to grant the dominant (and therefore to the domination)" (Bourdieu, 2001: 35).

Regarding the concept of domination, Hunnicutt (2009: 60) stresses that theories of violence against women must focus on male power but by placing that power within a patriarchal order, to see "how men are situated in their own scheme of domination relative to males and other groups of domination." Thus, she advocates theorising varieties of patriarchy, and defines; "Violence against women is a product of patriarchal social arrangements and ideologies that are sustained and reinforced by other systems of domination." (Hunnicutt, 2009: 567).

Throughout history, violence comes along with power visualised, pictured, demonstrated by images of battles, heroes and subordinated subjects, and the cultivation of reporting on violence is quite obvious (Carter and Weaver, 2003). Hence, the representation of violence and violent acts is rather common, and functions as a social code for power relations, leaving the 'Other'[6] aside. Consequently, this symbolic violence is reflected and inscribed in the visual. The making visible and articulating the complexity of intimate partner violence in its structural, cultural and not only interpersonal dimensions is rather difficult, since generally complex contents are difficult to explain. I thus return to the initial questions of this study: considering these inscribed complexities of violence in society and its symbolic order, (*a*) how do the media portray the phenomenon and (*b*) how do anti-violence initiatives represent this phenomenon of IPF in its societal complexities and its symbolic order?

3. Revisiting representations of gender-based violence

The cultivation of reporting violence, as well as the representation of sexual violence, is endemic in Western culture, deeply rooted in patriarchy (Boyle, 2005; Carter and Weaver, 2003). News media are never neutral or objective, as we knew already from Stuart Hall (1989: 135); consciously or unconsciously, reporters and journalists interpret reality or, as Judith Butler (2004: 10) puts it, depending on "who is imaging whom, and for what purpose". Journalists are socialised within structures and ideologies of a patriarchy that still exists. Media and audiovisual communication provide a range of pre-selected opinions, pictures and facts as 'reality'. They create a certain view on VAW, particularly on IPF, without further contexts. Thus, gender functions as an important structuring factor.

Given that mass culture functions as a device of recognition and expropriation of popular experience and dominant groups, capable of progressive or reactionary representations, cinema as a mass medium is also ambiguous in that sense. Movies — with their inherent capacity of assimilating or rearticulating social issues and discourses, of presenting an imaginary world to us — can accept or reject, recognise or refuse, negate or extol, they can convert something into a social "reality" or represent a social reality existing in the social imagery (Bernárdez *et al.*, 2008: 80).

Gillian Rose (2001: 6) states that the visual is a key in the "cultural construction of social life in contemporary Western societies" and that the production of the image(s) is never innocent. Images are not "transparent windows" but rather interpret the world.

Media representations, together with the immediate impact of images, play a crucial role in shaping public awareness of the societal problem as well as opinions on victims and perpetrators. For the exploration of imagery in intimate partner violence daily surrounding us, this chapter provides a synopsis, a meta-analysis on findings as to how gender-based violence is conveyed in news formats, film and advertisements. The diverse ranges of publications, as well as the inclusion of conference proceedings and project reports, are intended to further perspectives, since the issue of the (visual) representation of intimate partner violence is a rather under-researched one.

3.1. Representations in the news media

The Global Media Monitoring places the figure of female news subjects portrayed as victims as 18 % compared to 8 % of male victims (Macharia *et al.*, 2010: 15) in news reporting, although the prevalence shows that men are more likely to become victims — and perpetrators — of violence, although male-on-male violence is less newsworthy than male violence against women. Apart from women being over-represented as victims of violence, they are also more likely to be personified or even more often filmed in close-ups and be depicted in a sensationalised form of news coverage (Carter and Weaver, 2003; European Commission, 1999*a*; Geiger, 2008; Kunczik and Zipfel, 2006; López Díez, 2005; Marin *et al.*, 2011). Moreover, intimate partner violence is more likely to be represented in the news when it can be related to an individual person (European Commission, 1999*a*; Geiger, 2008; Marin *et al.*, 2011). On the one hand, female victims are portrayed as 'helpless', 'weak', or they are even blamed for their own victimisation; on the other hand, male perpetrators are represented as 'monsters' or 'pathological obsessions' or 'men who couldn't help themselves' (Almansa and Postigo, 2003; Byerly and Ross, 2006; Condon and Schröttle, 2006; Funk, 2002; Geiger, 2008; Jiménez Vílchez, 2003; López Díez, 2005; Meyers, 1997; Marin *et al.*, 2011).

Concerning TV Channels in Spain, cases of intimate partner femicide tend to be shown in a sensationalistic and dramatic way, depicting blood and injuries, when possible images of blood (see Visual 1) are routinely presented as a key image when the location of the crime is accessible (Migracom, 2008: 267). A recent study on the impact of recommendations for the treatment of gender violence in the media in Spain shows a tendency towards information on the issue tapering off in the press over the last 5 years,[7] and articles focus rather on hard facts (concrete assaults, murder, sentences, etc.) and less on awareness-raising or contexts (Carrasco *et al.*, 2011). In Television, attention to gender violence remains stable (CAC, 2011).

An aggravating factor is that in the media, television, with 92 %, is the place where most people hear about domestic violence against women in every EU country, and 59 % from the press (European Commission, 2010). Although news (television) continues to provide the most important source of information, societal contextualisation and the media's responsibility for delivering knowledge are lacking. Media blaming and secondary victimisation of women is quite common, male responsibility is concealed by suggesting that violent men are monstrous, insane, and intimate partner violence as the exception, the 'other' (Hunnicutt, 2009; Boyle, 2005; Taylor, 2009) and continues to represent domestic violence as an individual problem (Berns, 2004; Richards *et al.*, 2011), blaming the victims (Richards *et al.*, 2011; Taylor, 2009).[8] The mostly hidden systemic nature of intimate partner violence in the news media leads to the reconstruction of stereotypes and causes re-victimisation and obscuration of social roots and dimension.

3.2. Representations in advertisements

Advertising reproduces thousands and thousands of images, reinforcing the heterosexual gender dualism with its stereotypes of masculinity and femininity, mostly relating to men's sexual desires. The objectification of women is materialised in symbolic codes of sexualised gender roles, chopping them up into parts (thighs, legs, breasts, etc.) and fetishising the female body, comparable to pornographic representations (Selva and Solà, 2003). Consequently, these dominant constructions of 'desirable', 'ideal' femininity to attract male fantasies have been criticised as contributing to male violence against women (Carter and Weaver, 2003: 123).

> Turning a human being into a thing, an object, is almost always the first step toward justifying violence against that person.[...] This step is already taken with women. The violence, the abuse, is partly the chilling but logical result of objectification. (Kilbourne, 1999: 278)

Marcia Castillo Martín (2008: 126) quotes that violence has become an aesthetic space appearing repeatedly in advertising in recent years, as well as in the work of internationally recognised fashion photographers. In a similar way, Amparo Bonilla Campos (2008) draws attention to the mistreatment of women found in representations of masculinity and femininity and relationships between women and men in cultural imagery. Symbolic violence through sexist representations in advertisements is also stressed as one of the main conclusions of the Spanish *Observatory of the Image of Women*[9] (Instituto de la Mujer, 2008).

In the context of the 2010-launched 4th edition of *Killing us softly*,[10] Hodgson (2010) states, "The most dangerous image is one that eroticises violence". Many ads feature women in bondage, battered, or even murdered." One example related to intimate partner violence is the commercial for adhesive plasters of the HANSAPLAST (see Visual 2) trade mark, classified as justifying and trivialising gen-

der violence in the annual report on the image of women of 2008, a study on the gender variable in public broadcasting advertisements published by the Spanish Institute for Women (Instituto de la Mujer, 2008). The Network of Women's and Girl's Counselling in Austria reported a TV commercial by the BIPA cosmetic trade mark for its glorification of violence against women to the Austrian Advertising Council. The TV commercial under the slogan 'Disturbing yet' showed a threatened, chained and gagged women in the opening sequence, surrounded by syringes and photos in a basement, with two men mistreating her, presenting her with top-class-styling at the end. The women's counselling network insistently criticised this sexist aestheticism trivialising and justifying violence against women as being worth it for beauty. Due to public pressure, BIPA had to withdraw its commercial.[11] The recent documentary by Isabel Coixet "La mujer, cosa de hombres" [The woman, a man's thing] (Spain 2010) illustrates the longstanding tradition of representation of sexist advertising related to gender-based violence.

Violence in advertisements is manifest in performances against our gaze, in adaptations where there is no room for a different perception, making us accomplices of a sadistic spectacle in which women are depicted as objects, things, naked, fragmented, injured, marked by their skinniness, tortured by beauty treatments, enclosed in cages, threatened and persecuted by assassins (Selva and Solà, 2003: 87). Therefore, Bonilla Campos (2008: 18) rightly criticises the glorification and reinforcement of violence by the media, blending reality and fantasy. This social misogynist codification makes it clear how symbolic violence is deeply engrained in audiovisual culture.

3.3. Violence against women in film and narrative

In film narratives we find similar representations to those already observed in news formats, displaying male violence against women as a core narrative element, depicting the violent act as abnormal and not as a daily occurrence in women's lives, in which incidents and the victims are sensationalised and eroticised (Bernárdez *et al.*, 2008; Carter and Weaver, 2003; Frus, 2001; Guarinos, 2003). Moreover, Karen Boyle (2005: 193) assumes, "popular forms can be more amendable to feminist understandings of men's violence against women than news programmes, which rarely explicitly acknowledge feminist expertise or analysis." In fictional formats, as in news media violence against women, "domestic violence" is displayed as something exceptional, perpetrators are connoted as insane, and explanations for violent behaviour are sought on an individual level, the responsibility for suffering violence lies mainly with the woman, of whom it is said she is free to leave if she does not accept violence from her partner (Frus, 2001). Guarinos (2003: 81) assumes gender-based violence in films as patriarchally accepted.

> Finally, like other news and entertainment media, movies cooperate in repressing the hierarchical and gendered power relations that undergird our society. Films disseminate

the ideology of the male-centred happy family and the safe and peaceful home, reinforcing as natural the man as authority figure while overlooking the reality that millions of households are unsafe places for women and children. (Frus, 2001: 227)

Bernárdez *et al.* (2008: 83) state that personal violence not only appears in abuse, but constitutes an implicit and constant element in the narrative structures of all the movies analysed in their study.[12] The authors conclude that personal and institutional gender violence cannot exist without the support or the foundation of the symbolic or cultural one. Film narratives not only tell a story, but also stand for an oft- displayed and depicted symbolic order, reinstalling engendered power relations, providing myths of monstrous male batterers and the liberation of female heroines by simply leaving their perpetrators,[13] and at the same time lacking in any clarity about the real facts involved in violence against women (Frus, 2001; Eiter, 2006). Gertraud Eiter (2006) argues that particularly in mainstream cinema and television (action movies, thrillers, etc.), violence against women is a recurring element of representation, and most films contain a one-sided view and are devoid of any further context. VAW is shown as the single fate of an individual woman in a sensational way and for voyeuristic gaze. Visual representation in film narratives stands for a symbolic order of normalised violence within en-gendered power relations and lacks context as to the complexity of violence against women, or as Wheeler (2009: 172) says, "[c]inematic depictions of the problem have, at the best, a nebulous relationship to real-life incidents". Wheeler acknowledges the increased visibility and representation of the issue of domestic violence in English-language cinema, admitting that the underlying beliefs are neither neutral nor innocent, and he advocates reflection on the cinematic representation of the problem. Beyond this synopsis of mainstream production, it must be mentioned that there are some exceptional productions as well, showing the societal contexts and ways out of intimate partner violence such as the extraordinary film by Icíar Bollaín *Te doy mis ojos* (Spain, 2003) or the feature film project *Auswege [Ways out]* directed by Nina Kusturica (Austria, 2003) initiated by the Autonomous Austrian Women's Shelter Network.

In summary, although the exposure of intimate partner violence as an issue of public interest has increased its prominence in mainstream and commercial depictions, the subject continues to be represented more as an individual problem than in its cultural and social context and complexity. Loss-making news reports and vast evidence of symbolic violence are stimulating and reaffirming the clichéd imagination of the physical masculine act against the weak and helpless woman. DeKeseredy (2011: 123) states that belief in gender inequality is promoted by Hollywood movies, video games and certain music videos. These biases are transmitted by the media, reproducing, instead of clarifying, common myths and stereotypes. Violent media messages tend to increase tolerance of sexism, including violence against women (Barnett, 2011; DeKeseredy, 2011).

4.   Visual research: analyzing anti-violence representations

The analysis of images provided by the anti-violence movement is a simplified pre-test[14] conducted to obtain insights into the characteristics of representations by examining the visual material provided by national or supra-national institutions and organisations of the anti-violence against women movement in their efforts to eradicate intimate partner violence. The research design is based on the above theoretical discussion and methodological approaches by Hall (1980), van Zoonen (1994) and Rose's (2001: 3) approach to "critical visual methodology", "an approach that thinks about the visuals in terms of the cultural significance, social practices and power relations in which it is embedded". The visual research is conducted (1) to examine a range of different formats; (2) to explore visuals initiated/provided/launched by well-established institutions within the anti-violence against women movement; (3) to reflect the hypotheses introduced about stereotypes, myth and victimisation, (4) to contrast the findings and explanations for representations in the mainstream media (see part *a* above), as well as to generate more insights for further reflection in my PhD thesis.

The categories for the analysis are concluded from the previous discussion of theory and the state of the art to examine the images referring to: 'gender stereotypes and victimisation', 'depicted violence', 'complexity of GBV', 'ambivalences/contradictions' and 'visions/perspectives towards a life free of violence'. I applied these categories to an explorative sample of 14 visual units with a total of 30 images:[15] 2 video spots (5 stills); 1 feature film (6 stills); 1 documentary (3 stills); 7 campaign posters, 3 event posters; and 6 images from an exhibition. The visuals launched in the time period from 2003 to 2010[16] were selected from international and European institutions and organisations, as well as on the country level of Spain and Austria, and prominence and establishment were selection criteria.[17] The analysis is comprised of a chart with 3 major categories with sub-categories for each visual unit: DESCRIPTION (technical, aesthetics, item); STUDY CONTEXT (background, history; target); INTERPRETATION (original meaning; analysis and interpretation of the categories as mentioned above). The following tendencies can be deduced from the analysis of the explorative sample of visual materials from different institutions, areas and formats.

4.1.   From depicted violence to ambivalent messages

Referring to how violence is represented, I found ten out of 14 visuals using representations of violence (four explicitly, six implicitly), as opposed to four visuals without any reference to violence. As an initial tentative conclusion, we might say that policies of visualising intimate partner violence seem to follow a necessity of displaying violence. Victimisation of women or the female is found in six visuals, two of them are linked implicitly to victimisation, but could be read in a resistive, alter-

native or myth-breaking sense as well. Of the total, only two visuals clearly refer to a non-stereotypical representation, and three use a rather stereotype-neutral form of representation. We also can observe tendencies of ambivalent messages or paternalistic patterns torpedoing the idea of a woman as an autonomous human being.

For instance, in the poster and video in the CoE campaign (see Visual 1): the poster shows a realistic close-up of a female face, abstractly deformed, crumpled, with a challenging title and facts and figures about domestic violence. The title of the poster says "it starts with a scream, but it must never end in silence", giving an outlook of hope of an end to violence, but there is no image that corresponds to this message. The CoE states in the poster and video that they want to know if one is a victim or witness, but it lacks the facilitation of low-threshold access to respond to their question. The vision of the CoE claiming "it is time to find a way out" shows a paternal attitude, as the agency is not given to the woman. On the other hand, it does away with a myth — and makes it clear that the most dangerous place is at home in 30 seconds. Contradictions or ambivalences are left aside only in six of 14 visuals.

Visual 1. "Stop domestic violence against women", 2006. Campaign poster. By Getty Images
Source: Council of Europe.

4.2. Lacking complexity towards opening up new visions

Concerning representations of the complexity of VAW, the video spot launched by UNIFEM announces the different forms of violence and that gender is the reason for women suffering violence. The Council of Europe (CoE) campaign relates to the complexity by quoting the figures of women suffering "domestic violence" and by challenging the myth of the home as a safe place for women. The campaign *Maltrato Zero* [Maltreatment Zero] by the Spanish Ministry of Equality in 2009 and the documentary on survivors of IPV *Heridas-Ferides* [Wounds] by Susanna Barranco in 2008 are the two examples referring to the social and cultural dimension. *Maltrato Zero* deals with close-ups of popular men and women through their testimonies of no male superiority and no female inferiority in intimate relationships. Importance is attached to equality in relationships — this is visionary, a new way of looking at IPV, with prominent role models. *Heridas-Ferides* demonstrates the complexity of the problem — including the cultural and symbolic dimension — as a documentary on women and transgender persons as survivors of intimate partner violence shown in their strength and braveness, with their vulnerability, their experiences and visions, as individuals and in society (see Visual 2).

Five visuals (three posters by the Austrian Women's Helpline and two by the Platform against gender violence in Barcelona) contain no reference to the societal dimension at all — the fact that these visual products are provided by two very important NGOs is a rather surprising result, all the more so as NGOs usually aim to convey the structural dimensions of IPV.

Visual 2. Still, survivor speaking out
Source: Heridas [Wounds]*, 2009. Documentary. Directed by Susanna Barranco. Spain.*

The visions or new perspectives represented by the visuals of the anti-violence movement seem rather simple; in five we find the more or less self-evident wish to stop violence against women; true for UNIFEM, CoE, Women's helpline in Austria, Platform against Gender Violence, whereby the last one is also about empowerment, presenting a strong, active woman. The Austrian Women's Helpline additionally refers to the help provided. UNIFEM offers a new and positive form of representation by contrasting scenes of war and conflicts with happy and healthy female faces — supporting the vision of the end of violence. The CoE articulates its wish to find a way out, but does not provide any (visual!) vision for this wish. The feature film and documentary show different ways out of a life in violence as a vision. In the case of *Auswege*, this is contradicted by also displaying ambivalent contents such as presenting more severe violence taking place in the relationship of the migrant couple and a rather poor performance by social workers in the NGOs, who are supposed to be experts. *Heridas-Ferides* is outstanding as it gives a voice to survivors of IPV and demonstrates, in a very complex and authentic fashion, individual ways of overcoming violence. As outliers, there is also the vision of *Maltrato Zero*, referring to equality between woman and man, and *18 segundos* with its visionary "light" and "peace" as a perspective for women suffering violence (see visual 3).

Visual 3. Art Work
Source: "18 segundos" ["18 seconds"], 2005. Exhibition. Directed by Alejandro Marcos, Spain.

5. Conclusion: visuals as innovative pointers

The objective of this paper according to the previous study Gender Violence and the Visual (Wolf, 2010), is to outline and explore the imaginary world in which representations of intimate partner violence are embedded, while considering its complexity in the context of the social and symbolic sphere. As preconditions for the understanding of representation of gender violence, we have to acknowledge, whenever using en-gendered determinations, perceiving representations of gendered subjects, that they are to be understood within the acknowledgement of the non-existence of a pre-discursive, natural foundation of any sex or gender.

If women demand the elimination of intimate partner femicide, representing the phenomenon through language, art and politics, this actually indicates taking action within the system of this very violence, seeking representation and liberation, and at the same time being torpedoed by the same system. As a further precondition, the whole complexity of interpersonal, structural and cultural violence, represented in symbolic violence, has to be taken into account. Symbolic violence refers to the violence of representation based on the subordination of the "Other" in an en-gendered, en-classed, en-raced society of male, white, Western, Christian domination. As a fourth understanding, we have to bear in mind that neither fiction programs nor news-information formats are value-free and should always be considered as contextualised within interpretative (ideological) frames, deeply rooted in gender hegemony and the cultural and symbolic violence of masculine domination.

This tendency is nourished by misogynist codification, the objectification of women and the use of VAW for economic ends in the media, particularly in advertisements. We find loss-making news reports and vast evidence of the cultural and symbolic violence deeply engraved in the audiovisual culture and codes. The space between 'objective' information and created/fictional representation of VAW and its cultivation within audiovisual production and news reporting functions like a perpetuum mobile, in the myth-based and myth-reproducing narratives, and the social use of different representations of VAW. Mainstream representations of intimate partner violence reinforce gender hegemony and the stereotype of female victimisation; stimulating and affirming the clichéd imagination of the physical masculine act against the weak and helpless woman.

The social use of displaying and reproducing sexist violence in the visual is completely normalised in mainstream media. The cultivation of violence, its visual codes and its social use to structure gender relations are perpetuated through the powerful impact of narrative and images.

Regarding similarities and differences between mainstream and anti-violence representations, the samples of visuals analysed show tendencies of ambivalent messages which also tend to display paternal attitudes torpedoing the idea of a woman as an autonomous human being. Moreover, there is a tendency towards

reproducing stereotypes and victimisation similar to mainstream visuals. Visual policies of anti-violence initiatives seem to follow a necessity of displaying visual references to violence. In contrast to mainstream representation, the anti-violence visuals also have an inherent potential to challenge myths and stereotypes, to refer to the social dimension, to point at symbolic violence, as well as to provide visionary and innovative images towards a life free of violence. The most progressive and complex references to the issue of IPV are represented by moving pictures and artwork (the feature film *Auswege*, the documentary *Herides-Ferides* and the exhibition *18 segundos*). If a visual has to offset the complexity of IPV in a single image, it lacks an adequate representation of this complexity, although positive and potential examples have been found, such as in the campaign *Maltrato Zero*.

The visual contains the potential for reinforcing, reproducing or challenging, rupturing the phenomena of sexist violence. The 'outliers' of new, visionary and resistive images are visual key, are the innovative and progressive pointers to break with the imaginary world of stereotypes and myth about gender violence and naturalised symbolic violence.

Notes

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[2] For instance the Un Declaration on the Elimination of Violence against Women or the Council of Europe's Convention On Preventing And Combating Violence Against Women and Domestic Violence.

[3] An explorative study on the representation of intimate partner violence, conducted as pre-study 2010 for the author's PhD thesis, approved with distinction in November 2010, Dep. for Audiovisual Communication and Advertising; Autonomous University of Barcelona (UAB).

[4] Austrian Federal Act on Protection Against Domestic Violence from 1997 (changed and amended in 1999, 2002 and 2004) and the Spanish Law of comprehensive integral protection measures against gender-based violence (1/2004).

[5] Realising that feminist theory differentiates between various concepts and consists of rather a diverse discourse, comprising sex and gender in all contexts, this work will stick to and adopt mainly the ideas of Judith Butler, as appropriation for the research objectives due to her complex and broad comprehension of gender in societal, political and cultural contexts. This seems to be legitimate, as Judith Butler, in Gender Troubles, first published in 1990, critically discusses the works of Simone de Beauvoir, Julia Kristeva, Sigmund Freud, Jacques Lacan, Luce Irigaray, Monique Wittig, Jacques Derrida, Michel Foucault and had a major impact on discussions of gender and politics. Moreover, Butler's conception of non-normative sexual practices and the gender category intersecting with class, ethnicity, culture, religion is to be seen as the comprehension of the author of this work.

[6] The 'Other' as different, marginalised, and excluded from the dominant culture, 'race', gender, class, ethnic group, sexual practice, etc.

[7] Content analysis in January and September of 4 Spanish dailies from 2006 to 2008, and 5 dailies from 2009 to 2010. In 2010 there was a reduction in the amount of information published, of more than 40 % over the same period last year. The tendency to publish hard facts rather than contexts or articles for awareness-raising remains more or less the same since 2006. (Carrasco *et al.*, 2011)

[8] In general, the myth practice through "othering" or "culturalising" female victims or male perpetrators as exception and/or by certain social/cultural/ethnic attributes is evidenced as such as IPV can happen to any women perpetrated by any man without any regard to their education/economic/social level or ethnic/cultural background.

[9] Last annual monitoring available from 2008.

[10] Killing Us Softly 4, Advertising's Image of Women (2010) Video, 45min. directed by Sut Jhally. Jean Kilbourne is the creator of the award-winning Killing Us Softly: Advertising's Image of Women film series 1-4; distributed by the Media Education Foundation.

[11] Report to the Austrian Advertising Council, "Verherrlichung von Gewalt gegen Frauen [Glorification of violence against women]" (15.6.2010), available from: *http://www.werberat.or.at/beschwerdedetail.aspx?id=2507*; accessed July 16, 2010.

[12] A sample of 20 of the most popular Spanish films from 1998 to 2002.

[13] The most prominent example is the film *Enough* (USA 2002), directed by Michael Apted starring Jennifer Lopez as a victim of intimate partner violence, who after escaping takes intensive combat classes to kill her violent husband.

[14] The visual research of an extended sample and a more profound analysis will be elaborated in my PhD thesis, to have a more detailed and scholarly insight on the subject of disseminated visuals and contribute to the communication activities of the anti-violence against women movement, to which the author of this article is related in Catalonia as well as in Austria and in Europe.

[15] As the sample includes moving pictures and exhibitions, the term visual unit is used for a specific product, and the term image for the specific depiction which can be stills, an artwork, a poster, a photo, etc. The sample consists of 14 visual units with 30 images: 2 video spots (5 stills); 1 feature film (6 stills); 1 documentary (3 stills); Posters and artworks: 6 campaigns (7 posters); 3 events (3 posters); 1 exhibition (2 pictures and 4 artworks). The 14 units in detail: (1) Video Spot "Let's End Violence against Women". Source: UNIFEM (2007). Public Service Announcement by Leo Burnett. (2) Poster "Stop domestic violence against women" Source: Council of EUrope (2006). Campaign Poster. (3) Video Spot "Stop domestic violence against women" Source: Council of Europe (2007). Public-service TV spot. (4)

Poster "Halt der Gewalt" [Stop violence] Source: Autonomous Women's Shelter Network Austria. (undated) (5) Poster "Verliebt. Verlobt. Verprügelt." [Enamoured. Engaged. Battered.] Source: Autonomous Women's Shelter Network Austria (2007) (6) Poster of Frauenhelpline gegen Männergewalt 0800/222 555 [Women's helpline against male violence] Source: Austrian Women's Helpline (2010). (7) Feature fiction *Auswege* (2003); directed by Nina Kusturica; produced by Vienna's Film Academy (University of Music and Performing Arts.), DVD, Austria. (8) Poster "Constantes Vitales" [Vital Signs] Source: Gobierno España, Ministerio de Igualdad (2007). Campaign. Spain. (9) Posters Maltrato Zero [Maltreatment Zero] Source: Ministerio de Igualdad, Gobierno España (2009): Campaign Maltrato Zero. Spain (10) Blueprint - III Fòrum Contra les Violències de Gènere de l'any 2007. Source: Plataforma unitària contra les violències de gènere (2007) Barcelona. (11) Poster - IV Fòrum Contra les Violències de Gènere de l'any 2008; Source: Plataforma unitària contra les violències de gènere (2008) Barcelona. (12) Blueprint - VI Fòrum Contra les Violències de Gènere de l'any 2010 Source: Plataforma unitària contra les violències de gènere (2010) Barcelona. (13) Exposición "18 segundos". [Exhibition "18 seconds"] Source: Women's Institute of the Spanish Ministry of Equality (2005). (14) Documentary *Heridas-Ferides [Wounds]*; by Susanna Barranco, Associació Teatral Mousiké, Barcelona 2008. DVD

[16 According to changes in anti-violence legislation in Spain and Austria in 2002 and 2004, the CoE Campaign from 2006 to 2008, where Austria and Spain participated as member states.

[17 Selected organisations/institutions: United Nations Development Fund for Women (UNIFEM), Council of Europe, Autonomous Women's Shelter Network Austrian (AOEF), Spanish Women's Institute and the Spanish Ministry of Equality; Platform Against Gender Violence of Catalonia (Spain). For Austria, no governmental unit has been chosen, because the Minister for Women (the Federal Chancellery Austria, BKA), as responsible authority has mandated the Autonomous Women's Shelter Network for many years, whenever they wanted to launch a campaign. Another special case to mention: the feature film *Auswege* was directed by Nina Kusturica and produced by Vienna's Film Academy, however the Autonomous Women's Shelter Network initiated the film project and collaborated intensively in the production, hence it was selected for being strongly related to the NGO. Similarly, the Catalonian documentary *Heridas-Ferides* was selected for its relation to collaborating and counselling NGOs forming part of the Platform Against Gender Violence.

Visuals

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