

Women's Gaze and Desires in Spanish Cinema

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The birth of cinema marks a story of fascination and optical illusions, and its history portrays multi-layered perspectives and, in some cases, an individual gaze towards the Levinasian other. The case of Spanish cinema is especially interesting to analyse. While Franco's dictatorship relegated women to unmovable roles as submissive wives and devoted mothers, Spanish cinema was at the time and in the first years after the transition to democracy (with very few exceptions such as Pilar Miró) in the hands of male directors, producers, music composers, technicians etc and manufactured a rigid discourse on women's identities.

On the other hand, more recent Spanish cinema also illustrates how Spain has moved from an obviously patriarchal society where women were forced to depend completely on their fathers and husbands, to a modern, liberal society, where women have gained equal rights, but are still —like in most developed countries— underrepresented and discriminated.

Since the early 90s onwards, female directors have been changing the cinema landscape in Spain. They succeed in offering intimate narratives, attention to emotion and multi-layered readings of female characters and psychology. They illustrate women's experience and their negotiation of gender differences. Some of these female directors have become quite visible, precisely because of their powerful female protagonists and their examination and depiction of the female subjectivity, but also because of the numerous awards they have collected. In this paper I would like to examine how some of them (Icíar Bollaín, Isabel Coixet and Carla Simón) question traditional gender roles and expectations through their female characters — women who rebel against patriarchy and its negative consequences.

Iciar Bollaín, for example, director *Hola, ¿estás sola?*, *Flores de otro mundo* (Flores from another world) (1999), *Te doy mis ojos* (Take my Eyes) (2003), questions traditional gender roles and expectations through her female characters — women who rebel against patriarchy and its negative consequences. Isabel Coixet is one of most reputed Spanish film directors, especially well-known for her films *Things I never Told you* (Cosas que nunca te dije) (1996), *My Life without Me* (*Mi vida sin mí*) (2003), and *The Secret Life of Words* (*La vida secreta de las palabras*) () which were filmed in English with international actors and actresses. Coixet is particularly good at the depiction of emotions and existential conflicts.