

Domestic violence in Colombian film: Libia Gómez's "Ella"

Exploring feminist film for social transformation
through a case study methodology

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Abstract

In line with a global landscape in which domestic violence is amongst the most prominent gender-based problematics in contemporaneity, this project is concerned with the mediated discourses of domestic violence in Colombia. Specifically, it departs from the scarce treatment that Colombia's film industry has given to this hardship, considering that cinema has proven beneficial to assist in alternative socio-cultural transformation processes (Cupples, 2015; Roncallo & Arias-Herrera, 2013). Against a national film industry in which men have directed most fiction productions about domestic violence, Libia Gómez's film *Ella* (2015) arises as an exceptional case in which female authorship meets the public discussion of domestic violence against women. In this sense, this document aims to explore this film to account for the representational, personal, and industrial dynamics that may arise when female filmmakers represent domestic violence in Colombia. To address this issue, three sub-questions are posed. First, the study evaluated how domestic violence was represented in *Ella*. Second, it inquired the role *Ella*'s filmmakers assumed when producing a film about domestic violence. Third, the study investigated what opportunities and challenges these artists negotiated in agreement with their perceived roles. To accomplish this goal, the researcher conducted a case study through a multi-methodological approach. For this purpose, a character analysis methodology (Pérez Ruffí, 2017) was combined with in-depth interviews with *Ella*'s director and four ex-students who participated in the film's production. The findings underscored that domestic violence was represented in potentially transformative ways in *Ella*, since the film offered an alternative to blockbuster portrayals of household violence. Additionally, the research findings show how female filmmakers in Colombia deem that cinema is a compelling format to denounce domestic violence, learn from vulnerable individuals, and implement new industrial methodologies based on female subjectivities, care, and pedagogical approaches. Finally, the study also identified that female filmmakers encounter multiple gender-based disparities, financial obstacles, as well as emotional and physical challenges in their attempt to address domestic violence against women. Howbeit, these artists also saw the industry as a scenario for academic and personal growth, and the potential to increase the credibility of women as industrial workers and agents of socio-cultural transformation.

KEYWORDS: Feminist cinema, domestic violence, Colombia, women filmmakers.

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Preface

These pages materialize my dream as a young Colombian, who had to overcome many institutional, economic, and personal limitations to obtain some answers about her existence as a woman, in a nation yet full of gender-based violences. In these pages, I am hoping to provide the [Colombian] reader with a motivation to look at his/her own context, to stop ignoring Colombia's afflictions, and the burdens assumed by those who are closest to us.

I believe that presenting this document is evidence of God's grace over me, since he provided me with the mental, spiritual, and physical health to complete this degree, and He guided me when there was uncertainty and discouragement. He has been the one to open each one of the gates that I have come across in this path, and I trust it has been Him who has made possible what for me was economically and intellectually impossible.

I dedicate this thesis to my parents and sister, whose examples of sacrifice, kindness, and sensitivity towards others have been my constant inspiration. I also express my gratitude towards Nelsy, Joel, Annemieke, and Rutger, who became my parents away from home. Your love and dedication were my strength in times of weakness. Similarly, I extend my sincerest gratitude to my grandparents, uncles, and aunts, who demonstrated the great things we Colombians can achieve when we undertake projects collectively.

I am also profoundly appreciative of my supervisor, doctor Isabel Awad, for her dedication, trust, advice for this project, and her inspiring passion for our Latin American realities. Additionally, I wish to thank the Holland Scholarship committee, which facilitated precious academic, spiritual, and personal experiences through their decision.

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Last, I extend my solidarity, and a request for forgiveness to those domestic violence victims for whom I did not fight enough, and whom I ignored for years. May this academic contribution, and the personal lessons I gathered from it, continue guiding us in our national transformation processes.

My sincerest gratitude,

Nicole Cruz Roa.

1. Introduction

Violence against women is still one of the most serious global problems, as official statistics demonstrate. In 2017, 137 women worldwide were murdered daily by a family member (UNODC, 2019), exhibiting the determinant role that private domains and households acquire in fostering gender-based inequities. Following the definition of violence against women offered by the World Health Organization (2014), this problematic can be understood as the manifestation, within the household, of “any act of gender-based violence that results in, or is likely to result in physical, sexual, or mental harm or suffering to women, including threats of such acts, coercion or arbitrary deprivation of liberty” (p.84).

With one femicide process occurring every day (Corporación SISMA Mujer, 2020), Colombia illustrates this problematic with special intensity. Many Colombian institutions and governmental bodies have framed domestic violence as a Public Health concern (SIVIGE et al., 2020). Only in 2019, 40.760 cases of partner and domestic violence against women were reported, and data from previous years emphasize that young girls are the main victims of household violence (SIVIGE et al., 2020, p.2). Additional studies indicate that this problem affects Colombian women with variegated social, economic, and educational backgrounds, subjecting them to precarious security conditions that starkly contrast those of countries such as Norway or The Netherlands (GIWPS & PRIO, 2019; Gómez López et al., 2013).

Despite the magnitude of this hardship, most of the country’s media outlets provide limited treatment to this crisis. Conversely, alternative exteriorizations of violence such as forced migration and drug cartels are prioritized as profitable narrative models (Rivera-Betancur, 2014, p.138). A limited treatment of domestic violence is also evident in the national film industry. A search in the official source of Colombian film statistics reveals that only 10 of the 354 Colombian fiction movies created in the last two decades have addressed this topic.ⁱ Arguably, this exhibits a predisposition towards certain political realities at the expense of neglecting alternative ones. For instance, while the experiences of many Colombians forced to migrate were openly discussed in 6 national fiction movies from 2019 (Proimágenes Colombia, n.d.-b), domestic violence received no treatment in the national feature films produced in that same timeframe.ⁱⁱ

From these limited number of national films about domestic violence, only 1 has been directed by a woman. This is the 2015 film *Ella*, directed by Libia Gómez, and made collectively with students and rising artists. Considering *Ella* is an exceptional, significant attempt to represent and discuss the experiences of domestic violence victims, the analysis of this film will be at the core of the present project. The movie, shot in black-and-white, narrates the story of Gisel, a twelve-year-old girl subjugated

to the physical and verbal abuses of her stepfather. The movie has received numerous awards and nominations in Argentinian, Canadian, and German film festivals, and its social significance encouraged the National Fund for Film Development to subsidize its writing and production stages.ⁱⁱⁱ The film's treatment of "highly critical and painful topics of our [Colombian] reality, tough and overwhelming subjects"^{iv} (Gómez, n.d., as cited in Arcila Perdomo, 2014) was recognized as a significant step towards cultural diversity when the Montreal International Film Festival included the product in its official selection (Arcila Perdomo, 2014).

Ella innovates in three directions: First, while many Colombian filmmakers prefer lucrative narratives related, for example, to drug-dealing and the armed conflict (Rivera-Betancur, 2018, p.653), Gómez addressed a theme that has proven unprofitable for other directors and herself.^v Secondly, while other female directors have often prioritized topics such as bipartisan violence, or the injustice pervading rural areas (Gutierrez Ortiz, 2019), through *Ella*, Gómez focused on portraying domestic violence and gender-based disparities.^{vi} Third, whilst film industries are skeptical of workers without sufficient networks or experience (Conor et al., 2015; Tremblay & Huesca, 2016), Gómez involved filmmaking students and rising practitioners as cinematographers, producers, and production designers of *Ella* (L. S. Gómez, personal communication, February 8, 2021).^{vii}

Inasmuch as Gómez's product counters a landscape in which explorations of domestic violence through cinema are scarce, and considering she is the only female director in Colombia that has approached this theme through a feature film in the last two decades, her overt discussion of household misogyny is an exceptional case. In this sense, a case study methodology that guarantees an in-depth examination of the film and its producers paves the way to nurture current "processes of knowledge" (Flyvbjerg, 2011, p.305) around Colombian film, and may yield alternative possibilities that fit Colombia's context while challenging established conceptions around domestic violence.

Furthermore, since this is the only Colombian feature film of the last twenty years that portrays domestic violence and was written and directed by a woman, the analysis of *Ella* can contribute to understanding film as a political tool suitable to extend feminist discourses. Since women who were students, rising filmmakers, or members of vulnerable communities participated in its creation, the film is a valuable case to contribute to existing theoretical discussions about female agencies and transformative strategies underlying Colombia's contemporary film industry. While some academics have explored the development of feminist movements in Colombia, the contribution of film as a collective, political format with the potential to foreground female subjectivities can be further explored.^{viii} Therefore, treating *Ella* as a case study may encourage the development of innovative,

stronger perspectives and discourses for activists and filmmakers concerned with household violence.

In this sense, the project aims to examine the dynamics sustaining the film's production through the main research question "*What representational, personal, and industrial dynamics can arise when female filmmakers represent domestic violence in Colombia?*". *Ella's* representational dynamics can be analyzed through a first sub-question: "*How is domestic violence represented in the film?*". To understand the personal dynamics that originated in *Ella's* creation, a second sub-question is proposed: "*How do Ella's female producers perceive their role around domestic violence in Colombia?*". Additionally, these personal dynamics should be understood in relation to the industrial dynamics surrounding the film's creation, with the third sub-question: "*What industrial and personal negotiations do they sustain in agreement with this role?*".

Albeit examining the representations embedded in the film can illustrate innovative strategies for Colombia's film industry, as well as alternative discourses that can contribute to social improvement, it is also necessary to attend to the sustaining structures and actors that shape such representations. Recognizing these structures and actors is fundamental since the film's producers interact with specific socioeconomic conditions, public and private establishments, and the final representations in complex and undetermined ways (Ahearn, 2012, p.266). In other words, repairing on the mediated message, the people who produce it, and the institutions and economic flows that regulate and influence these messages and production processes is crucial "to contribute in a genuinely critical manner to the debates about contemporary media culture" (Schrøder, 2007, p.84).

Given the undeniable predominance of men in direction roles within the national film industry, much literature that examines Colombian film's development and its socio-cultural influence has highlighted the work of men, resulting in a reduced corpus of texts discussing the benefits posited by female directors.^{ix} Conversely, this research expands academic discussions of Colombian film by calling for increasing recognition of the work carried by female filmmakers.

Furthermore, assessing rising filmmakers and collective representations as contingent strategies to address domestic violence will shed light on film's pedagogical properties and the crucial role of film producers to create awareness in national and regional communities where domestic violence is pervasive. In the end, this endeavor is socially significant since it encourages national filmmakers and academics to embrace film's potential to "review power relations, interaction settings, the demonstration of sociopolitical existence, the female gender's ability to accomplish meaningful transformations within the institutional decking"*(Oliveros Aya & Gómez Ramírez, 2013, p.225).

In the following chapter, several theoretical discussions will be explained. On the one hand, the

relevance and risks of publicly discussing domestic violence will be exposed. On the other, the chapter will repair on the political and feminist potential of film. The third chapter of this document will discuss the significance of implementing a case study methodology. Specifically, this section illustrates the advantages of a qualitative, multi-methodological approach, that combines a film-character analysis methodology with in-depth interviews. While the former can account for gender ideologies represented in the characters of *Ella*, the latter methodology provides the opportunity to examine personal beliefs, as well as economic and industrial opportunities and obstacles not openly represented in the film. Then, the fourth chapter exposes the findings of this study, and the final chapter offers some conclusions and areas for further research.

2. Theoretical Framework

To delve into the discussions elicited by the female filmmakers behind *Ella* and their representations of domestic violence, it is necessary to assess how domestic violence has been addressed in a diversity of media and cinema trends. Subsequently, this chapter will repair on some of the representational and industrial perils that stem from publicly discussing this hardship. Finally, the chapter will resort to examples in Latin America and Colombia to explain how cinema can also be a powerful tool for socio-cultural change.

2.1 Mediated efforts against domestic violence

Many feminist organizations, citizens, and government officials in Colombia have claimed that the country lacks sufficient and adequate solutions to counter domestic violence against women. For instance, it has been argued that statistical measures and official denunciation channels currently sustaining improvement plans do not accurately portray the severity of the hardship (Corporación SISMA Mujer, 2020). Despite these argued insufficiencies, initiatives to approach the hardship, such as questionnaires, research projects, and legal alternatives have been developed (SIVIGE et al., 2020) under the conviction that they have the potential of “providing women real and lasting alternatives”* (Valencia Vernaza, 2019, p.9).

One of the main strategies promoted by national institutions and feminist conglomerates is openly denouncing violent events in the household. Thus, local authorities have established multiple medical practices and telephone hotlines to “evidence the problematic and incentivize the search or acceptance of therapeutic assistance”* (Ministerio de Salud, n.d., p.17).^x Similarly, some artistic initiatives, such as the “Ni Con el Pétalo de Una Rosa” festival [Not Even With A Rose Petal], defend that open denunciation through art and pedagogy is crucial to fight domestic violence. Ultimately, these national initiatives mirror recent global and regional attempts to publicly unveil private violences to resist gender-based disparities.

As an illustration, the increasingly public discussion about domestic violence in Latin America has encouraged innovative political practices, knowledges, and collective and individual imaginaries that underscore female leadership and agency (Motta, 2019). Within this discussion, women have resorted to a strategic implementation of storytelling, and to demonstrations of care and solidarity to leverage “the transformation of narratives of victimisation, infantilisation and devaluation into stories of survival, resilience and resistance” (Motta, 2019, p.16-17).

These practices have been at the core of Latin American and transcontinental movements that

have politicized and created visibility over gender disparities in the domestic sphere, such as #NiUnaMenos and #MeToo.^{xii} Activists and regular citizens have implemented media's affordances, highlighting "popular power, and the popular sector's capacity to influence political decisions" (Chenou & Cepeda-Másmela, 2019, p.408). Until now, these overt discussions have served to further include women and other marginalized individuals in political deliberations. Similarly, through a collective gathering of statistics, these discussions have been useful to advocate for increasing governmental response. Additionally, as Clark-Parsons (2019) notes when examining public tweets linked to the #MeToo campaign, these enterprises pave the way for social transformation by "destabilizing the dominant discourses shaping everyday actions and modelling alternative ways of being" (p.4).

While digital media has been at the core of most of these contemporary initiatives (Chenou & Cepeda-Másmela, 2019; Clark-Parsons, 2019), the discussion of domestic violence has also been hosted in other formats such as film. According to Frus (2001, p.227), even a reduced corpus of Hollywood and mainstream blockbusters, for instance, have served as the basis for imaginaries of household violence. In a similar vein, Wheeler (2009) defends that some Hollywood and European films have played "a crucial role in disseminating both facts and myths about domestic violence and have helped to consecrate the emergence of violence against women in the home as a visible social discourse" (p.156).^{xii}

Nevertheless, as Wheeler (2009) defends, the domestic violence discussion that some mainstream movies offer has several limitations. In his opinion, domestic violence has often been insufficiently portrayed, considering the scope of this problem in the United States and the United Kingdom. Besides, most of these films give precedence to entertainment and profitability rather than to explicitly promoting feminist agendas. These tensions underline the need to repair on the limitations of the strategies through which domestic violence has been publicly discussed. Furthermore, an assessment of these restrictions would be incomplete without considering the local factors that currently shape Colombia's film industry. In this sense, the representational, individual, industrial, and economic perils that come with openly discussing domestic violence through cinema should be considered.

2.2 Risks of representing domestic violence through cinema

While considering the opportunities that popular media fosters for feminist claims, some academics call for careful consideration of the risks of openly discussing the struggles that stem from domestic violence. For instance, Banet-Weiser et al. (2019) discuss that the visibility and popularity

accomplished within profit-driven media platforms can easily subsume feminist discourses to an “economy of visibility”. Within this “economy”, traumatic personal experiences may be revealed to ensure or increase circulation and popularity within digital environments, and this may contribute to the banalization and normalisation of gender inequalities (Banet-Weiser, 2018; Clark-Parsons, 2019).

The extent to which domestic violence is banalized through these overt media discussions may be assessed following three considerations. First, as Clark-Parsons (2019) notes, banalization occurs when women demand to be represented, believing this suffices for political transformation (p.5). Hence, change is believed to occur through the mere inclusion and visualization of more women. This becomes problematic when the circulating representations highlight tenacious, self-sufficient women, while neglecting a public discussion of the contexts, regulations, and ideologies that sustain gender inequities. As Fraser (1995) responded to Judith Butler, when the emphasis is placed on individual performance and visibility, political discourses may become subjugated “to commodification, recuperation, and depoliticization—especially in the absence of strong social movements struggling for social justice” (p.163).

Secondly, when the individual, nuanced, and unique experiences of victims with variegated identities are replaced by stereotyped representations to ensure overabundant visibility, their stories become banalized. Distributing violent experiences as standardized consumption goods is another form of banalization since “seeing and hearing a safely affirmative feminism in spectacularly visible ways often eclipses a feminist critique of structure, as well as obscuring the labour involved in producing oneself according to the parameters of popular feminism” (Banet-Weiser, 2018, p.9). Thirdly, representations shared in the public sphere can banalize domestic violence when they serve to leverage the popularity, status, and income of individuals other than the victims. For instance, when celebrities and activists receive economic benefit from sharing, extending, or mirroring these statements, capitalist trends are being favored at the expense of painful memories and events.

While some of these concerns of banalization have focused on online trends, an evaluation of the discourses shared through cinema exhibits analogous perils. Recalling Banet-Weiser’s (2018) preoccupations around the “economies of visibility” serves to investigate some ways in which cinema can banalize discussions of domestic violence. As she points, banal discourses focus on visibility and popularity. Thus, scrutinizing the ways in which the film industry obtains visibility and popularity is crucial to understand how film can banalize the discussion of domestic violence.

The theatre and cinema scholar Wheeler (2009) has examined some of the characters and violent events represented in a corpus of mainstream films about domestic violence. His enterprise

assists in understanding how Banet-Weiser's (2018) "economies of visibility" materialize through cinema productions, since it reveals representational strategies through which the nuances sustaining real-life violent scenarios can become oversimplified. From his assessment, three formulas to leverage the visibility, popularity, and revenue of film products and creators may be inferred. These are (1) portraying indestructible victims, (2) alienating the aggressor, and (3) aestheticizing violence. In the following paragraphs, each one of these formulas will be explained. Understanding these provides researchers and viewers a toolset to critically assess both the representations imbued in domestic violence films and contingent perils that arise from discussing this topic through cinema.

2.2.1 Portraying indestructible victims

First, Wheeler (2009) identifies that some blockbuster films portray domestic violence victims as self-sufficient, tenacious women, who do not remain passive but gain agency throughout the film. Either through their intelligence, emotional endurance, or physical strength, victims manage to defeat their aggressors and bring the story to a happy ending. Thus, in these films, women who have been physically, sexually, verbally, and psychologically attacked are often transformed into heroines, when they are able to build new romantic relationships, increase their professional success, and abandon their violent partners.

These representations are questionable for two main reasons. On one side, characterizing victims as agents with an unlimited capacity to decide their fate may emphasize personal accountability over collective responsibility for the factors, institutions, and contexts that host domestic violence (Wheeler, 2009). Just as Clark-Parsons (2019) noted in her exam, representing female victims as relentless, empowered individuals may neglect a discussion of systematic limitations surrounding them. While victims capable of gaining physical strength or designing innovative escape plans are deemed empowered under popular feminism, "the cultural value of individualism may result in drawing attention away from the structural factors that foster gender violence." (Marin & Ruso, 1999, p.33).

Furthermore, these portrayals limit female agency to a dependence on economic and social capital, since the women portrayed overcome violent circumstances through the payment of self-defense lessons, alternative residences, or the assistance of new romantic partners. Such scenarios contrast many violent contexts in real life, considering that victims often lack sufficient economic means, or support from their relatives to abandon violent households (Gómez López et al., 2013). These representations depart from narrative models that prioritize an individualistic growth of the character (Bordwell & Thompson, 1995), and further banalize discussions of domestic violence by sharing a model

of “happy feminism” (Banet-Weiser et al., 2019) that erroneously equates representing strong victims with creating better conditions for them.

2.2.2 Alienating the aggressor

Although many feminists advocate that openly denouncing violence perpetrators may lead to profound political changes, merely representing these aggressors in public spheres is not sufficient to guarantee critical reflexivity towards violent scenarios. Wheeler (2009) notes how most aggressors delineated in blockbuster films of domestic violence are alienated, or built with exaggerated traits that separate them from the audience, through multiple strategies.

First, the author points that some aggressors are built as drug addicts, alcoholics, exceptional villains with wide repertoires of violence within which domestic violence is not the most important (Wheeler, 2009). By the same token, some of these aggressors are depicted as outsiders, obsessive characters with extraordinary intelligence that are “never shown to be normal in any way” (Wheeler, 2009, p.158). Additionally, these aggressors are further alienated when they are presented as wealthy, attractive individuals, with lifestyles and traits that contrast those of “99 per cent of the cinema audience” (Wheeler, 2009, p.158).

These constructions banalize discussions of domestic violence inasmuch as they follow conventions established within different cinematographic genres, and primarily aim to generate profitability or entertain the audience (Wheeler, 2009, p.158). Thus, some of these stereotyped portrayals leave aside the experiences of aggressors with lower incomes, who are not necessarily obsessive, extraordinarily attractive, nor violent in every sphere of their lives. Consequently, these representations extend a stark distinction between characters and real-life aggressors, while encouraging “that attention is firmly placed on the individual [...] and is distracted from wider social or cultural questions” (Wheeler, 2009, p.159).

2.2.3 Aestheticizing violence

Finally, Wheeler’s (2009) investigation reveals that some domestic violence films may be banalizing this hardship through its aesthetic presentation by means of (1) audiovisual language and/or (2) marketing strategies. On one side, Wheeler (2009) questions the iconographic basis of some domestic violence films since they borrow variegated audiovisual resources from advertising and television. From his perspective, aestheticization takes place when violent scenes are crafted in very elaborated, stylized manners that serve to strengthen the romantic, melodramatic, or intriguing plot of

the product. Such elaboration can be considered banalizing as “this aestheticization can sometimes have the effect of desensitizing the viewer and making acts of domestic violence seem exhilarating and exciting” (Wheeler, 2009, p.167).

Here, Wheeler (2009) conceives that desensitization does not merely occur when openly discussing domestic violence, but when prioritizing an artistic, stylized presentation of this hardship in these open discussions. This interpretation contrasts that of multiple media psychology scholars who have delved into the consequences of openly discussing violent behaviours against women in film (Linz et al., 1984; Linz et al., 1988; Mullin and Linz, 1995). From these scholars’ perspective, repeated, open portrayals of gendered violence suffice to desensitize viewers towards victims, even when such representations do not necessarily introduce domestic violence in visually appealing ways. For instance, Mullin and Linz (1995) confirmed that repeated exposure to open filmic discourses of domestic violence caused individuals to become less sensitive to real-life violence victims. In this sense, banalization may lead to desensitization: “a decreased likelihood to take action on behalf of the victim when violence occurs.” (p.449).

The representational resources embedded in films are not the only means through which domestic violence can be aestheticized, and therefore, banalized. As Wheeler (2009) demonstrates, the marketing strategies selected to promote some blockbuster films about domestic violence can also contribute to portray domestic violence as an intriguing, appealing phenomenon. For instance, when some of these movies are marketed as emotional romances with attractive casts (Wheeler, 2009), an interest in entertainment and popularity precedes the preoccupation to incentivize awareness towards violence as a social hardship. Similarly, when local stories are molded in agreement with international narrative and marketing conventions, local conditions and histories are ignored to favor proven profitable models (Wheeler, 2009, p.167).

2.2.3.1 Poverty Porn

The contingent aestheticization and banalization of sociopolitical hardships has also concerned multiple Colombian filmmakers. In the 1970s, the Colombian directors Luis Ospina and Carlos Mayolo warned that film could exploit national hardships in pursuing profitability. While they sought to expose and transform some of Colombia’s socioeconomic difficulties at the time, they argued that cinema could deform the country’s reality, and turn it into consumption goods suitable for international film audiences (Ospina & Mayolo, n.d.). From their perspective, a ‘pornographic’ treatment of Colombia’s context arose because “misery was being presented as another spectacle, where the spectator could

clean his guilty conscience, feel moved, and calm down”* (Ospina & Mayolo, n.d.). Considering these concerns, contemporary Colombian filmmakers interested in political improvement face the challenge of addressing Colombia’s realities in ways that exceed the commercialization, deformation, and standardization of violent experiences in the household.

2.2.4 Industrial risks

Admitting that publicly discussing private violences carries several potential representational perils, using cinema for these discourses also poses multiple personal and professional risks for the filmmakers that discuss such topics. Considering these dangers is beneficial to fathom why the treatment of domestic violence in Colombian productions has been limited. Additionally, the analysis of these dangers reveals areas that should be developed to foster better filmic representations, paving the way for transformation through these audiovisual discourses.

Colombia’s film industry has not been the only one to experience the obstacles that result from pursuing social improvement and, additionally, feminist agendas by means of cinema. As an example, the leader of the international organization Women Make Movies, Debra Zimmerman (2016) explains how the goals of feminist filmmakers around the world have often been threatened by a pervasive lack of funding, economic sustainability, or credibility from local governments.^{xiii} Furthermore, it is necessary to consider that the hardships experienced by filmmakers acquire additional nuances depending on the particular socioeconomic contexts in which these artists are located. In this sense, female Colombian filmmakers encounter two main difficulties within the national film industry: the low profitability of their productions, and inequality and precarious working conditions.

2.2.4.1 Profitability

In contrast to other countries, Colombia does not currently host an economically viable film industry. Given the lack of sufficient financial resources, government incentives, and support towards national productions, producers increasingly recognize that film production is not a profitable business (Rivera-Betancur, 2014). Such unprofitability can be partially explained by attending to the behaviors and preferences of Colombian film distributors, producers, and viewers.

Colombian filmmakers who manage to produce their movies despite the few resources available encounter distributors disinclined towards national products. Thus, female Colombian filmmakers risk that their pieces will be insufficiently promoted by national distributors, since the latter often promote these films in few venues or exhibit them in timeframes that are difficult for the audience to attend

(Rivera-Betancur, 2014). In addition, some distributors often divide these reduced exhibition opportunities amongst many national films, resulting in up to five national productions simultaneously competing for the attention of an already reduced audience (Rivera-Betancur, 2014).

Because of these tensions, numerous national producers hesitate on investing in films with innovative proposals, and prefer to extend few, traditional narratives that have enjoyed moderate success: “Family movies, that transmit a simple, reassuring message”* (De Hoyos, 2013). These investment preferences, however, have induced many national viewers to contend that national films are not varied enough, that they do not identify with such national productions, and that Hollywood narratives better reflect their daily experiences (Rivera, 2008).

In this regard, national audiences are reluctant towards various stylistic and narrative choices. On the one hand, Colombian viewers perceive that motion pictures shot in black-and-white – as *Ella-* are boring or unsophisticated (Rivera, 2008, p.323). On the other hand, many Colombian viewers are unenthusiastic about narratives that explore social injustices and national politics. Hence, since their first approximations as creators in the national industry, female Colombian filmmakers have been constrained when discussing less commercial narratives. For instance, the participants of “Corporación Cine Mujer”, an extinguished feminist film conglomerate that surged in Colombia in the late 70s, experienced variegated economic restrictions and limitations to accomplish personal goals as a consequence of creating overtly feminist content (Arboleda Ríos & Osorio Gómez, 2003).

Consequently, female filmmakers in Colombia encounter audiences educated by “the prevalence of market interests over humanistic ones”* (Rivera, 2008, p.322). Hence, these artists risk investing strenuous efforts in building narratives with limited transformative power, given that viewers often do not understand these discourses, and there are scarce initiatives to re-educate audiences in appreciating autochthonous narratives (Rivera-Betancur, 2014, p.135).

2.2.4.2 Inequality and precarious conditions

Not only does Colombia’s film industry host economical risks for artists interested in social change, but this industry is also the terrain of gender-based discriminations and inequalities. Both established and rising female filmmakers currently face a work arena in which the presence of men continues to be pervasive (Roquero García, 2012), with most fiction, documentary, and animation productions being directed by men (FIACINE, 2018). As in other countries, many Colombian women are segregated from areas such as cinematography or sound design, while being associated with traditionally feminine skills suitable for areas such as acting, production, or production design (Arboleda

Ríos & Osorio Gómez, 2003; Hesmondhalgh & Baker, 2015; FIACINE, 2018).

By the same token, established and rising female filmmakers currently affront multiple boundaries for employment and career development, such as lack of social capital, and reduced work experience (Conor et al., 2015; Tremblay & Huesca, 2016). Resembling international creative landscapes, many Colombian female filmmaking students often offer their assistance in projects for free with the hope of building strong networks for the future. Besides, considering the shortage of financial resources available, and a generalized mistrust of women as fiction directors, female Colombian filmmakers are often responsible for gathering the capital for their own productions (Mujeres: a luchar contra el sexism en el cine, 2016; Rocha, 2018).

2.3 Cinema's significance for sociocultural change

Despite the risks derived from openly discussing violent experiences through cinema, these discourses also have the potential to transform uneven scenarios. Cinema's political potential depends, to a great extent, on its openness to authors who carry alternative subjectivities and life experiences. This potential is also evident in contemporaneity, with the arrival of authors from vulnerable communities to different film industries. The openness to these authors has promoted new communities of support, provided resources for specific realities, and stimulated excluded sectors to interact with film techniques and technologies for social improvement (Zimmerman, 2016). For instance, the participation of women as directors propelled further actions against sexual violence in Italy, since they were the first authors to record a real-life rape trial (Zimmerman, 2016, p.290).

Considering that Colombian activists have urged for indigenous, Afro-descendant, and working-class victims of domestic violence to be heard (ANUC, n.d.; Motta, 2019), film may provide such opportunity through the participation of Colombian women as makers. First, their inclusion as authors offers the possibility to unsettle the male standards and desires that usually shape film representations of women (Mulvey, 1975, p.62). Additionally, such inclusion may place creators and viewers under common backgrounds and struggles within a nation with variegated materializations of violence. Thus, cinema has the potential to join women in the audience and women behind the scenes under common experiences, and a common awareness of their potential to transform the uneven conditions that surround them.

Moreover, when critical reflexivity and denunciation are prioritized, these public announcements have the potential to elude banalization and yield a positive social impact. As previously suggested, the possibility for social change arises when the purpose of these public discourses is

questioned: “The visibility of popular feminism, where examples appear on television, in film (...) is important, but it often stops there, as if *seeing* or purchasing feminism is the same thing as changing patriarchal structures” (Banet-Weiser, 2018, p.4, emphasis in original). In other words, if openly representing feminist discourses is not the same as challenging patriarchal structures, it is crucial to critically assess what is necessary for media representations to defy these uneven structures.

Some feminists argue that efforts to publicly recognize private violences can be effective when there is an open denouncement of perpetrators, institutions, and citizens who neglect victims (Clark-Parsons, 2019, p.13). Accordingly, these public discourses can serve to direct public attention towards the individuals, institutions, ideologies, and systems that foster domestic violence. Additionally, they may overcome the normalisation of violent experiences, promoting that feminist discourses do not become a mere vehicle of consumerist practices.

Just as cinema may banalize some representations or posit industrial perils, the discussion of social injustice and gendered violences through this format posits distinctive possibilities. On the one hand, it has been argued that film, as other media entertainment formats, can provide significant political opportunities for marginalized sectors, assisting individuals in uneven life scenarios to understand power disparities illustrated in gender discourses (Cupples, 2015). In this regard, films that are sometimes underestimated because of their mainstream content can engage audiences with profound discourses of identity and social improvement (De Oro, 2020; Smith, 2017).

On the other hand, previous trends in Latin America exemplify that cinema’s audiovisual language and production processes may posit alternatives to the banalization of domestic violence. Such possibility arises from the New Latin American Cinema movement, which gained attention in the 60s, and was comprised of filmmakers from Chile, Brazil, Argentina, Colombia, and other countries in the region (Roncallo & Arias Herrera, 2013). Concerned with the idea of ‘revolution’, these artists defended that “cinema was not a representation of political ideologies, but a political practice itself” (Roncallo & Arias-Herrera, 2013, p.96). This initiative emerged in a regional landscape characterized by strong nationalisms and political conflicts. Specifically in Colombia, historical events such as the “Bogotazo”, and cinema proposals from this same nation further nurtured the urge to implement cinema for social transformation (Roncallo & Arias-Herrera, 2013).^{xiv}

This interest in revolution led these artists to pursue the ideological transformation of their viewers through new filmic contents, forms, and logics of production, that significantly differed from those of Hollywood and the French New Wave (Roncallo & Arias-Herrera, 2013). These proposals were deemed transformative given their potential to shift the sociopolitical paradigms established by cinema

movements coming from Europe and the United States (Roncallo & Arias-Herrera, 2013). Since the Latin American movement opposed revenue-seeking models and narratives that idolized personal experiences, its strategies can be adapted to assist the goals of contemporary feminists who resist the banalization of violent incidents within the household. In the following subsections, the proposals of the New Latin American Cinema around cinema content, forms, and logics of production will be discussed, since they provide an opportunity to reevaluate the use of cinema and its potential as a tool for sociopolitical change.

2.3.1 Transformative contents:

The New Latin American Cinema movement argued that Hollywood's representations of Latin America had to be modified from an autochthonous perspective to induce political transformation (Roncallo & Arias-Herrera, 2013). These directors considered it was crucial to openly discuss Latin America's nuanced realities and social problematics "to produce a deep understanding of its singular character beyond the traditional categories that had described that condition" (Roncallo & Arias-Herrera, 2013, p.100). In this sense, the participants defended that, for ideological transformation to occur, cinema had to show Latin America's realities faithfully.

This belief led them to construct narratives with characters initially immersed in arduous contexts. Since they were often incapable of overcoming these hard conditions, the films portrayed characters who cyclically returned to their initial difficulties (Roncallo & Arias-Herrera, 2013). By representing these hardships, they invited viewers to attend much-ignored realities and struggles, and to recognize them as their own. From their perspective, sharing these representations through cinema was vital, since the image served to mediate and reveal political realities in ways that other formats were unable to attain (Roncallo & Arias-Herrera, 2013).

Such representations resisted Hollywood's stories with happy closures and characters that surpassed most obstacles (Roncallo & Arias-Herrera, 2013). More importantly, these audiovisual constructions accentuated the strong influence of regional structures and contexts over individual agencies. Additionally, their attention to the multiple sides of each calamity, and the varied traits of each character countered alienating portrayals of Latin Americans as exotic or different (Roncallo & Arias-Herrera, 2013), encouraging a reconciliation between characters and spectators.

2.3.2 Transformative forms:

The participants of The New Latin American Cinema movement believed that cinema could foster political change by guiding spectators to reflect on the realities present in the region. In turn, this meant that not only should viewers associate their lives with those of the characters, but that they should become aware of the many contradictions, conflicts, and dilemmas that coexisted in Latin America (Roncallo & Arias-Herrera, 2013). As Roncallo & Arias-Herrera (2013) discuss, the creators had to implement an equally dialectical audiovisual language, which accounted for contradictory relationships that remained unattended on a day-to-day basis.

Such dialectical language was accomplished through the employment of montage to produce “shocks and associations which in reality are dilute and opaque because of their high degree of complexity and because of day-to-day routine” (Gutiérrez Alea, 1997, p.122). Therefore, when frames were juxtaposed, or the rhythm of certain sequences was accelerated or decelerated, relationships between agents and their contexts were shared for the audience to critically evaluate (Roncallo & Arias-Herrera, 2013). Consequently, connecting characters experiencing precarious situations with specific institutions and political behaviors encouraged viewers: “to understand the material forces that have created that [sic] conditions” (Roncallo & Arias-Herrera, 2013, p.104).

2.3.3 Transformative production logics:

Finally, these directors considered that ideological transformation was possible if some dynamics established by Europe’s and United States’ film industries were redesigned (Roncallo & Arias-Herrera, 2013). From their perspective, the clear division between director and audience hindered cinema’s socio-cultural potential. Therefore, the central question for these makers became “what can be done so that the audience stops being an object and transforms itself into the subject?” (García Espinosa, 1997, p.75). As an answer, they acknowledged that educating others in film creation and viewing was imperative to reconstruct Latin America’s social landscape.

Their understanding of cinema as a collective construction called for variegated subjectivities as authors of now democratic representations. Further, when envisioning industries in which “the creators are at the same time the spectators and vice versa” (García Espinosa, 1997, p.76), these artists challenged profit-driven industrial models of the epoch and emphasized the relevance of multiple perspectives around shared social realities.

To summarize, the potential that cinema may offer for the discussion of domestic violence resides in (1) fostering increased participation of women as authors, (2) encouraging autochthonous,

nuanced representations, and (3) becoming a space to educate audiences as critical readers and producers. As an attempt to illustrate this potential, it is beneficial to consider if and how some transformative processes in Colombia have been leveraged through cinema's potential so far.

2.3.4 Examples of cinema's transformative potential

Some contemporary Colombian movies, sustained by current policies of Colombia's film market, have assisted marginalized communities and evidenced cinema's sociopolitical potential (De Oro, 2018). For instance, through their film *Birds of Passage*, the Colombian filmmakers Ciro Guerra and Cristina Gallego posed a compelling opportunity to disrupt existing misconceptions around indigenous agencies, knowledges, and subjectivities, providing "cultural tools of resistance that seek to value indigenous cultures and go beyond the ignorance of ancestral roots in the face of Western culture's imposition" (De Oro, 2020, p.8).

Alternatively, currently extinguished national film conglomerates have also found in cinema the opportunity to extend feminist discourses. This was the case of "Corporación Cine Mujer": a group of feminist filmmakers concerned with foregrounding domestic violence against women and alternative sociopolitical struggles women encountered (Arboleda Ríos & Osorio Gómez, 2003). Their enterprise, which materialized cinema's potentiality to produce "a voice that articulates a community's condition into the collective silence" (Schuhmann, 2015, p.55), may serve as guidance for feminists in the contemporary film industry.

3. Methodology

As has been previously argued, analyzing *Ella* offers an exceptional opportunity for three reasons. First, this is one of the few Colombian films of the last two decades that addresses domestic violence against women. Secondly, the film highlights political discourses for social improvement that have often been neglected by other female directors. Finally, Gómez defied some established barriers in the industry to encourage the involvement of developing artists and filmmakers. These three features turn the film into a unique opportunity to examine existing limitations and opportunities that exist in Colombia's film industry when domestic violence is discussed, from the perspective of female filmmakers, as well as the representations that emerge within such negotiated landscapes.

For the current project, a case study methodology was implemented, considering that it facilitates the critical, profound knowledge of contexts and influential components surrounding exceptional units of analysis (Flyvbjerg, 2011). From this perspective, assessing *Ella* and its producers through this methodological lens can reveal which factors exert crucial influence on national filmmakers' interest to approach domestic violence, and in what ways uneven realities may be fostered or defied through their approach. Hence, a case study approximation guided by the conviction that "in the study of human affairs, there appears to exist only context-dependent knowledge" (Flyvbjerg, 2011, p.302) can account for specific economic, personal, and historical interests that need to be reshaped to leverage socio-cultural transformation in Colombia.

While some scholars contend that case studies are exclusively useful for hypothesis testing (Flyvbjerg, 2011), treating *Ella* as a case study propounds the potential to delve into three significant theoretical discussions: (1) the implementation of representational strategies to fight domestic violence against women, (2) the acknowledgment of innovative political practices in Colombian film, and (3) further understanding of the negotiation processes that take place between women in the national film industry and the industry itself, with its established conducts and affordances.

3.1 Multi-methodological approach

Specifically, this research will examine two components of *Ella* to answer the sub-research questions and to delve into the aforementioned theoretical discussions. The film itself constitutes the first component. On one side, the representations ingrained in the film offer a model for other filmmakers with feminist agendas. Additionally, an in-depth approximation to the film supplemented by the postures of Gómez and her crew can unveil some audiovisual strategies and signifiers that convey (or fail to convey) the political interests of these makers. When analyzed along with the perspectives of

Gómez and her team, the film exemplifies how constraining and leveraging industrial factors affect the final product offered to the audience.^{xv} These possibilities arise from the multi-methodological approach of this study.

The experiences and perspectives of *Ella*'s makers, on the other hand, constitute the second component analyzed. They can reveal new opportunities and risks that emerge when discussing domestic violence in Colombian film. Their negotiations, social concerns, and perspectives can assist in understanding cinema as a political and transformative tool in Colombia. Additionally, the female makers of *Ella* can yield richer understandings of the moral, economic, and industrial factors that shape the representations seen by the final viewers (Payán Lemos & Ríos Mejía, 2019).

The analysis of these two components as an assembled cultural product is of added value considering that to better assess social processes from a critical perspective it is crucial to acknowledge both the representations constructed and the perspectives of the actors who produce such construed representations (Ortner, 2006). As Schröder (2007) notes, researchers should not assume that representations are faithful vehicles of objective production conditions. In his view, “the media text (...) reveals very little about the multiple discursive constraints and opportunities affecting (...) the team of people producing it in the complex division of labor of the contemporary media” (p.81-82).

Prioritizing the experiences of workers involved in media production should not come at the expense of underestimating the significance of the media product itself either. In this regard, Ortner (2006) defends that a comprehensive understanding of “public cultural representations” depends on the analysis of both, the representative work and the practices and ideologies sustained by media producers (p.81). Attention to the perspectives of *Ella*'s producers to illustrate existing dynamics in Colombia's film industries can yield more nuanced responses to the “questions of power and inequality” (Ortner, 2006, p.3) with which the current research is concerned.

In sum, an understanding of the industrial, personal, and representational dynamics that arise when making a film about domestic violence in Colombia (main research question) needs to attend to the financial, institutional (sub-question 3), and personal factors that shape these films (sub-question 2), as well as the representations that emerge (sub-question 1) when combining personal, artistic, and political goals with industrial and other societal influences. To ensure a close, detailed, “nuanced view of reality” (Flyvbjerg, 2011, p. 303) the study approached the film *Ella* and its female creators by means of a character analysis methodology and in-depth interviews, respectively.

The selection of these methods obeyed multiple considerations. Albeit some quantitative methods, such as surveys, allow researchers to examine individual opinions and values (Matthews &

Ross, 2010), these aim to prove generalizable hypotheses with the assistance of representative samples (Silverman, 2011). However, this project does not intend to provide generalizable findings, since the contexts in which domestic violence develops, and the ways in which film industries and makers work are considerably unique, varied, and complex.

While Flyvbjerg (2011) notes that case studies are compatible with quantitative methodologies, qualitative techniques further encourage the participation and engagement of researchers with the purpose of constructing valid knowledges, inviting them to “place themselves within the context being studied. Only in this way can researchers understand the viewpoints and the behavior that characterizes social actors.” (Flyvbjerg, 2011, p. 310).

Additionally, this research required a method that prioritized the variegated perspectives of multiple filmmakers who performed different tasks within the film crew. In other words, against quantitative methods that limit flexibility to favor systematicity (Matthews & Ross, 2010), this study depends on qualitative procedures previously acknowledged for allowing researchers “to grasp and articulate the multiple views of, perspectives on, and meanings of some activity (...) or cultural object” (Johnson, 2001, p.5-6). Finally, the iterative nature of qualitative methods best suits multi-methodological procedures, paving the way to revise and follow up on complex topics — such as domestic violence — through multiple data collection attempts. On the contrary, quantitative methods are often not iterative and subscribe the analysis of complex themes to the quality of the data measured in limited attempts.

3.1.1 Character Analysis Methodology

The visualization of *Ella* and its analysis was conducted prior to executing the interviews. Such order aimed to enhance the overall outcome of the research by offering further points of reference to discuss as topics in the interviews. Considering the currently standing legislative limitations to access the film outside of Colombia, the researcher ensured access to the film by contacting the director herself, who provided the content implementing the video-sharing platform Vimeo.

In this stage, a character analysis was conducted, guided by the methodological proposal of Pérez Ruffí (2017). His methodological approach focuses on film characters, arguing that their analysis posits an innovative strategy to reveal and criticize the ideologies that sustain dramatic structures (Pérez Ruffí, 2017, p. 536). Since he encourages an examination of gender ideologies as signifieds implanted in audiovisual signifiers (Hall et al., 2013), his scheme examines how the audiovisual language is employed to represent reality, revealing the film’s main “cultural codes, and dominant meanings” (Aiello, 2020,

p.3).

This methodological approach has four main advantages. First, it is a flexible, multidisciplinary model that may be adapted to local film productions and varied genres (Pérez Rufí, 2017).^{xvi} Secondly, because the model was created based on script-creation guides, it attends to the political nature of characters, highlighting that they are built in agreement with specific beliefs and contexts. Third, the scheme emphasizes that characters are not the mere result of genre conventions, nor the exclusive influencing components of the audiovisual discourse. On the contrary, Pérez Ruffí (2017) conceives characters as having a psychology and agency of their own, while simultaneously accounting for structural factors that shape their behavior and the overall narrative. Therefore, his definition can be aligned with feminist demands to attend both the individual and systematic components that foster domestic violence.

A fourth advantage of Pérez Ruffí's (2017) proposal is that it clearly demarcates several components that serve to fathom "the construction of the filmic discourse, (...) interpretations about its message, not always very evident, or to contrast the different ways in which determined models or character types have been conceived within diverse cinema practices"*(p. 535). His scheme can be implemented for replication, comparison, and verification of the results here obtained, enhancing the reliability of this study.^{xvii}

In accordance with this methodology, the researcher designed a coding scheme with which key characters were assessed (Appendix E). First, the main character, Gisel, was explored as a representative of domestic violence victims. Further, her stepfather was analyzed to develop an understanding of the representations posed around violence perpetrators. Such approximation paved the way to assess power articulations made visible through Gómez's film, along with contingent stereotypes or innovative strategies employed. This revealed some opportunities that these characters pose to understand domestic violence victims and perpetrators. Similarly, it evidenced the traits implemented to represent them, and contingent risks for feminist discourses that stem from these representations.

Furthermore, special attention was provided to the contexts in which physical and psychological violences occur. When revising these occurrences, the reactions of surrounding characters were carefully looked at, given their potential to reveal Gómez's calls for the audience to reflect on their own position in real-life violent contexts. Hence, questions such as "Do secondary characters seem to be empathetic when violent events take place?" and "Do these secondary characters seem to support violent events in any way?" were analyzed within the Character's Personality and Circular/Flat Character categories (Pérez Rufí, 2017). Asking such questions assisted in evaluating the representational proposal

that *Ella* offers of individuals that support or denounce domestic violence.

In a like manner, the character analysis of the product looked at how the violent situation surrounding Gisel progressed throughout the movie. For this purpose, a comparison between Gisel's household's circumstances at the beginning and the end of the film was carried. Furthermore, specific individual, economic, relational, and ideological elements were identified, to clarify if they hindered or incentivized her to overcome her position as a victim. Such analysis sought to explore the denunciation potential of *Ella*, assessing if these representations focused on the individual or systematic components sustaining domestic violence. Additionally, the analysis located the characters that facilitated or hampered Gisel's liberation from violence's burden, and how alternative female characters engaged with Gisel's situation, either to assist her or ignore her uneven circumstances.

Wheeler's (2009) analysis of the representations embedded in blockbuster films around domestic violence was also crucial guidance for the character analysis of *Ella*. His observations around the portrayal of victims and perpetrators worked as points of reference to contrast national social narratives with blockbuster movies. Because Wheeler's (2009) investigation identifies contingent banalizations of domestic violence through cinema, it proved beneficial to reveal how *Ella* could be following or resisting banalizing trends.

Finally, in conformity with The New Latin American Cinema movement, which introduced dialectical cinema as means for political transformation (Roncallo & Arias-Herrera, 2013), the character analysis of *Ella* attended some of the montage strategies employed in the product. Initially, the researcher described visual elements in the film with which characters are associated —such as costumes or locations — (Appendix E), forasmuch as noting the denotative characteristics of audiovisual elements leads to identify connotated symbols and ideologies (Aumont, 1990, p.75-76). Thereafter, a deconstruction of the audiovisual contrasts was performed by noting how locations, rhythms, and characters within one take opposed those of subsequent takes. As an example, the analysis repaired on how a take of Gisel being violently called by her father [03:35] was juxtaposed with a take of Facundo in the butchery.

3.1.2 In-depth interviews

Semi-structured in-depth interviews were conducted with the director of *Ella*, Libia Gómez, and with four female filmmakers that participated in the film as apprentices. The selection of these interviewees prioritized the female participants of *Ella* that were students at the time the movie was produced, namely the ex-students María Jimena Sánchez, Astrid Useche, María Paula Jiménez, and Carol

Peña.^{xviii} The inclusion of Gómez in the sample is an attempt to grasp her expertise as a director “thoroughly enculturated in the setting or community” (Johnson, 2001, p.10). Prior to conducting the interviews, a consent form was shared with all interviewees, who agreed to have their real names revealed in the Results section of this study.

On one side, the interview with Gómez pursued to fathom long-established risks and political opportunities for professional Colombian filmmakers. On the other, interviewing the female students who participated in the film sought to delineate future political contingencies, and deeply rooted disparities hampering the political significance of Colombian cinema and its industry. Consequently, five participants were interviewed implementing the Zoom and Microsoft Teams online conference platforms, to comply with COVID-19-related restrictions. The interviews lasted between 38 to 81 minutes.

The theoretical review and character analysis led to the creation of two topic lists for these encounters. The first list, comprised of four sections, was designed to interview Gómez (Appendix C). The first section delved into the personal and economic motivations and risks involved in addressing domestic violence with the assistance of students. Consecutively, it repaired on the representations built, to contrast contingent risks of banalization with Gómez’s intentions. For instance, the risks of falling into ‘poverty porn’ were discussed, and Gómez’s understanding of domestic violence in relation to national structures and institutions was scrutinized. Thirdly, Gómez’s stance on film as a transformative instrument was investigated, and her role as a female author within an uneven cinema industry was considered. Finally, the topic list reviewed her initiatives to promote democracy through film practice, and the difficulties and opportunities that arose from working with other women.

The second topic list (Appendix D) was the basis to interview the students and was also comprised of four sections. Whilst these discussions also addressed the personal motivations of these participants to contribute to the movie, the interviews sought to fathom how their experience in *Ella* nurtured their future personal and professional developments. More importantly, their opinion about the representations of domestic violence in *Ella*, and the political, democratic, and collective nature of cinema were at the core of these discussions. Further, the financial and ethical risks involved in film production were evaluated, along with their experience as women in the industry.

After conducting the interviews, a thematic analysis was executed through open, axial, and selective coding stages (Boeije, 2010). While an inductive approach to the data was prioritized, the priorly conducted film analysis further informed the assessment and coding of the interview transcripts. Thus, during the transcription stage, initial ideas pertaining to the national cinema industry, the social

and representative nature of cinema, and the relevance of domestic violence were written down. Subsequently, a preliminary list of codes was developed, accounting for the ways in which participants referred to film, to their responsibilities as filmmakers, and their preferred narrative and audiovisual strategies. Additionally, these codes reflected how the participants understood domestic violence, their position as women within the industry, the importance of authorship, and the influence of economic factors for the format.

The thematic analysis was built on the basis of three principles. First, the principles of constant comparison and analytic induction were ensured through an iterative revision of initial and subsequent codes against the theoretical grounding for this study (Boeije, 2010, p.83-86). Such principles were applied to ensure that initial findings could be “supplemented, corrected, clarified, rejected” (Boeije, 2010, p.87) and eventually strengthened.

Finally, sensitivity to the previous theoretical discussion was core, and the researcher sought to be “sensitive to thinking about the data in theoretical terms” (Strauss, 1987, p.21). For this reason, concepts such as banalization, dialectics, and female authorship guided the reading and re-reading of the interview transcripts. The application of this principle, however, did not overshadow an inductive analysis of the transcripts. In the end, this fostered the production of some codes that were not necessarily based in the theoretical concepts discussed before.

In the open stage of coding special attention was provided to “interesting aspects in the data items that may form the basis of repeated patterns” (Braun & Clarke, 2006, p.89). Consequently, three preliminary themes were defined: the role of cinema and its makers, female and communal authorship, and industrial perils and opportunities. The selective coding stage, in which Boeije (2010) defines core categories and repetitive themes, was carried through a definition of essential ideas communicated through the preliminary themes (Braun & Clarke, 2006). In the end, this led to a final thematic scheme within which the themes (1) *the role of female filmmakers around domestic violence*, (2) *industrial*, and (3) *personal negotiations when making films around domestic violence* can be distinguished.

3.2 Limitations

Some limitations surge from using a digital platform to gather meaningful information around such sensitive topics, as domestic violence. However, rapport was enhanced with strict reciprocity (Johnson, 2001) since the researcher herself has previous experience with filmmaking practices. The researcher used verbal and non-verbal expressions to demonstrate a sincere interest in the responses provided. Further, when the participants suggested innovative industrial methodologies, the researcher

nurtured such initiatives by sharing her perceptions of the industry with her own professional experiences. Such strategy sought to “build a mutual sense of cooperative self-disclosure and trust” (Johnson, 2001, p.8).

Likewise, the researcher recognizes the reduced nature of the sample, and that only one of the interviews did not comply with the minimum time required of 45 minutes. Similarly, the researcher acknowledges that the consideration of exclusively one film for this study posits an additional limitation. This restricts this project for comparison with other films created by Colombian women, albeit these films may extend other feminist discourses, such as the situation of women in the armed conflict or the injustice surrounding female migrants.

This study does not aim to accomplish an objective, unequivocal reading of the film. On the contrary, its purpose is to illustrate how *Ella*’s representations of domestic violence may be read by women who share some of the socio-cultural conditions embedded in the movie. Thus, while the character analysis here conducted departs from the subjectivity of a woman who has not been directly affected by domestic violence, the researcher’s familiarity with the culture, symbols, and contexts represented in *Ella*, and the interviews performed, assist in providing valid, nuanced perspectives over these representations.

3.3 Ethical considerations

To conclude, it is vital to acknowledge the ethical concerns that emerge from researching domestic violence in Colombia, and the need to prioritize reflexivity in the research process. The researcher recognizes that her biographical background as a student within a prestigious European university may have generated distant power relations with the interviewees (Broom et al., 2009). Further, considering that most participants know each other and were aware of each other’s participation, the researcher attempted to anonymize their answers when these were potentially antagonistic.

Facing these contingencies, the researcher emphasized her personal knowledges around filmmaking to “employ impression management to mitigate any problematic dynamics, thus allowing continuity across the data” (Broom et al., 2009, p.63). Finally, the researcher acknowledges her privileged position in relation to domestic violence victims, since she has not experienced this hardship first-hand. This limitation guided her to become further sensitive to the audiovisual representations placed in the film, and to demonstrate openness towards the different experiences, memories, or personal knowledges that the interviewees brought during the research process.

4. Results

4.1 Film Analysis

The first part of this chapter will expose the results of the film analysis executed on *Ella*, through the character analysis methodology developed by Pérez Rufí (2017). First, this chapter presents the representational resources implemented for the character of Gisel, a domestic violence victim. Subsequently, the section offers an account of the traits that were employed in the construction of Facundo, the violence perpetrator character. Finally, the chapter evaluates how institutions and secondary characters were portrayed, accounting for the ways in which *Ella* publicly exposes systematic injustices. To facilitate the reading of *Ella*'s analysis, a detailed depiction of *Ella*'s plot and characters has been included in Appendix B.

4.1.1 Ella's representation of the domestic violence victim

The analysis of Gisel, the 12-year-old character that receives constant physical and verbal abuses from her stepfather, reveals three main trends. First, repairing on the socioeconomic conditions, actions, and verbal expressions around this character unveils that she is represented as a constrained individual. Second, *Ella* represents a domestic violence victim as an agent that, while limited, is a proactive pursuer of social transformation. Third, the film departs from some simplistic portrayals of domestic violence victims, emphasizing that they can be complex individuals, imbued in strong traditions and gender ideologies that influence their behaviors and freedom.

4.1.1.1 Gisel as a constrained individual

Initially, the Character's Backstory category of analysis, defined as the social, economic, and educative conditions that shape the characters (Pérez Rufí, 2017) was employed. Gisel is part of a vulnerable community and is economically dependent on her stepfather. Such dependence is reinforced by her age, which prevents her from getting a job. Her lack of sufficient economic resources to escape and pursue an alternative life is one of the main reasons why she continues bearing her violent stepfather. Thus, in *Ella*, the domestic violence victim is represented as an individual restricted by economic and bodily dynamics.

Similarly, Gisel is shown to fear and be embarrassed by her stepfather's aggressions. As an illustration, when Georgina notices the cut on Gisel's wrist, Gisel makes a rapid effort to hide it. Also, Gisel's words reveal how she psychologically assumes certain responsibility for her stepfather's behavior: "She said that Mr. Facundo resented seeing me *because I look a lot like my dad*" (Gómez, 2015, emphasis added). Because Gisel hides her wounds, acts and speaks carefully to avoid her

stepfather's anger, and partially blames herself for her situation, we may assert that she is also an individual constrained by psychological dynamics.

In *Ella*, other audiovisual resources further emphasize Gisel is oppressed and inhibited. For instance, in several scenes, Gisel is shown inside her room behind a window frame, as if she were locked in a cage. Similarly, following Pérez Ruff's (2017) proposal to examine characters' costumes, it becomes evident that, unlike other children of her age, she does not attend school.^{xix} Gisel is also shown to be physically constrained with most of her appearances transpiring within the tenement house, where there are no other residents her age.^{xx}

The representation of Gisel as economically restricted offers an alternative to some blockbuster portrayals of wealthy women who enjoy economic independence despite not having a job.^{xxi} More importantly, representing a domestic violence victim as cohibited may assist in creating stories with which many real-life victims can connect. This association may be possible since many Colombian women victims of domestic violence reside in vulnerable urban sectors (Gómez López et al., 2013). Furthermore, whilst domestic violence blockbusters often portray women with exceptional conditions (such as massive residences, wealthy relatives, or extraordinary musical talents), Gisel's household and economic conditions may more faithfully resemble those of many Colombians.

4.1.1.2 Gisel as an agentive character

Analyzing Gisel's personality in agreement with Pérez Ruff's (2017) methodology reveals traits such as strength, dignity, sensitivity, and solidarity. To illustrate, she materializes these virtues in the scene of Georgina's burial at the park. In this sequence, Gisel voluntarily brings some curtains to embellish Georgina's coffin, even though this initiative results in a violent encounter with her stepfather. Further, while Alcides and Rosita pronounce a traditional prayer for the deceased, Gisel remains silent and devout. Likewise, she does not hesitate to put some flowers in Georgina's hands and the cross above her coffin, and she willingly helps Alcides and Rosita to set the coffin into the ground.

Thus, what stands out in this sequence is the way in which Gisel, as a 12-year-old, assumes the death of a beloved person with respect, matureness, and willingness extraordinary for someone with her household background and age. In a similar vein, when she is in her room taking care of her wounds, the resilience with which she faces her difficulties becomes evident. These traits confirm that while *Ella* portrays Gisel as oppressed, the film also underscores her virtues. More importantly, the movie emphasizes how her actions and decisions often oppose those of perpetrators and neglecting institutions, by being caring and supportive.

Correspondingly, Gisel is represented as caring when she takes care of Georgina before her death, and when she assumes partial care of Alcides after Georgina passes away. She is also shown as caring when she chooses to tell Alcides that it was her stepfather who murdered Georgina. Gisel's acts of care can be deemed transformative, recalling that demonstrations of care towards other women can transform existing narratives of gender-based violences (Motta, 2019). In a similar manner, it is also her decision to be caring for Alcides what transforms and leads him to be sensitive towards her violent circumstances.

It may be argued that these representations of resilience promote a "happy" feminism" (Banet-Weiser et al., 2019, p.9) through the portrayal of a loving, caring, *indestructible* woman who seems invincible despite her difficult context. But as was previously argued, Gisel's capacity to make decisions that differ from those of her aggressor is complemented with an exhibition of socioeconomic factors that constrain her. Besides, Gisel's empowerment is in no way unlimited, and her construction as an agent does not exempt her from having flaws. For example, she is shown to be impatient when Alcides spills the scrambled eggs in the kitchen, and it is her who decides to throw Facundo's plate on the table. These varied actions and traits point to Gisel as a nuanced character, who takes beneficial and detrimental decisions.

When treating Gisel as an agent, *Ella* differs from the representations built in some domestic violence blockbusters in an additional significant way. Most of these blockbusters materialize female agency by showing a victim that focuses on her well-being, with efforts to run away or begin a new life. Notwithstanding, in *Ella*, Gisel's agency is exhibited through her capacity to recognize the hardships of others and assist them in these difficulties. In this regard, a narrative strategy similar to those of the New Latin American Cinema was employed. Gisel's actions contrast those of other characters, since she is always assisting them in their adversities, while they initially disregard her situation. Such contrast extends a representation of reality as the interplay of contradictory characters with contradictory priorities. Consequently, in *Ella*, the domestic violence victim is depicted as agentive, capable of producing social change through her actions, words, and relationships of care.

4.1.1.3 Gisel as a complex individual

Ultimately, *Ella* represents the victim as a complex individual, whose actions and personality are affected by tradition. First, Gisel is shown as a complex character when the film focuses on dimensions other than her position as a victim. This is achieved through references to her sexual orientation and reproductive development. For instance, when Georgina suggests that Gisel will soon need to start using

sanitary pads, or when various audiovisual resources limelight the character of the young scrap metal trader, the complexity of Gisel as a multi-dimensional character is brought to the fore. The influence of tradition and misconceptions around female sexuality are visible in the scene with Gisel and Georgina sitting on the stairs. When Georgina asks Gisel if she knows how to use a pad, she asserts she knows, although her dress gets stained with period blood later in the film.

Another way in which Gisel is exposed as a multi-dimensional character is through constant references to her as a human with experience and wisdom. Not only is she the caregiver for her stepsisters but, after Georgina's death, Gisel becomes Alcides' guidance in the performance of certain daily tasks. Similarly, references to other manifestations of violence add complexity to Gisel's hardship. When the domestic violence narrative is interwoven with narratives about criminality in vulnerable sectors, or systematic violences towards other communities, Gisel's situation is depicted as a result of complex systematical deviations, instead of being portrayed as an isolated difficulty.^{xxii} Ultimately, these strategies serve to pose Gisel as a multi-dimensional individual, whose emotions, actions, and decisions are in constant negotiation with long-established ideologies and systematic deficiencies.

4.1.2 Ella's representation of the aggressor

Pérez Ruff's (2017) scheme served to scrutinize the character of Facundo, Gisel's violent stepfather. In Ella, the aggressor is represented through three main traits. First, he is built as a complex, multi-dimensional character. Secondly, *Ella* contextualizes the perpetrator, offering some Colombians a relatable character that is a victim of alternative national difficulties. Third, Facundo's decisions, actions, and words unveil that the perpetrator is also accountable for his violent actions.

4.1.2.1 The aggressor as a complex individual

When following Pérez Ruff's (2017) categories of Personality, Verbal Expressions, and Costumes, the study encountered that Facundo is conceived as a complex individual, who is often traditional, religious, and gallant. One example resides in the sequence with Rosita crying outside the butchery. In agreement with traditional standards of cavalry and masculinity, Facundo offers the woman a handkerchief and asserts that she can count on him. These same traditional standards encourage him to service Rosita when she enters the butchery as a client. And he is also shown to subscribe to traditional religious beliefs when he blesses himself at Georgina's visitation. Facundo's adherence to traditional conceptions of romance and gallantry are evident through additional behaviors, such as catcalling, and the fact that he continues wearing a wedding ring, although his wife formerly passed.

While Facundo is abusive towards Gisel, he seems to be a caring father with her stepsisters, since he buys food for them and procures that they eat breakfast on time. Facundo's gentle behavior with his pet evidences his capacity of being empathetic. Likewise, his gesture of providing Alcides money for Georgina's burial illustrates Facundo's capacity of noticing the needs of others. Through these representations, Facundo is built as a complex individual by being shown as compassionate and sensitive. In this regard, it may be defended that his motivation to help Alcides was not altruism, but remorse, because it was him who killed Georgina. However, either because of a bad conscience or a genuine desire to help, his action proves that he can notice and react towards the difficulties of others.

When delineating Facundo as a complex, multi-dimensional character, *Ella* poses an alternative to alienating cinema representations of perpetrators. In contrast to alienated aggressors that are insensitive villains, or inhumane monsters (Wheeler, 2009), *Ella*'s aggressor is, at some moments, a widowed man with romantic interests, a caring father and neighbor. These traits provide the audience with a character that may feel closer to their reality. Additionally, a common understanding between audience and aggressor is further developed through the context in which Facundo is represented.

4.1.2.2 The aggressor as a relatable victim

Facundo contrasts, in several ways, the wealthy, professionally ambitious, successful perpetrators shared in some domestic violence blockbusters (Wheeler, 2009). While he is ambitious in his romantic pursuance of Rosita, he is never represented as professionally ambitious, yet remains working as a butcher throughout the film. Besides, although some Hollywoodesque aggressors chase their partners by hiring expensive private investigators, Facundo lives in a low-class neighborhood and lacks such economic capital. In fact, he depends on his encounter with Rosita to realize she is hiding his daughters and is murdered because he cannot afford to give his money away easily.

Facundo's death posits an appealing contrast. He is murdered in his butchery, by burglars who are not chased by any police officer, nor denounced by any neighbor. As such, Facundo is ignored by the same institutions that neglect Gisel and other domestic violence victims. Through this scene, *Ella* shows that aggressors themselves may become victims of the systematic injustices that foster their violent behaviors. Another way in which the film foregrounds Facundo's vulnerability within the national context is by construing him as the single father of three children, considering that his occupation and the socioeconomic context of the household could, in real life, posit multiple difficulties for the family (Zapata Posada et al., 2019, p.14).

Therefore, the film represents the aggressor as a complex individual embedded in contexts that may go beyond his agency. In other words, *Ella* avoids portraying omnipotent aggressors, and accounts for many economic and sociopolitical limitations with which many Colombians may be familiar. In representing this relationship between perpetrators and local restrictions, the film extends the revolutionary initiative of the New Latin American Cinema by “showing how reality is” (Birri, 1997, p.93). This initiative, in turn, poses the opportunity to call Colombian audiences to critically assess their contexts, and how these contexts host and bolster violence perpetrators.

4.1.2.3 The aggressor as accountable

Finally, *Ella* highlights the aggressor’s accountability in two ways. First, the movie shows that Facundo is violent with some women —such as Gisel, Rosita, Georgina, or his helper at the butchery shop—and not violent with others —his daughters, or other female residents in the tenement—. Then, Facundo is accountable inasmuch as he *actively decides* when and with whom to be violent. Secondly, an analysis of Facundo’s actions, following Pérez Ruffi’s (2017) Personality category, reveals that the aggressor extends gender inequalities through means other than physical violence. To illustrate, when Facundo grabs the buttocks of his butchery employee, or touches Rosita’s leg to comfort her, it becomes evident that household aggressors may voluntarily extend uneven power relations through non-violent actions.

It could be asserted that exposing Facundo’s attacks on women to reinforce his accountability may contribute to desensitize viewers. Similarly, his representation as responsible could be deemed to emphasize individual accountability instead of systematic deficiencies. Howbeit, as will be reinforced through the subsequent section, his representation as an individual with a capacity to decide and act is transformative because it is shared along with representations that are critical towards institutions. Moreover, the film represents secondary characters who are also agentive, and therefore, responsible of neglecting Gisel’s situation.

4.1.3 Ella’s representation of other characters and institutions

As was argued in the methodological chapter, this project examines the role of other characters in *Ella* to account for their support or negligence towards Gisel’s situation. Through Pérez Ruffi’s (2017) categories of Personality and Discursive Elements That Outline The Character, it became evident that other female characters were also represented as victims of systematic, gender-based violences. Also, when these characters overcame some of their personal burdens, they were also able to support Gisel through her hardship.

In the film, cages are an audiovisual resource widely associated with women. For instance, the butchery helper is portrayed behind a window frame, and Georgina is represented behind a balustrade. At the same time, women are shown to be institutionally neglected. For example, Eulalia's case is underestimated by the police officers. Additionally, Georgina's death exemplifies how women who defend themselves or other women risk their lives. In this sense, other female characters of *Ella* can be deemed constrained. In other words, they are institutionally and collectively neglected, and fear the consequences of pursuing better conditions for themselves. While male characters are usually not associated with cages, an interesting exception emerges when Facundo is confronted by his neighbors and ends up locked behind his door's metal frame. Here, the scene may convey that collective awareness and action have a significant potential to assist the victim and denounce the perpetrator.

Not only are these women constrained, but they must overcome, in different ways, death. This is the case of Eulalia, whose son died, Rosita, who witnesses Facundo's murder, and Gisel, who discovered Georgina was dead. Interestingly, the film accentuates how Colombia's gender traditions and systematic gaps burden women even when they have passed. To illustrate, Alcides' drive to provide Georgina with a burial himself stems from the assumption that only he has the capacity and obligation to decide over her, since, as he asserts, "She is *my* wife" (Gómez, 2015, emphasis added). Also, Georgina's exhumation represents the institutional obstacles women may encounter in Colombia even when they are no longer alive, in the name of legality and public benefit.

Then, in attempting to elude Facundo's retaliation, face death, or survive economic precariousness, these women end up underestimating Gisel's situation. Additionally, secondary characters implicitly approve of gender-based violences when laughing or remaining silent. For example, when Facundo catcalls Rosita, her colleagues and she react with coquettish laughter. Furthermore, when Rosita celebrates her birthday with Alcides and Georgina, all three remain silent when Facundo calls out violently on Gisel. It is in these varied behaviors that these characters anchor complicity with domestic violence. Howbeit, Georgina, Rosita, and Alcides are transformed throughout the narrative, and this transformation leads them to support Gisel.

As an illustration, at the beginning of the movie, Georgina openly discusses Gisel's circumstances without acting against them. Later, however, she openly disapproves of Alcides' conformism with Gisel's hardship and protests with actions such as eluding a kiss. Her development as a brave character who no longer remains silent is materialized in the scene on which she hits Facundo, while the rest of her neighbors remain distant and fearful.

Rosita, on the other hand, begins as a character guided by tradition, fear, and attraction. As the

movie progresses, she grows into a woman capable of weaving new opportunities for herself, Gisel, and her sisters. While Rosita does not initially oppose Facundo's behavior, she later confronts him by hiding Gisel and her stepsisters, despite the physical and psychological consequences this brings. Finally, Alcides is initially represented as a loving husband, who is nevertheless indolent towards Gisel's hardship. As other characters, he is constrained by fear and tradition, and believes that being concerned about domestic violence victims is something that only scoundrels do.

What Georgina's, Rosita's, and Alcides's growth evidences is that the actions of characters who are not perfect, yet multi-dimensional, are crucial to counter domestic violence against women. In other words, in *Ella*, Gisel's situation is not solved by providing her with a new, perfect, romantic partner, with friends who would help her unconditionally, nor with family members who seem to have all the economic and social capital required to rapidly solve the hardship. In contrast, *Ella* posits individuals with moral dilemmas, moments of braveness and dread, who are often deemed helpless, as significant agents of transformation for Gisel.

Moreover, the film represents national institutions under two main traits. Employing Pérez Ruffi's (2017) categories of Personality and Verbal Expression served to reveal the lack of sensitivity with which national institutions such as the Catholic Church and the police force are portrayed. When Alcides seeks help in the police station, he is shocked by corpses treated with inefficiency and indolence. Further, while Alcides was one of the few characters that assisted Gisel, he is incarcerated. Simultaneously, the police officers cooperate with the aggressor to find Gisel and her stepsisters. The contradiction sustaining these scenes reveals how *Ella* questions the vulnerability of national justice systems.

Additional illustrations of the inefficiencies and imbalances sustaining national institutions pose *Ella* as a film with transformative potential. To exemplify, *Ella* represents a religious leader that preaches compassion, while being unwilling to officiate Georgina's burial given Alcides' scarce resources. Further, the police officers represent inefficiency when ignoring the well-being of Colombian women to favor institutional rules and procedures. For instance, when Eulalia reports her missing son, the officers invite her to examine corpses and to wait patiently. Similarly, Georgina's exhumation demonstrates that these officers would rather adhere to systematic conducts than honor a woman who died defending a domestic violence victim.

As will be explored in the forthcoming section, the intentions of creating legitimate feminist denunciations are further nurtured by the responsibilities that Libia Gómez and her students perceive as filmmakers. Thus, we will now turn to analyze how the female creators of *Ella* understand their role

when discussing domestic violence against women. Additionally, the next section will reveal how these producers conciliate the opportunities and difficulties that emerge when discussing this topic in national films.

4.2 Interviews

The thematic analysis conducted with the interviews yielded three main themes. First, the interviewees identified multiple responsibilities for themselves when discussing domestic violence against women through cinema. Secondly, the participants perceived that Colombia's film industry posed both beneficial opportunities and obstacles in the discussion of this topic. Finally, during the interviews, the participants recalled how they had to negotiate their personal beliefs and preferences when addressing this topic in *Ella*. In the following sections, these themes will be further explained.

4.2.1 Role of female filmmakers around domestic violence against women

The analysis conducted on the interviews revealed that the participants assumed three main responsibilities when discussing domestic violence against women. Primarily, these filmmakers considered they had the responsibility to denounce this hardship. Secondly, they argued that they had to assume the role of apprentices, to promote a respectful, ethical, and beneficial treatment of the topic. Third, the participants acknowledged their responsibility to propose new industrial methodologies and priorities.

4.2.1.1 Filmmakers' role as denouncing artists

When discussing the research conducted for *Ella*'s production, Libia recalled how young girls were the main domestic violence victims in the community where the movie was shot. For Libia, it was crucial to address the situation of these girls, for whom it would be harder to openly denounce their circumstances in real life. In resonance with the film analysis results, Libia pointed out that some female characters represented women who, in real life, continue extending gender-based violences through their ideologies:

I was trying to... like to show with Rosita that woman who believes that life's dream is to get a man, right? The most macho man, and the strongest man. And that is, to say, where certain women set their sight on. And... in the end, he even hits her, so she ends absolutely discouraged around that fake idea that we get in our heads... not we get, not me, but some women, that the solution is to get a big, strong, macho man to protect our lives.* (Libia).

Based on these accounts, it could be argued that Libia deduced two mechanisms through which feminist cinema can denounce domestic violence. First, cinema serves to denounce domestic violence by creating visibility over this hardship. Secondly, cinema can denounce household violence by calling audiences to critically reflect on their own ideologies. When calling women to reflect on the contradictory nature of their ideologies, Libia designed a movie with revolutionary potential (Eisenstein, 1958).

Similarly, the set decoration assistants Carol and Astrid agreed that female filmmakers should discuss domestic violence to create empathy, awareness, reflexivity, and change. Further, most interviewees agreed that female filmmakers must critically assess the purpose of their productions. In a like manner, most participants emphasized that both Colombia's economic and sociopolitical conditions, and the challenges to produce cinema, should lead female filmmakers to pursue socially transformative films. For example, María Jimena, costume assistant, noted that:

It would be unacceptable to ignore it. It is fine to also make humor cinema and so on, and have fun, and so, in Colombia. But what we see in Latin American countries is that... (...) we depend on funds, we depend on co-productions, we always depend on getting three grants (...) so if you are going to take eight years to make a movie, one would expect that this film, at least to some extent, had certain social awareness*

These opinions reveal how the filmmakers of *Ella* do not merely pursue commercial success through their productions. Considering the difficulty with which funds are obtained, and how only a few national directors can materialize their scripts, it could be expected that filmmakers use these economic resources to boost their careers with popular formulas. By asserting that these scarce filmmaking opportunities should prioritize discourses of social awareness, the participants conceived themselves as artists in the service of society.

Nonetheless, María Jimena and the costume assistant María Paula offered an alternative perspective, underscoring the personal benefits that cinema posits. For them, when filmmakers talk about domestic violence, they do so for means other than collective denunciation. On the one hand, María Paula defended that filmmakers discuss this topic as an exploration of the artistic curiosity inherent to all human beings. María Jimena, on the other hand, pointed that filmmakers discuss this topic to convey their individual concerns and experiences.

In the end, a movie such as this will not, will not be seen by many people, I mean, it doesn't reach a great audience. 'Tu voz estéreo' at noon reaches greater audiences, you know? So... and it also talks about [domestic] abuse, it also has a chapter about [domestic] abuse (...) It is

necessary to make films, to tell our stories (....) How does portraying it help? I mean, it helps in the sense that it makes it evident.^{xxiii}

The film analysis suggested that the socioeconomic context of *Ella's* characters could facilitate a connection with Colombian audiences. Nevertheless, some participants argued that they, as part of the audience themselves, did not feel connected with the women represented in the film. From their perspective, since the film did not generate strong bonds with the audience, its potential to denounce domestic violence became limited.

4.2.1.2 Filmmakers' role as apprentices

All participants of the study agreed that female filmmakers interested in treating domestic violence have the responsibility to carefully study the context they are attempting to represent. In this regard, two strategies for an ethical portrayal of this hardship were offered: (1) thorough research in the pre-production stage and (2) immersion with women victims of domestic violence and the communities on which this hardship develops.

On one hand, Libia defended that female filmmakers have not sufficiently represented domestic violence because their socioeconomic conditions are usually different than those of women victims. In the light of these differences, Libia argued that thorough desk research can promote the respectful representation of unfamiliar difficulties while preserving the narrative intention and personal contribution of the film's author. Conversely, all four students argued that filmmakers should adopt new subjectivities and physically approach the communities whose experience they are attempting to represent:

Something I would say is super important is that, whenever I am going to narrate something, I need to try to move from my... my perspective's comfortable space to the space I am trying to portray. And that means to abundantly nurture myself from that space, to become a part of that space during quite some time, I mean, inhabit it before shooting there, make me known amongst people, get to know people, establish real, affective relationships with that reality.*
(María Paula).

In line with these complementary perspectives, the interviewees pointed to different cinema formats as suitable for the discussion of domestic violence. While Libia saw in fiction an opportunity to represent domestic violence, all students agreed that the documentary format better respects this hardship and the national socio-cultural contexts on which it arises. Undeterred by these contrasting preferences, all participants considered that faithfulness to reality should be a priority for filmmakers representing

violence in the household.

Whereas the film analysis saw in *Ella* a potentially faithful representation of Colombia's realities, Libia added that she departed from her own reality through the inclusion of some characters, events, and locations based on her personal experiences. This led her to include the tenants in the tenement house, or a scene of Alcides killing a mouse. More importantly, she emphasized that she eluded a treatment of violence victims under 'poverty porn' conventions. In her words, she avoided a pitiful portrayal of victims to match European preconceptions around Latin America or to obtain personal gain. To do so, she resorted to two audiovisual tools: a black-and-white treatment and the narration of the movie from a timeless perspective.

The students, however, viewed these tools through differing lenses. Carol, for instance, perceived that these strategies served to accurately reflect reality, and could guide the audience to learn how domestic violence is present in many contexts in Colombia, while pervading the nation's past and present. Nevertheless, other students deemed that the black-and-white, timeless treatment proposed aestheticized domestic violence, and distanced the narrative from real-life victims. One of the interviewees argued that this aestheticization exaggerated the economical deficiencies surrounding domestic violence victims. She also contended this aesthetic exploration overshadowed the film's discourses of empathy, and resulted in ignoring the real, difficult conditions surrounding the film's set.

Similarly, another interviewee reckoned that Libia's representation of domestic violence was distant from real-life violent scenarios. For her, *Ella*'s violent scenes resembled those of TV commercials, given their exaggerated, theatrical nature. In her opinion, the film neglected the verbal, sometimes subtle, mechanisms through which gender-based violences develop. Furthermore, in contrast with the character analysis of Gisel, which deemed her as a potentially complex, empowering representation, this participant contended that the 12-year-old was often portrayed as excessively submissive.

Their interest in realistic representations and the experiences of victims shows that, for *Ella*'s producers, there is greater significance in building authentic portrayals than in producing films that dovetail with popular demands. Achieving a realistic, respectful denunciation, however, continues posing challenges for women in the industry. On the one hand, as Libia asserted, her black-and-white, timeless design aimed to underscore the relevance of women in Colombia. On the other, these strategies could potentially convey that domestic violence is an isolated difficulty, involving extremely aggressive perpetrators, or submissive victims in very vulnerable sectors. Such contingency reveals that strategies initially designed to elude the commodification of domestic violence may backfire in an aestheticization, and therefore banalization of this hardship. In other terms, contemporary female

filmmakers addressing domestic violence face the challenge of representing women in ways that do not exaggerate, nor minimize their hardships since, as one participant noted, an exaggerated or aesthetical representation can extract the film's realism and reduce its effectiveness.

4.2.1.3 Filmmakers' role to transform industrial practices

Whereas most students agreed that learning from domestic violence victims would be a significant step to assemble more realistic and respectful movies, they asserted that directly involving victims in the production of these films could assist these individuals in navigating their difficult socio-cultural contexts. In this sense, the filmmakers perceived that their role was not exclusively to research these contexts, but to educate and guide women in such communities. Most participants emphasized that, when representing victims, filmmakers should provide these women with knowledges around audiovisual strategies, technologies, and techniques. As some interviewees noted, filmmakers can involve domestic violence victims when encouraging them to participate in industrial projects, and by teaching them how to create their own narratives.

María Paula, for instance, considered that filmmakers should encourage the direct participation of communities where domestic violence is pervasive. She believed that guiding these individuals to perform filmmaking tasks in agreement with their individual skills would encourage a more democratic participation in the filmmaking experience. Correspondingly, Carol and Astrid suggested that teaching these communities how to create their own audiovisual projects was crucial, since this initiative would promote autochthonous narratives, redefining cinema as a format potentially "benevolent, more healing"*(Carol).

In suggesting these strategies, the filmmakers recognize their task to promote the cinema industry as a space for the democratic, collective creation of narratives. By assuming the task of educating and guiding others, the students behind *Ella* propose a significant industrial shift. They no longer conceive the industry as a space where exclusively specialized professionals are heard. Conversely, they understand the industry as a scenario where victims are no longer relegated to the role of audiences, but can participate as creators, and decide how they are represented. Such initiative proposes, as did the New Latin American Cinema movement, that cinema has the potential to leverage socio-cultural growth "through contact with the people, by integrating them into the creative process, by elucidating the aims of popular art, and by leaving off with individualistic positions" (Sanjinés, 1997, p.62).

Interestingly, some interviewees deemed that, in addition to their filmmaking experience, their

subjectivities as women were of pivotal influence in their attempts to educate and guide new cinema creators:

Women's ability to communicate and to generate empathy is, is a very valuable thing for this kind of projects where, where also creatively it's like many things thrive inside the emotions (...) [to] generate reflections, generate emotions, based in empathy and in community projects, I think women's role there is very, very important because the community itself tends to feel a bit more comfortable and less attacked when women participate than when men participate.* (Astrid).

As Astrid, other interviewees recognized the importance of resorting to their subjectivities as women to lead these pedagogical processes. However, some of them argued that other industrial factors should also shift in agreement with this female perspective. This is what María Paula defined as the *female gaze*, which should be at the core of contemporary attempts to narrate domestic violence against women. In her consideration, female filmmakers can carve this *female gaze* out by studying the role that women undertake in Colombia's culture. This role, as she described, is *being caring* "in every sense, right? Like being caring with... with whom we live, or being caring with...with... their lives, their food, their sustenance, and I think that gaze is also transferred into how we represent our realities"*.

María Paula believed that, in their responsibility to establish this *female gaze* in Colombia's industry, female filmmakers must persevere exploring and employing new audiovisual languages. For her, these languages differ from the languages employed by men in their attention to detail and the actions of care that the characters execute. As she defended, with *Ella*, Libia Gómez set a pivotal example for other female filmmakers by evidencing the difference between a *female gaze* and a *male gaze*. In the student's opinion, where Libia created characters that were caring towards each other, a male director would have focused on Alcides or a faster-paced narrative.

Even more compelling was the fact that, through the memories they recalled around *Ella*'s shooting, it became evident that these filmmakers themselves were assuming the role of caregivers in their filmmaking profession. María Jimena, for example, cited many instances in which she assumed care of Humberto, the actor that interpreted Alcides, given his delicate health condition when *Ella* was produced. Also, she pointed to the costume department as a space in which several actors felt they could be more open, vulnerable, and where significant relationships were built. By the same token, Libia showed to be caring by including students to work in *Ella*, since she desired to provide them with work experience for a vastly competitive industry.

Such actions of care reveal more than a coincidence between caring characters and caring

female filmmakers. With female filmmakers acting in accordance with the traits they represent, the division between creator, represented, and audience becomes even more diffuse. More importantly, it signals transformative trends that take place in the industry when female filmmakers address domestic violence. This attention to care led most students to introduce new methodologies for the industry, methodologies that prioritize the well-being of others and would introduce transformations in the pre-production, production, and post-production stages.

In relation to the pre-production stage, María Jimena, Carol, and María Paula expressed their sincere concern for the economic costs represented by films such as *Ella*. From their perspective, the fact that this movie cost one billion Colombian pesos, yet had a significantly reduced audience, suggests the urgency with which filmmaking costs should be reevaluated from the moment films are conceived.^{xxiv} The interviewees argued that female filmmakers should design narratives that are more affordable and sensitive towards the scenarios in which Colombian cinema is created: scenarios that are often economically precarious.

Subsequently, all students coincided in their suggestion for new production methodologies. From their experience in *Ella*, they learned that filmmakers must also be caring towards other crew members, considering that the film set can turn into a scenario of tensions and stress. Interestingly, all students suggested that dialogue between coworkers was key to establish more empathetic, beneficial work arenas:

Filming dynamics are very exhausting but, for example, I don't know (...) in shootings in which there are post-production parties that space may be introduced, like... well... if there is energy for the party there is energy to, like to sit down for a moment, talk things out and also talk them... search an assertive way to talk about them, right? It is not about talking to blame, but to recognize things... to recognize things, maybe to apologize (...).* (Carol).

If there is something that is not all right it has to be talked about, we take a break, it doesn't matter, we are delayed, it doesn't matter, I will make it work later, but pauses must be done to... to generate those spaces of... like acknowledging that something is not all right so that we all change.* (Astrid).

On this matter, the students contended that the dialogue methodology has not been sufficiently implemented in the industry. Instead, they noted that the pervasive hierarchical production model, with unquestionable directors and department heads, created barriers and resulted in detrimental work dynamics. Based on their experience with *Ella*, the students pleaded that female filmmakers should

introduce more horizontal, democratic production dynamics. In this methodological proposal, any member of the crew could approach the director or department head with new ideas. Similarly, all students acknowledged the significance of treating all crew members as equals. They also contended that industrial patterns where department heads use their authority as an excuse to become verbally abusive should be reshaped with caring attitudes.

Finally, the students defended that female filmmakers should introduce care dynamics in the post-production stage. For instance, Carol believed that the relations built with community members should not end because the film is finished: “It is not about me going a year, understanding his experience, making my movie, and then never knowing anything from that person... that is, I also feel *there is a responsibility with that human being*”*. Likewise, several students highlighted the relevance of recognizing the humanity and value of the communities that inspired their narratives. In this sense, female filmmakers pose that the industry should not only nurture from the experience of vulnerable women but should provide them with lasting lessons and relationships in exchange.

4.2.2 Industrial negotiations when creating films about domestic violence

When reflecting on why the treatment of domestic violence has been limited in Colombia’s fiction productions, Libia optimistically believed that more projects around this hardship will upsurge in the future. She asserted feminist topics are at the core of contemporary media discourses, trending because of movements like the #MeToo. While she insisted she has been working on more cinema proposals to address gender-based violences, Libia revealed it is very difficult for her to materialize these narratives because she lacks a producer interested in these topics. Interestingly, Libia’s concern to produce films that match popular feminist trends indicates that female filmmakers may also be interested in representing domestic violence when it becomes a *popular* topic.

Further, asserting that obtaining a producer for her feminist films would take a significant amount of time, Libia believed that, when these ideas were to be produced, topics like domestic violence may no longer be at the center of popular agendas. Her preoccupation is compelling insomuch as (1) it signals that female filmmakers in Colombia have limited possibilities to produce cinema that corresponds to popular themes and (2) it evidences that these creators are driven to discuss domestic violence, not only as an attempt to create awareness, but motivated by popular demands.

Moreover, multiple students confirmed how the national industry continues to be a space where gender-based disparities are extended. For instance, one student recalled that, in *Ella*, she encountered various coquettish comments coming from male crew members. Besides, another student

noted how, in the national industry, women working in the Art department often need to redefine their dressing style to produce a more professional and credible image. However, María Jimena noted that, when directing *Ella*, Libia set an example and inspiration for other female filmmakers. While Libia had to face the skepticism and defiance of other male crew members, María Jimena believed that Libia successfully established her authority as director and as a woman.

Albeit, in *Ella*, the national industry posed multiple gender-based barriers for these filmmakers, the students highlighted that Libia's effort to include them produced a more flexible industrial environment for learning and professional development. For the students, being able to work in *Ella* was of pivotal influence for their subsequent careers. Furthermore, Libia reckoned that initiatives such as the Fund for Film Development provided further flexibility when working in the industry, since this initiative has allowed her to sustain her personal vision in her films.

Also, María Jimena added that the industrial flexibility accomplished through *Ella* was crucial to nourish academic practices at the film school she attended. Producing this film with students and vulnerable communities was key to update academic courses such as Actor Direction or Production. Hence, whilst these filmmakers encountered multiple industrial inequities, they also benefitted from the flexibility of the national industry. This flexibility resides in how the industry hosts work-related and artistic processes, while contributing to academic and socio-cultural improvement.

4.2.3 Personal negotiations when creating films about domestic violence

Considering the influence that *Ella* had in their personal lives, all students argued that producing this film took them out of their comfort zones in varied ways. For instance, Carol reflected on the long shifts and the long distances she traveled to arrive at the set. These demanding practices made her more aware of how cinema processes impact her body, and how the filmmaking profession may often be exhausting. Recalling these long shifts, María Paula admired the members of the community where *Ella* was shot. From her perspective, despite the psychological and physical fatigue, these members were extraordinarily friendly and motivated. In this sense, María Paula further recognized her role as an apprentice and reflected on how filmmaking is not exclusively a professional but a life experience that should be enjoyed as much as possible.

These personal learning processes, however, were not uncomplicated. When the film crew visited a location with deeply complex socio-cultural dynamics, some community members progressively manifested their discontent, and the film crew had to leave, as it would have been life-threatening to stay. Reflecting on this event, María Paula recognized how difficult it can be to familiarize with

vulnerable communities without being intrusive. Correspondingly, another student explained that these socio-cultural dynamics caused her to be in distress when visiting the community, which made it difficult for her to enjoy being at the film set.

In a similar vein, another student confessed that certain work dynamics eventually caused her to stop attending the shooting. This interviewee revealed that, when enrolling as an intern in *Ella*, she had to negotiate her professional area of interest, in favor of acquiring significant work experience with the movie. Thus, while she collaborated in the Art department, it was her intention to learn from other departments that were of her greater preference. Further, this student acknowledged that, in this desire to grow professionally and academically, she bore multiple mistreatments from her department head.

What these accounts communicate is that, when these female filmmakers produced a film around domestic violence, they had to step out of their comfort zone, and negotiate their personal beliefs around the community and the filmmaking profession. The filmmakers had to (1) give priority to the film's production before their physical comfort. Also, the interviewees had to (2) compromise their subjectivity as privileged individuals, and (3) their emotional preferences when engaging with vulnerable locations and communities. Finally, another area that these filmmakers had to negotiate when producing *Ella* was (4) their professional interests and (5) ethical standards.

5. Conclusion

To conclude this research project, the three sub-research questions posed will be answered, and this will guide us to answer the main research question. Subsequently, the theoretical implications of these findings, along with the societal influence that they offer will be discussed. Finally, this chapter will evaluate some of the limitations around the results obtained and will provide ideas for future research endeavors.

5.1 Findings

The present study was concerned with the study of *Ella*, a fiction film directed by the Colombian Libia Gómez. It aimed to scrutinize the film as a case study, to investigate: "*What representational, personal, and industrial dynamics can arise when female filmmakers represent domestic violence in Colombia?*". This research question was divided into three sub-questions, the first one being "*How is domestic violence represented in the film?*". Departing from the character analysis methodology proposed by Pérez Rufí (2017), the study found that *Ella* poses a representational alternative to some blockbuster portrayals of domestic violence.

It does so by accounting for some structural injustices that, in real life, further sustain household violence. These are, amongst others, economic dependence, gender ideologies anchored in tradition, neglecting individuals surrounding the victim, or indolent and inefficient institutions. Also, the character analysis revealed that *Ella*'s representation of domestic violence victims is potentially empowering by depicting multi-dimensional, agentive victims, capable of influencing their contexts. Similarly, *Ella* attempts not to idealize the aggressor, emphasizing his accountability and his proximity with Colombian audiences.

The second and third sub-questions aimed to approach, through in-depth interviews, the female filmmakers behind *Ella* to account for the industrial and personal dynamics that upsurge when these individuals address domestic violence. The second sub-question inquired "*How do Ella's female producers perceive their role around domestic violence in Colombia?*". Through the interviews held, three main roles were deducted.

First, these filmmakers perceived they had the responsibility to use cinema to denounce domestic violence, and they believed cinema has the potential to generate awareness and change through their narratives. Second, the interviewees agreed it is their duty to learn from the victims they attempt to portray, to produce ethical, realistic representations. The complexity of this task resides in achieving realistic portrayals that do not exaggerate nor minimize domestic violence, nor the vulnerability of the communities in which this hardship develops. Third, the participants conceived they

had a responsibility to transform industrial practices, establishing new occupational methodologies that departed from female subjectivities. At the core of these new methodologies was the inclusion of new authors as cinema creators, and the practice of care towards other crew members and communities.

Furthermore, the project offered a third sub-research question: "*What industrial and personal negotiations do these filmmakers sustain in agreement with this role?*". Regarding the industrial negotiations, when these filmmakers build domestic violence narratives, they encounter scarce financial opportunities and a lack of credibility in women filmmakers. Nonetheless, the interviewees also saw the potential to challenge such disbelief in women and deemed the national industry as a flexible field that may promote academic and socio-cultural growth. In terms of the personal negotiations, when representing domestic violence, some filmmakers had to prioritize an adequate performance in their occupations over their physical and emotional comfort. Simultaneously, the participants had to negotiate their privileged perspectives with the socio-cultural dynamics of the community where *Ella* was shot. Also, their professional interests had to be made flexible, to take part in *Ella* as a constructive work experience.

Considering these three sub-questions together allows us to answer the research question as follows: When female filmmakers represent domestic violence in Colombia, potentially transformative representations are built. These representations can alternate popular discourses of victims, aggressors, and their context, with representations of Colombia's reality as a multi-dimensional, complex terrain for political awakening. Not only are these artists providing alternative representations of the hardship, but they are leveraging an understanding of cinema as a political practice itself (Roncallo & Arias-Herrera, 2013). When female filmmakers discuss domestic violence, they may need to negotiate their physical and emotional health, as well as their occupational preferences. In these processes of self-denial, there is also evidence of political commitment with the topic, the community, and with the industry itself. Finally, when female filmmakers attend to domestic violence in Colombia, they can encounter a lack of funding. Yet, once again, these filmmakers have the potential to promote political change through methodologies of care and pedagogy.

5.2 Theoretical and societal implications

Three main theoretical discussions that could be further developed with this study were posited in the Introduction chapter. First, the study aimed to discover new representational strategies to further fight domestic violence against women. In this regard, *Ella* potentially surpasses a mere banalization of domestic violence when delving into the systematic deficiencies that continue to undermine gender

equality in Colombia. The film's portrayal of a domestic violence victim and an aggressor that are close to the reality of many Colombians poses a model for other filmmakers interested in portraying domestic violence. However, the controversy caused by the black-and-white, atemporal aesthetic in *Ella* points to the urgency of finding representations that neither idolize the director's personal inclinations nor overemphasize the vulnerability of the contexts in which domestic violence upsurges.

Secondly, the project sought to acknowledge innovative political practices in Colombian film. The findings exhibit that, when creating *Ella*, female filmmakers proposed a collective creation of cinema. In this conception, the film industry is more than exclusively a commercially oriented scenario and becomes a political terrain "where the immutable script is disappearing or where the dialogue, during the act of filming, spontaneously issues from the people themselves and from their prodigious capacity. Life begins to be expressed in all its power and truth." (Sanjinés, 1997, p.63). As such, female filmmakers in Colombia are working in the reconstruction of the social fabric, encouraging the interaction and collective work amongst members of different communities, with different subjectivities, and life experiences. This interaction, as they proposed, should be pursued in all film production stages, with victims participating in the film's production, and in learning processes to create their own audiovisual narratives.

Third, the current project has shed light on negotiation processes that women assume on an industrial and personal level. What these processes reveal is the need to establish new industrial methodologies oriented towards gender equality. At the same time, they point to Colombia's filmmaking industry as a space with a compelling pedagogical potential, in which not only academic, but emotional and professional growth can be fostered.

These findings are socially significant since they invite scholars and filmmakers to persevere scrutinizing and deconstructing our understanding of autochthonous hardships, such as domestic violence. Also, the comparison with blockbuster, popular public discourses, encourages a de-banalization of these representations and understandings. More importantly, this academic effort evidences the pivotal role of women for Colombia's sociopolitical improvement, despite the oppressions they undergo in Colombia's film industry and households. What *Ella* exemplifies is that, as Sara Motta (2019) asserts, our revolutions are being *feminized*. Thereupon, we now witness how women who are often excluded from political spheres —filmmakers with varied industrial barriers, and women victims of domestic violence—offer political practices and subjectivities that are potentially transformative.

5.3 Limitations and areas for further research

While selecting a character analysis methodology proved advantageous to compare *Ella* with blockbuster films about domestic violence, one limitation of this study is that it did not compare *Ella*'s characters with those of other Colombian films. In this sense, the study would benefit from evaluating how other female Colombian filmmakers represent girls, men, and women, to extend the insights this research provides around the female gaze in Colombia's specific context.

Moreover, while the study approached all women who worked as student interns in *Ella*, the execution of five interviews posed the limitation of leaving aside the perspective of other female workers who worked in *Ella* as head departments or members of different branches, such as Cinematography or Production. Similarly, the selection of this sample is limited inasmuch as it does not include female members of the community where *Ella* was shot, albeit it may be argued that their contribution to the film was equally significant.

Departing from the findings here exposed, other scholars are encouraged to explore how male fiction directors represent domestic violence in Colombia, or why they have addressed the topic more than national female fiction directors have. An additional pivotal area for future research may be found in audience studies. In this regard, investigating the audience reception for films around domestic violence, either through interviews or surveys, may assist both filmmakers and researchers in further understanding why national films still lack recognition from Colombia's public. Such research would pave the way for feminist films to have greater influence, and to accomplish the goal of revolutionary cinema: socio-cultural transformation.

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7. Appendices

7.1 Appendix A: Participants' description

Hereby a general description of the interviewees for this study may be found.

- a. Libia Stella Gómez Díaz: Colombian director, scriptwriter, and lecturer at the Film and Television School of the National University of Colombia. Magister in Art and Architecture Theory and History. She has directed five national movies, including fiction and documentary works.
- b. María Jimena Sánchez: Professional in Film and Television Production, candidate for a master's degree in Documentary Creation. She performed an internship as a costume assistant for the film *Ella*.
- c. María Paula Jiménez: Professional in Film and Television Production, documentary director and producer. She performed an internship as a costume assistant for the film *Ella*.
- d. Carol Peña: Professional in Film and Television Production. She performed an internship as a set decoration assistant for the film *Ella*.
- e. Astrid Useche: Professional in Film and Television Production. She performed an internship as a set decoration assistant for the film *Ella*.

7.2 Appendix B: *Ella's* Plot and Main Characters

Ella is the story of Alcides, an elder man that lives with his wife, Georgina, in a tenement house under vulnerable economic conditions. Georgina is a friend and caregiver of Gisel, their twelve-year-old neighbor and domestic violence victim. When Georgina defends Gisel from one of her stepfather's attacks, she is physically assaulted, and this, added to her delicate health background, causes her death.

Because of this, both Alcides and Gisel are left without a crucial individual for their lives and learn to support each other. As such, Alcides progressively shows compassion for Gisel's hardship, and Gisel supports Alcides in his daily tasks and his pursuance of a dignified burial for Georgina. Throughout this journey, both characters encounter the indifference of both individuals and institutions, from which Rosita is an example. While Rosita — Alcides' niece — begins as a shy character, attracted to a domestic violence perpetrator, she ends supporting both Alcides and Gisel in their hardships, and standing up against several forms of gender-based inequalities.

After Georgina's death, Facundo provides Alcides with some money to assist with the burial expenses, but Alcides is reluctant to use it. Yet, after multiple attempts to adequately bury his wife, Alcides buries her in a public park, as he cannot afford a formal, legal burial service. In this mission, Gisel

and Rosita assist him. At this moment, Gisel reveals that Facundo was Georgina's murderer, to which Alcides responds by offering Gisel the money that Facundo gave him. He suggests that Gisel does not need to return home and asks Rosita to hide the children while they find an alternative solution for Gisel's circumstances.

Because of his children's disappearance, Facundo contacts the police, and eventually finds out that Rosita is hiding them. When he is taking the girls out of Rosita's house, Facundo hits the seamstress. From this moment, it seems that Gisel's situation is destined to remain unchanged. Yet, three criminals attack Facundo's butchery and murder him. Subsequently, the movie ends with Alcides giving his last farewell to Georgina, who is now buried next to a murdered Facundo, suggesting the possibility of better conditions for Gisel.

Ella is a fiction movie directed by the Colombian Libia Stella Gómez Díaz, produced by Dos Dedos Producciones, and distributed in 2015. It was selected for festivals such as the Frauen Film Festival Dortmund in Germany, 2015; the Focus on World Cinema-Regards in Canada, 2014; the Mar del Plata International Film Festival in Argentina, 2014 and the Montreal International Film Festival in Canada, 2014. The film's main characters are:

1. **Alcides:** Alcides is a senior resident of a tenement house in Ciudad Bolívar, Bogota. He is the husband of Georgina and works as a recycler. He has a son and is Rosita's uncle.
2. **Eulalia:** This woman is a secondary character that works as a reference to the "false positives" tragedy in Colombia. Throughout the movie, she looks for her disappeared son, who is later revealed to be dead. The character serves as a representative of many women residents of Soacha, a vulnerable community in Bogota. When the film's script was being written, it became known that nearly 3000 young men were murdered by government-led military forces and illegal groups. As the character, many women in these communities sought their male relatives, and have been neglected by national institutions.
3. **Georgina:** Georgina is Alcides' wife, and she also resides with him in a tenement house in Ciudad Bolívar. She lives across Facundo, Gisel, and her stepsisters, and is Gisel's caregiver after Gisel's mother passed away. She dies after Facundo attacks her at the tenement patio.
4. **Gisel:** Gisel is a twelve-year-old resident of a tenement house in Ciudad Bolívar. Since her mother passed away, she resides only with her stepfather and two younger stepsisters. She is a domestic violence victim, physically, psychologically, and verbally attacked by her stepfather.
5. **Facundo:** Facundo is a butcher that lives in the same tenement house as Alcides and Georgina. He is a widowed parent of two girls and is Gisel's stepfather.

6. **Rosita:** Rosita is a thirty-five-year-old seamstress, Alcides and Georgina's niece, and has a romantic interest in Facundo. Eventually, this romantic interest disappears when Rosita notices Facundo's violence towards Gisel. Rosita hides Gisel and her stepsisters, but is discovered and physically attacked by Facundo.

7.3 Appendix C: Interview Guide, Libia Gómez

- **Introducción:** ¿Quién soy? ¿De qué se trata el proyecto? Quiero, por medio de estas entrevistas, conocer la perspectiva de las cineastas colombianas alrededor de la violencia doméstica. También me interesa saber qué factores influyen en estas representaciones, por ejemplo en términos de industria, economía, y a nivel personal.
- **Filme Ella:**
 - Quisiera comenzar pidiéndote que me cuentes acerca del filme *Ella*. ¿Hace cuánto se realizó esta producción? ¿De qué trata la historia? ¿En qué época está ambientada? ¿De dónde surge esta inspiración?
 - Haciendo una evaluación del cine hecho a nivel nacional e internacional, existen relativamente pocos largometrajes que hablen acerca de la violencia doméstica, y en Colombia hay muchos menos hechos por mujeres. En este sentido, quisiera saber ¿qué te llevó a querer mostrar este tema en pantalla?
 - ¿Por qué crees que las mujeres cineastas en Colombia no han hablado mucho sobre este tema?
 - Dado que la historia entrelaza diversas violencias y dificultades que vivimos como país, quisiera saber ¿por qué tomas la decisión de retratar la violencia doméstica *a la par con otros sufrimientos*? Es decir, ¿por qué no retratar únicamente la violencia doméstica, o retratar únicamente el viaje de Alcides?
 - ¿Cómo te aseguraste de que el tratamiento de la violencia doméstica no se perdiera al tratar otras violencias?
 - Tengo presente que en tu labor como docente de la Universidad Nacional has realizado varios proyectos con estudiantes, como lo es *Un Tal Alonso Quijano*. Sin embargo, me gustaría saber ¿por qué la decisión de incluir estudiantes en *Ella*, así como artistas que no habían realizado largometrajes antes?

- ¿Cuál fue la reacción de los productores con la inclusión de estudiantes en el rodaje?
¿Qué responsabilidades se asumieron a nivel financiero para incluirlos en diferentes departamentos?
- ¿Podrías contarme si trabajar con estudiantes requirió algún esfuerzo adicional para familiarizarse con el contexto en el que estaban filmando?
- **Representaciones:**
 - Me gustaría regresar a una entrevista reciente que tuviste en el marco de *Árboles, Frutos, y Retoños* con la Universidad Nacional, porque en ella mencionaste que tu meta con esta película era más bien alejarte de la pornomiseria. Entonces, quisiera saber ¿qué es la pornomiseria para ti?
 - ¿Qué pasos a nivel narrativo, a nivel estético, tomaste para asegurarte de que el tratamiento de esta comunidad no fuera un tratamiento agresivo de tinte pornomisérico?
 - ¿Podrías contarme cuáles fueron tus fuentes de inspiración para la creación de Gisel y Facundo? ¿Qué referentes de violencia doméstica implementaste?
 - Además, quisiera preguntarte ¿por qué tomas la decisión de mostrar algunas escenas de violencia doméstica abiertamente, y otras fuera de campo?. ¿Qué te llevó a construir este retrato?
 - También quisiera hacerte una pregunta a nivel narrativo. De acuerdo con algunos manuales tradicionales de guion, los personajes tienen un objetivo que persiguen. En el caso de Alcides, has mencionado y es evidente que su objetivo es proveer un entierro 'digno' a su difunta esposa. Sin embargo, quisiera que pudieras contarme un poco más acerca de los personajes femeninos: ¿Cuál es el objetivo de Gisel, de Rosita, y de Georgina?
 - El final de la película me deja dos preguntas. Primero ¿por qué volteó Alcides el cartel? Quisiera saber ¿por qué era necesario que la carnicería estuviera *cerrada*?
 - También quisiera preguntarte, ¿por qué decidiste que Facundo fuera asesinado al final de la historia? Antes, cuando Rosita acoge a las niñas, la narrativa nos da la esperanza de ver a Gisel en mejores condiciones. Pero una vez más, Facundo logra violentarlas, entonces, ¿por qué recurrir al asesinato? ¿Crees que esta es la única forma en que una víctima puede dejar de ser violentada?

- Podrías contarme ¿por qué incluyes dos escenas en las que Alcides tiene encuentros violentos con un ratón? ¿Qué querías expresar a través de estas imágenes?
- También me interesa saber, ¿por qué hay, en varias ocasiones, una ruptura de la cuarta pared? ¿Qué quisiste lograr con esta estrategia?
- **Impacto Social:**
 - Estuve viendo una entrevista que realizaste con la Cinemateca de la Universidad Nacional, y en ella explicabas que, en una conversación con Carlos Henao, surgió la necesidad de hacer esta película desde *una mirada femenina*. Podrías explicarme ¿qué significa crear esta película desde una mirada femenina?
 - ¿Cómo lo lograste?
 - Mirando en retrospectiva, años después de la realización de esta película ¿Cuál crees que ha sido tu aporte, así como el de tus estudiantes, en una industria nacional que continúa siendo predominantemente masculina?
 - ¿Qué te llevó a tomar riesgos estéticos y narrativos como el uso de blanco y negro, o un montaje dialéctico que usualmente no son bien vistos por nuestro público?
 - ¿Recibiste quizás, alguna crítica negativa de la cuál hayas aprendido? ¿Qué expresaron los residentes de la zona de grabación cuando la película estuvo finalizada?
 - Uno de los momentos más interesantes de la película, me parece a mí, surge cuando Gisel retira las cortinas de su ventana y le dice a Facundo que las está quitando '*para que todo el mundo vea*'. ¿Cuál es la importancia de que los vecinos y los demás *vean lo que sucede en casa de Gisel*?
 - Podrías contarme ¿cuál es la contribución de *Ella* a un país y una región donde la violencia doméstica sigue siendo una problemática viva y fuerte?
 - Me gustaría que me compartas ¿qué significó trabajar de la mano no sólo con mujeres estudiantes sino con mujeres miembros de la comunidad en Ciudad Bolívar? Al incluir las voces, experiencias, y opiniones de mujeres de la comunidad como Deisy Marulanda o algunas extras, ¿hubo limitaciones para expresar tu visión personal?
- **Industria nacional:**
 - Despues de casi siete años de haber realizado esta película, ¿qué recomendaciones darías a cineastas interesados en trabajar la violencia doméstica? ¿Qué estrategias narrativas y estéticas les recomendarías?

- Tengo conocimiento de que tu película ganó financiación en dos etapas del Fondo de Desarrollo Cinematográfico de Colombia. ¿Consideras que esto facilitó tu independencia en la forma de retratar las problemáticas en la película, o te hubiera gustado contar con apoyo económico de otras entidades para esta película?
- **Cierre:** ¿Te gustaría añadir algún comentario o regresar a alguna pregunta antes de que demos cierre a la entrevista?

7.4 Appendix D: Interview Guide, Students

- **Introducción:** ¿Quién soy? ¿De qué se trata el proyecto? Quiero, por medio de estas entrevistas, examinar la relevancia del trabajo hecho por estudiantes mujeres de cine en Colombia. No sólo atender las representaciones que están creando, sino qué factores influencian esas representaciones.
- **Filme Ella:**
 - Yo quisiera que comencemos hablando un poco acerca de la película *Ella*. Cuéntame por favor de qué trata esta película.
 - ¿Cómo llegaste a formar parte del equipo de rodaje en este proyecto? ¿Qué motivación había? ¿Qué tareas desempeñaste en él?
 - ¿Recuerdas alguna experiencia de rodaje que haya significado mucho para ti, o que haya quedado presente aún después de terminar la película?
 - ¿Qué expectativas tenías al unirte a este proyecto? ¿Qué esperabas aprender y obtener de esta experiencia?
 - ¿Cómo describirías tu experiencia en este proyecto? ¿Se ajustó a tus expectativas respecto a la realización de cine colombiano?
- **Representaciones:**
 - Considerando que tu labor estuvo ampliamente enfocada al aspecto visual de la película, y a cómo transmitir ideas a través de los ambientes o vestuarios ¿podrías explicarme de dónde obtuvieron inspiración para el tratamiento de sus vestuarios/espacios?
 - ¿Qué medidas tomaron para asegurarse de que el tratamiento con los personajes fuera respetuoso ante la comunidad (de Ciudad Bolívar) y fiel a su realidad?
- **Violencia doméstica**
 - Como tú misma lo has mencionado/como lo ha mencionado en repetidas ocasiones la

directora Libia Gómez, esta película retrata la realidad de muchas mujeres. Uno de los temas que aborda ampliamente es el de la violencia doméstica. Podrías mencionarme ¿qué contribución trae, en tu opinión, tratar este tipo de temas en la pantalla grande?

- ¿Consideras que es un tema con el cuál los estudiantes de cine, aún con poca experiencia en el campo, deben involucrarse? ¿Por qué sí/no?
- ¿Consideras que la violencia doméstica es tratada con la misma importancia que otras problemáticas sociales, desde los programas de cine nacional como el que tú estudiaste? ¿Por qué sí / no?
- ¿Crees que es necesario atender otras temáticas desde los proyectos universitarios? ¿Qué temáticas?
- ¿Qué pasos son necesarios para que estas temáticas sean vistas con su debida importancia desde que somos estudiantes?

- **Reflexiones finales:**
 - Tengo entendido que esta película fue un trabajo en conjunto, no sólo realizada por estudiantes y otros realizadores profesionales, sino con la comunidad de Ciudad Bolívar. ¿Qué pudiste aprender de este trabajo en conjunto con otras mujeres de la comunidad? ¿Crees que la película hubiera sido la misma sin la participación de mujeres procedentes de esta comunidad?
 - Mirando atrás a la experiencia de rodar esta película, ¿qué cosas hubieras hecho distinto desde tu departamento, o en el proyecto en general?
 - ¿Qué recomendación darías a estudiantes mujeres de cine en Colombia, con base en tu experiencia filmando *Ella*?
- **Cierre:** ¿Te gustaría añadir algún comentario o regresar a alguna pregunta antes de que demos cierre a la entrevista?

7.5 Appendix E: Character Analysis, Preliminary Scheme

ⁱ This number was gathered from Proimágenes Colombia, the official source of national film statistics. The films dealing with domestic violence scenarios are “Chocó” (Hendrix Hinestrosa, 2012), “Mi pasión por David” (Zuluaga, 2020), “La mujer del animal” (Gaviria, 2017), “Oscuro Animal” (Guerrero, 2016), “Ella” (Gómez, 2015), “Ángela”

(Quintero, 2020), “Refugiados” (Lerman, 2014), “Estrella quiero ser” (Nieto Roa, 2014), “Karen llora en un bus” (Rojas Vera, 2011), and “Juegos bajo la luna” (Walerstein, 2000).

It should be noted that an exhaustive and complete list of Colombian films has not yet been developed, given that some independent productions are sometimes disregarded from official catalogues, or movies are included when Colombia participates as co-producer, even if it is to a lesser extent than other co-producing countries (i.e., portraying less Colombian characters than characters from alternative nationalities, with reduced monetary or workforce contributions). Moreover, the films that have been listed here do not address domestic violence against women to the same extent, since some of these approach the social problem throughout the whole film, while others link it to secondary characters and highlight alternative social hardships.

ⁱⁱ These films are “Alma de héroe” (Pardo, 2019), “Niña errante” (Mendoza, 2019), “El silencio del río” (Tribiño Mamby, 2019), “Monos” (Landes, 2019), “El amparo” (Calzadilla, 2019), and “Río Seco” (Hernández, 2019). These movies represent 15% of the national film production in 2019, and they portray forced migration or some of the conditions that trigger this form of violence. Among the topics addressed in the remaining percentage of national films, there is comedy, criminality in urban areas, or reflexive approximations to some national indigenous communities.

ⁱⁱⁱ Some of these festivals were the Frauen Film Festival Dortmund in Germany, the Focus on World Cinema-Regards in Canada, and the 29th Mar del Plata International Film Festival in Argentina (Proimágenes Colombia, n.d.-a).

^{iv} The researcher has translated this and subsequent quotes from their original version in Spanish. These fragments may be identified with an asterisk (*).

^v When being interviewed about her first movie *La historia del baúl rosado* (Gómez, 2005), Gómez admitted that the product was “a total failure”* (CMF CMF, 2014) for its producers and investors. In a similar vein to *Ella* (Gómez, 2015), *La historia del baúl rosado* incorporates some of Gómez’s concerns for gendered violence. For instance, the investigation that takes place throughout the film is detonated by the appearance of a murdered girl in a trunk. As Gómez emphasized, this movie represented a significant risk for stakeholders, which caused it to take eight years to obtain sufficient funding for this initiative (CMF CMF, 2014).

^{vi} Here bipartisan violence is understood as the armed encounters produced by the historical conflict between two of the most prominent national political parties: Conservatives and Liberals. For more information on how women filmmakers have addressed this theme see Gutierrez Ortiz, 2019.

^{vii} This is especially significant, insomuch as both cinematographers and production designers intervene to a great extent in the visual look and the representations carried in the film. As such, these roles decide how certain ideologies are signified through visual signifiers that reach the final audience. Additionally, production designers affront transformative responsibilities, considering that this role is often assumed by women, and has often been terrain for stereotypes and ideological contestation (Hesmondhalgh & Baker, 2015). Finally, the participation of students as production interns is compelling, inasmuch as this encouraged direct interaction with the economic

factors and dynamics molding the final product.

^{viii} For examples of contemporary feminist initiatives in Colombia see Motta, 2019.

^{ix} For some examples on this see De Oro, 2018; De Oro, 2020; Rojas Hernández, 2015.

^x For instance, local authorities have insisted that medical staff privately inquires female patients if they are experiencing any mistreatment or abuse in their household. They are encouraged to do so through indirect questions such as “Do you feel safe at home?” (Ministerio de Salud, n.d.).

^{xi} #NiUnaMenos began as a data activism movement in Argentina, with citizens and activists protesting, participating in innovative offline demonstrations, and retrieving data to evidence misogyny and variegated forms of violence against women that were long ignored by the local government. On the other hand, the #MeToo movement originated in the United States, with activists such as Tarana Burke and Alyssa Milano encouraging women victims of sexual violence to claim these injustices publicly. Although created in the United States, the trend quickly spread across the globe. For a more detailed account of these instances see Chenou & Cepeda-Másmela, 2019; Clark-Parsons, 2019.

^{xii} Examples of these films are *Enough* (Apted, 2002), or *Sleeping With The Enemy* (Ruben, 1990).

^{xiii} As Zimmerman (2016) explains, Women Make Movies is a feminist organization that currently distributes films by and about women around the world and was established in the 1970s. The organization has also been responsible for educating women in film production and viewing, under the belief that these practices can establish communities of support that further encourage social improvement.

^{xiv} One of the most known political events that took place in Colombia and inspired an urge for political change was the “Bogotazo”. Cinema proposals such as the movie *Camilo Torres* (León Serrano, 1966) exemplify how a political and transformative cinema arose in Colombia, in line with the emergence of this trend in different countries in Latin America (CVIUV, n.d.; De Taboada, 2011) For more examples on Colombian films that share the concerns of the New Latin American Cinema see Faguet, 2009.

^{xv} Because this study will not approach audience members of the film, the analysis will be limited to the study of the representations built in the movie, avoiding theories about the reading of these audiovisual constructions.

^{xvi} As Pérez Rufí (2017) argues, his model nurtures from literature, theatre, and cinema traditions, and is based on many classical authors recognized for their work on film analysis and script creation, such as Casetti & Di Chio or Linda Seger. Pérez Rufí’s (2017) methodology has proven flexible when being employed by film scholars of diverse backgrounds. For some examples on this see Grossocordón Cortecero, 2019 and Narpier Dourthe, 2019.

^{xvii} Pérez Rufí (2017) offers the following eleven analysis components: (1) Circular/flat character, (2) Character's appearance, (3) Verbal expression, (4) Character's personality, (5) Character's backstory, (6) Exterior life, (7) Goal and motivation, (8) Discursive elements that outline the character, (9) Extra-discursive elements that outline the character, (10) The character as a role and (11) The character as an actant. From Pérez Rufí's (2017) eleven components, only eight were considered for this study. The "Extra-discursive elements" concerned with the viewer's processes of reading and decoding (Pérez Rufí, 2017, p. 548) exceed the scope of this study. Considering that the category of "Character as a role" focused on the attitudes and actions of the characters, which were already examined within previous categories, this component was omitted in the character analysis. Finally, the component "Character as an actant" was removed from the study, since it follows alternative, structuralist conceptions of the character, and its application could diminish the agency of the character within the narrative.

^{xviii} For instance, only four out of nine interns involved in the film were women. (L.S. Gómez, personal communication, February 8, 2021).

^{xxix} In Colombia, it is common for children of public and private schools to wear school uniforms when they attend these institutions. In the movie, Gisel is never seen wearing one.

^{xx} Some exceptions to this rule are the scene in which Alcides, Rosita, Gisel and her sisters bury Georgina, or the scene in which Gisel and Georgina take the baby to the hospital.

^{xxi} According to Wheeler (2009), examples of these characters are *Enough's* (Apted, 2002) lead character Slim, and Laura in *Sleeping With The Enemy* (Ruben, 1995).

^{xxii} Specifically, the film refers to the case of the "false positives" as an example of systematic corruption against individuals from communities with insufficient economic resources. Eleanor Gordon (2017) provides a useful definition that summarizes the false positives massacre in Colombia. As she writes, the "false positives" crimes involved the execution of around 3.000 vulnerable men by members of the military forces and illegal armed groups. These murders were conducted to accredit the government's effectiveness, presenting the civilians as guerrilla members.

^{xxiii} 'Tu voz estéreo' is a Colombian television series that addresses varied national hardships through a fiction format.

^{xxiv} Approximately 267.000 US dollars or 1.100 minimum wages.