

# A Diffractive Analysis of Documentary Film *No existimos*: Making Visible the Invisible with an Eccentric Technology of Gender\*

## Un análisis difractivo del documental *No existimos*: hacer visible lo invisible mediante una tecnología de género excéntrica

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**Resumen:** Leyendo entre sí una serie de ideas planteadas por Teresa de Lauretis (1987; 1990), Donna Haraway (1988; 1992), Annette Kuhn (1994) y Karen Barad (2007), este artículo aborda el cine documental feminista como aparato de difracción y como tecnología del género excéntrica. El artículo está dividido en cuatro secciones. La primera presenta la definición del cine como tecnología de género y la del sujeto del feminismo como excéntrico. Combinamos este planteamiento inspirado en de Lauretis y Kuhn con la propuesta de Barad y Haraway de la difracción como metáfora óptica para entender la construcción de conocimientos.

**Abstract:** Reading through one another insights raised by Teresa de Lauretis (1987; 1990), Donna Haraway (1988; 1992), Annette Kuhn (1994) and Karen Barad (2007), this article approaches feminist documentary cinema as diffraction apparatus and eccentric technology of gender. The article is divided into four sections. The first section follows Kuhn's and de Lauretis's definitions of cinema as technology of gender and of the subject of feminism as eccentric. We bring these ideas together with Barad's and Haraway's proposal of diffraction as an optical metaphor for the production of knowledges. In the second section we elaborate on what the application of a diffractive

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En la segunda sección, planteamos qué implicaría la aplicación de una metodología difractiva al análisis del cine documental mediante tres herramientas metodológicas: emocionalidad (Ahmed, 2014), materialidad (Olivieri, 2012) y performatividad (Bruzzi, 2000; Butler, 1990, 1993, 2015; Barad, 2007). En la tercera sección aplicamos esto al análisis del documental español *No Existimos* (Solano, 2014). Concluimos resumiendo cómo los paradigmas difractivo y excéntrico pueden contribuir a una mejor comprensión de las posibilidades del cine documental feminista para co-crear y re-hacer el mundo.

**Palabras clave:** tecnología del género; sujetos excéntricos; aparato de difracción; cine documental feminista; representaciones de violencia de género

methodology to the analysis of documentary cinema would entail. We do so by putting forward three methodological tools: emotionality (Ahmed 2014), materiality (Olivieri, 2012), and performativity (Bruzzi, 2000; Butler, 1990, 1993, 2015; Barad, 2007). In the third section we apply this to the discussion of Spanish documentary *No Existimos* (Solano, 2014). We conclude by summarising how the diffractive and eccentric paradigms can contribute to a better understanding of the possibilities of feminist documentary cinema for co-creating and re-making the world.

**Keywords:** technology of gender; eccentric subjects; diffraction apparatus; feminist documentary cinema; representations of gender-based violence

## 1. DIFFRACTION THROUGH AN ECCENTRIC TECHNOLOGY OF GENDER

Teresa de Lauretis starts her 1987 article “The Technology of Gender” by defining “gender” as a classificatory term, i.e. as the representation of the relation of belonging to a certain category. As such, gender assigns each person a whole host of meanings and a certain position within the social group: “gender is not sex, a state of nature, but the representation of each individual in terms of a particular social relation which pre-exists the individual and is predicated on the conceptual and rigid (structural) opposition of two biological sexes” (de Lauretis, 1987a, p. 5). The process by which gender as a social representation is accepted and absorbed by the individuals as their own representation, despite being imposed, is carried out by what de Lauretis calls “technologies of gender”. These are “sociocultural practices, discourses and institutions devoted to the production of women and men” (de Lauretis, 1987a, p. 19).

Cinema and theory are among these technologies of gender, with, and against which, feminist film theorists and filmmakers have been working since the early seventies. Annette Kuhn has summarised the goal of feminist film theory as “making visible the invisible” (Kuhn, 1994, p. 67). Feminist efforts have been engaged in dismantling dominant discourses, while simultaneously creating conditions for the en-gendering of multiple “subjects of feminism” capable of being “inside and outside the ideology of gender, and conscious of being so” (de Lauretis, 1987a, p. 10). De Lauretis describes the movement enacted by the subject of feminism as one divided between the dominant representations of gender and what those representations leave out:

It is a movement between the (represented) discursive space of the positions made available by hegemonic discourses and the space-off, the elsewhere, of those discourses: those other spaces both discursive and social that exist, since feminist practices have (re)constructed them, in the margins (or ‘between the lines,’ or ‘against the grain’) of hegemonic discourses and in the interstices of institutions, in counter-practices and new forms of community. (de Lauretis, 1987a, p. 26)

In an essay published three years later, de Lauretis further defines the subject of feminism as “eccentric”, since it is not only defined on the axis of gender, “but multiply organized across positions on several axes of difference and across discourses and practices that may be, and often are, mutually contradictory” (de Lauretis, 1990, p. 137). Like Gloria Anzaldúa’s new mestiza, who moves across borders “developing a tolerance for contradictions, a tolerance for ambiguities” (Anzaldúa, 1987 [2007], p. 101), the eccentric subject is “constituted in a process of struggle and interpretation, a rewriting of self [...] in relation to a new understanding of community, of history, of culture” (de Lauretis, 1990, p. 144). The eccentric subjects are also similar to Donna Haraway’s (1992 [2004]) and Trinh. T. Minh-ha’s (1986) “inappropriate/d others”, who “cannot adopt the mask of either ‘self’ or ‘other’ offered by previously dominant, modern Western narratives of identity and politics” (Haraway, 1992 [2004], p. 69).

In light of the above, we assert that feminist cinema and film theory have operated as what we propose to call eccentric technologies of gender. In their interrogations beyond the essentialist binary opposition of femininity/masculinity, these eccentric technologies have strived to render possible the conditions for “an eccentric discursive position outside the male (hetero)sexual monopoly of power/knowledge” (de Lauretis, 1990, p. 127). The eccentric subjects of feminism inhabit the margins of the master narratives, since it is in that “elsewhere” in which “the terms of a different construction of gender can be posed –terms that do have effect and take hold at the level of subjectivity and self-representation” (de Lauretis, 1987a, p. 25).

In another essay originally published in 1985, “Rethinking Women’s Cinema. Aesthetics and Feminist Theory”, de Lauretis had already directed her analysis of feminist film theory and feminist cinema towards the creation of a vision from elsewhere: “our task as theorists is to articulate the conditions and forms of vision for another social subject [...] the time has come to re-think women’s cinema as the production of a feminist social vision” (de Lauretis, 1987b, p. 134). Such a vision is no longer focused on deconstructing the man-centred perspective but on constructing other ways of seeing, congruent with the points of view of the feminist eccentric subjects. It could also be defined as the gaze of the eccentric subject of feminism, the inappropriate/d other or same “who moves about with always at least two gestures: that of affirming ‘I am like you’ while persisting in her difference and that of reminding ‘I am different’ while unsettling every definition of otherness arrived at” (Minh-ha, 1997, p. 418).

According to de Lauretis, the main project of feminist cinema lies on “how to effect another vision: to construct other objects and subjects of vision, and to formulate the conditions of representability of another social subject” (de Lauretis, 1987b, p. 135). We can diffractively read this position with Haraway’s feminist reclaiming of vision, not as the false master capacity to separate subject from object and order all differences, but as partial perspectives of multidimensional subjectivities accountable for their positionings.

In “Situated Knowledges: The Science Question in Feminism and the Privilege of Partial Perspective”, Haraway emphasises: “vision is always a question of the power to see –and perhaps of the violence implicit in our visualizing practices” (Haraway, 1988, p. 585). Only by recognising this, does it become possible to elicit power-sensitive conversations that lead to contestable and contested knowledges rather than to fixed and categorical ones. Feminist and eccentric gazes must also be, therefore, what we propose to call situated gazes, i.e. “views from somewhere” (Haraway, 1988, p. 590).

We believe that these ideas can be applied to cinema, especially to that genre which works with the audiovisual (re)presentation of realities: documentary cinema. This is a technology of gender in which we might find “means for understanding and intervening in the patterns of objectification in the world – that is the patterns of reality for which we must be accountable” (Haraway, 1988, p. 589). It is at this point that we consider it useful to bring into the conversation the optical metaphor of diffraction, for it opens up a different way of seeing beyond reflection.

Diffraction is a concept used in physics to describe wave behaviour. As a quantum phenomenon, diffraction broke the paradigms of classical physics, since quantum physicists proved the indeterminacy principle with the double-slit experiment<sup>1</sup>: “that the ontology of anything cannot be determined without regard to the apparatus of observation, or else that the apparatus participates in the ontology of the thing observed” (Belia, 2015, p. 14). Reflection is coherent with an ontistemological approach “that takes observation to be the benign facilitator of discovery, a transparent and undistorting lens passively gazing at the world” (Barad, 2007, p. 195). But this belief in “the independently determinate existence of words and things” (Barad, 2007, p. 195), which can be objectively mirrored, is questioned by an approach that considers how the observation apparatus is entangled with the observer(s) and with what is observed, thus establishing what comes to matter in each encounter: the aforementioned move from the paradigms of classical physics to quantum physics’ indeterminacy principle.

Adopting this perspective takes us to a move away from the understanding of documentary cinema as the reflection of any so-called fixed reality out there, which is then mirrored by the camera. Instead, we conceptualise it as diffraction apparatus, i.e. technologies that co-produce and record the processes through which human

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<sup>1</sup> Thomas Young performed the double-slit experiment with light in 1801. In 1927, Davisson and Germer demonstrated that under some circumstances electrons show the same wavelike behaviour.

elements (e.g., the filmmakers) and non-human elements (e.g., the camera) intra-act with other human and non-human parts of the world (e.g., filmed subjects and objects, spectators, screens). A diffraction apparatus makes boundaries and cuts within phenomena so as to make part of the world intelligible to another part of the world in specific ways. Despite its complex definition, a diffraction apparatus can be as simple as a question, which places the focus on one aspect instead of another, or a camera, which necessarily frames only a portion of what stands in front of it.

The separation between subject/observer and object/observed is replaced by an understanding that both are permanently entangled. Diffraction does not take the boundaries of any subject nor object for granted, “but rather investigates the material-discursive boundary-making practices that produce ‘objects’ and ‘subjects’ and other differences out of, and in terms of, a changing relationality” (Barad, 2007, p. 93). Rather than “interactions”, Barad talks about “intra-actions” to highlight the fact that objects and agencies of observation are mutually constituted in their encounters. Such an idea can be diffractively read with the aforementioned reconfiguration of the eccentric subjects of feminism, whose point of view and strategic identity are always processes of struggle and rewriting, attained by means of a “critical, deconstructive relationality” (Haraway, 1992 [2004], p. 69).

What we propose here is to approach feminist documentary cinema as diffraction apparatus so as to analyse how it can work as eccentric technology of gender. To conceive feminist documentary films as diffraction apparatuses that “enact what matters and what is excluded from mattering” (Barad, 2007, p. 148) from a gender-aware perspective involves analysing how the films intra-act with different parts of the world, the differences they make, and where the effects of those differences appear. In the next section we therefore engage with what the application of a diffractive methodology to the analysis of feminist documentary cinema would entail.

## **2. MATERIALITY, EMOTIONALITY AND PERFORMATIVITY: HOW FEMINIST DOCUMENTARY CINEMA MATTERS**

Thomas Waugh explains that committed documentary filmmakers engage in changing the world “by rooting their work within actively ongoing political struggles: by making films [...] not only about people engaged in these struggles but also with and by them as well” (1984 [2011], p. 6). In this sense, documentary films matter not only as final products, but also as processes along which human and non-human bodies and intra-actions are transformed.

We agree with Ilona Hongisto’s statement that “documentaries do not only operate on a plane of signification, but also partake in the material processes that co-compose the real” (Hongisto, 2015, p. 12). Discarding the representational paradigm in the analysis of documentary cinema changes the focus “from producing accurate and authentic representations to creatively contributing to the

transformability of actual beings in the real” (Hongisto, 2015, p. 12). Such an onto-epistemological turn has ethico-political effects, as it moves from “reflecting on representations” to “accounting for how practices matter” (Barad, 2007, p. 90). Moreover, “whereas reflection is about mirroring and sameness, diffraction attends to patterns of difference” (Barad, 2007, p. 29), and these patterns do not only map where differences appear, but “where the effects of difference appear” (Haraway, 1992 [2004], p. 70).

It is not our purpose to offer essentialist and prescriptive definitions of what feminist documentary cinema is or should be. Instead, we follow Domitilla Olivieri’s proposal of “studying what makes a documentary feminist in terms of what a documentary does” (Olivieri, 2012, p. 7). According to the diffraction metaphor, we can analyse what feminist documentary cinema does by paying attention to its material-discursive practices at four levels: form, content, production, and reception. By feminist material-discursive practices, we refer to those practices in and through which part of the world becomes legible to another part of the world in ways that render visible the role that gender has in the legitimisation of inequalities, while also enacting other forms of livable lives.

We propose three tools for analysing feminist documentary cinema as diffraction apparatus and eccentric technology of gender: materiality, emotionality and performativity. Olivieri uses the expression “materiality of documentary” to describe two aspects. Firstly, she argues for “the filmic representation in its material specificity” (Olivieri, 2012, p. 42), which involves going beyond the content, paying attention to “how the film is constructed: its technologies, framing, editing, voice-over, use of realistic or fictional images and sounds, and use of different filmic strategies” (Olivieri, 2012, p. 10). Secondly, materiality “refers to the manner in which documentary film engages with bodies and with the matter of the world” (Olivieri, 2012, p. 10).

For Hongisto, the main way in which politically committed documentary films participate in “the real as process” (Hongisto, 2015, p. 12) is through framing, which involves making cuts and drawing boundaries within phenomena, precisely what diffraction apparatuses do. Taking Olivieri’s definitions and Hongisto’s query as a starting point, with our attention to materiality we intend to answer the following questions: How does a feminist documentary film (re)frame reality? How does it entangle diverse narrative waves through the editing?

New materialist methodologies pay attention to how affects and emotions contribute to social production: “the concern is no longer with what bodies or things or social institutions are, but with the capacities for action, interaction, feeling and desire produced in bodies or groups of bodies by affective flows” (Fox and Alldred, 2015, p. 402). The affective turn reconfigures the research apparatus in order to attend to the affective flows within assemblages of human and non-human and to “explore how affects draw the material and the cultural, and the ‘micro’, ‘meso’ and ‘macro’ into assembly together” (Fox and Alldred, 2015, p. 406).

Sara Ahmed is critical of the clear distinction between affect and emotion because she doesn't consider it helpful. As for why she decides to employ the word "emotion" rather than "affect" in *The Cultural Politics of Emotion*, she explains: "I was interested in this idea of movement that is explicit in its etymology. And it was also partly that I wanted to use the word that is used in everyday life" (Ahmed, 2014, p. 97). She explores "how emotions work to shape the 'surfaces' of individual and collective bodies" (Ahmed, 2014, p. 1). Her argument is in line with our understanding of cinema as diffraction apparatus that enacts boundaries within phenomena through intra-actions. This is clear, for example, in the emphasis that she puts on the "press" within the word "impression":

...it is through emotions, or how we respond to objects and others, that surfaces or boundaries are made: the "I" and the "we" are shaped by, and even take the shape of, contact with others [...] the surfaces of bodies "surface" as an effect of the impressions left by others. [...] emotions are not "in" either the individual or the social, but produce the very surfaces and boundaries that allow the individual and the social to be delineated as if they are objects. (Ahmed, 2014, p. 10)

It is in this sense that we propose emotionality as our second methodological tool for the analysis of feminist documentary cinema as diffraction apparatus and eccentric technology of gender. Emotionality helps us describe "how texts are 'moving', or how they generate effects [...] [and] the way in which texts name or perform different emotions" (Ahmed, 2014, p. 13). The emotions evoked by feminist documentary cinema are regarded as "effects rather than origins" (Ahmed, 2014, p. 196). By calling attention to emotionality, the questions that we intend to answer are: How does making/watching a feminist documentary film affect subjects and objects on both sides of the camera and the screen? How do emotions traversing the film-diffraction apparatus produce the surfaces and boundaries that delineate subjects and objects, the individual and the social?

The third tool, performativity, brings together insights by Judith Butler (1990; 1993; 2015), Stella Bruzzi (2000) and Karen Barad (2007). Since her 1990 *Gender Trouble* Butler has argued that gender is performative. Elaborating on J. L. Austin's concept of performativity as a way to refer to linguistic utterances that bring what they state into being or make a set of events happen as a consequence of the utterance itself being made (Austin, 1962 [1975]), she explains that gender "is a certain kind of enactment [...] prompted by obligatory norms that demand that we become one gender or the other" (Butler, 2015, p. 32).

The theory of gender performativity is at the basis of Butler's discussion of Jennie Livingston's documentary *Paris is Burning* (1991), which portrays the African-American, Latino, gay, and transgender communities involved in the drag balls of New York City during the eighties. Butler asserts that this film manages to render gender performativity visible through the drag figure (1993, p. 125).

However, she also makes it clear that not all kinds of drag are subversive and that deviation from the norm is mostly punished rather than celebrated.

Some critics claim that documentary cinema is always performative. Bruzzi, for instance, argues that documentaries are “the result of the intrusion of the filmmaker onto the situation being filmed” (Bruzzi, 2000, p. 8) which, rather than invalidating authenticity, replaces the idea of unmediated transparency “with a performative exchange between subjects, filmmakers/apparatus and spectators” (Bruzzi, 2000, p. 6). Instead of presenting a reality that exists previously and independently, performative documentary cinema shows realities resulting from the intervention of the camera and/or the film production, situations created from the very action of making a documentary.

Bruzzi’s approach to documentary cinema as a performative act which captures reality in-the-making echoes Barad’s understanding of reality as dynamic intra-activity (Barad, 2007, p. 206). Indeed, Barad’s take on performativity gives particular relevance to matter: “an agential realist elaboration of performativity allows matter its due as an active participant in the world’s becoming, in its ongoing intra-activity” (Barad, 2007, p. 136). Hence, the performativity of documentary cinema as diffraction apparatus, which includes human and non-human agents and objects of observation, matters at various levels: from the way it frames and creates boundaries to the alliances it helps sustain on both sides of the camera and the screen.

Building on Bruzzi’s, Butler’s and Barad’s insights, we propose performativity as a way of naming the power that feminist documentary cinema has to bring about a situation or to set effects into motion. These are the questions that we intend to answer by applying this tool to our analysis: How does feminist documentary film understood as a process bring about the realities it shows? How do its intra-actions with subjects and objects on both sides of the camera and screen set into motion a series of effects?

In the next section, we apply these tools to the analysis of Spanish documentary film *No existimos/We Don’t Exist* by Ana Solano (2014) as diffraction apparatus and eccentric technology of gender. We identify feminist material-discursive practices at four levels: form, content, production and reception of the film. In order to analyse form and content, we perform a feminist close reading (Lukic & Sánchez-Espinosa, 2011). As for production and reception, the methods are interviews with the filmmaker and fieldwork at screenings.

### **3. NO EXISTIMOS: RESPONSIBILITY TOWARDS VULNERABILITY IN AUDIOVISUAL REPRESENTATION**

The work of the Spanish visual artist Ana Solano is at the crossroads of video art, experimental documentary and ethnographic enquiry. Her 2014 film, *No existimos* is organised as a video essay, that is, a critical text on a specific subject,

“often fragmentary and frequently presenting a personal view of the author, with a clear structure consisting in an introduction, body and conclusion” (Olivieri, 2012, p. 153). In this case, the introduction and conclusion are expressed with a reflexive voice-over that can be connected with the position of the author/filmmaker. And the body of the film incorporates various layers, which unfold the complex topic of the film: the violence faced by female refugees in their home countries, but also throughout their transit and in their European host countries.

As explained in the previous sections, we propose to analyse this film as a diffraction apparatus that makes part of the world intelligible to another part of the world in specific ways. We will argue that such a process is traversed by a series of feminist material-discursive practices which turn the film into an eccentric technology of gender, capable of opening up the conditions of visibility for “an eccentric discursive position outside the male (hetero)sexual monopoly of power/knowledge” (de Lauretis, 1990, p. 127). Our insights regarding form, content, production and reception of the film, are hereby read through one another in order to respond to the questions raised by our three tools for analysis, i.e. materiality, emotionality and performativity. We will start with a question concerning the latter: How does feminist documentary film understood as a process bring about the realities it shows?

The production of *No existimos* lasted four years, two of which were devoted to ethnographic research, to interviewing female refugees in Spain and France and to gathering testimonies from lawyers, sociologists and journalists working on this issue. Through the United Nations High Commission for Refugees in France, Solano got in touch with female refugees and asked for interviews with them. She had decided to start from what they wanted to say. Her interview guideline consisted of three questions, as she explained to us:

I asked them about the relation their host countries established with them and whether their human rights were still under threat [...] the other question was how they handled their female identity before the physical and psychological pain they had suffered and continued to suffer [...] and the other was about their escapes from their home countries into Europe and the extent to which their persecutions were gender related.<sup>2</sup>

Solano identified a pattern in their responses: “they express their pain and fear through silence, in their home countries and in those where they apply for

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<sup>2</sup> “Les preguntaba la relación que establecen con ellas los países de acogida y si continúan peligrando sus derechos como seres humanos [...] la otra cuestión es cómo encaran ellas su identidad femenina en relación al dolor físico y psíquico que sufrieron y que siguen sufriendo [...] la otra, la relación que tenía la huida de sus países de origen a Europa por la causa de persecución sobre género”. July 18<sup>th</sup> 2016. All the translations from the original interview carried out in Spanish are ours.

refuge and asylum.”<sup>3</sup> They agreed to be interviewed as long as the filmmaker did not record them and would keep their anonymity. She was then faced with the ethical dilemma on whether and how to represent this silence and invisibility. Moreover, she realised that some of her initial categories, such as “female identity”, did no longer work: “Because they tell me ‘what’s that?’ If they don’t have an identity, what do I want to talk about, what do I want them to tell me?”<sup>4</sup>

This was also a key moment at which Solano developed one of the main theses of the film: they “apply for refuge due to a gender problem [...] The feminicide taking place in their countries is the reason they look for refuge in this old Europe.”<sup>5</sup> Locating her work process at the tense intersection of a tragic reality and its artistic translation, she left aside the idea of exposing the painful testimonies of these women and rather focused on how the human rights of female refugees remain under threat in European territory: “I pose the problem that we have in Europe, how we are actually dealing with, how we are treating them.”<sup>6</sup>

Solano understood her responsibility towards the material implications on the subjects with whom she was intra-acting and this impacted the way in which she decided to render visible the gender-based violence they were experiencing. She regarded the materials generated in the fifty hours of interviews as a “textual mass”, from which she then developed the layers that make up *No existimos*. Within the diffractive methodology, we can define this strategy as one of moving from a reflecting mirror to a diffraction apparatus which could make reality intelligible in a way that turned sensitive data into informative and affective audiovisual narrative waves. This leads us to our questions regarding the materiality of a feminist documentary film: How does it (re)frame reality? How does it entangle diverse narrative waves through the editing?

*No existimos* can be described as consisting of five different narrative waves: interviews with experts (wave 1), facts, figures and theoretical insights (wave 2), the filmmaker’s voice over reflections (wave 3), the refugees’ testimonies (wave 4), and the music together with what Solano calls “fiction materials” (wave 5). These “fiction materials” comprise digitally generated images, video art pieces, manipulated photographs and superimposed texts used as transitions but also as metaphorical translations of the emotions evoked by the refugees. For example, as we listen to the desperate testimony of a woman applying for refugee status in France, we see the background image of a building getting closer and closer, with

<sup>3</sup> “el dolor y el miedo lo manifiestan a través del silencio en sus países de origen y en los que piden refugio y asilo”. July 18<sup>th</sup> 2016

<sup>4</sup> “Porque ellas me dicen que, ¿qué es eso? Si ellas no tienen identidad, ¿de qué quiero hablarles, qué quiero que me digan?” July 18<sup>th</sup> 2016

<sup>5</sup> “Piden refugio por un problema de género [...] el feminicidio que se está produciendo en sus países era lo que las llevaba realmente a buscar refugio en esta vieja Europa”. July 18<sup>th</sup> 2016

<sup>6</sup> “Planteo el problema que tenemos en Europa, cómo estamos tratando en realidad, cómo las estamos tratando en Europa”. July 18<sup>th</sup> 2016

window frames intersecting to suggest prison bars, thus provoking a sensation of confinement and suffocation.

Together with these "fiction materials", music and sound design are key for the emotionality of *No existimos*, which leads us to the question: How does making/watching this film affect subjects and objects on both sides of the camera and the screen? For instance, the constant sound of trains generates a feeling of persecution. The absence of voices from the majority of refugees (we only read their testimonies) is replaced by guttural sounds and isolated phrases in different languages. A recurring musical pattern is similar to a heartbeat, which signals the human bodies that are not visible in the film, but on which the effects of gender violence, borders, laws and trials are materialised beyond the screen.

Four experts are interviewed in the film: Smaïn Laacher, sociologist and judge of the Cour Nationale du Droit d'Asile; Flor Tercero, lawyer; Caddy Adzuba, journalist; and William Spindler, United Nations High Commission for Refugees spokesperson. These interviews are presented in four blocks, usually accompanied by fiction materials and edited in a way that we can describe as diffractive, i.e. "attending to entanglements in reading important insights and approaches through one another" (Barad 2007: 30). For example, what Tercero says about sexual violence in Congo overlaps with what Adzuba describes about the feminicides in this country. Likewise, what Laacher explains about silence as a manifestation of trauma and of how narrating one's story is a Western imposition, is further exemplified by Tercero's criticism of the violent interviews at the OFPRA (Office Français de Protection des Réfugiés et Apatrides).

These interviews are frequently presented with talking heads on one side of the screen and digital images telling a parallel story on the other side. Solano also complements the information given by the experts with facts, figures and theoretical insights. However, she disrupts the epistophilia commonly associated with documentary cinema, i.e. when rather than visual pleasure, the spectator looks for the pleasure of getting to know something, because she presents this data in fast and/or flickering ways, making it hard to read it all. In the end, the spectator can only gather the information because of its being repeated several times throughout the film. Such formal strategies, in Solano's opinion, can generate a distancing effect in the audience who, intrigued by the impossibility of following what is being told, might pay more attention to the contents.

As for the other question connected with emotionality: how do emotions traversing the film-diffraction apparatus produce the surfaces and boundaries that delineate subjects and objects, the individual and the social?, a key narrative wave is that of the filmmaker's voice-over reflections. *No existimos* opens and closes with reflexive segments in which this voice-over makes Solano's position explicit, pondering the challenges and contradictions of making this film, and disrupting once again the epistophilia of the so-called God's voice:

The more I advance, entangling myself in this web of rebel emotions, of positions confronting social and governmental structures, the more I hear their testimonies, full of fear that they will be identified, that their voices will be recognised, their faces, their gazes [...] I try not to lose the thread that led me to begin this documentary. I try to reach the end, or perhaps the beginning [...] This thread, which I began, has managed to entangle me. (Solano, 2014, 2:45; 59:41)<sup>7</sup>

The filmmaker-narrator locates herself within a European reality from which she looks at the women refugees, located in so-called third world countries where the conditions for women are portrayed as much worse, so that the only possibility to improve their situation is to ask for refuge in Europe. Several times in the video essay these women are referred to as victims and the affects mobilised around them are predominantly negative: pain, fear, distress and humiliation. In this sense, *No existimos* could be said to reproduce a victimising gaze. However, in many ways, the voice-over speaks from what we can describe as an eccentric position, challenging the violence of representation of non-Western women as passive victims whose only chance is to be saved by external interventions.

Firstly, even though the refugees remain faceless, and even voiceless in most cases, their experiences and emotions are visualised throughout the film. Moreover, as indicated previously, not exposing them to the spectator's gaze is actually a responsible decision, so as not to endanger women who are already in a highly vulnerable situation. Secondly, despite being portrayed as victims of sexist and racist violence, the refugees are also referred to as women with a free will and with power of decision: "Ariadnas" whose "desire to get out of Crete (not to save Theseus) forces [...] [them] to go down paths, to endure the crossing" (Solano, 2014, 1:01:08). They are women who "don't have the right to travel. However travel they do" (Solano, 2014, 27:41).

Thirdly, the director makes it clear that gender-based violence and inequality are not exclusively problems in non-European countries. She acknowledges her privileged position, for it is evident that women who have to escape from their own countries due to direct attacks are in an extremely vulnerable position. But she also stresses the agency of these women who search for better living conditions. In her interrogation of the European migratory laws, and in her direct criticism of the violence at the trials and everyday discriminatory attitudes in the host countries, Solano challenges "Western feminist presumptions about who needs saving, from what, and by whom" (Hemmings, 2011, p. 208). The refugees are also presented as heterogeneous and eccentric subjects traversed by intersectional patterns of differences, as one of the refugees' testimonies exemplifies:

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<sup>7</sup> The languages spoken in the film are French and Spanish, with English subtitles. We have resorted to these subtitles for the transcriptions.

In my country a woman who is a Muslim and a lesbian is condemned to death penalty. I have lodged an asylum request here in France [...] Discrimination does exist in France but not just due to the French or the westerners in general, it also exists among the Arabian-African community in France [...] To be a lesbian produces as much rejection here as in Iraq (In Solano, 2014, 19:34).

Reflections upon the other question that has to do with performativity - how do its intra-actions with subjects and objects on both sides of the camera and screen set into motion a series of effects?- have already been raised in connection with the production process and are also present in the reception effects. According to Solano, it is more effective to transform harsh realities into “textual masses” through art and cinema. Nevertheless, this approach locates a film like *No existimos* in a grey area: it seems to be too realist and socially focused for video art, but too abstract and artistic for a human rights documentary. However, this “inappropriate/d” location has favoured a flexible distribution of the film, making it part of art galleries’ exhibitions and advocacy screenings at governmental institutions, but also of film festivals such as the “New Filmmakers Platform Madrid Film Festival”. We attended two screenings held within the framework of this festival in October 2016: the first one was for communication students at Rey Juan Carlos University, and the second one was open to the general public.

In the first screening, reactions were positive. Formal decisions were the main focus of the questions, which supports Solano’s idea of engaging publics, not just with the content, but also with a different film language. In our interviews she stated that her work with intellectual layers (e.g. interviews, facts and figures) and with affective layers (e.g. the music and the fiction materials) is also a strategy to reach wider publics, as she believes that, while some people may be interested in raw data, others will be more touched at an emotional level. For the moderator of the Q&A session, a white Spanish woman, the most important aspect of the film was its reflexive gaze towards gender inequality in Europe:

[*No existimos*] goes beyond the issue of women, of refugee women who have to go into exile. What it really raises is that such a situation occurs because of their being women. And these women you have spoken to are not in their countries but in Europe. And it is in Europe that they experience that problem too. They had it in their country but they also have it in Spain, they also have it in France, two countries which we assume are developed countries working for women’s equality, for equal conditions, and so on. But these women, coming from outside, can perceive that we also experience inequalities on a daily basis. They come looking precisely for that difference in Europe but they do not find it here either.<sup>8</sup>

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<sup>8</sup> “va más allá, yo creo del simple tema de la mujer, de las mujeres refugiadas, que se tienen que exiliar, porque realmente lo que se plantea es que la situación es por ser mujer. Y que estas mujeres con las que has hablado no están en sus países, están en Europa, y que es en Europa donde tienen ese problema

When a female student asked about the emotions the film generated in them, Belén Herrera, producer and photographer of the film, answered that her main feeling was impotence. During our interview, Solano expressed a similar feeling of despair: “After finishing this project, I almost ended up in a depression. Because your work with these women has been very hard and you know that is all you can do, at the end of the day.”<sup>9</sup> As Waugh states about political documentary cinema: “filmmakers themselves cannot make revolutions but can only provide ‘working tools’ for those who can” (1984 [2011], p. 6). In this case, for instance, lawyer Flor Tercero has proposed to use the film as an educational tool among lawyers and judges working with refugees.

Anneke Smelik has reflected on how spectators can assume an ethical position so as to escape from fear, impotence, anxiety and passivity. She follows Haraway’s proposal of politicising practices of witnessing through the figure of the “modest witness”: “Witnessing is seeing; attesting; standing publicly accountable for, and physically vulnerable to, one’s visions and representations” (Haraway, 1997, p. 267). Elaborating on this idea, Smelik suggests two ways in which viewers might react to audiovisual messages: “affectively through empathy or identification, and intellectually through reflexivity and knowledge. Either way, ethical accountability involves an active and affirmative response” (Smelik, 2010, p. 322). These two kinds of answers were indeed present in the responses that *No existimos* generated in those audiences in which we carried out our fieldwork.

In the second screening, the main emotions expressed by the audience were distress and anger. The spectators acknowledged the suitability of the film in connection with contemporary events concerning migration and gender violence within and beyond European borders, and as a young Latin American woman put it:

I think this documentary is very pertinent for today, because in Latin America there’s full media coverage of this October 19th [2016] event, called “Ni una menos” [Not one woman less], which denounces processes in which we are constantly being killed. We the women [...] It is a global fight. This happens in Argentina, where this march has started. This happens in Mexico. This happens in Spain. Here too there are many cases of femicide that are hardly shown [...] This is not happening only in Iraq, Israel, Afghanistan, Latin America. No. It happens constantly and we are totally exposed as a gender.<sup>10</sup>

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también. Lo tenían en su país pero es que ese problema lo tienen también en España, lo tienen también en Francia, que nos suponemos países desarrollados en donde se trabaja por la igualdad de la mujer, igualdad de condiciones, etcétera, etcétera. Pero ellas son conscientes de que, quizás precisamente porque vienen de afuera, nosotras convivimos con nuestro nivel, eh, diariamente, pero ellas vienen buscando precisamente esa diferencia en Europa y tampoco la encuentran.” October 19<sup>th</sup> 2016

<sup>9</sup> “Después de terminar este proyecto, acabé casi en una depre. Porque vienes de un trabajo muy duro con las mujeres y sabes que no puedes hacer nada, que lo único que haces es esto”. July 18<sup>th</sup> 2016<sup>11</sup>

<sup>10</sup> “Creo que este documental cala muy bien precisamente el día de hoy, que a nivel de Latinoamérica se está llevando un proceso totalmente mediático este 19 de octubre, “Ni una menos”, donde estamos

An example of an affirmative response in the same screening was that of a woman who wanted to help with the distribution of the film:

Thank you for this wonderful documentary that has moved me. I don't understand so much about experimental cinema but I think the information that you transmit has been concise and it touches very deep inside. My question is whether you are going to continue presenting this documentary or how we can collaborate to disseminate it.<sup>11</sup>

Linking the close reading of *No existimos* to the theoretical premises stated at the beginning of this article, we can see that Solano succeeds in “making visible the invisible” (Kuhn, 1994, p. 67) and in articulating “the conditions and forms of vision for another social subject” (de Lauretis, 1987b, p. 134). Indeed, in *No existimos*, the violence faced by subjects who do not want to be visible is visualised by means of diffractive strategies which, paraphrasing Trinh T. Minh-ha, “provoke [...] facilitate, and [...] solicit a new seeing” (Minh-ha, 2005, p. 13). These strategies function as practices that render the filmmaker accountable, and as emotional and performative tools that let the voices and faces of the eccentric subjects be heard, seen and felt.

#### 4. FINAL THOUGHTS: WHAT THE DIFFRACTIVE AND ECCENTRIC PARADIGMS CAN CONTRIBUTE TO FEMINIST DOCUMENTARY CINEMA

Throughout this article, we have developed our proposal of approaching feminist documentary cinema as diffraction apparatus and eccentric technology of gender. We have done so by applying specific methodological tools to the analysis of a Spanish case study. In this section, we summarise what we consider two main contributions that the diffractive and eccentric paradigms might offer to the discussion and understanding of feminist documentary cinema: responsible ways of co-creating realities with intellectual and/or affective audiovisual narrative waves, and eccentric positions outside androcentric epistemologies based on hierarchies and an alleged objectivity.

In *No existimos*, director Ana Solano presents female refugees as vulnerable subjects but also as capable of resistance. And she does this without showing their

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hablando de procesos en los cuales nos están matando todo el tiempo, mujeres (...) es una lucha mundial, esto pasa en Argentina, de donde ha salido esta marcha. Esto pasa en México, pasa en España, aquí también hay muchísimos casos de femicidio que igualmente se evidencian (...) esto no está pasando solamente en Irak, Israel, Afganistán, Latinoamérica, no, nos pasa constantemente y estamos totalmente expuestas como género” October 19<sup>th</sup> 2016

<sup>11</sup> “En primer lugar agradeceremos este maravilloso documental que a mí me ha emocionado. Igual no entiendo tanto de cine experimental pero creo que la información que transmitáis ha sido concisa y que llega, llega muy dentro. Mi pregunta es, ahora, si vais a seguir pues presentando este documental o de qué forma podemos colaborar para difundirlo.” October 19<sup>th</sup> 2016

faces or their voices since this could put them in danger. We believe that the importance given to the violence of representation in itself, particularly in terms of the material implications that uncritical exposure could have on the filmed subjects, can be considered an example of a responsible approach towards representing gender-based violence in the audiovisual.

Instead of resorting to painful testimonies that nurture a victimising depiction of female refugees, Solano employs affective and intellectual narrative waves to give visibility to bodies and voices that ask to remain invisible. While stressing the emotions experienced by her interviewees through diverse audiovisual metaphors, she underpins to the pain caused by gender-based violence, without falling into sensationalism and remaining committed to actual change in the real world. The filmmaker does not show the women with whom she has spoken, but the narrative waves of her film direct attention towards the full presence of their absence. In the musical heartbeat and in the fiction materials made out of anonymous faces, the reality of the material bodies of these women haunts the documentary.

The final aspect that we would like to highlight is the creation of an eccentric discursive position in documentary cinema capable of subverting androcentric epistemologies. In *No existimos*, this is done by means of the narrative thread of the filmmaker/narrator's reflections on the process of making the documentary. In her constant questioning of the situations faced by women, both inside and outside European borders, as well as her interrogation of her own filmmaking decisions, this self-reflexive voice-over is that of an eccentric subject who embraces her contradictory identity and tries to imagine an "elsewhere" balancing between facts (the lived reality of the here-and-now) and fiction (imagined alternatives to it):

I like to imagine that their fight for survival will not continue in their new host countries. I like to imagine that our states have the necessary mechanisms so that they can live and not only survive. I like to imagine that in the host countries, feminist women are not divided among themselves (Solano, 2014, 57:36).

Gender-based violence has received significant mainstream media attention but, in many cases, this has been translated into women being portrayed as helpless victims who need to be protected. Interestingly, the film that we have analysed in this article deals with the violence faced by female refugees but chooses not to show these women. It is in this sense that we have selected it as an example of an eccentric technology of gender, capable of creating an elsewhere from which to talk about such urgent issues. Solano resorts to documentary cinema not as mirror, reflecting any so-called reality, but as diffraction apparatus framing and cutting phenomena in specific ways. Documentary hence becomes the tool to make sense of real facts, while also creating the unexpected conditions for necessary change.

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