

## Forms of rage in Franco's Spain

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**Video URL:** <https://vimeo.com/871930421>

**ENG Abstract.** This video essay explores how the film *Black bread* (2010) by Agustí Villaronga foregrounds repression. It is a film that depicts a world of inequality and homophobia where children learn that violence is not an anomaly but a tool. Through the audiovisual format I argue that the film provokes thought on the complexity of rage and how to either challenge or perpetuate heteropatriarchal norms. The film makes visible the process through which the powerful manipulate the rage of the marginalized by shifting blame for their oppression. When shame and fear fuel rage, it loses its productive potential and becomes destructive. In denying his roots out of fear and rage, the protagonist reconstructs himself in the image of those behind his pain. There is no cinematic vision of a remedy to cruelty, or a productive use of rage. The conclusion suggests that representing that destructive process is enough.

**Keywords:** dictatorship; homophobia; rage; Spanish cinema.

## ES Formas de la rabia durante el franquismo

**Resumen.** Este videoensayo explora cómo la película *Pa negre* (2010) de Agustí Villaronga pone en primer plano la relación entre la vulnerabilidad, el miedo y la rabia en un contexto de represión económica, política y sexual. Es una película que describe un mundo de desigualdad y homofobia donde los niños aprenden que la violencia no es una anomalía sino una herramienta. A través del formato audiovisual sostengo que la película provoca una reflexión sobre la complejidad de la rabia y cómo esta puede tanto desafiar como perpetuar las normas heteropatriarcales. La película pone al descubierto el proceso mediante el cual los poderosos manipulan la ira de los marginados culpabilizándolos de su opresión. Cuando la vergüenza y el miedo alimentan la ira, esta pierde su potencial productivo y se vuelve destructiva. Al negar sus raíces por miedo y rabia, el protagonista se reconstruye a imagen de quienes están detrás de su dolor. La película omite mostrar un remedio a la crueldad o un uso productivo de la ira. La conclusión sugiere que es sugerente representar ese proceso destructivo.

**Palabras clave:** cine español; dictadura; homofobia; rabia.

**Summary.** 1. Written statement. 2. References.

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### 1. Written statement

Since 2013, the discourse of the ultra-nationalist party Vox has mobilized a rightwing backlash in Spain against feminist movements and LGBTQ+ inclusive measures that have sought to deconstruct the hegemonic power of the white heterosexual male. The far-right ideology of Vox and their insistence on the heteronormative male/female binary, however, is hardly new. How can we better understand the persistent causes and consequences of present-day homophobia and misogyny in Spain? In this video essay, I trace a longer trajectory of violence

as demonstrated in the film *Black bread* (2010) by Agustí Villaronga. The film is set in a small Catalan village during the Franco regime (1939-1975) when political opponents and sexual 'dissidents' were not only imprisoned, tortured, and murdered, but their vulnerability and rage became manipulated by those in power. It is a film that depicts a world of political and sexual repression where children learn that violence is not an anomaly but a tool. In that context, fear and rage bind together and function to govern the lives of the main characters. This video essay explores how the film provokes thought on the

complexity of rage, arguing that it can drive political change and transcend heteropatriarchal norms, or reinforce them.

In the groundbreaking text 'The uses of rage', Audre Lourde (1981, p. 280) argues that marginalized groups have «a well-stocked arsenal of anger potentially useful against those oppressions, personal and institutional, which brought that anger into being. Focused with precision it can become a powerful source of energy serving progress and change». For Lourde, rage constitutes a refusal of the deadening force of pain. She frames guilt and impotence as useless feelings and obstacles in realizing the creative possibilities of rage. As this video essay holds, the shifty workings of shame and gaslighting must be added to this list of barriers that disallow anger to be used constructively. I explore how the film makes visible the process through which the powerful manipulate the rage of the marginalized by shifting blame for their oppression. When shame and fear fuel rage, it loses its productive potential and becomes destructive.

The film's narrative provides the perspective of a Republican family's queer son who is born in poverty as he comes of age during the postwar years. Along with the young protagonist, viewers discover the secrets related to multiple crimes committed in the village, all of which are rooted in political violence, homophobia, and aggressive masculinity. This video essay unravels these stories of betrayal and deciphers the film's primary motifs. The main character's annihilation of his beloved caged birds suggests that rage keeps him captive instead of setting him free. Returning to Lourde's theorization of anger, rage can mean pain but also survival if it is faced with clarity and used for illumination and protection. The child's rage, however, allows him to survive in body alone as he never learns what Lourde calls the tools to face anger constructively. Instead, he denies his roots out of fear and unexplored rage. In that process, he reconstructs himself in the image of those behind his pain. Unlike Lourde's example, the anguish of

being excluded and silenced only teaches him to remain unseen. To paraphrase Lourde's metaphor, these are the bricks that go into walls against which the oppressed will bash their consciousness, unless it is recognized that those bricks can be taken apart (279). Through the protagonist's intractable dilemma, Villaronga makes evident the enormous struggle that channeling rage entails. There is no cinematic vision of a productive use of rage. The conclusion suggests that merely representing that destructive process serves its purpose.

The inclusion of this video essay in this special issue makes inroads in the study of the uses of rage and its representation. It also offers a pathway to delineate a longer trajectory of inequality, anti-gay hate, and toxic masculinity in present-day Spain. Nearly five decades after the death of Franco, and eight decades after the 1940s context in which *Black bread* is set, debates around gender and sexuality remain fraught and dangerous. By scrutinizing the breadth and historical depth of the exclusionary projects rooted in patriarchal power and the social invisibility that they produce, we not only gain a deeper understanding of the past but also a sharper insight into the present.

## 2. References

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