

## SET YOURSELF FREE

### Review of the short film *El orden de las cosas* by Neus Fernández

*El orden de las cosas* is a Spanish drama short film written, directed and produced by the brothers César and José Esteban Alenda. It was released in 2010 and has a running time of 20 minutes. It stars Manuela Vellés as Julia; and Javier Gutiérrez, Mariano Venancio and Biel Duran as Marcos, among a few other brilliant actors. It was nominated to the best short film in the Goya Awards 2011.



This short film denounces the injustice of gender violence and shows the audience the cruel reality of women who live repressed, abused, and controlled by their partners or husbands. *El orden de las cosas* has two main characters: Julia and Marcos, who have a son, Marquitos, and live together in an apartment. The short film starts with Marcos searching a belt, which is special and important for him as it has been passed on from generation to generation in his family. He asks for Julia and Marquitos to help him look for the belt, but Julia doesn't move or talk, she just lies in the bath as she watches his son grow up and his husband grow old. Eventually Marquitos realizes that his mother is being a victim of gender violence and leaves the house, but Julia remains trapped in there, unable to leave or communicate with the outside of the apartment and his son. One day Marco's siblings go to the apartment with their partners and blame Julia for the problems of their marriage, they all have a traditional and male chauvinist mentality, they believe that women must be submissive and both wives accept it as if it were the right behaviour to have. We can feel the tension between the characters, which goes in crescendo throughout the movie until the whole situation explodes at the end and Julia sets herself free.



This film depicts the violence and repression without showing it explicitly, it uses metaphors and symbols to do so. It takes place in the bathroom of the apartment, where Julia is laying in a bath. This bath represents Julia's space and prison, the isolation and control by Marcos. The bath is filled with water as tension increases and it eventually is overfilled and the water is spilled all over; or it is

emptied, leaving Julia defenceless. The belt symbolizes tradition, an old and chauvinist mentality which establishes men as superior people, and women as servants, who should be submissive and obedient. Passing on the belt to the next generation means the continuation of this mentality. Marcos wants to give the belt to his son, but as he grows up, he realises what it meant, and he refuses to be as his father. The door of the bathroom is always open, which lets Marcos control, humiliate, threaten, and invade Julia's privacy. She has no freedom, no ambitions, no happiness. Her whole life has been taken away by his husband and she doesn't even own herself.



Marcos claims that this is how a relationship is supposed to be, he normalizes the situation, he says that this is “el orden de las cosas”, as the title says. When at the end Julia sets herself free, she finds herself in the ocean, she goes to the shore, where there are many other baths with belts inside. They all represent freed women

and the strength that it has taken for them to free themselves from such a relationship. The beach shows the beautiful world that is waiting for every woman being a victim of gender violence out there, the worthiness of the fight for freedom and the peaceful life which awaits them far from their oppressive partners. The short film expresses really deeply the feelings that the characters feel and the psychology that is behind each character’s expressions. It is really absorbing and breathtaking, it conveys a feeling of tension throughout the film and allows the audience to put in the character’s shoes. The performances of the thespian are outstanding, Manuela Vellés makes us imagine Julia’s situation even without talking, using face expressions. It is a really powerful film, and it is able to transmit what gender violence feels like and how oppressed and trapped women feel in these kinds of relationships.

I feel like this short film is a must watch. Everyone should watch it to realize how gender violence is present in our world and how some women are deteriorated to the point where they feel like nothing, like their life is no longer controlled by themselves. A lot of women out there are silenced, isolated, and abused on, suffering not only the physical violence but also a psychological damage which will mark them forever. Julia is a victim of gender violence, and although it is extremely hard to face Marcos and free herself, she is able to do it and walks towards a better, more peaceful life. Yet, I think Marcos and his siblings and respective wives are also kind of victims of the traditionalism and of a chauvinist mentality that they have been taught is right. We should raise awareness of gender violence and everyone should be educated about it. The male privilege and superiority has to come to an end and has to stop being normalized by both men and women because it is not “el orden de las cosas”, it is not how it is supposed to be. Our society needs change, and we have the power to do so. This short film has made me reflect about all of this, and I think it is a much-needed reflection. It makes us see that gender violence must stop being normalized, all women have to own their lives and not allow repression or abuse. Setting themselves free is always an option, and a whole better life is waiting for all of them out there. So, I would definitely recommend this film, gender violence needs changing.

