

How gender and authority made it possible to steal up to 300.000 babies in Spain

A gender perspective on Stolen Babies in Spain during and after the Franco era through the media's portrayal of the phenomenon today

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Abstract

In 1939 – 1990s Spain was plagued by several cases of newborn babies disappearing from the maternity bed of their mothers and irregular adoptions. This paper investigates several cases within the event through contemporary media's portrayal of the events, taking a gender perspective on the entire phenomenon. With an underlying basis in the bachelor thesis 'Framing de los bebés robados en la prensa española: una perspectiva de género' by Kristensen & Vejnø (2021) I seek to develop on the findings from Kristensen & Vejnø (2021) in order to answer how, and if, it was possible to steal children from one woman and give them to another, without being questioned or challenged. Gender, power, and authority becomes key issues in the investigation to answer who, how and why? Furthermore, the paper attempts to showcase the relevance of those events in contemporary society and media today, 80 years later.

Introduction

During 1936 – 1939 Spain was plagued by a civil war between republicans and nationalists. The civil war ended in 1939, with a right-oriented, nationalist victory, and Francisco Franco's 36 year-long dictatorship began (Samson, 2017). At the same time, newborn babies started getting separated from their parents at birth and irregular adoptions began (Grandison, 2012). Mothers were separated from their newborn babies immediately after giving birth, with the information that the baby had to see a doctor (ibid). Later the mother of the child, and father if present, would be informed that the baby had passed away (ibid). The tendency to this story was that all these women, who had their babies taken away from them, were republicans, opposition to Franco's Falange¹, or other women who did not fit into Francoist Spain, such as single mothers. This phenomenon continued until the beginning of the 1990's, long after Franco had died (Delgado, et.al. 2018), in this period it is presumed that between 30.000 and up to 300.000 babies were stolen in this period (Litten, 2022). The death of Franco in 1975 also meant an end to his Francoist dictatorship that hereon after saw democracy resurrected in Spain. A majority of the members of the Catholic Church supported Franco's nationalist coup in 1936, and shortly after the civil war, the Church gave an official blessing to Franco (Scott, 2022).

¹ The Falange was a nationalist party supporting Franco during the civil war. The Falange's militia had a vital part in the troops of Franco and gained power by supporting Franco (Lundgren-Nielsen, 2021).

The support from the Church legitimized Franco's actions and the two institutions maintained a depending relationship throughout Franco's rule (ibid). Through their relationship the Church was given influence in politics and society, while Franco was given moral legitimacy to his dictatorial rule (ibid). According to Grandison, 2012, during Franco's dictatorship it was rumored in the public that babies were being stolen from the maternity bed of families, whose societal status and ideological standpoints did not fit into Franco's regime, however no one wished to question the authorities in dictatorial Spain. In 1982, the phenomenon finally grabs the media's attention when a Spanish journalist published a photo of a baby corpse, kept in a freezer in a maternity clinic in Spain, confirming the rumors. The corpse was kept in the clinic to use as a prop to convince the mothers of their babies' deaths (Grandison, 2012). Even though this confirmed many people's fears, the Spanish society were still adjusting from dictatorship to democracy, and it was uncommon to question doctors and nuns, who were considered authorities at the time (Adler, 2011). This meant that the story did not get the publicity that it deserved and even in his grave, the ideologies of Franco's dictatorship managed to live on and silence the suppressed. 30 years later, the media's interest for the story was awakened. In 2010, a collective complaint was sent to the Spanish congress and senate from Anadir², the national association for people affected by irregular adoptions. The complaint that was put forward made the National Institute of Toxicology and Forensic Sciences, INTCF, take part in the case by starting an exhumation of the alleged dead babies to look for DNA matches. This is done because several men and women have shared their stories, explaining how the hospital or the church took care of the burials of their alleged dead babies back when the phenomenon took place (Grandison, 2012), and there have been speculation about whether there are actual bodies in the graves (Ansedo, 2018). This caught the attention of both national and international medias, and institutions such as BBC News Spain and CBS did documentaries on the issue. In the BBC documentary several victims are given a voice by the media. BBC grants victims, both parents and children, the opportunity to share their story, while the documentary also focusses heavily on finding someone to hold responsible for the events (Adler, 2011). A German documentary from 2022 focusses on the role the Catholic Church played in stealing babies during Franco's regime (Litten, 2022). In 2018 a 50-year-old woman was recognized by the Spanish court as being a stolen child and an 82-year-old man, Dr. Eduardo Vela, was proven guilty, however not sentenced due to old age (Minder, 2019), a case I will return to later in the frame and discourse analysis of the paper. The events still causes stir in today's Spain, when the Spanish organization SOS Bebés Robados takes to the streets in their recognizable yellow shirts and gloves. SOS Bebés Robados is an organization consisting of people from families who are affected by the disappearance of newborn children from the maternity bed and by both legal and illegally adopted people, looking for information about their origin. The organization aims to spread knowledge about the problem, make the organization a known public figure, guarantee the event will not be repeated, continues the search for biological family unifications and lastly, to uncover the whole truth about the events (SOS Bebés Robados). The phenomenon has previously been investigated with a perspective on the influence and power of the Catholic Church and on the Francoist dictatorial rule Spain was under, however in this article I wish to investigate the events from a gender perspective. I wonder if the fact that the children were stolen from the maternity bed, where only women lie, play a vital role in how and why it was possible to take a newborn child away from it's birthparent and get away with it.

This paper will investigate how the case of the stolen babies is being portrayed from a gender perspective by investigating contemporary media's portrayal of the events, using contemporary research literature and methodology to uncover two of Spain's most read medias' general portrayal

² Asociación Nacional de Afectados por Adopciones Irregulares

of the events. Using findings from the above investigation to find whether the power and authority granted by gender in the time of the events presented in a theoretical gender perspective can answer if gender had anything to do with how and why the events could take place. Furthermore, I wish to uncover whether Spain's stolen babies are still relevant today, 80 years after the events began.

To explore these questions the paper uses Frame Analysis by George Lakoff (2004, 2006) and complimentary Analysis of Mediated Discourse³ by Anabela Carvalho (2008) to identify the specific frames and discourses used to describe the events. They will be used to analyze six newspaper articles from 2012, 2016 and 2018 in Spanish medias El País and ABC, two of Spain's most read medias with more than a million readers every day (Orús, 2021). The discourse analysis is a tool to uncover the general perspective of the two medias and to reveal underlying gender bias in these cases. In addition to this, the gender perspective taken in this paper relies heavily on the Gender Perspective by María J. E. Poves and Soledad L. Delgado, an explanatory theory on the issue, that offers historical and societal background information on gender, power, and authority in the given period, where the events took place. This theory is used to uncover how, and if, it was possible for some people in Spanish society to steal a child from one person and give it to another, without being questioned or challenged.

Before digging into the subject I wish to comment on the phrasing "Stolen Babies". This is how the events are mainly described in mainstream media and how most information is found on the subject. However, in this paper, the wording "Stolen Babies" is solely used for its' familiarity and common usage on the topic and no further meaning is to be read into this particular choice of wording.

Theoretical and methodological underpinnings

This paper draws on hermeneutics and additionally Lakoff's theory of Frame Analysis, Carvalho's theory of Analysis of Mediated Discourse and Poves' and Delgado's historical Gender Perspective.

The research has been carried out hermeneutical, continuously exploring, readjusting, and widening the research project until a satisfactory degree of truth was uncovered (Fredslund, 2012). Hermeneutics is a methodological tool used in text interpretation. Hermeneutics is based on the research process as a circle of understanding constituted by a part of meaning and a whole of meaning, operating dependently on each other (Fredslund, 2012, p. 78). The concept of prejudgment is important and to be understood literally in hermeneutics (*ibid*). One can never be without prejudgment, however if the researcher is aware of their prejudgment, it can help understand and uncover the truth about your field of research (*ibid*, p. 79), by actively searching for new knowledge and different perspective on your research area to widen your horizon of knowledge (*ibid*). This research critically investigates the past phenomenon of Stolen babies from a new perspective, gender, to find answers that can provide a better understanding of events and the relation of how it happened, when it happened. The hermeneutical process is mainly used to uncover the truth about how it was possible to keep silencing the men and women, who had their babies stolen, for such a long time.

Frame Analysis by George Lakoff (2004, 2006) is used to uncover the medias framing of the phenomenon of Stolen Babies. Lakoff points out that any word creates and forces a frame (Lakoff, 2006, 93). A frame is a mental structure that allows us to understand reality, and sometimes create reality (*ibid*: 25). It is about communicating ideas and worldview in a fitting language that can carry those ideas (Lakoff, 2004, 23). The Frame Analysis will be used to uncover both ABC and El País

³ Analisis de discurso del mediatico

view on the phenomenon and what “truth” about it they are communicating to the world through their expressed language.

Analysis of Mediated Discourse by Anabelo Carvalho is critical towards classic Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA) and offers a developed model for CDA that includes a time perspective, discursive strategies of the actors in a text and the effects of mediated discourse (Carvalho, 2008: 162 – 163). Carvalho offers both a textual and a contextual tool for analysis. Carvalho’s textual tool for analysis works complimentary to Lakoff’s Framing Analysis, while the contextual tool offers a contemporary and historical dimension, working critically intertextual and taking the historical events into consideration (ibid: 172). In this research it is used to make a comparative study of the two medias, El País and ABC’s portrayal of Stolen Babies with the purpose of uncovering how each of the two medias portray the events year by year and to uncover the similarities and differences in how ABC and El País frame and portray Spain’s stolen babies, additionally to reveal what events underlie each the articles. Using both Frame Analysis and Mediated Discourse Analysis on the issue from contemporary media can point towards if there is a shared or a torn public discourse on the phenomenon, and if so, which ones?

In 2018 María J. E. Poves and Soledad L. Delgado published a theoretical take on the phenomenon of Stolen Babies as a Gender Perspective in the book: *Nuestra Historia - Marx y la historia 1818 – 2018*. Poves and Delgado offers information on the Spanish view on women of the time as individuals and their roles in the family and society. The chapter explains how women were subordinate to men, an instrument to produce children and please their husbands (Delgado, et. al., 2018: 174 - 175). The importance of understanding and acknowledging the view on women of the time to understand how, and why, it happened is emphasized by Poves and Delgado. They have constructed a sort of timeline of the development of events, dividing the events into three periods: Early Francoist regime from 1939 - 1952, late Francoist regime in 1952 - 1975 and after Franco’s death in 1975 – the middle of the 1990’s. The periods are not to be understood as sharp divisions but overlapping periods. The first period is characterized by political suppression (ibid: 170). The same goes for the second period, however in this period the catholic ideology gains power and authority, both in Spain but also in other places of the world (ibid). The third period takes place in newly democratic Spain after Francos death. In this period an economic factor overshadows the phenomenon (ibid: 171). The theoretical standpoint and information offered by Delgado and Poves helps guide the research in discovering and understanding the structures that allowed the system of stealing babies to operate for years, mainly related to social actors’ roles in the phenomenon in the past. Delgado and Poves solely focus on the past, and how Spain’s social and political past structures and history can explain the events. I do agree with their research, it’s importance and accuracy and am impressed by it, however I wish to offer complimentary research. This paper offers a perspective on these past events of Spain’s stolen babies through contemporary media’s framing of past events when publishing about them today. It is just as important to investigate the phenomenon within a contemporary perspective since the cases are yet to be closed for all the involved parts. The victims, both parents and children, are still looking for answers and justice, and it is an ongoing case in Spain, with several court trials, DNA-testings, etc. yet to be dealt with (Litten, 2022), (Adler, 2011). Additionally, in this research several specific cases are compared to the findings provided by Delgado and Poves, which both challenges and confirms their research by Delgado and Poves.

Contemporary media’s portrayal of the events

In this section the findings of Frame Analysis (Lakoff, 2004, 2006) and Analysis of Mediated Discourse (Carvalho, 2018) used on 3 newspaper articles from the years 2012, 2016 and 2018 from

Spanish media El País and 3 newspaper articles from 2012, 2016 and 2018 from Spanish media ABC will be presented to identify tendencies in the portrayal of the past and ongoing events about Spain's stolen babies in contemporary media.

El País changes their approach to the events of stolen babies throughout the years. In 2012 their article is about a court trial for Pilar Alcalde, a woman stolen from her birth parents as a newborn in 1982 (Junquera, 2012). The article focusses on the accused in the case and is titled “*¡Soy inocente!*” (ibid), which translates to “*I am innocent!*”. The article places the accused men in the case, Zamarriego and Elizaga in a negative frame. The headline of the article is followed by a video of Zamarriego and Elizaga arriving to court and reacting violently to the situation outside, being confronted by journalists and members of SOS bebés robados and shouting at them (ibid). This negative framing is reinforced by a description of Zamarriego speaking in a threatening tone⁴ (ibid) and the following quotation of Elizaga: “Shut up or I’ll throw a pie in your face”⁵ (edt.) (ibid). The framing of Zamarriego and Elizaga makes the headline appear ironic, clarifying that El País is placing their sympathy on the victims of the events. In 2016, El País publishes an article titled “Doctor Vela will be the first person to be brought to trial in a case of stolen babies”⁶ (edt.), (Junquera, et. al. 2016). This article follows the case about Ines Madrigal and her courttrial. In Madrigals case, dr. Vela is accused of taking Madrigal from her birthmother and gifting her to another family (ibid). El País places their sympathy with Madrigal by including facts on her case and a strong and humanizing quotation: “I don’t want to see him in prison. I want him to apologize”⁷ (edt.), (ibid)., framing her as ‘the good’ in this case. This means that El País have had the same portrayal of the events in both 2012 and 2016, framing the accused in the cases as ‘the bad’ and placing sympathy with the victims, however in 2018 they publish a new article titled “DNA analysis of 81 cases rules out that they could have been stolen babies” (edt.), Ansede, 2018. In this article it is possible to identify a shift in El País’ discourse on the subject. The 2018 article is appealing to logic and common sense by including a social actor, Alonso, who is a scientist. Alonso works with the INTCF and is not able to confirm any case of stolen babies after having conducted a scientific investigation on 81 cases (ibid) of stolen babies, which causes doubt on the accuracy of the events. El País gives credibility to Alonso by describing him as “*one of the greatest experts in Spain*”⁸ (edt.) (ibid). El País furthermore includes a quotation from an anonymous man, who believes he has lost his child to the phenomenon years go. He states that he would rather see his child kidnapped than dead, which is presumed understood by the reader, and to wake sympathy (ibid). This demonstrates El País’ focus on the development of the events year by year. In 2012 and 2016 the articles are focused on destinies and stories from individuals, while in 2018 the perspective changes and takes a more scientific approach and tries to offer a conclusive explanation on the phenomenon for all the involved. Here it is noteworthy that the majority of the social actors in El País’ 2018 article are male, and those actors are given a kind of authority to give a conclusion on the issue by El País. El País goes from following cases of stolen babies, portraying and supporting the victims’ perspective to taking an active part in trying to explain the entire phenomenon as an incorrect approach and explanation of high child mortality in the age of the phenomenon (Ansede, 2018). When observing this shift in El País’ portrayal of the events, firstly it must be taken into account that the articles from 2012 and 2016 were both written by Junquera, while the 2018 article is written by Ansede. Furthermore, it showcases El País’ attempt to give different perspectives on the case and follow the development of actual events within Spain’s stolen babies.

⁴ “*tono amenazante*” (Junquera, 2012)

⁵ “*callese o le voy a dar una torta!*” (Junquera, 2012)

⁶ “*El doctor Vela será el primer juzgado por el ‘caso de los bebés robados’*” (Junquera, et al. 2016)

⁷ “*NO QUIERO VERLE EN PRISIÓN. QUIERO QUE PIDA PERDÓN*” (Junquera, et.al. 2016)

⁸ “*uno de los mayores expertos de España*” (Ansede, 2018)

ABC have a continuously developing discourse within the same frame of the case throughout 2012, 2016 and 2018. In 2012 ABC and El País write about the same case, Pilar Alcalde. ABC frames Zamarriego, the accused, in a bad way by including compromising quotations from him in the article, such as Zamarriego telling a journalists: “*Let’s see who this ends bad for*”⁹ (edt.) (EFE, 2012). In 2016, El País and ABC write about the same case again, this time Ines Madrigal. ABC’s article is titled “*Dr. Vela, the first to be charged in the case of stolen babies*”¹⁰ (edt.) (EFE, 2016), similar to the El País articles title in 2016. In the article, Dr. Vela, the accused, is framed as guilty by including quotations from the court trial such as having “*sufficient motives*”¹¹ (edt.) (ibid) from the judge. ABC’s framing of Dr. Vela influence blame on him in the case. The way ABC focusses on framing Dr. Vela as guilty, it showcases their support for victims of the events, in this case Ines Madrigal. In 2018, ABC publishes an article about Ana Belén, a stolen baby, now grown woman, and the reunion with her biological mother after 45 years apart (Ramirez, 2018). In the article, the reunion between mother and daughter is described picturesque, waking emotions and sympathy with a specific choice of words from the author such as: “*soul in suspense*”¹²(edt.) (ibid), and “*A new hug completely erasing the blame*”¹³ (edt.) (ibid). The article has a positive portrayal of the events, showing the best possible outcome of the sad events, giving hope to other cases of stolen babies. The discourse from ABC is appealing to the readers emotions, both by including quotations, but even more through picturesque descriptions of events. Throughout the years ABC’s discourse becomes increasingly more appealing to the readers emotions. Portraying victims and their claim to justice, placing ABC’s Sympathy with the victims of the phenomenon and recognizing their cases. ABC’s and El País’ 2018 articles differ and places the two medias on different sides of the events, ABC recognizing the events and its victims, while El País doubts the entire accuracy of the events of stolen babies.

The gender perspective on Stolen Babies and the medias’ portrayal thereof

ABC and El País are portraying the phenomenon in a frame of contemporary cases and events within the topic of stolen babies, but to be able to understand the current problematics of the phenomenon, this paper will now discuss the origin and age of the events, taking a gendered perspective on the cases presented by ABC and El País.

In 2012, ABC and El País communicate the case of Pilar Alcalde, a now grown woman, who as a baby went missing from a maternity clinic in Madrid in 1982 and is considered one of the stolen babies. Taking the gender perspective on Alcalde’s case, she goes missing in the third period suggested by Delgado and Poves (2018) of the events, the period after Franco’s passing. Between 1975 and the 1990’s, the women who had their babies stolen were the women who did not fit into that age’s ideal view on women. The ideal was a submissive, catholic woman, with a strong male figure present in her life (Delgado, et.al. p. 174). In the case of Alcalde and several other cases, Sister María Gómez Valbuena, a catholic nun is on trial as an accomplice to the crime (EFE, 2012), (Junquera, 2012). When Alcalde’s birthmother, Maria Luisa Torres Romero, had become pregnant with Alcalde, it was with a man who did not wish to take part in the baby’s or Romero’s life (Junquera, 2011), this means that Alcalde’s birthmother is starting to miss some of the elements needed to fit into the ideal view on women at the time, in this case the element is a strong male figure. Back then,

⁹ “*A ver si vamos a acabar mal*” (EFE, 2012)

¹⁰ “*El doctor Vela, primer procesado por el caso de los bebés robados*” (EFE, 2016)

¹¹ “*Motivos suficientes*” (EFE, 2016)

¹² “*Alma en vilo*” (Ramirez, 2018)

¹³ “*Un nuevo abrazo borró por completo los reproches*” (Ramirez, 2018)

Alcalde's birth mother was frightened of her future, due to her situation and therefore she turned to Sister Valbuena, the accused in the case, for help (ibid). After giving birth, she was told that her daughter had passed, however later Sister Valbuena confesses to Alcalde's birthmother that her daughter had been adopted, furthermore Sister Valbuena threatened to expose Alcalde's birthmother for adultery (Euro Weekly News Media, 2011). Even though Alcalde's birthmother was a catholic woman, her adultery did not align with catholic family values, making her lose another element of fitting into the ideal view on women of the time. Alcalde's birthmother already had a daughter before having Alcalde, and an exposure of adultery posed a risk of losing that child (ibid). However, how could a female nun have the power to steal a baby? Delgado and Poves (2018) clarifies that the male gender were authoritative figures with power in Spanish society, however the Church gradually gained more power in Spanish society in the period of the events, granting church figures, such as Sister Valbuena authority and power. Alcalde's birthmother's exposed situation and the power and threats of Sister Valbuena explains how it was possible to steal a baby in 1982 and let her be adopted by another family.

In 2016, ABC and El País communicate the case of Ines Madrigal, another victim of the events. Madrigal would also become the first person to be recognized as a stolen child by the Spanish court (Minder, 2019). As a baby, Madrigal was gifted to her adoptive mother from a doctor in 1969 (Junquera, et. al. 2016), (EFE, 2016). Placing the case of Madrigal in the late Franco period of events, where the tendency was newborn babies being stolen from women who were opposition to Franco, such as socialists or republicans (Delgado, et. al. pp. 170 – 172). Madrigals birthparents' political standpoint are not made public, however Madrigals adoptive parents were a married catholic couple, supporting Franco (Minder, 2019). Madrigal's adoptive mother received a phone call from Dr. Eduardo Vela, the accused in Madrigal's case, stating he had a present for her (EFE, 2016). Madrigal's adoptive mother did not know she was picking up a child, Ines Madrigal, when she went to pick up her present from Dr. Eduardo Vela (ibid). In Madrigal's case, her adoptive mother met the ideal of women at the time, being married catholic, and having a strong male figure in her life, Madrigal's adoptive father, which points to why Madrigal was gifted to this exact couple. Madrigal's birthmother had become pregnant out of wedlock (Junquera, et.al. 2016), which was not ideal at the time in the catholic Spain. The catholic church was extremely firm about their traditions and family values (Delgado, et.al. pp. 175 – 176), meaning Madrigal's birthmother were not an ideal catholic or ideal woman at the time. However, it is questionable why Madrigal's adoptive mother would accept a newborn child as a gift without asking questions of where that baby came from. On Madrigal's birth certificate her adoptive mother is stated as her birthmother, however Madrigals adoptive mother have admitted the papers were falsified (EFE, 2016). In the 1940's during Franco's fascist regime, he legalized altering information on birth certificates (Delgado, et.al. p. 170). Delgado and Poves (2018) underlines the degree of trust in authorities in Spain at the time. Dr. Eduardo Vela who gifted Madrigal to her adoptive parents was a powerful man at the time. Firstly, Vela is a man, making him superior to women due to his gender in that age (Delgado, et.al. p. 170). Secondly, Vela's occupation was gynecologist, a male doctor, making him an authoritative figure. Thirdly, Franco's legalization of altering birth certificates grants doctors as Vela great power of deciding what family a child belongs to. Proving the authorities of the time did not only have power to silence the women who had their babies taken away from them, but also power to silence the women who were receiving a child from an authority figure. Proving the male authorities' power goes beyond silencing a woman who is not considered ideal in that time's society, but to male authorities having power to silence any woman in that time.

In 2018, ABC shares a story of a reunion between a biological mother and her daughter after 45 years apart. Ana Belén was taken from her birthmother in 1973 in the late Franco period of the events. After giving birth to Belén, hospital staff took the baby for washing and afterwards Belén's birthparents was informed that their daughter was stillborn (Ramírez, 2018). Belén's birthmother had two sons before Belén. Belén's birthmother never doubted the information she was given, she trusted the hospital staff. Delgado and Poves (2018) points out that women who already had more than one child were seen as eligible to steal new babies from, which is one fitting factor of Belén's birthmother. Belén's adoptive parents gave an amount of money to a nun, Sister Maria, annually (Pujol, 2018). Delgado and Poves (2018) explains how an economic dimension gained gradually more impact on the events throughout the years from being a sort of catholic charity to large sums of money becoming an integrated part of the action (Delgado, et.al. 2018, p. 171). Belén found she was a stolen baby after her adoptive parents' passing, when she found two birth certificates for herself, with different last names, additionally also her adoptive mother's medical journal, stating that she was unable to produce children (Ramírez, 2018). Pointing towards Belén being another victim of Franco's legalization of altering with birth certificates, and the power that granted hospital staff.

The gender perspective motivates diving into authorities and power figures then and now. Delgado and Poves (2018) mention the power of authorities and how their decisions and opinions were never questioned. Authorities of that age were found in churches, public service, and the medical industry, granting anyone, working in one of those institutions, power. Such as priests, nuns, nurses, doctors, police, etc. In the cases mentioned in this paper several authority figures have been mentioned. The authorities had power to control other individuals' basic human rights, by deciding which family a child should belong to. In the case of Ines Madrigal, Dr. Eduardo Vela is accused. Vela has power in his male gender, his occupation as a doctor and his relation to the church. In the time of the events, many of the maternity clinics where you would give birth, were run by the church, and a majority of the staff were nuns and people with a relation to the church, making it a powerful institution at the time. As mentioned earlier, a woman is also on trial, Sister Maria, challenging the authority and power of the male gender as claimed by Delgado and Poves (2018). The power Sister Maria had was gained through her relation to the church and her position in the institution, positioning her as an authority figure to some of the women giving birth. To emphasize the view on- and power of authorities at the time, I can exemplify by mentioning a mother's, victim of the events, outrage when a BBC journalist asks why she did not question the incident when it happened. The mother answers: *"Doctors, nuns? ... I couldn't accuse them of lying. This was Franco's Spain. A dictatorship. Even now we Spaniards tend not to question authority."* (Adler, 2011). This quotation underlines a social tendency of the degree of power authorities had in Spanish society in the 20th century.

The separation of parents and children did not happen for the first time during Franco or for the last time when the events ended. Today families are still being separated at birth or shortly after (European Justice, n.d.). However, today it is done on different principles and power lies elsewhere, such as an assessment by a municipality of the birth parents not being able to take care of a baby (ibid). At the time Spain was under a dictatorial rule and Franco's ideals sat the agenda. Today Spain is governed by a democratic rule and the power to separate families are distributed from the state to specific units in municipalities (ibid). The authorities at the time of Spain's stolen babies acted on a set of principles of that specific age. Delgado and Poves (2018) explain it as cultural and political principles and structures, fitting into Franco's fascist Spain, justifying their actions. If one tries to accept and understand how the perception of women in 1939 – 1990s was women being subordinate to men and other authoritative figures in society - different from what we know today – then we must ask

ourselves whether their grounds for family separations of that time, and at the time, were just as legitimate as the grounds we use for family separations today?

Then the question of how the events could take place can be explained with a rather simple answer: Due to the view on women of the time. However, it is never that simple. One of the biggest differences in family separations then and now are transparency. Today the parents are truthfully informed about separation, and not lied to about it like they were during Francos's regime and the years that followed, proven in both the case of Madrigal, Belén and Alcalde. It could be the corruption and the untruthfulness of the events that still cause the phenomenon to create controversy today, in the form of demonstrations, trials, etc.

Another important factor in the differences of family separations then and now is who is focused on when the evaluation is being done. Today focus lies on the family as a whole and the health, needs and development of the child. It is not focused on the mother, the woman. Political and cultural grounds shall not take part in evaluating if a child should be separated from their biological family or not. The gender perspective demonstrates how the stealing of newborn babies was justified due to the view on women of the time. The woman and her opinions did not matter or were even considered. Women were subordinate to both men and authorities. The stealing of babies during and after Franco was a phenomenon of repression of women. And with that, I will move along to short conclusionary remarks.

Conclusionary remarks

The gender perspective on the events states how the suppressive view on women between the years 1939 – 1990's, where the events took place, is to blame for creating the possibility of stealing a newborn baby from its' birth mother. It was the power of the authorities of the time and the lack of a critical approach to authorities, that allowed the possibility of stealing babies from their mothers. The media attention the phenomenon has gotten today, shows the importance and relevance it has for the Spanish population still and how there is a collective need for justice and answers from authorities of today. The cases that are dealt with in this research and in the articles from medias ABC and El País confirms the theory of Delgado and Poves (2018) as an accurate take on the events but with room to develop further on their theory, looking deeper into the gender perspective, the political perspective, a historical and religious perspective. The scale of the events is big enough for more research on the topic, and there are still unanswered questions and responsibilities to be taken.