

# **Part 1: Politics in Small Cinemas**



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## 1. A call for freedom in the Spanish cinema (from a local perspective)

**Abstract:** My presentation focuses on independence and separatist tendencies of Catalonia in Spain, as well as on national and ethnic stereotypes in Catalonian identities as expressed in cinema. *Freedom Trilogy* (*Victoria 1, 2, and 3* from 1983 to 1984 by Antoni Ribas), which represents Catalonian regional cinema, serves as a basis for understanding of the identification with a community and the perception of the local distinction. The film communicates an important independence issue: *Freedom Trilogy* is a historical fresco dealing with separate national and ethnic identity of Catalonia.

**Keywords:** Microregionalism, cinema Catalan, national identity, *cine autonómico*, Catalan identity, Catalan culture, historical super productions, *Victoria 1, 2, 3*

A historical reconstruction enables the recovery of a lost memory.<sup>1</sup> In the case of Catalonia, a turn towards the past in the Spanish cinema that started in the so-called “transition period” (1975–1982) had a special significance because of the importance of nationalist tendencies that were present in the region. The Catalan cinema, as a cinematography separate from the national one, first appeared after the first free elections in Spain held on 15 June 1977 and granted some national groups and regions a certain level of autonomy (including Catalonia and the Basque Country). The Catalan Cinema Institute was created by a group of Catalan cinematographers and intellectuals on 20 December 1975, only 1 month after General Francisco Franco’s death (20 November 1975). The first commercial success of the Catalan cinema was *La ciutat cremada* (*Burnt City*, 1976) directed by Antoni Ribas, set between the years 1899 and 1909. Antoni Ribas revived the Catalonian history with two pieces – the above-mentioned *Burnt City* and the so-called “freedom trilogy,” a historical fresco in three acts, *Victoria* parts 1, 2, and 3, produced between 1983 and 1984. In 1985, Catalan filmmakers established the Association of the Directors of the Catalan Cinema with Bigas Luna chosen as its president and Antoni Ribas as vice-president.

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1 Jean-Claude Seguin, *Histoire du cinéma espagnol* (Paris: Éditions Nathan, 1994), p. 90.

“A Call for Freedom” in the Spanish cinema, with its national specifics, is best depicted in the “freedom trilogy” – *Victoria* parts 1, 2, and 3. This film belongs to the *cine autonómico* (regional cinema) trend presenting the essence of Catalanian “dream of autonomy.”

### “The Freedom Trilogy”

Ribas’ “freedom trilogy,” a historical super-production of the Catalan cinema, consists of three films: *Victòria! La gran aventura de un poble* (*Victory! The Great Adventure of the Catalan People*) [*Victoria! La gran aventura d’un poble*], released on 9 September 1983; *Victoria!-2 (El frenesi del 17/The Frenzy of the 1917)* [*Victòria 2: La disbauxa del 17*], released on 6 December 1983; and *Victoria!-3 (La razón y el arrebató/Victory!-3: Reason and Exultation)* [*Victoria-3: El seny i la rauxa*], released on 3 February 1984. It was produced in two language versions – Spanish and Catalan.

Ribas’ monumental historical epic poem in three acts (the first part is 142 minutes long, the second and the third 135 minutes each) reminds the viewer of the beginning of the Restoration Period (1917–1930) in Spain<sup>2</sup>. Precisely, it covers the period between 1917 and the rise of Primo de Rivera’s dictatorship (Rivera was the commander of the military district in Catalonia between 1922 and 1923 and the Spanish Prime Minister after a peaceful coup d’état that took place on 13 September 1923). The action of all the parts of the film takes place in Barcelona. The main plot is set against the background of World War I (in which Spain was not involved) and develops as an aftermath of the events happening in Russia. Echoes of the victory of the October Revolution reach the anarchists proclaiming revolutionary slogans about liberation. The plot depicts the crisis in the country – a political, ideological, and governmental crisis that culminated between 1917 and 1918– and it illustrates the road of the Catalonians to achieving full autonomy. The fight against centralisation of power in Madrid is symbolised by the preparations to blow up the Montjuïc fortress standing on a hill over Barcelona, representing the oppression of the regime. The plan of destroying the fortress links all three parts of the trilogy.

The action of the first part of the trilogy starts in June 1917, the year when a “period of deep upheaval which transformed Spanish society”<sup>3</sup> began. The

2 See Manuel Tuñón de Lara, Julio Valdeón Baruque, Antonio Domínguez Ortiz, *Historia Hiszpanii* [History of Spain], trans. Szymon Jędrusiak, (Kraków: TAIWPN UNIVERSITAS, 1997), p. 522–544.

3 Manuel Tuñón de Lara, Julio Valdeón Baruque, Antonio Domínguez Ortiz, *Historia Hiszpanii*, p. 522.

ideological crisis among the ruling class led gradually to the crisis in the country, and it all took place when Spain's economy was affected by World War I – “although Spain did not directly take part in the War, the years 1914–1918 shaped its history throughout the 20th century.”<sup>4</sup>

There is a certain analogy between Ribas' epic Catalan tale and Bernardo Bertolucci's *Novocento* (1976, *Twentieth Century*, aka *1900*). Both directors focused on showing the events of 1 year which caused consequences for the whole of the twentieth century. In Bertolucci's film, the year 1900 was the moment that determined the future for the characters of the film and for Italy. In Ribas' take, the future of the Catalonian people, who are a collective character in his trilogy, was decided in 1917. Bertolucci's monumental spectacle (consisting of two parts – the first that lasts 162 minutes, and the second that lasts 154 minutes) cost \$9,000,000. *Victoria*, being the biggest and the most lavish historical production of the Catalan cinema, stands the comparison with the Italian piece in the aspect of the immense scale. The budget, originally estimated at 300 million pesetas, finally exceeded 450 million.<sup>5</sup> Both films tackle the idea of revolution and in both the revolution is postponed until the future – Bertolucci would present “stages of revolutionary utopia”<sup>6</sup>; for Ribas, the revolution was a dream of an anarcho-syndicalist, who was an idealist and pacifist at the same time. Bertolucci's political notion can be put into words: “History is created by every man's desire, but only in the extent to which it is pursued.”<sup>7</sup> These words can be also attributed to Jaume Canals (starring Xabier Elorriaga), the main character in Ribas' trilogy, who evolves from a barely noticeable trade unionist smuggling weapons (in the first sequence of the first part) to the leader of all unionists, concluding an alliance with one of the *junteros* – lieutenant Rodriguez Haro (portrayed by Helmut Berger), despite all divisions between them, to change the course of history (in the third part). Both in the film by Bertolucci and by Ribas, the protagonist impersonates a form of a romantic fight that is doomed to fail. Bertolucci's *1900* was a take on the relation between the past and the present, with the

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4 de Lara, Baroque, Ortiz, *Historia Hiszpanii*, p. 522.

5 “Antoni Ribas estrenó ‘Victòria!’, la mayor superproducción de la historia del cine catalán,” *El País* (10.09.1983): 15 Sep. 2016, [http://elpais.com/diario/1983/09/10/cultura/431992808\\_850215.html](http://elpais.com/diario/1983/09/10/cultura/431992808_850215.html).

6 Joël Magny, “Polityczny wymiar twórczości Bernarda Bertolucciego od Przed rewolucją do Wieku XX” [The political aspect of Bernardo Bertolucci works from *Before the Revolution* to *Twentieth Century*], in: *Bernardo Bertolucci w opinii krytyki zagranicznej* [Bernardo Bertolucci in the opinion of foreign critique], ed. Tadeusz Miczka (Warszawa: FilMOTEKA Narodowa, 1993), p. 130.

7 Magny, “Polityczny wymiar twórczości Bernarda Bertolucciego,” p. 130.

plot developing from 1900 to 1945. It was addressed to the viewer from the 1970s. Ribas' trilogy refers to the times that, after a series of conflicts, eventually lead to Catalonia being granted full autonomy. It is known from history that *Mancomunitat* of Catalonia held an assembly of representatives in Barcelona on 21 December 1918 during which a decision was made to act immediately to acquire full autonomy, and on 26 January 1919, a draft of *The Statute of the Autonomy* was acclaimed.<sup>8</sup> But the trilogy was filmed with the perspective of a creator from the post-Franco era: a creator who was aware of the results of Primo de Rivera's dictatorship (the abolishment of all privileges of the Catalonians in 1925) and of the later consequences of General Francisco Franco's victory, which started a long-lasting period of dictatorship (all privileges were cancelled in 1939).<sup>9</sup>

### Freedom! A Great Adventure of the Catalan People

The opening shot in *Victoria! A Great Adventure of the Catalan People* shows the walls of the Montjuic fortress, which is an army base, located on top of a cliff overlooking the sea between the port and the city. The fortress (now Castell de Montjuic) is a notorious prison where political prisoners were being detained and murdered. Currently, the Catalans consider this place as a symbol of the struggle for independence and liberation. The last shot in the film is a close-up on the intertwined hands of three *junteros* dressed in civil clothes, including Lieutenant Rodriguez, which symbolise the alliance in the struggle for a new Spain.

The first part of the trilogy sets the socio-political situation in Barcelona against the background of the situation in the whole country determined by Spain's decision to remain neutral in the face of the war in Europe (the decision was declared in Madrid in 1914 by the Prime Minister Eduardo Dato).<sup>10</sup> It is accentuated that there are diverse social strata and disproportions in the quality of life between those who benefit from the neutrality – entrepreneurs and bourgeoisie earning fortunes from trade and wealthy aristocrats, and the impoverished social groups who earn a stable income, a salary, like the workers in the trade unions, or a soldier's pay, in the case of the army. The disproportions can be noticed already in

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8 de Lara, Baroque, Ortiz, *Historia Hiszpanii*, p. 529.

9 The parliament and Generalitat were liquidated, Catalan language was banned in public places, statute was suspended, national symbols were prohibited, which initiated conspiracy – the Catalan National Front was established (Front Nacional de Catalunya). Retrieved: "Historia Katalonii" [History of Catalonia], *Historia Katalonii/Cules/FC Barcelona*, 15 Sep. 2016, <http://www.blaugrana.pl/cules/historia-kataloni>, p. 5.

10 de Lara, Baroque, Ortiz, *Historia Hiszpanii*, p. 524.

the first sequence of the film, which takes place by the waterfront in Barcelona. Elegantly dressed members of the high society are leaving the Great Theatre of Catalonia during the “Cinematograph” spectacle, for a more wanton entertainment on the beach. The local inspector Sánchez also enjoys a dissolute company of women of easy virtue who start “a Babylonian bath, Babylonian and shameless.” Local poor men arrive at the waterfront to plunder remnants of a scattered shipwreck where they find loot – shoes that leave imprints creating a “lane” in the sand, and that turns out to be made of paper. At the same time, sheltered by the night, a trade unionist Jaume Canals tries to sneak through the Coast Guard controls as he gets weapons smuggled in a box. By dawn, a strange shape emerging from the sea attracts the attention of a woman standing by the waterfront theatre and as she looks through her binoculars she sees other people, with binoculars as well – a short man in a bowling hat carrying a poster advertising a double session of “Cinematograph” at the Great Theatre of Catalonia (Gran Teatre Ctalunya, Sessio doble de CINEMATOGRAF), men in white suits standing on a balcony of the Casino building, one of them making flash signs, a man in a black tuxedo and a top hat on a bridge, a man who has just finished caressing a woman, and then all of them (still in their gala outfits) gather on the shore and look through their binoculars towards the sea. Someone says: “it must be a sea snake,” another: “No, it’s a whale,” and yet another: “It’s rather a submarine.” Eventually, they recognise: “It is a German submarine. How did it get here?” and they start betting “is it going to shoot or not?” The Chief of the local police, Superintendent Bravo Portillo refuses to believe that the Germans might have entered the neutral waters damaging international relations. When “the observers on Her Majesty’s Services” confirm that they have seen the vessel, he threatens them that they will be detained under the charge of being drugged with cocaine. This “violation of Spain’s neutrality” by the Germans, as one of the men notices, becomes an impulse for exchanging opinions and expressing slogans that illustrate who supports which political party. Someone shouts: “Long live the freedom of trade!”, another: “Long live the allies!”, yet another: “Long live the European empires!”, someone cries, “Long live the democrats!”. And the woman and man who were intimate at night start singing (she in German and he in Spanish) symbolically standing on two sides of a barricade. A worker appears among those “united by emigration” (later it turns out he is a police spy) and accuses the society: “This society is responsible for you being a whore, you being a parasite and you thieves, crooks or smugglers” and then proposes: “War is on the side of those who rule. Let’s overthrow the government and put an end to this war!” The ship in the harbour with the word “NEUTRAL” on its side, the submarine emerging from the sea with the German sailors, and a

small boat carrying a box with weapons transported by Canals and his helpers – all symbolise the line dividing society into *germanófilos* and *aliadófilos*, according to their political preferences. The initial sequence of the film is audacious in the way it shows the absurdity of the situation, combining the seriousness of political issues with a dose of sense of humour, which is characteristic of the first part of the trilogy.

The next sequences of the film show Barcelona as the centre of political and social events leading to the decentralisation of power (becoming independent of Madrid). Jaume Canals, a trade unionist and activist, collects weapons for his comrades, because the weapons are “the key to the power that the army has over the city.” They want to conquer “the line of fortifications, from which the vice-king rules Catalonia” and destroy the fortress that the Catalonians have wanted to destroy for a century. He makes a plan to organise a general strike that will prepare the grounds for changes in Spain. Lieutenant Rodríguez Haro, who is a member of the *junteros* movement, is disappointed with some of the soldiers, because “you cannot identify the whole army and the country with one man” and suggests that there is a need to reform the army to restore the people’s trust in it and so that the people stop blaming the army for everything that is wrong in the country. He expresses his concerns during an aristocratic party where many intellectuals are present, including a Catalan nationalist Carlos Roula who blames Madrid politicians for everything, hates the soldiers, and viciously attacks Rodríguez saying: “It is time you start living only off soldier’s pay and not be supported by rich fiancés like Cristina Luz.” Later, Lieutenant Rodríguez makes an offer to the anarcho-sindicalist Canals to join the forces of the Defence Junta and the trade unionists in a fight for a good cause. This happens after the leader of the *Juntas de Defensa* (Defence Junta), Colonel Benito Márquez is arrested. Colonel Benito Márquez (played by Francisco Rabal), the chief of the Vergara regiment at the Barcelona garrison and the leader of the *junteros* in the army, allowed for training that was against the rules and disrespected an order from the military supervisor. When he is summoned to the headquarters, he is ordered by his supervising general to dissolve the juntas, but he refuses to execute it, surrendering to the general as a prisoner. He is arrested for insubordination and transported to the Montjuïc fortress. The colonel tells Rodríguez to respect the law and not to rebel against the given orders – he is more respected among the soldiers than the generals who are not capable of enforcing orders on the army without his support. The soldiers who sympathise with the colonel await his orders. Rodríguez turns to him saying: “Spain needs you,” but he goes to the fortress telling them: “I command you to be obedient and to wear your uniforms



with pride.” It is Rodríguez who starts defining the political aims of the *junteros* after Márquez’s arrest. Those aims are the dismissal of all generals, creation of the Nation’s Liberation Government, and conciliation with the people. He sees the role of Canals and the alliance with the trade unionists as a means to achieving this last aim: to reconcile soldiers and civilians. This unofficial initiative, supported by the majority of *junteros*, will be the main theme of the third part of the trilogy. The first part closes with a coalition to overthrow the king and to change the political situation in the country, sealed with a handshake of three *junteros*.

Antoni Ribas uses a sexual metaphor to minimise the pathos of liberation political ideas pronounced by various social groups. Everyone in the politically diversified society, independently of the social group, represents the same erotic vigour. Eroticism is what unites despite divisions and what defines the temperament of a Catalanian. Sometimes it is bawdy, sometimes deviant, and sometimes touches an obscene note. During the time of pursuit for freedom, eroticism is the only sphere of actual freedom – the liberation from costumes and conventions, which is also a road to social promotion. The shots exhibiting the erotic temperament of the characters are often motivated by the convention of a spectacle and they are used as one of the ways of pointing out Catalan uniqueness. In this sense, an aria in an opera inspires a couple to make love. Police Inspector Sánchez takes part in a public “shameless, Babylonian bath” in the sea accompanied by prostitutes. Canals’ spouses, spending most of the time separated (because love has to give way to the “idea”), give free reign to their passion whenever they meet, regardless of the circumstances (although they are being watched). Some of the scenes take place in the Parallel, where the night-life flourishes and the prostitutes are using their charms to lure the men. Canals, responsible for collecting the weapons for the unionists, although a pacifist by nature, soothes a conflict between a father and his daughter Juanita (debutant Eva Cobo) who has engaged in an affair with her dance teacher, which for her meant a first step in getting away from poverty. And all this is put into the frame of an opera spectacle. Striving for freedom corresponds with an atmosphere of sexual liberation. It is a part of cultural identity. Another facet of this cultural identity can be inferred from the poster held in the opening sequence by the man in the bowling hat, the “Catalonian Méliès” (Gran Teatre Catalunya, Sessió doble de Cinematograf) – it is a hint pointing to the fact that by this time Catalonia already had a film studio (brothers Ricardo and Ramón de Baños established The Royal Films Movie Association in 1916).

## Victory!-2 (The Frenzy of 1917)

In the film *Victory!-2 (The Frenzy of 1917)*, the frivolous atmosphere is even more accentuated and corresponds with the climate of the political frenzy dominating all conflicted sides. As they stroll through the city and discuss how to reinstall order, Superintendent Bravo Portillo and Inspector Apolinar Sánchez get excited about the news like “round, firm, smooth and curvy breasts,” “cassials pills,” or an advertisement “do you remember about my insatiable lust,” and Superintendent Bravo ponders: “We will not know whether there are any revolutionary slogans amongst these advertisements until we get the code. Fortunately, we have some good spies in the police. Our informer says that he knows the key to the code. However, we need to be careful, so that the unionists don’t realise it, because if they did, they would change it.” Barcelona becomes an arena for spies on the services of the corrupted police, which support the government, but, as Bravo says: “the governments change, but the police stay.”

The city is also full of people willing to provide entertainment for the newly arrived German sailors and where the bribed police turn a blind eye on violating international agreements. Pursuant to the slogan: “Good pornography is also an art,” “honourable mothers,” encouraged by the owner of a club, talk their daughters into dancing for the drunk German sailors. When they resist, one of the women suggests to her daughter: “show, only the thigh,” which is overheard and then repeated by the public: “thigh, thigh...” At this point the mother warns – “if you don’t go out, I’ll do the gig myself.” Therefore, plump mature mothers do their frivolous dance as the first ones, and then their innocent daughters, looking like white flowers in white dresses, take their place with full “dignity” as they are encouraged: “show the buttocks, girls, the buttocks” – they gradually uncover everything they can and eventually they start dancing like naked nymphs. One of the German soldiers who used the sexual services in the facility refuses to pay, so the police hold the German government accountable for it, issuing a bill with the title: “expenses for the country and the victory.” The students catch their teacher with a prostitute. Surrounding him, they make a toast to their passed exam (which they are only about to take) [this toast is a hidden hint to a film by José Luis Garci *Asignatura Pendiente (Unfinished Business, 1977)*, which compromised the old – in this case Franco’s era – moral norms. The film was one of the many in the post-Franco period that contested the existing moral order].<sup>11</sup>

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11 Emmanuel Larraz, *Le cinéma espagnol des origines à nos jours* (Paris: Les Éditions du CERF, 1986), p. 248.

Sheltered by night, the unionists keep collecting the weapons, continuing the preparations for a general strike. The police superintendent knows about the contraband, but prohibits everyone from doing anything about “the vanishing weapons,” because he wants to shift the problem to the military intelligence. In another place, in the evening, an announcer introduces an exciting theatre spectacle: “Ladies and Gentlemen... You are witnessing the greatest controversy that has shaken the foundations of Christianity. Here, in front of you, there it is, the loathed, disputed, defamed, shameless, obscene, plebeian, vulgar, salacious, animalistic, passionate, bawdy and always fantastic... tango.” At this moment a couple of dancers – Juanita and her teacher – start performing tango moves to the choir singing of seminary students (which sounds nothing like any dance music) in front of the public composed of prelates. The dance is interrupted: “This cannot be, my children – one of the prelates says – Tango is danced with passion. It is a hot and passionate dance. Or at least that is what they said...” and encourages the dancers: “Forget about the House of God and think that you are in the most deprived cabaret in the fifth quarter. This is at least what I have heard. Tango does not exist in Latin. We are bound by the anthem to be persistent and to pursue so that the master Millet himself approves of this sinful dance. Let’s not forget that [a quote in Latin:] ‘no one shall say that the Church does not make an effort.’ We also still need an accordion in order to make the diocesan committee understand, what tango is.” The longer the couple dance the Argentinian tango on the floor, the merrier are the smiles on the faces of this atypical audience. The most frenetic and passionate of all dances, tango in this scene looks like taken straight from a Fellini film that perfectly illustrates the absurdity of the surrounding reality.

The police use the services of a spy to prepare a provocation that should enable them to destroy the unionists and Inspector Sánchez kidnaps Canals’ children to get him into a trap. Maria, the mother of Canals’ children (played by Norma Duval), blames him for the disappearance of their children and declares she would claim to take them back, as they should be with their mother and not their father’s mistress Palmira (played by Carme Elias). The two friends now stand against each other, and Maria warns her rival: “Jauma needs to screw some lass from time to time, and as you well know, this is not how he treats the women of his life.” Maria wants to file a lawsuit to strip him of parental rights motivated by the facts that he neglects his family and she is going to marry (for the sake of the children) Mr. Llorenç Vinyes, so that he can take authority over them. When Canals eventually finds Inspector Sánchez to recover his children, the Inspector’s mother tells him that they are sleeping like angels, whereas Canals’ daughter is being sexually assaulted by the Inspector’s brother in an adjacent room. When Canals decides to

open the door to this room using force, Sánchez points a gun at him. “It is a real hunting gun, isn’t it?” Canals asks, making a reference to the memorable film by Carlos Saura *The Hunt (La Caza, 1965)*.<sup>12</sup>

Earlier, Juanita met Lieutenant Rodriguez Haro at a crossroad (the Y-shape symbolising the choice of the road in life) and foretold him that he would need her help. Haro meets with lieutenant colonel and his supporters, and this meeting shows a division among the soldiers. One fraction supports the coup d’état and liberating colonel Márquez and the members of the High Junta (as long as he is in prison he cannot be defeated) and the other backs coalition with the people (this is the part of the *junteros* led by Rodriguez). The first group is afraid that the separatists shall exploit the division in the army in their fight for autonomy. Rodriguez declares: “We do not want another coup, but far-reaching reforms. Can’t you see that you are falling into another trap set up by the generals from Madrid?”

Political ideas and main characters of the political plot remain overshadowed by the absurd reality of the second part of trilogy. Colonel Márquez is barely mentioned, Lieutenant Rodriguez gradually matures to take over initiative and a family drama crosses Canals’ unionist strike plans. He is abandoned by the mother of his children who is planning to marry his friend (a unionist turned entrepreneur). There are two closing shots. The first one shows a breakup in the family (the son stays with his mother and her husband-to-be and the daughter stays with her father). In the other there is a watchman with gun.

In the second part of Ribas’ trilogy, the madness of 1917 is illustrated in situations that reach the limits of absurdity. Those were the circumstances that the Catalans had to endure, deriving from both the crisis in the state and the echoes of shocks that shook Europe (war and revolution). The specific take on this historical issue reveals the temperament of a true Catalan, who keeps his sense of humour even confronted with the absurdity of history.

### **Victory!-3 (Reason and Exultation)**

As a matter of fact, *Victory!* by Antoni Ribas is not only a trilogy, but in composition terms it is based on the triptych scheme. All the parts – except for one retrospection in the third one (when Canals recalls April 1904 when for the

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12 *The Hunt* by Saura was showing the times of the Spanish civil war as a source of a national trauma; the rabbit hunting taking place in an empty *arrayo* has the function of “masking the murderous instincts.” Alicja Helman, *Ten smutek hiszpański. Konteksty twórczości filmowej Carlosa Saury* [This Spanish sadness. Contexts of the film works by Carlos Saura] (Kraków: Rabid, 2005), p. 56.

first time he shouted: “Long live the anarchy! Away with the king!” during the visit of the king Alfonso XIII) – present the events in the chronological order. However, the relation between each of the parts indicates it is a triptych. There is a specific correspondence in the arrangement between the threesome’s stories. Ribas’ *Victoria!* is a set of separate parts, but these parts are also complementary elements of a bigger unit. In the case of a triptych, although the paintings are separated, they are not isolated – they relate between each other. The whole of the triptych should be read simultaneously, not in chronological order. In the case of this triptych trilogy the second, the most shocking part, takes the place of the central piece, translating absurd of history into the language of eroticism. Socio-political situation in Barcelona and the present liberation tendencies dominate the first part. They are illustrated, not solely, but with the use of a sexual metaphor. The third part combines the issues of a big-scale (like making the history) with those that are private, personal (like love and death).

First words uttered in *Victoria!-3 (Reason and Exultation)* is the famous quote: “The die is cast.” Those are said by an officer (Pablo) approaching Lieutenant Rodriguez Haro as he fastens the buttons of Jaume Canals’ uniform. The quote, attributed to Julius Caesar who allegedly said it as he crossed the Rubicon (10 Jan 49 BC), signified the end to an old republican system and the birth of the Roman Empire. Here it refers to the alliance between a part of the liberal *junteros* and the unionists, a point of no return. Rodriguez, once standing at the crossroads (as is the scene with Juanita and the second lieutenant), now takes an irrevocable decision – he is going to intervene in the course of history. Jaume Canals says: “The unionists think that Barcelona is a bomb and all that it lacks is a fuse and I think that this city is a fuse and the whole country is a bomb.” His companions – unionists who object to the war idea – dress up in military uniforms to hide their identities and help Lieutenant Rodriguez Haro and his supporters in an action of not allowing the order of releasing Márquez from reaching the castle. For the unionists, this theatrical gesture (one of them says he looks like a drummer in an operetta) is a test, checking if they can count on a coalition with the army. Simultaneously, another group of unionists mines the Montjuïc hill to set the fortress on fire. The first ones are climbing up the hill to prevent releasing Márquez, the others are placing dynamite to destroy it, as: “Maybe the people will lose fear and they will feel free seeing how the symbol of oppression crumbles down.” The first group of the unionists fail their mission. As a result, Rodriguez Haro will face expulsion from the army and Jaume Canals will have to seek shelter in the house of his ex-wife’s new husband.

The political plot is developing from the first part of the trilogy. Now it is completed with the personal perspective – the troubles that started in the second part. The private perspective has a function of a *memento mori* of its kind. It is developed in grotesque, exaggerated sequences. Three men – a priest, a solicitor, and a doctor – pay their visits to the groom Lloren Vinyes Bajzels before his wedding with Maria Allaga. The first one wants to convince the democrat that he should make his vows before God, and to remind him of his mortality. The second one tells the groom to use the opportunity and write down his last will. The third one visits him because he could never forgive himself if he was not present by his deathbed. The wedding is a pretext to remind of death. The priest says: “Those, who believe, shall not perish but have eternal life, but you are going to die, Lloren Vinyes Bajzels...” and the former unionist who became an entrepreneur and a democrat, thinking about the future, pities that “It may turn out that peace in Europe will lead to our fall or to a civil war.” This far-reaching intuition of Vinyes represents the perspective on history adopted in the film.

Maria and Llorenç's wedding party coincides with the great explosion. One of Canals' companions tells him: “We have lit the fuse of revolution” as he points to the Montjuïc castle and the hill shaking from a series of explosions. Although one plan failed (Márquez, afraid of the possible division of the country, did not join separatists and dissidents), the other one worked, strengthening the myth of Agrato Vidal, a phantom anarchist – in the reality Jaume Canals. Two months after the wedding the solicitor, the doctor, and the priest come again to Llorenç Vinyes' house. The first one comes to write down the last will of the dying man, according to his wish. The doctor is told that Vinyes is too ill to talk to him. The third one follows Vinyes who has got up from the deathbed and went out to the streets so that the death would have to chase him. Before his departure, he calls for Canals and explains that he married Maria so that his fortune would not be taken over by the government, but it would be inherited by Maria and her children. This dimension of the plot is completed with two deeds of love: Juanita manages to use some “influential acquaintances” to close the case against Rodriguez and she returns him to Cristina Luz, and Vinyes leaves all his fortune to Maria, which brings the whole family together. In the end of this sequence of grotesque situations, the Police Superintendent Bravo Portillo is shot in the street (on 15 September 1919), Colonel Márquez is dismissed from the army (February 1918), and Maria and Canals visit the astronomical observatory one day before Primo de Rivera overthrows the government (on 12 September 1923). In the guide to the observatory there is information that one of the planets is called Barcelona, so “we have a second Barcelona in the space.” And Canals–Agrato Vidal asserts:

“Our problems are small and insignificant when seen from the perspective of the Universe.” His last words in the film seem like a message: “I am sure of one thing though. We cannot allow others to impose their customs, language and laws on us. There is no one who can tell us we shouldn’t be ourselves.” This is a claim to maintain cultural identity. Although it is said the day before installing military dictatorship by Primo de Rivera, this “dream of autonomy” will be only fulfilled in the post-Franco period.

“The dice is cast” quote, inaugurating the third part, makes the viewer realise that what is present (the autonomy granted after General Franco’s death in 1975 and the introduction of a new constitution in Spain in 1978 – the state that was when the film was being produced) many years ago was only the future. The third part presents alternative historical paths for Catalonia and the “victory” – the destruction of the Montjuïc fortress – is a visions of a desired “past” and partly a utopian future (the fortress was never destroyed, but nevertheless it remains as a symbol of the once oppressive rule). In the third part, Antoni Ribas showed the stages of a revolutionary utopia (also through the means of a grotesque exaggeration of the action) with “Barcelona in space” at the dawn of Primo de Rivera’s dictatorship.

## Conclusion

*Victorial-1, 2, 3* is the biggest historical production in the local Catalan cinematography. It conveys the vivid culture and temperament of the Catalan people. The seriousness of the theme is mixed with a grotesque perspective. The pathos is minimised by remaining ironically distanced from the situation. It tells about the history from the present-day perspective. It shows that Catalan identity is based most of all on the language and culture and the historical motifs. It refers to “personal mythology” to present the regional history. As a super-production representing cinematography of a micro-region, it stands as a symbol of the domination of Madrid. It is also an evidence of a “new freedom of expression”<sup>13</sup> that came with the fall of Franco’s dictatorship.

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13 Marsha Kinder, *Blood Cinema. The Reconstruction of National Identity in Spain* [8. *Micro- and Macroregionalism in Catalan Cinema*, European Coproductions, and Global Television], University of California Press, Berkeley and Los Angeles 1993, p. 395.

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## 2. The troubled image: The conflict in Northern Ireland as seen by the Irish and the British<sup>1</sup>

**Abstract:** “The Troubles” – this is the name given to the conflict between Northern Ireland and Great Britain (and, in a sense, between the Irish Republic) which lasted from civil rights protests in the late 1960s up to 1998 Good Friday Agreement. The Troubles significantly dissipated political tensions in that part of Europe. However, this conflict is not only a political one but also national, economic, sectarian and cultural. The approach to this conflict defines issues of Irish identity from the northern part of the island. Cinema is also engaged in this conflict as the Troubles became the subject of films directed by both the Irish filmmakers (Pat O’Connor, Jim Sheridan, Neil Jordan, Terry George) and the British ones (Alan Clarke, Ken Loach, Mike Leigh, Paul Greengrass). The aim of this chapter is to look into these narrative patterns and to the dominating ideological attitudes present in these films.

**Keywords:** Northern Ireland, Troubles, Irish cinema, British cinema, conflict

### Introduction

The cinematic image of the Troubles in Northern Ireland is always troubled, by definition. In all accounts concerning films about this conflict, there is persistent question: ‘which side are you on?’ Is it the republican or the unionist side that is supported? Is the film made from the Irish, British or Northern Irish point of view? Whose nationality makes the nationality of the film itself: the one of the director, the screenwriter, the producer or the film company? The ‘identity’ of these films is always disputable. The character of the two-side conflict suggests that it should be quite easy to divide films into two groups – representing pro-republican (Irish) and pro-unionist (British) narration. But it is not. The aim of this chapter is to look into these narrative patterns and to show that even though there are some dominating attitudes, their diversity is more important.

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1 This publication had been completed as a part of the project *British postwar social cinema* financed by Narodowe Centrum Nauki (2014/13/B/HS2/02638).

It is said the Troubles started in the late 1960s, with the protests against the discrimination of Catholic minority, and lasted until 1998, when the Good Friday Agreement was signed. The events that instigated this phase of conflict were the declaration of war between Irish Republican Army (IRA) and Ulster Volunteer Force and the civil rights march in Derry in October 1968 that was banned by the authorities and eventually evolved into riots. What happened next – the deployment of the British Army, the radicalisation and escalation of the terrorist actions on both sides, and the crucial events of the conflict, such as ‘Battle of Bogside’, McGurk’s bar bombing along with plenty of other bomb attacks, Bloody Sunday, brutal Shankill Butchers murders and hunger strikes in Maze prison – built not only the history of the conflict but also its mythology.

Although some British film critics, as Roy Greenslade suggests<sup>2</sup>, still may have a problem with accepting the dominating cinematic image of their country’s role in Northern Ireland as a cruel coloniser or occupant, it would be difficult to find a film – at least in more or less official circulation – that would openly support unionists’ cause or justify Britain’s politics. Even if IRA in itself is usually shown as a ruthless (even to its members) and criminal organisation, there is always a figure of a pro-republican or of an IRA member that resists the stereotype of a merciless terrorist. He (as it is always a man) feels, thinks and doubts; he ultimately doesn’t believe in violence; he is a ‘gentle gunman’<sup>3</sup> – he saves the good name and represents the real face of republicanism. IRA may be defended or condemned, but there is always some understanding for it. Which cannot be said about the loyalist paramilitaries – although they hardly ever appear on screen. The main protagonist – regardless of the national origin of the production – is nearly always Irish, or republican, or nationalist. So usually these films tell the story of an Irishman as a victim of Britain, in every meaning of this word.

But the shades of this attitude may be numerous and depending on many factors, even if its core is the same. Brian McIlroy in his publication *Shooting to Kill* argues that “prevailing visualisation of the ‘Troubles’ in drama and documentary ... is dominated by Irish nationalist and republican ideology and that the Protestant community is constantly elided by American, British and Irish filmmakers ... who prefer to accept the anti-imperialist view of Northern Ireland’s existence”<sup>4</sup>.

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2 See Roy Greenslade, “Editors as censors: the British press and films about Ireland,” *Journal of Popular British Cinema*, Vol. 3 (1954), pp. 77–92.

3 See John Hill, *Cinema and Northern Ireland: Film, Culture and Politics* (London: British Film Institute, 2006), pp. 192, 195.

4 Brian McIlroy, *Shooting to Kill: Filmmaking and the “Troubles” in Northern Ireland* (Richmond: Steveston Press, 2001), p. 11.

It's hard to disagree: cinema usually takes side of the republican cause and that is an objective observation. But writing about his growing up in Belfast, McIlroy hints at his non-Catholic background. His pro-Protestant attitude soon becomes clear – his arguments and rhetoric only confirm it. Of course, he has an unquestionable right to write in his own voice – especially that such a voice is a rare one in academic writing. But it proves, along with every account concerning films about Northern Ireland, that it is impossible to be apolitical while discussing this subject. It applies to the filmmakers too. And as this whole cinematic image seems to be rather homogenous, at least with respect to the distribution of guilt and harm, it is not that division that decides about the message, but the attitude structuring every level of the narrative.

These attitudes oscillate between the sense of wrong and the feeling of guilt associated, respectively, with the Irish and British attitudes. This pattern proves true regardless of the phase of the conflict during which particular films were made. The Irish (and/or pro-republican) attitude involves the accusation of the British authorities of their colonial cynicism. The British filmmakers admit the British guilt, but their arguments are not so much an apology to the Irish side as the condemnation of the imperial attempts of their country. The crime of imperialism, as these films say, is always a fundament of all terrorism that happens on the Northern Irish ground – no matter if it's on the republican or unionist side.

To illustrate my point, I would like to take into account a few representative films made by Irish, British or Northern Irish filmmakers and produced by Irish or British companies.

That's why I leave aside works such as *'71* (2014) directed by Frenchman Yann Demange, American hits such as *The Devil's Own* (1997) by Alan J. Pakula or genre films just exploiting the subject, such as *Resurrection Man* by Marc Evans (UK, 1998). I am interested only in these films that were made during the Troubles or directly related to them. The tone and direct slant of these films fully depend on the year of production – which is probably why there was such an outburst of films in mid-1990s, when the ceasefire came into force and the peace process seriously began. These films were part of the more or less free debate on over two decades of terror.

Although it is tempting to recognise particular films as Irish or British, it is not always possible to do this. It may be clearer if the nationality of the filmmaker is self-evident and we are sure he or she is an author fully responsible for the shape of the film, which is the case of Jim Sheridan, Neil Jordan, Mike Leigh, Ken Loach or Steve McQueen. The problems begin with co-productions whereby we have to ask a question: which producer, Irish or British, shall we consider responsible for

the overall message of the film? And what is the decisive factor concerning the provenance of the film: whether it is who is funding the film, whether what is the country of the production company or what is the nationality of the staff? And to what extent does producing the film by Irish or British institution becomes a political statement? All in all, Northern Ireland is neither Ireland nor Britain. Or maybe it is both at the same time? A similar problem emerges when we consider films made by directors who may be identified just as Northern Irish (such as Terry George, director of *Some Mother's Son*, 1996; Tom Collins, who made the Irish film *Bogwoman*, 1997; and Pearse Elliott, director of Irish/British production *The Mighty Celt*, 2005), and this kind of identity is a fragile one.

Nevertheless, every discussion about cinema and the Troubles must start with the founding myth – the *Odd Man Out* by Carol Reed (UK, 1947). This masterpiece established the whole pattern of nuanced narrative embracing ambiguity, an interplay of condemn and support, where the covert attitude opposes and dominates the overt one: we know that the main hero, Johnny, is doomed, just like his republican organisation. Still, he is the hero and the audience is somehow forced to sympathise with him, to admire his nobleness. As John Hill stresses, *Odd Man Out* established a pattern for subsequent Troubles' films in many other respects: it presents the view of the conflict based on fate rather than politics, it clashes public and private spheres, and it gives the whole story a form of classical tragedy<sup>5</sup>.

### **The Irish: a sense of wrong**

It is surprising how marginalised the political perspective is in the Troubles' films made by Irish directors. The republican/unionist conflict appears here as an internal affair, a purely social issue where the division line is drawn not between the society and the authorities but rather between two sides of the broken community. Both sectarian and nationalist natures of this division seem to be a forgotten source, not a real problem. We don't dwell on a religious matter and we are not given a rational or political cause of this conflict. What Irish films usually present is raw tribalism that has more in common with the sense of invincible fate and not with the explicable, sociopolitical and in consequence economic problem. This kind of attitude is particularly clear in *Cal* (1984) by Pat O'Connor. The dual nature of tribal conflict helps to give the film the structure of a classical tragedy. In *Cal* – directed by an Irishman but financed by a British company – an IRA member, Cal (John Lynch), falls in love with the Catholic wife (Helen Mirren)

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5 Hill, *Cinema and Northern Ireland*, p. 191.

of a Protestant policeman assassinated by him. There are no clear motives, this initial killing has no substantial meaning; it is just an incident that serves as an explanation for the impossibility of the love story. The military conflict or IRA causes are just an obstruction, a curse – Cal doesn't seem to believe in anything, he's bored and apathetic. And the failure of this love affair is not a question of sectarian, class or national differences – it's all about destiny and violence, inevitably interrelated. And it is the question of living in Northern Ireland: this place is tantamount to destiny, you can't escape or change it.

This bleak and firm conviction starts to melt down during the peace process, in mid-1990s. The social division is still overwhelming, but the films express a more optimistic attitude. Although *In the Name of the Father*, based on the true story of false accusations and imprisonment of 'Guildford Four' supposedly responsible for a pub bombing, is set in the middle of 1970s, its message is closely related to the climate of the 1990s. Sheridan's attitude is not yet conciliatory – not until *The Boxer* – it mercilessly accuses Britain and calls for justice. But at the same time, it says that the peace process must involve an honest settling of accounts between both sides: Great Britain and IRA. The main protagonists – Gerry Conlon and his father, Giuseppe (Daniel Day-Lewis and Pete Postlethwaite) – are the victims of both IRA and British authorities. The visibility of Britain's law system adds to the political character of Sheridan's film, but it is the emotional load of the family relations that decides about the film's impact. And again, it is politics that seals the heroes' destiny. And the figure of 'family' serves as a symbol for the whole Northern Irish society: it is broken by injustice and politics, both on IRA's and British side. As McIlroy stresses<sup>6</sup>, and as the very title suggests, it is the father figure that is the fundamental subject of this film. Who should the republican Belfast boy rely on? A maniac IRA commander, British authority or Giuseppe, his biological father, straight and upright, a Catholic victim of an exploiting and discriminating system? Proving the convicted innocent certifies both the moral authority of Giuseppe and the innocence of the republican cause. They become synonymous. It is not the republicanism that has to be abandoned, but the methods of terrorists.

*Some Mother's Son* (1996) by George (formerly involved with the Irish National Liberation Army)<sup>7</sup> also uses a family melodrama structure. And again, strictly political matters and tensions, this time the infamous hunger strikes of the republican prisoners in British prison, are mapped onto a family dilemmas and, as

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6 See McIlroy, *Shooting to Kill*, pp. 76–77.

7 George co-wrote his film with Jim Sheridan and is also a co-screenwriter of *In the Name of the Father* and the screenwriter of *The Boxer*.

a result, the film's articulation of ceasefire politics is subordinated to the modes of family and romantic melodrama with which it is interwoven<sup>8</sup>. This subordination doesn't mean the political stance is weakened in any way. Quite the contrary – the emotional impact of family distress gives the political attitude more strength. In *Some Mother's Son*, we watch a 'mother and son' relationship, with the mother becoming an ideologically, religiously and emotionally tinted symbol of both Mother of Christ and Mother Ireland. The strikers are almost invisible here, being vehicles for the tragedy of their mothers: Annie (Fionnula Flanagan), politically committed and fiercely supporting her son, and Kathleen (Helen Mirren), shocked by the very fact her child is into politics (or terrorism). To Kathleen, the biggest challenge is to understand and accept her son's choice and, as a consequence, to make a stand about the political struggle as well. Again, director's target is both the IRA and British justice, the latter, however, being the real source of violence. IRA appears here as both a uniting force and a threat to the local community. The difference in attitudes of Annie and Kathleen has class foundations and that tackles an important question: whose issue is the republican cause, middle or working class? In her everyday life, Kathleen, a middle-class woman, avoids the Troubles by pretending they don't exist. Annie's family experiences worse discrimination as being the lower class and Catholic at once. As such, it is more politically informed and radical. But the activities and causes of IRA are almost erased – it is not important what the strikers are accused of. They are not victims but martyrs, and this aspect is underlined by a clear Christ-like appearance of the inmates, especially the strikers' leader, Bobby Sands (John Lynch). In this light, Kathleen gains the status of Mother of Christ, with one difference: she won't let her son die and will take him out of strike. This failed martyrdom has a political and religious meaning – Ireland wants to have her children alive, regardless of IRA or Britain. That's the first step to reconciliation.

This new conciliatory tone is dominating in *The Boxer*, made in 1997, while the peace process reached full speed. As a repetition of a *Romeo and Juliet* structure, with lovers divided by the conflict (although both are on republican side), it can be compared to *Cal*. But here the main hero, Danny (Daniel Day-Lewis), is – in contrast with Cal – a committed and active one. This development of the protagonist may reflect the change of time: Cal was passive as he couldn't see any future for him and his love, while Danny is in the midst of the transformation of Northern Ireland and he wants to be a part of this process. It is symptomatic

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8 Hill, *Cinema and Northern Ireland*, p. 203.

that Britain is almost completely eliminated from this image, as if success of the ceasefire was solely the question of internal affairs.

Just like in McIlroy's observation, not only Britain is eradicated in these films, but also the Protestant side of the conflict, unexpressed and invisible. That gives an unjust impression that the Troubles concern only Catholics and republicans with victims being only on this side. There are exceptions – such as *Nothing Personal* (1995) made by an Irishman, Thaddeus O'Sullivan, as it gives a double portrait of both communities. But still it is just an addition, a completion of the predetermined picture, suggesting a need for a community agreement without offering an opportunity to tell a different story.

### **The British: the sense of guilt**

Regardless of the official stand of their country, British filmmakers have never justified British military presence in Northern Ireland. It is worth debating for and to whom they direct their films. Is there an internal accusation of home authorities, an anti-imperialistic outcry or an expression of atonement or compensation for all injustice and harm done? Ken Loach in *Hidden Agenda* (1990), Paul Greengrass in *Bloody Sunday* (2002), Steve McQueen in *Hunger* (2008) – all of these are not much on republican or Irish side as they are fiercely against the British forces. *Contact* (1985) and *Elephant* (1989) by Alan Clarke are more puzzling cases, as they seem to distillate the very essence of the conflict. It is striking though how British filmmakers, in contrast to the Irish, avoid the private perspective to give way to a more political view.

The exception is Mike Leigh's *Four Days in July* (1984), a rare attempt at describing down-to-earth existence of Catholics and Protestants. Leigh shows two couples expecting babies – and the delivery date is estimated for the vulnerable days of Northern Irish community: 12th of July is the day of the Protestant parade commemorating the 1688 victory of William of Orange over the Catholic king in Battle of Boyne. During the Troubles, this annual parade often resulted in riots. In Leigh's film, despite the focus on the ordinariness of everyday life, the conflict marks everything – it's in the Catholics' small talk of life in prison and injuries suffered during the bomb attacks, and in distasteful anecdotes of Protestant soldiers about the border patrols. It is also in the narrative structure as Leigh divides the plot between two families letting them meet only in the final scene when babies are born. There is no space for peace or understanding: the children will be given purely Irish or British names, symbolically carrying the war to another generation. But equality in showing two sides doesn't reflect in director's attitude; while the Catholic couple is warm and tender for each other,

their Protestant counterparts are cold and distanced. It is easy to believe this difference stems from the political and social tensions.

The film that is entirely concerned with politics is *Hidden Agenda*. Here, in contrast with the Irish cinema, the republican voice is used as a trigger for unveiling the scheming of high-profile British politicians (Loach leads the source of terrorism straight to Margaret Thatcher herself). An American couple, civil rights activists Ingrid Jessner (Frances McDormand) and Paul Sullivan (Brad Dourif) investigate the methods used by the British authorities when interrogating republican prisoners. Just after closing the case, Paul dies in an ambush, while being driven to an IRA quarters and carrying a tape with testimonies dangerous for the British state. Loach leaves out the love affair and IRA issues to focus on the British politics that has the power to break every resistance. *Hidden Agenda* is a political fiction drama; the events depicted cannot be taken as facts, but the mechanisms are indicated by Loach as believable and realistic.

Films by Greengrass and McQueen are based on true stories – and the ones that are the most susceptible of myth-making. *Bloody Sunday* recalls the events that took place in Derry, 30 January 1972, when 26 civilians were shot by British forces during the civil rights march. Greengrass uses the convention of the documentary style, covering 24 hours of this ill-fated day. The protesters were Catholic, but their leader, MP Ivan Cooper (James Nesbitt) was a Protestant. What we see here is a bleak, detailed re-enactment of the events, with the chaos, horror and disbelief that accompanied them. Greengrass makes his style austere, but he cannot escape aestheticisation of image and, in consequence, the whole story. The disorder in the frame builds the tension but the good/bad division drawn here is clear. It is the conflict between British and Northern Irish, with the result already determined. The juxtaposition of personal tragedies with the uniformed military actions only deepens the feeling of guilt. But the soldiers have human faces too, and just like in Irish films, republicans were the victims of both IRA and British authorities; here these army boys are victims of their government, thrown in a war they don't really understand or accept. Greengrass' usage of documentary convention somehow legitimises his vision of Bloody Sunday. The ending credits informing the audience reporting the legal actions after this 'Bogside Massacre' and informing that British army bore no consequences for this operation give this depiction a powerful credibility.

While McQueen comes back to the historical events as well, he goes away as far as he can from any documentary convention. To some extent, *Hunger* recreates the 1981 dirt and hunger strikes, but its idea is to re-imagine the horror of it and not to bring back sheer facts. In contrast to George using the strike as an excuse for the universal narrative, McQueen focuses on it entirely, showing in hypnotising,



visually sophisticated frames, and shots all the sensual and physical aspects of dirt protests and of suffering hunger. But here Bobby Sands is not the one known from the imagery spread in republican mythology. With the face and body of Michael Fassbender, he becomes a modern, universal figure, taken out from the historical context. But Greengrass, although distancing himself from political accusation, repeats George's strategy in one respect – torture and dying of Bobby Sands is presented like in *The Passion of the Christ* and this trope determines the meaning of *Hunger*. The camera caresses every wound, worships the weakening and finally deceasing Sands' body, fitting perfectly in the religious imaginary of republican martyrdom.

McQueen's film is entirely visual, with almost no dialogues. There is, however, one scene set in the middle of the film, breaking this coherence and establishing the centre of gravity. It is the conversation between Sands and the priest, explaining the motivation, consciousness and consequences of the striker's decision of starving himself to death. The reductive minimalism of the set adds to the intensity of words. This dialogue has also religious undertones – in both content and form (Bobby's tale as a parable). It echoes a similar moment from *Odd Man Out* when Jimmy's girlfriend talks to the priest expressing firmly her stance about Jimmy and the doomed fate of the Organisation's cause. McQueen's film may be seen as incoherent and too formalistic<sup>9</sup>, but it accomplishes an important aim: it attributes the republican cause with a dignity of an almost mystical nature.

In the films by Alan Clarke, there is no dignity at all either in the terrorism or in the fight against it. Clarke, quite surprisingly, given his social realist background, moves towards somehow experimental minimalism. *Contact*, an adaptation of a once controversial book by Anthony (AFN) Clarke, depicts the routine of British border patrols in Northern Ireland. The director abandons most of the narrative communicativeness of the book leaving just sheer repetitiveness of tours and hunting for unnamed enemy – local terrorists. Narrative information is radically reduced – the dialogue is scarce, we know nothing about the reason of this hunt or psychological motivation of the soldiers. The result is the sense of complete alienation and danger, the reification of fight. This almost behavioural depiction of conflict – from the British perspective – results in a painful question: what is this absurdity about and what are these people (British soldiers) doing here? This question relates both to the narrative and to the conflict in general. *Elephant* is even more radical as it rejects any narrative. It shows eighteen executions carried by unspecified terrorists – the film consists only of walking and killing, shocking

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9 See Tony Rayns, "Hunger," *Sight&Sound*, Vol. 18, No. 11 (2008), p. 63.

in their dull repetitiveness, with no commentary in words or images. The last execution breaks the pattern and wakes up the hypnotised viewer unexpectedly building up an ambiguity of interpretation. Clarke avoids any clear attitude, he's just giving the visual material – the viewers have to decide for themselves.

## Other voices

All of these films were directed by men. And although sometimes they focus on women's experience, the frame perspective is always male. There are a few exceptions though: one of them may be Margo Harkin's *Hush-a-Bye Baby* (1990), a story about a pregnant teenage girl whose boyfriend is serving a sentence in a British prison. But it is *Maeve* (1983) directed by Pat Murphy that expresses not only female but also a feminist point of view. It doesn't mean the film is didactic in any sense – there is no edifying immediacy here. Murphy presents life in its fluency – *as a series of contradictions, choices, a process of engagement and work*<sup>10</sup>. She engages various modes of storytelling, equalising life experience with storytelling itself and opening the film structure; the present, the past, reality and myths, all of them entwined. Maeve leaves Belfast and leaves the Troubles. She is haunted by it, but her stance is firm – the conflict is something external, and she opposes it by rejecting any participation in it. That forms her feminism and distinguishes her from typical imagining of a woman in Troubles' narratives as a 'mother of us all'<sup>11</sup>. This kind of feminism is inevitable as there is a *total lack of common ground or space for interaction between republican interests and the feminist cause*<sup>12</sup>.

As most of the Troubles' films focus on the conflict, there is only one, I suppose, that gives all attention to the place itself. In *I am Belfast* (2015), a film essay by Mark Cousins, Belfast is an elderly woman talking with the director and showing him her own space, independent and proud, though traumatised. Although Cousins' work isn't specifically about the Troubles, it lies in the centre of the story as the time of destruction for both the place and the community. What is more important, Cousins, born in Belfast, seems to be the only director that restrains from indicating the guilty side and says: we do it to ourselves. Like in the scene when She-Belfast tells the story of how birds were eating human flesh scattered on the streets after the bombing. She is asking: are we just meat for each other? It's not about the reconciliation, it's about the communal therapy.

10 Janet Hawken, "Maeve," *Undercut*, No. 6 (1982–1983), p. 8.

11 See Hill, *Cinema and Northern Ireland*, pp. 236–242.

12 Hawken, "Maeve," p. 9.

This tone of *I am Belfast* may be possible in 2015, when the narrative of the Troubles is in a way closed and the new one, concerning life after the conflict, opens up. One may expect these new accounts would be equally traumatic as the earlier ones, for both the Irish and the British, and especially for the Northern Irish community. The lack of military conflict doesn't mean the end of the Troubles. The violence was, paradoxically, offering a meaning of life for so many. The new essence is still in the process of emerging and needs new ways of cinematic imagining.

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### 3. Are they terrorists or victims? Basque cinema, violence and memory

**Abstract:** Basque cinema from the last decade has apparently neglected political conflict and recent violence. The film *Lasa eta Zabala* (2014), by Pablo Malo, is one of the exceptional cases in which Basque recent violent past is revisited on-screen. Starting in 1983, it tells the real story of two young ETA (Euskadi Ta Askatasuna) militants who are refugees in the French Basque Country and are soon to become the first two official victims of the GAL (Grupos Antiterroristas de Liberacion), the state-sponsored death squad that killed 27 people between 1983 and 1987. Lasa and Zabala were kidnapped, tortured for months, and then executed and buried. *Lasa eta Zabala* engages with a difficult topic, since it tells the story of two victims that were originally – and according to the official memory – terrorists, and their executioners were *civil guards*, the police force that was for years ETA's primary target.

Based on an in-depth interview with the screenwriter, in this chapter, I present *Lasa eta Zabala* as a flawed contribution toward a historical memory. Knowing the controversial material they are dealing with, screenwriter and director deploy different strategies to make their film less inflammatory, but the result is incoherent and confusing. As many authors (Labanyi, Crumbaugh, and Verdery) have noted when reflecting on the Spanish civil war and Franco regime's victims, *Lasa eta Zabala* also decontextualizes political violence, emphasizing the role of the victims, but at the end it ends up being too cautious to really go into the reasons and consequences of these brutal acts.

**Keywords:** Cinema, memory, terrorism, victims, Basque conflict

#### Basque cinema and historical memory

In the last decade, Basque cinema has emerged and bloomed. After 12 years of silence, *Aupa Etxebeste!* [*Hooray for Etxebeste!*] (2005), a comedy shot integrally in Basque language, was released with notable audience success, prompting a humble but steady production flux of Basque films. Coincidentally, the first years of the twenty-first century have also opened a new political cycle in the Basque Country, after the much-awaited decision of separatist group ETA (Euskadi Ta Askatasuna) to put an end to decades of violence. This context has put a new political focus on the necessity of some sort of “grand narrative” to help Basque society understand and remember its violent past.

It could be expected that these two circumstances – a revitalized Basque cinema and a symbolic battle over the past – would somehow overlap, with films contributing to the task of a narrative-building about the past. However, this is only partially true. Compared to the effervescent post-Franco era in which a thriving cinema industry engaged with a nation-building intent via subsidized cinema (Stone and Rodriguez, 2015: 64), Basque cinema of the twenty-first century has changed its focus and style. On the one hand, the use of Basque language is for the first time in history regular and more natural now. On the other hand, these new films have shifted “its discourse from the violence that marks so much earlier Basque cinema to class, gender, and sexual struggles,”<sup>1</sup> and in general, they have not shown a great interest in the conflictive and violent past.

Indeed, reflection on the Basque conflict has been present in documentary films but it is scarce when it comes to fiction movies. Actually the two more successful films of this last decade of Basque cinema are a comedy: the aforementioned *Aupa Etxebeste!*, which still holds the box office record among Basque-speaking films, and an exquisite drama – *Loreak [Flowers]*–, which along with a general critical acclaim was submitted to the Oscars race representing Spain in 2015.

Stone and Rodriguez have pointed at a shift from a *cinema of citizens* to a *cinema of sentiment*,<sup>2</sup> following a global trend that diffuses nationhood – and therefore the nation-building role of cinema – and highlights personhood. As they put it, “contemporary Basque cinema is a cinema of sentiment in which the Basqueness of the protagonist is a detail that does not determine the events of the film.”<sup>3</sup>

However, in this chapter, I would like to discuss a particular film that can be considered an exception inside this new wave of Basque cinema, and indeed an exception to this *cinema of sentiment*. That film is *Lasa eta Zabala*, a 2014 movie written by Joanes Urkixo and directed by Pablo Malo.

*Lasa eta Zabala* can be considered an exception; first from a genre perspective, because this film is a legal thriller based on an actual violent episode. Thriller is perhaps the most neglected genre in this new wave of Basque cinema, more inclined to produce comedies, dramas, and documentaries. But more importantly, as *Lasa eta Zabala* is set in the 1980s and 1990s, it can be considered a historical film, a movie that openly seeks to contribute to the debate about memory of the recent violent past in the Basque Country.

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1 José Colmeiro, Joseba Gabilondo, “Negotiating the local and the global,” in *A Companion to Spanish Cinema*, eds. Jo Labanyi and Tatiana Pavlović (Oxford: Blackwell Publishing Ltd., 2012), pp. 94.

2 Colmeiro, Gabilondo, “Negotiating the local,” p. 9.

3 Colmeiro, Gabilondo, “Negotiating the local,” p. 10.

The film tells the actual and well-known story of two young ETA militants who became the first victims of the GAL (Grupos Antiterroristas de Liberacion), the state-sponsored death squad that killed 27 people in the 1980s. In October 1983, Joxean Lasa and Josi Zabala, who were political refugees in the French Basque Country, were kidnapped by civil guards, tortured, and then executed. Their bodies, buried in southern Spain, were not identified until the mid-nineties.

Some authors have described Basque cinema of previous decades as sympathetic to ETA (de Pablo, 2014: 200), linked to the social support that the group still held in the post-Franco time. This support declined dramatically over the years,<sup>4</sup> and now that ETA is politically and morally defeated, Lasa and Zabala's scandalous case is a difficult topic to engage with: it tells the story of two victims that were originally, and according to the official narrative, *terrorists*.

And this difficulty, I would contend, is one that the filmmakers have not been able to resolve satisfactorily. Based on an in-depth interview with the screenwriter and promoter of the film, Joanes Urkixo,<sup>5</sup> together with a film analysis, I will try to explain why I think *Lasa eta Zabala* is, sadly enough, a flawed contribution to historical memory, drawing on three main reasons: ideological and stylistic discrepancies between screenwriter and director, a desire to avoid any controversy, and an excessive emphasis on the figure of the victim. By doing so, my goal is to exemplify why Basque conflict and the project for a historical memory via cinema is still a challenging and largely uncompleted mission.

## Two episodes, two sides, two views

The project of bringing this terrible story to the screen was first conceived by screenwriter Joanes Urkixo as a two-episode miniseries, but EitB (Euskal Irrati Telebista), the Basque Public Broadcasting Group, requested a film after the project was pitched. According to the screenwriter, the original idea would count with two main characters. In the first episode, the main character would be Jesús García, an actual police officer who promoted the investigation about two bodies that would be later identified as those of Lasa and Zabala's. The second episode would be led by Iñigo, based on the actual lawyer Iñigo Iruin, who ran the

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4 Rafael Leonisio, Raúl López, "Between fear, indignation and indifference. Basque public opinion and socio-political behavior facing terrorism," in *ETA's Terrorist Campaign: From Violence to Politics, 1968–2015*, eds. Rafael Leonisio, Fernando Molina, and Diego Muro (Oxford: Routledge, 2017), p. 148.

5 This interview took place in Bilbao, 14 July 2015, and was later completed via e-mail and phone.

investigation and trial of the murders. Once converted into a full-length film, the actual protagonist happens to be Iñigo, the lawyer, while Jesus García only leads a couple of scenes at the beginning. I contend that both characters are actually one, namely, the impersonation of justice and integrity. Just in case we miss the point, both have extremely similar and explicit conversations at two different points of the film.

When Jesus García exits the judge's office, after convincing him to open the case for the found bodies in Alicante, he is confronted by a civil guard. According to this man, García is working in favor of those who would not "hesitate to shoot us both if they had the chance." And when he asks: "Which side are you on?," García replies: "on the side of justice and duty, and so you should be, in case you've forgotten." Also Iñigo the lawyer, later on, has a similar conversation with Fede, his assistant, about the convenience of making a witness commit perjury to win the case. But Fede states, and Iñigo concurs, that breaking the law that way is behaving like *them*, those who have committed terrible crimes. Their *side* is that of justice, not revenge.

In both conversations, the idea of the two sides is stressed. But these two sides are not ETA versus GAL, or terrorists versus law enforcement, nor even freedom militants versus corrupt police officers, but rather, justice versus injustice. According to this idea, Iñigo and officer García are on the same side, despite the fact that they are in different contexts, have different ideologies, and even speak different languages. In other words, Iñigo defends ETA militants in court and Jesús García is a police authority fighting ETA, but both are, according to the film, on the same side, since both are working for justice.

This idea, although politically correct, seems at odds with the historical context in which the film is set, and it is actually denied by another sequence of the film, that is, the opening scene. This pre-credit scene is set in 2013 and represents Lasa and Zabala's sisters, now middle-aged, being interviewed in the radio. The radio presenter brings out the "sides" issues, but he does it this way: "Thirty years are gone since the killing of your brothers and now it seems possible for victims of *both sides* to come together and share experiences" [the emphasis is mine]. And the actress who impersonates Pili Zabala, insists on the same idea: "All of us, from *both sides*, have justified many injustices."

So there were actually two sides, but they were not the justice/injustice sides that Iñigo and Jesús desired for, but rather two sides *at war*, justifying and committing injustices equally, according to the radio interview that opens the film.

This radio interview with the victims' sisters is short and only appears before the credits. It is set in the present, unlike the rest of the film; its style and pace



differ from the other thriller-like scenes; and the characters never appear again. It is certainly a strange sequence, but the screenwriter explained me the reasons. In the original script, the relevance of this interview was much bigger. It was actually the common thread of the film, and it was through the voices of the sisters that the actions unfolded. But the director, Pablo Malo, disagreed with this narrative device and reduced the radio interview to one short scene that would work only as an epilogue. In the last moment, while editing, he decided to make it a prologue instead.

The radio interview was one of the many issues in which the director's and screenwriter's views collided. As it ended being, the radio interview is incoherent inside this film, not only formally but also ideologically, as the different approach to the "both sides" issue shows.

The differences between the director and the screenwriter can be boiled down to one: their aims were different. Always according to the Urkixo, "reconciliation was not Pablo's fight, he always saw the film as a thriller, period." That's why the radio interview and its explicit and ideological message bothered Pablo Malo. He wanted to build a pure thriller, without sending further political messages.

Sticking to the facts did not seem difficult, since, apart from all the necessary elements (violence, conspiracies, seeking of justice by heroes, etc.), this case was one of the very few state terrorism cases that was trialed, and it is therefore very well documented.

## The judicial truth as a half lie

The judicial record of the case was actually one of the main reasons to pick up this story. According to Urkixo, the trial and the sentences were some kind of "safety net" they counted on, since they were going to put on the table a very sensitive and therefore controversial topic. Pablo Malo himself has repeated in every interview that the film is based "on facts proven, judged, and ratified by international courts."<sup>6</sup>

The fear is understandable since the attacks that director Julio Medem faced when he released *La pelota vasca, la piel contra la piedra* (2003), a documentary about the Basque conflict, were still fresh in the memory. Medem's film, which portrayed not only ETA victims, but also GAL and torture victims, was fiercely attacked by right-wing parties, many media outlets, and some ETA victims' associations, including boycotts, demonstrations, and petitions of withdrawal from the San Sebastian International Film Festival<sup>7</sup>.

6 Rocío García, "Lasa y Zabala, la polémica llega al cine" *El País*, 14 September 2014.

7 Stone, Rob. *Julio Medem*. Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2007. P. 229

To understand this hysteria, it is worth bringing up an idea that Justin Crumbaugh has posed in a different context, that of the Francoist victims in contemporary Spain. That idea is that victims are used as a means of disqualifying opponents' agendas. ETA victims and their political use are a great example of this symbolic dispute. For the Spanish right-wing party, the Partido Popular (PP), ETA victims "have been the perfect tool to transpose historical culpability (from Franco to ETA)."<sup>8</sup> Therefore, when "Franco's victims become publicly constituted as victims, they implicitly enter into an imagined dialogue with the victims of ETA."<sup>9</sup>

If Franco's victims are a potential challenge to the conservative monopoly over victimhood itself, the question becomes even trickier when it comes to ETA militants who are themselves victims of state terrorism. This was the kind of challenge that a film like *Lasa eta Zabala* might have posed and the danger the filmmakers feared. After all the film flips the victim/terrorist roles: the victims of this case are ETA militants, and they are kidnapped, tortured, and made disappeared by civil guards, historically, the police force that has been a prime target for ETA. That is why the film is so cautious. They stick to the judicial record and rely on the new peace scenario we live in today for a pacific release of the film, a scenario that Medem could not count on when he premiered his risky film.

The screenwriter always knew that he was going to base his story on the judicial record. And he stuck to his decision rigidly. Consequently, outside the judicial truth there is nothing: no interpretation, no speculation, and no wider context. At the end, only one moral message: every victim of every political violence is a victim from the same side, the evil side.

And it is precisely under these two premises: to speak only about what was proved in court and the mantra that "every victim is equal" that the film loses consistency and coherence. It seems quite obvious to say this but the judicial truth is only one part of reality, it can only refer to the facts that were proved and ratified, and when presented isolated, as the film does, they sometimes become incomprehensible, if not bizarre. Many things could not be proved then. The most palpable one is the question about the involvement of the government in the creation, funding, and promotion of the GAL. In the film, Galindo, the infamous colonel in charge of the death squad, tells his men, before committing the crimes: "we've received an order from the government of the nation." And then he repeats: "keep in mind that we work with official backup, we're working with a safety net here."

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8 Justin Crumbaugh, "Are we all (still) Miguel Ángel Blanco? Victimhood, the media afterlife, and the challenge for historical memory," *Hispanic Review*, Vol. 75, No. 4 (2007), p. 368.

9 Crumbaugh, "Are we all (still) Miguel Ángel Blanco?," p. 367.

But this is the only reference to a government responsibility for the crimes, the rest of the film avoids this question in a disconcerting way. At one point of the lawyer's investigation, Iñigo is working on a blackboard, trying to build a pyramid of the death squad organization. On top of it, there is a big X. In the final version of the script, as the screenwriter told me, this X had some relevance, and Iñigo referred to it with the next line: "It's too high, I cannot reach it." But during the shooting, and based on atrezzo problems, the director decided to suppress that line and the X is almost imperceptible for the viewer. This X is important because it is a direct reference to Mr. X, as the media and the popular imaginary knew Felipe González, the former president of Spain (1982–1996). Although it remains a mystery today who the person on top of the GAL was, many point their fingers to González, and this case, together with other corruption scandals, costed him his position in 1996.

But, in the film, besides Galindo's initial words and the discreet X on the blackboard, the film sidesteps the question of the government connection with the crimes in a rather cautious way.

I would like to argue that with this blatant omission, the film becomes incomprehensible for a viewer without previous knowledge about it. According to the story we see on-screen, some civil guards are chosen to "stab ETA on the neck" but they must do it outside the law. The reason for it is never explained. At one point Galindo describes the task ahead: "we need to go to France and do the same things we do here but not legally, because that is not possible." From this line one could infer that in Spain it is actually legal to kidnap, torture, and execute someone, making the body disappear afterward. In the film, the role of France is never explained, and we never learn why Lasa and Zabala have, together with other comrades, refugee status in the neighbor country.

Surprisingly enough, once atrocities are committed – the film is quite explicit in this respect – the state responds according to the law, even though it has been suggested that the state is behind the crimes. There are some aggressions and threats to witnesses, and also a bomb is sent to Iñigo the lawyer, an incident in which his assistant Fede dies; but all these acts are committed by civil guards individually. On the part of the state, there is no pressure, no refusing to collaborate, and the film also forgets the eloquent fact that Colonel Galindo was promoted to general in 1995 by the González government, when he was already on the spot for this case.

The response of the state, as represented in this film, seems nothing but democratic and exemplary. That is why there is another scene that looks, again, quite out of this context. I am referring here to the scene at the cemetery.

After 12 years missing, the bodies of Lasa and Zabala finally return home for a proper burial. Family and friends await at the gates of the cemetery. A strong police detachment guards the gates. Tension grows as orders arrive saying that only close relatives can enter the cemetery. There are insults and protests, and although Iñigo tries to mediate for a peaceful resolution, finally the police baton charges people gathered around the cemetery.

Even though this is not a key scene from a narrative point of view, I think it is very telling of the limitations of the film. Isolated from its political and social context, only showing patches of chaos and violence and with a poor *mise-en-scène*, it is a great example of how the representation of a past incident can be completely ahistorical, if the connections between facts and acts are never explained. One cannot help but see the director's reluctance in the poor way the cemetery scene is directed. Again, for the viewer with no previous knowledge of the case, it is difficult to understand why the Basque autonomous police is attacking the families gathered for such a tragic occasion. This is the consequence of omitting the context of political tension and violence of the 1990s in the Basque Country, in which the Basque police was "dealing with a low-intensity war."<sup>10</sup> Regarding the *mise-en-scène*, although we see the date of the incident on screen – June 1996 – actors and extras are shot wearing heavy coats and the atmosphere is nothing but gray and obviously wintery. Just a small detail that reveals the sloppy way the scene is directed.

Finally, and as a relative "happy ending" for the hero, Iñigo, the sentences are very high for the civil guards involved. Iñigo takes the sentence to the cemetery, where Fede is buried. Iñigo has had to pay a high token, but, as it is suggested for a moment, justice has been lastly done. But wait, just before the final credits roll up, Iñigo's voice-over recalls that Bayo and Dorado, as authors, only served 6 years of the 67 they were convicted, and Galindo and Elgorriaga, convicted as instigators to 75 years in prison, only served 4 and 1 years each. Who reduced their sentences and why? The film does not talk about it.

## Are all victims equal?

The movie tells us very little about Lasa and Zabala. There are a couple of scenes at the beginning in which we see the two young men in their daily routine as political refugees in the French Basque Country. Their connection to ETA is never explained. In reality, the only action Lasa and Zabala took as ETA members was an attempt to rob a bank. Apart from this first minutes of the film, we only see Lasa

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10 Paddy Woodworth, *Dirty War, Clean Hands: ETA, the GAL and Spanish Democracy* (New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 2002), p. 285.

and Zabala as victims. They are violently kidnapped, savagely tortured, and then driven 800 km in the trunk of a car to be, on arrival, shot in the head and buried in quicklime. The representation of these events is explicit, to the point that Lasa and Zabala's parents were prevented from watching the film.

Of course, if we only read this film as a thriller, we do not really need to know much more about the victims, they are there so evil can deploy its power, and they also give the hero a motive to pursue justice. From a historical memory perspective, however, I think showing Lasa and Zabala's terrible suffering is not enough. The problem here is to fall into the kind of issues that Crumbaugh identified when talking about Franco victims, some kind of contest to determine who suffered more and who consequently deserves our memory and attention. In this macabre contest, the film tries to suggest that there is a tie. Everybody suffered, all this was a nonsense, and it is good that we have moved on. This is more or less the message we get from the radio interview. That is why I think the film leans toward what historian Ricard Vinyes has described as *simple ecumenism*. Simple ecumenism suggests that every dead, tortured, and offended are equal. This being empirically true, turns out to be useless and disconcerting from a historical perspective. According to this vision, the war is "a bunch of confrontation techniques and not the prolongation of social and political relations."

With the idea of both sides – justice and injustice, those who commit crimes and those who suffer them – the film falls into the *simple ecumenism* described by Vinyes. The story focuses on the victims, the two young boys, but we know nothing about them besides their victim roles. Occasionally, we also see other victims fall: there are seven references to ETA crimes during the film, and we see how the GAL also kills other refugees in the French Basque Country, following the confessions made by Lasa and Zabala during torture. The opening credits, with a Hitchcockian touch, refer to the "years of lead," as the deadliest years of ETA are known: they show car explosions, chaos, and street violence. But everything appears mixed on-screen, lacking any connection or interpretative intent.

This ideological asepsis might very well be interpreted as lack of courage. Reality reminds us that not all victims are equal, or at least not all victims are treated equally. In the summer of 2015, a Spanish court ratified the Ministry of Interior's decision to refuse compensation to GAL victims if they had themselves participated in organized crime. On the same line, only a few months earlier, a pacifist event that was going to take place in the Congress of Spain, and in which victims of ETA and GAL were going to take part together, was vetoed by the two main political parties, PP (Partido Popular) and PSOE (Partido Socialista Obrero Español). Even more recently, the unstable identity of GAL victims was

put on the table at prime time: during a televised debate prior to the last Basque Government elections, in September 2016, Pili Zabala, one of Zabala's sisters and now running for *lehendakari* (president of the Basque government) was denied her victim condition by another candidate, that of the PP, Alfonso Alonso. This tense anecdote – Zabala sent Alonso a frosty stare that made him babble – was the highlight of the TV debate, profusely commented on social media and discussed by every political party.

## Conclusion

It is obvious that the film dealt with a highly inflammable material, even from a contemporary perspective. Unfortunately, the attempt ended up caught in its own contradictions and limitations.

The alleged intention of both producer and screenwriter was to send “a political message of memory and reconciliation.” But at the same time, they commissioned the project to a director known for his thrillers and his ideological neutrality. “We chose him because he was not politically marked” said Urkixo. Predictably, this director reduced the political content and emphasized the thriller tone of the story, but let the story halfway. If it is a thriller, there are many avoidable scenes – like the radio interview –, if it really wants to talk about historical memory, a wider context is required. But screenwriter's and director's erratic movements to reach a compromise decontextualized violence and isolated this particular case, making a poor contribution to historical memory, and also, if I might say, a poor thriller.

But there is a problem in the original script as well: strictly sticking to the judicial record narrows the focus so much that many of the narrated things seem incomprehensible, if not grotesque.

I believe that our violent past deserves more audacity and more confidence in a mature viewer, a viewer able to understand that, beyond all the respect that any victim deserves, contextualizing and establishing connections does not mean to justify violence. As I see it, a more audacious approach would have been an invitation to a deeper reflection on violence, its causes and consequences.

The new wave of Basque cinema is focusing on making more personal films and, with the mentioned exceptions, sidestepping the question of historical memory/memories. I suspect there is some kind of exhaustion behind this artistic trend: Basque conflict has been an overwhelming and suffocating issue for too many decades in the Basque Country. But there is also a limit to freedom of speech, and controversy will haunt every film that defies the official narrative. But controversy, even boycott, is a danger that requires courage. We need to come to terms with the fact that denial or self-censorship will not be the path to follow. As Jo Labanyi has stated

when speaking about the Francoist victims, “there is no one historical memory but rather a conflict of memories.”<sup>11</sup> The same goes for the Basque conflict. Cinema should acknowledge this conflict of memories, not refuse it, if it wishes to become an agent of the project for a sincere historical memory and a true reconciliation.

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## 4. A traditional stereotype for modern Spanish politics: The Basque pro-independence coalition Herri Batasuna and its depiction in cinema

**Abstract:** This chapter shows an approach to national stereotypes in the Basque Country, through four different films. It analyses how the pro-independence coalition Herri Batasuna (People's Unity) was portrayed in films in which their plots took place in the 1980s. We propose that its characterisation is ruralised, traditional and irrational, and is built in connection with the new Spanish modern-democratic identity, as its opposite pole.

**Keywords:** National identities, cinema stereotypes, Basque nationalism, 1980s

The aim of this chapter is to propose an interpretation about how the Basque cinema has dealt with national stereotypes in the Basque Country. For that purpose, we will analyse how the Basque pro-independence coalition Herri Batasuna (People's Unity) has been portrayed in four different films.

Herri Batasuna was formed in 1978, opposed to the approval of the Spanish Constitution. Three years after Franco's death, the Constitution was negotiated among the former Francoist government and the opposition parties that were elected in June 1977. It established the continuity of the Francoist monarchy, the Army, police forces and administration, but assured the multi-party election system and the human and civil rights.

Herri Batasuna characterised the very same Constitution as anti-Basque and anti-workers, arguing that it did not accept Basque people's right for self-determination and that it declared capitalism as the only possible economic system. From the beginning, Herri Batasuna assumed a violent campaign of ETA (Euskadi Ta Askatasuna, Basque Country and Freedom) and supported armed organisation's militants and prisoners.

ETA was an armed organisation founded in 1959. During Francoism, influenced by Cypriot and Algerian independence, and Cuban Revolution, they pretended to encourage a revolutionary mass movement towards an independent and socialist Basque Country. After Franco's death, ETA escalated its killing action, in search for what they called a real breakup with the dictatorship.<sup>1</sup>

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1 José María Garmendia, *Historia de ETA* (Donostia: Haranburu, 1996); Francisco Letamendia, *Historia del nacionalismo vasco y de ETA* (San Sebastián: R&B, 1994); José

In January 1978, ETA announced a five-point programme that included the conditions for a ceasefire: 1) amnesty for political prisoners, 2) legalisation of every political party (pro-independence parties were not legal), 3) expulsion of former-Francoist police forces from the Basque territory, 4) approval of the working and popular classes' concerns as expressed by their own organisations, and 5) an autonomous government for the Basque Country with the control over Spanish Army in the territory and the right to organise an independence referendum.

The five points were an updated statement from the one presented in 1976: the KAS Alternative (Koordinadora Abertzale Sozialista, Patriotic Socialist Coordination). That alternative was felt as a common-sense proposal, because most opposition parties accepted those terms in 1976. But the situation had changed after the first multi-party elections in 1977, and especially once the Constitution was accepted.

During the 1980s, Herri Batasuna refused to participate in the Spanish parliament or any autonomous parliament, unless the KAS Alternative was accepted by the government. This was a decade led by the political leaders that emerged during the last years of Francoism. In that sense, the 1980s were the context in which a generation that had been politically brought up during the dictatorial rule landed in a Constitutional Monarchy. Both ETA and Herri Batasuna understood that the political reform, led by Francoist government, ended in a covered dictatorship. However, the rest of anti-Francoist main parties accepted the Constitution as the best democracy that could have been achieved.

That is why we have chosen films in which their plot takes place in the 1980s: *Erreporteroak* (*The Reporter*, Iñaki Aizpuru, 1983), *La muerte de Mikel* (*Mikel's Death*, Imanol Uribe, 1984), *Ke arteko egunak* (*Smoky Days*, Antxon Ezeiza, 1989), and *Yoyes* (Helena Taberna, 2000). As can be noticed, the films are from different epochs. Hence, we should analyse each of the films related to their own historical context.

The main political difference in the 1980s was about the essence of the Constitutional Monarchy established in 1978: democracy for most, but covered dictatorship for some. Herri Batasuna contested elections in 1979 for the first time, and their big support in the Basque Country surprised the Spanish public opinion. That difference between the Basque Country and the Spanish public opinion has a lot to do with the national issue, as we will see.

That is to say, we will see how stereotypes on national characters were used and which characteristics were added to each national identity, through the chosen films. We will argue that Herri Batasuna was conceptualised as the negative pole in relation with the new Spain that aroused after 40 years of military and conservative dictatorship.

In that sense, another principal idea we will defend is that national identities are built and reproduced in a metaphoric dialogue with other nations. A national definition, as any definition, implies a differentiation. That is to say, to be part of a nation, France for instance, means the denial of the French being German, English, Spanish, etc. The national identity is part of a dynamic process that includes a self-identification (a definition of one's nation) and a categorisation of the others (usually neighbour nations). In other words, every nation is defined in relation to other nations.<sup>2</sup>

Thereby, we will deal with both the self-definition process and the categorisation of the other process regarding national identity that took place in post-Franco Spain, and specially, in the Basque Country. We have to be aware of both national identities, if we want to understand how national stereotypes are reproduced through the cinema, and, also, how the cinema dealt with the exceptional situation in the Basque Country.

We must remember that Basque society has been exposed to a dual national interpellation since the end of the nineteenth century, when Basque nationalism appeared as a political movement. It was a *fin de siècle* bourgeois-racist, anti-socialist and ultra-catholic movement in its beginnings, in the vein of French Barresianism and German *völkisch* movement.<sup>3</sup> During the first third of the twentieth century, the Basque national identity spread out from its initial narrowness, and different liberal and even leftist political parties defined themselves as nationally Basque.<sup>4</sup>

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- 2 Juan García, "Nación, identidad y paradoja. Una perspectiva relacional para el estudio del nacionalismo," *Reis: Revista española de investigaciones sociológicas*, No. 67 (1994), pp. 165–186; Chris Lorenz, "Representations of Identity: Ethnicity, Race, Class, Gender and Religion. An Introduction to Conceptual History," in: *The Contested Nation. Ethnicity, Class, Religion and Gender in National Histories*, ed. Stefan Berger and Chirs Lorenz (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2011), pp. 24–59.
  - 3 Azurmendi, *ETA de principio a fin*; Javier Díaz Freire, "El cuerpo de Aitor: emoción y discurso en la creación de la comunidad nacional vasca," *Historia Social*, No. 40 (2001), pp. 79–96; Pedro José Chacón, "Introducción al estudio de la etapa barcelonesa de Sabino Arana Goiri (1883–1888)," *Letras de Deusto*, Vol. 42, No. 134 (2012), pp. 155–182.
  - 4 Santiago de Pablo and Ludger Mees, *El péndulo patriótico. Historia del Partido Nacionalista Vasco (1895–2005)* (Barcelona: Crítica, 2005).

In the late 1960s, the Basque nationalist discourse became hegemonic among the anti-Franco movement in the Basque Country, and the idea of a dichotomy between a Basque-progressive-democratic people and an antiquated-fascist-dictatorial Spain was widely assumed by the Basque society.<sup>5</sup> Both the appropriation of Spanish identity by Franco's dictatorship,<sup>6</sup> on the one hand, and ETA's violent campaign against the dictatorship and its socialist rhetoric, on the other, were the key elements to the assumption of that national dichotomy in the Basque Country.<sup>7</sup>

It is widely accepted that what was called the Spanish Transition implied an enormous transformation of Spanish national self-identification. Especially after the June 1977 elections, the period between Franco's death and the arrival of the first socialist government (1975–1982) was transmitted by the main media, the government, and the major parties in a very specific way. The period of 1975–1982 was explained as a lineal path that, after four decades of dictatorship, had achieved the emergence of a modern and democratic Spanish nation.<sup>8</sup> In that sense, key elements were eluded from the Spanish Transition's main narration, such as the government's authoritarian practice that guided the process and the multiple-sourced violence that accompanied that time.<sup>9</sup> However, it was a very successful narrative.

In the aforementioned context, Herri Batasuna, stuck in the demand that the government must accept the KAS Alternative to be considered democratic, was isolated from the Spanish widely accepted narration of those same years.

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5 Francisco Letamendia, *Historia del nacionalismo vasco y de ETA*.

6 Ismael Saz, "Las culturas de los nacionalismos franquistas," *Ayer*, No.71 (2008), pp. 153–174.

7 Mikel Arriaga, *Y nosotros que éramos de HB: sociología de una heterodoxia abertzale* (San Sebastian: Haranburu, 1997).

8 Sebastian Balfour and Alejandro Quiroga, *España reinventada. Nación e identidad desde la Transición* (Barcelona: Ediciones Península, 2007); Jordi Muñoz, *La construcción política de la identidad española: ¿del nacionalcatolicismo al patriotismo democrático?* (Madrid: Centro de Investigaciones Sociológicas, 2012).

9 Ferran Gallego, *El mito de la Transición. La crisis del franquismo y los orígenes de la democracia (1973–1977)* (Barcelona: Crítica, 2008) Gonzalo Wilhelmi, *Romper el consenso. La izquierda radical en la Transición española (1975–1982)* (Madrid: Siglo XXI de España, 2016); Sophie Baby, "Volver sobre la Inmaculada Transición. El mito de una transición pacífica en España," in: *La transición española. Nuevos enfoques para un viejo debate*, ed. Marie-Claude Chaput and Julio Pérez Serrano (Madrid: Biblioteca Nueva, 2015), pp. 75–92.

Moreover, the isolation of Herri Batasuna grew ever larger because they accepted ETA's violence until what they understood as a real breakdown with Francoism was to be achieved.

Herri Batasuna was, according to itself, the heir of the wide anti-Franco movement in the Basque Country and was based on the idea of a dichotomy between a Basque-progressive-democratic people and an antiquated-fascist-dictatorial Spain. Its large support in every election proved that it represented a considerable feeling among Basque society at the time. But after the approval of the 1978 Constitution, a mutual and constant misunderstanding was the rule between Herri Batasuna's self-image and Spanish public opinion, as we will explain.

The first film we will introduce precisely contextualises that breakdown between Herri Batasuna and the widely accepted public opinion. The story told in *Erreporteroak* (1983) shows how this trend in public opinion appeared. Though its quality is not brilliant, we think the film shows in a sincere way the mood of the time and that it has a considerable symbolic importance.

It is the story of two reporters, good friends and flatmates, during 1980 and 1981. But the political developments during that time will put a great strain on their relationship. We will highlight two ideas that are developed in the film: 1) ETA as something from the past, and 2) Herri Batasuna's position as being irrational and non-political.

Once the socialist party reached the government in 1982, the previously explained idea of a modern and democratic Spain was widely accepted. It finally arrived, with the young socialists' government. In that sense, ETA, which appeared during Francoism, was felt as the last breath of a sad past.

Thus, if Spain had obtained finally a democratic political system, the past was a pre-political period. And ETA was categorised as an irrational organisation, something from the pre-political and violent past (the dictatorship). According to Spanish public opinion, ETA was acceptable before, but not in the new political and rational Spain. In a very interesting turn of events, ETA, obsessed with the effective breakup with Francoism through the KAS Alternative, filled the vacuum of fascism left behind by Franco, according to public opinion.

Thereby, Herri Batasuna, which supported KAS Alternative, became the social symbol of the maintenance of ETA, a pre-political, irrational, and fascist phenomenon once Franco died. This process is conceptualised in *Erreporteroak*, where the protagonists part company after the failed Spanish military *coup d'état* on 23 February 1981, and a difference of opinion leads to one of them joining Herri Batasuna. "You're losing the plot!" is his former friend's answer to that decision.

Furthermore, another idea that we must emphasise from *Erreporteroak* is that Basques are seen as a traditional rural community in the modern Spain, as shown through the relationship that both protagonists have with two Spanish girls that are filming a documentary about the Basque people. “For them, the Basque people... in the mountain and the sea,” criticises the one linked to Herri Batasuna, referring ironically to the Basque society of the time that was in fact highly industrialised.

That rural image had been exploited by official media during Franco’s time: it had presented the Basques’ as noble people, ancient because of their language—Basque is the only pre-Indo-European language spoken in Western Europe—and traditions. But the same stereotype had also been used in Basque nationalist imaginary: they were not Spanish, because they were there, before the Spanish came. Indeed, what is interesting for our analysis is how the ruralised and traditional image created a powerful symbolic link between the past, Franco for Spanish public opinion, and those who claimed to be the real defenders of the Basque people, Herri Batasuna, in the new modern Spain of the 1980s.

*La muerte de Mikel* (1984), the second film we have chosen for this chapter, is the story of Mikel, a homosexual Herri Batasuna militant. The plot emphasises the political isolation of the coalition, as it was the fact for the mid-1980s. It also highlights the importance of Spanish police’s violence in the Basque Country, which in fact was one of the determining factors that made Herri Batasuna’s discourse credible. But the film gives the impression that their claim of this police’s violence as proof of the continuity of Francoism only nourished the violent situation.

The main idea is maintained during the movie: normal Basque people are in the middle, surrounded by two alien elements, two obstacles from the past—the Spanish police’s violence and Herri Batasuna’s attitude. This is the most important image of the film, constructed step by step during the sequence of Mikel’s funeral. His former comrades are gathered outside the church, and Spanish police is located in front of them. Allegorically, the mass becomes a celebration of Spanish modernity, in spite of the people that, outside the church, oppose the new political system.

Overall, Mikel’s problem of accepting his homosexuality, and making himself accepted, is only a metaphor of that image. His exclusion from Herri Batasuna’s city council candidacy is presented as the proof that the coalition does not accept the modernisation of society and that it is clinging to the past. It is presented again as something from the past, an agent who feeds violence and, furthermore, is intolerant to people’s personal decisions.

The director of the film, Imanol Uribe, has recently admitted that he invented the plot to focus on criticising Herri Batasuna's attitude (La 2, 2013). He explained that he heard something about a person excluded from the coalition because of a drug addiction. Nevertheless, he thought that the gay issue would be better for a film, forgetting the fact that the Herri Batasuna was among those political parties that had supported the gay liberation movement since the late 1970s.

A very obvious visual link was constructed in *La muerte de Mikel* that highlighted the stereotyped traditional image of Herri Batasuna: Mikel kisses his boyfriend to say goodbye in his town, and the camera focuses on some old men who wear traditional clothes, behind the gay couple. Upfront, the next scene occurs in Herri Batasuna's headquarters, where Mikel is told that he is not going to be part of the candidacy. He answers angrily: "You're such a priest!" That is to say, the film emphasises the idea that Herri Batasuna is, along with the catholic clergy, an antique obstacle to the modernisation of society.

We can contextualise Uribe's position in the shift that occurred among the public opinion from the late 1970s onwards, regarding ETA's violence. His first film, *El proceso de Burgos* (1979) (Burgos Trial), was a documentary about ETA members that were judged in 1970 by a Spanish military court. And his message was not far from Herri Batasuna's discourse. Two years later, he released *La Fuga de Segovia* (1981) (Flight from Segovia), an action film based on a real escape from Segovia prison that ETA members organized in 1976. In the film, he shared the idea of ETA as something that should have disappeared after Franco. With *La muerte de Mikel*, Imanol Uribe reached the definitive breakdown with the political culture represented by Herri Batasuna.<sup>10</sup>

The next film we will analyse tells the story of Dolores González Yoyes. A former prominent member of ETA, Yoyes left the organisation in 1979. In 1985 she came home from exile. She did not formally accept the terms of government's reintegration policy, but she was still an important symbol both for the Spanish Government and for ETA. The Spanish media presented her return as a victory and she was ultimately assassinated shortly after she had returned to her home town. Yoyes' assassination was one of the most controversial murders committed by ETA. Yoyes' story being very well known in the Basque Country—the viewer knows how the film will end—, the interesting thing about the movie is how the characters and the main symbolic elements are presented.

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10 Larreta C. Roldán, "Una apuesta suicida; ETA en el cine de Euskadi," *Ikusgaiak*, No. 5 (2001), pp. 181–205.

The film *Yoyes* (2000) starts with a robbery committed by ETA during Franco's epoch. The plot assumes the aforementioned idea that ETA should have become extinct after Franco's death. *Yoyes* is presented as an individual who in 1979 realises this historical destiny. In this case, the film does not present any difference between ETA—embodied by her former male comrades—and Herri Batasuna—embodied by her own brother. We should take into account that the film was made towards the late 1990s, when the Spanish Government and the media fully adopted the idea that Herri Batasuna was part of ETA and started a series of procedures to outlaw the political coalition.

The film reconstructs an interview between *Yoyes* and her former comrades where, after asking them, she decided to return home without their permission. However, at home, ETA's voice is still present. His brother is a Herri Batasuna councillor in the town and criticises his sister's decision during a family meal. The idea is that there is a *continuum* between ETA and Herri Batasuna, through men who are rude to independent women. Another member of the family emphasises the idea of the sole commitment to violence, when he assures: "you [Herri Batasuna] run in the elections, but you don't show up at parliament, not even to defend your thing." In concordance with public opinion during the late 1990s, in *Yoyes*, Herri Batasuna is just a loudspeaker for ETA. They are both the same thing.

The director Helena Taberna made a similar use of the character that Uribe made in Mikel's death. She presents a feminist narrative where the protagonist fights against intolerant men. In fact, *Yoyes* was committed to feminist issues during her ETA leadership time.<sup>11</sup> But eluding the interesting discussion about revolutionary membership and feminism, a discussion present in every revolutionary organization during the 1970s,<sup>12</sup> ETA's male leadership is just shown as an obstacle to *Yoyes*' personal dignity during the entire plot of the film. The protagonists are presented unambiguously and appear as flat two-dimensional characters.

In essence, the film shows Herri Batasuna–ETA to be intolerant and reinforces the idea of ETA being something from the past. In this case, they were an obstacle for women's liberation. Nevertheless, far from taking into account the feminist critic to the traditional genre and family roles, the film emphasises *Yoyes*' role as a mother and devoted wife, and her public political commitment is seen as an obstacle to her real happiness.

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11 Elixabete Lasa et al., *Yoyes. Desde su ventana* (Garrasi: Alberdania, 1987).

12 Cinzia Arruzza, *Las sin parte. Matrimonios y divorcios entre feminismo y marxismo* (Es: Crítica & Alternativa, 2015).



That apart, the final sequence is well constructed, in which *Yoyes'* assassination is represented as a ritual tribal sacrifice. Another link between ETA and the past. The idea is that the scene, set during a day celebrating Basque traditions, is a performance. Everybody knows that the traditional representation of the village is fake: *Yoyes* was assassinated in 1985. People were dressed as if it was a traditional society, but they knew it was not.

Nevertheless, according to the film's sequence, ETA feels that *Yoyes* is tainting the traditional celebration and arrives to the decision she must be sacrificed. In that long sequence, traditional musical instruments are heard for the first time in the film, louder and louder. And *Yoyes'* killer appears to be the priest who is committed to do a human sacrifice to ensure his tribe's ancestral life.

Returning to our argumentation about national stereotypes, *Yoyes* film presents Basque nationalists as the defenders of a lost paradise, a tribal antiquity that in the 1980s can only be represented as a celebration day. Once again, Herri Batasuna appears to be rural and traditional. We must notice that a rural and traditional image of the Basque Country was also recreated by the conservative *Euzko Alderdi Jeltzalea* (Basque Nationalist Party) that led the autonomous government during the 1980s and 1990s. Even if we acknowledge that the traditional imaginary was at some point present in Herri Batasuna's image—as in every nationalist movement—it cannot be escaped that precisely thanks to *Yoyes* feminist issues appeared for the first time in ETA leadership's publications, and her own sister was deeply involved in the creation of a feminist organisation linked to ETA in 1978: *KAS-Emakumeak* (KAS-Women).

The last film we will analyse is a unique exception in the Basque filmography from the 1980s, because it does not reproduce the usual stereotype about Herri Batasuna. *Ke arteko egunak* (1989) was directed by Antton Ezeiza. Previously linked to the Communist Party of Spain (PCE) and one of the protagonists of the so-called Spanish New Cinema during the 1960s, Ezeiza became sympathetic with ETA during the early 1970s. Exiled in 1973, after his return in 1977, he was involved in the creation of a Basque national cinema.<sup>13</sup>

*Ke arteko egunak* was the first film in Basque language that was accepted in the San Sebastian Film Festival's Official Selection. The plot is based on Pedro's return from Mexico to the Basque Country in the 1980s. Nevertheless, far from reproducing Herri Batasuna's stereotype as other films from the 1980s did, such as *Golfo de Vizcaya* (*Bay of Biscay*, Javier Rebollo, 1985) or *Ander eta Yul* (*Ander*

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13 Josu Martinez, "Ikuska saila: ostarte bat laino itsasoan," *Jakin*, No. 200 (2014), pp. 95–113.

and *Yul*, Ana Diez, 1988), it seems that the director's aim is to make explicit the inevitable existence of the coalition in the modern Basque society.

It is an exception among the series of films that were produced, thanks to Basque autonomous government subsidies during the 1980s, in the so-called Basque cinema's growth. And it is also an exception compared to the films released during the 1990s and 2000s, when ETA members were usually represented as purely fanatic terrorists: *Días contados* (*The Days Are Numbered*, Imanol Uribe, 1994), *El viaje de Arian* (*Arian's Trip*, Eduard Bosch, 2000), *Todos estamos invitados* (*We Are all Invited*, Manuel Gutierrez Aragon, 2008), and so on. Let us explain the idea developed in *Ke arteko egunak*.

As most of the films that deal with Basque politics, *Ke arteko egunak* includes a reference to Francoism. Linked to the idea that armed organisations should have disappeared along with Franco, both the films (*La muerte de Mikel* and *Yoyes*) were obliged to represent, in a way, the popular acceptance of ETA during that epoch, and oppose that to the post-Franco modern Spain.

But in this case, the reference to Francoism is not about ETA. It is about the protagonist's father, who appears to be a prisoner arrested by the Civil Guard during the old times. The symbolical link is made with the protagonist's daughter, who is in prison for being a member of ETA. Thereby, the past-present connection is not symbolised by ETA. On the contrary, it is symbolised by the imprisonment of Basque people. That is to say, the film assumes the continuity of the aforementioned dichotomy between a Basque-progressive-democratic people and an antiquated-fascist-dictatorial Spain.

However, far from simply reproducing that dichotomy, the interest of the film rests on its conflictive approach to the idea through the protagonist, who is an alcoholic unable to maintain social relationships and is a newcomer to the Basque Country in the 1980s. The main theme is that there is a political problem in the Basque Country hard to solve, whether it suits us or not.

It is Pedro's former partner who makes Pedro and the spectator aware of the existence of a political culture linked to her daughter in prison (Herri Batasua). It is not clear if she is of the same opinion or not, but she acknowledges this possibility. Later, by chance, Pedro meets a couple who are Herri Batasuna sympathisers and makes them the centre of his new network of friends. Nevertheless, while he is distracted by his addiction to alcohol, politics is changing the world in which he resides. We must also highlight the fact that the film takes place in an entirely urban environment where, contrary to the ruralised stereotype, in this case, Herri Batasuna is totally integrated in modern society.

The idea of Herri Batasuna as an obstacle to the end of ETA is also present. It is stated that “they do not let” Pedro’s daughter reintegrate, following the government’s policy regarding ETA prisoners since 1984. But one of the main characters, Kepa, pledges that “no one can stop this train,” because politics is bigger than politicians. So, the film runs away from the idea of attributing Herri Batasuna a certain task. What is more, at the end of the film, Kepa joins Herri Batasuna, just as they are organizing Pedro’s daughter’s welcome home event, after her final release from prison. It is also important that Kepa’s militancy starts just when he breaks up with his girlfriend. There is a key moment in the film when Pedro asks Kepa: “So, you are interested in politics?” and Kepa answers: “I can’t escape politics.”

In the final sequence, the welcome home event, there is a parallel to that of Mikel’s funeral. We see a crowd in front of the police. A crowd, a gathering, in which Kepa becomes another anonymous face among Herri Batasuna sympathisers, whereas Pedro marginalises himself in the cocoon of his alcoholism. Overall, the film highlights the isolated position of Herri Batasuna in society too, but in this case, not as an obstacle to normality as in other films. Quite the opposite, Herri Batasuna is understood as the proof of an exceptional political situation.

After having analysed those four films, it is time for conclusions. First of all, we must underline that Herri Batasuna’s stereotype as something from the past, traditional and irrational, was an image built in a confident relationship with the Spanish political developments during the late 1970s and early 1980s. Herri Batasuna had a discourse based on the anti-Francoist opposition from the late 1970s, but once the Constitution was ruling, the very same discourse was seen as an obstacle to the established democracy. That is why Herri Batasuna was stereotyped as something from the past, the B side of the modern Spain. If Spain had become a democratic, rational and modern democracy, Herri Batasuna, who opposed the Constitutional monarchy, was felt as fascist, traditional and irrational by Spanish public opinion. That is the process that appears in *Erreporteroak* and it represents the breakdown between a part of the Basque society and the main Spanish national narration.

In that sense, for those who shared the idea of an emerging modern Spain, Herri Batasuna was conceptualised as its negative pole. Precisely, the opposition of Herri Batasuna and ETA’s violent campaign functioned for the Spanish identity as proof of the new modern Spain. On the contrary, Franco’s heritage, such as the Monarchy, the Army, the Civil Guard and the Spanish indivisibility written in stone in the 1978 Constitution, was for Herri Batasuna the proof that they continued fighting against a conservative-dictatorial Spain, and that they represented the progressive-democratic Basque people. Then, we should understand both

positions' own identification and categorisation of the other, as a reflection of the symbolic dialogue that happens upon every national identification.

Second, we must highlight that ETA's armed campaign made Herri Batasuna unable to challenge the symbolic bond between their political positions and the traditional-irrational stereotype. The bombs and murders were theorised by ETA as the unassimilable element for the bourgeoisie and the necessary element for a revolutionary position. But, in fact, it functioned as an element that created mutual misunderstanding between Herri Batasuna and the Spanish public opinion.

Third, in some films, that stereotype was used as an important cinematic element. But it created inconsistent plots where the stereotyped image was overwhelming and shadowed interesting issues such as gay and women's liberation, which were supposed to be the key elements in those movies.

After the end of ETA's violent campaign in 2011, and the emergence of political movements in Spain that challenge the official narration about the Spanish Transition, we hope that Basque cinema will be able to escape insurmountable mutual national stereotyping.

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## **5. New content and aesthetics in small cinemas: The case of the Basque-language films *80 egunean* and *Loreak***

**Abstract:** In 2015, at the 63rd San Sebastian International Film Festival, cultural policy makers from 15 countries and regions where non-hegemonic languages are spoken issued the manifesto, *Glocal Cinema: Big Stories, Small Countries*. This manifesto seeks to promote and showcase the value of the work of professionals from these *Small Cinemas*. Together with this, 2005 can be considered a turning point in Basque-language cinematography, which is included in the *Small Cinemas* group. This year saw a substantial growth in the production of Basque films that turn from content typecast under the Basque Conflict, demonstrating the emergence of new aesthetics, content, and formats of audiovisual production. Moreover, the films directed by Jon Goenaga and Jose Mari Garaño attained international recognition, winning many international awards, and one of these films was selected to compete at the Oscar Awards. This chapter explores how local cinema become *Global Cinema*, analyzing the films *80 egunean* and *Loreak* and examining their content and the aesthetics tied to their successful production, distribution, and exhibition.

**Keywords:** Basque cinema, Glocal cinema, small cinema, cinema in the Basque language, *80 egunean*, *Loreak*

### **Introduction**

Multilingualism is one of the main characteristics of the cultural diversity of the European Union (EU). The key aims of the EU specified in the Treaty on European Union (TEU) include that of respecting “its rich cultural and linguistic diversity” and ensuring that “Europe’s cultural heritage is safeguarded and enhanced” (article 3, TEU). According to the European Commission, the EU has 500 million citizens

and 24 official languages,<sup>1</sup> a figure that is lower than that of member states, which is 28, since several share the same language. But alongside the official languages, there are over 60 regional or autochthonous minority languages in the EU, with a total of some 40 million speakers, almost 10% of EU citizens. These minority languages include Euskera, the Basque language.

Conscious of this cultural and linguistic diversity, many initiatives have been set underway in recent years. At the 63rd San Sebastian International Film Festival (Zinemaldia), a total of 15 European regions, including the Basque Country, signed the manifesto “Glocal cinema: big stories, small countries,” to encourage cinema in non-hegemonic languages. As the manifesto states, despite the increasing market share of European films and the growing weight of internal production in the European market, “if we take a look at the most seen films in Europe in 2014, 18 of the top 20 are in English, French, German or Spanish.” This makes it patently clear that European filmographies produced in non-hegemonic languages require special attention and public support.

This chapter explores how the local cinema can become *Global Cinema* by analyzing the films *80 egunean* and *Loreak* and by examining their content and the aesthetic tied to the independent production and coproduction as keys of success.

For that purpose, this chapter first provides a survey of fiction feature films made in Euskera up to the end of 2015, making use of the database of rated films of the Ministry of Culture and taking account of the different publications on the question and the abovementioned manifesto “*Glocal cinema: big stories, small countries*.” Finally, it focuses on two Basque-language feature films that have achieved international success in recent years: *80 egunean (80 Days)* and *Loreak (Flowers)*, directed by Jose Mari Goenaga and Jon Garaño. These directors have a long and successful career and are one of the main referents in the New Basque Cinema.

## Manifesto: *Glocal cinema: big stories, small countries*<sup>2</sup>

The manifesto “*Glocal cinema: big stories, small countries*” was presented on 21 September 2015 during the 63rd San Sebastian International Film Festival. This was signed by 15 European regions,<sup>3</sup> including the Basque Country. The main aim

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- 1 The 24 official working languages are Bulgarian, Croatian, Czech, Danish, Dutch, English, Estonian, Finnish, French, German, Greek, Hungarian, Irish, Italian, Latvian, Lithuanian, Maltese, Polish, Portuguese, Romanian, Slovak, Slovene, Spanish, and Swedish.
  - 2 Manifesto available online at the following link: <http://www.glocalcinema.com/pages/manifesto>.
  - 3 Wales, Sweden, Slovenia, Finland, Poland, Norway, Latvia, Ireland, Iceland, Hungary, Italy, Friuli, Estonia, Denmark, and the Basque Country.



of this initiative is to encourage cinema in non-hegemonic European languages, by which is meant European cinema not filmed in English, French, German, Spanish, or Italian.

The manifesto, which extols the value of Europe's cultural and linguistic diversity, aims to "reinforce the value of another cultural map of Europe, with the distribution and exhibition of films in languages other than the louder European languages" and calls for "public support for this important issue." There are many filmmakers who decide to make their films in minority languages, although this entails positioning themselves in a very small market and creates difficulties for funding, distributing, and screening those films. Institutional support becomes especially important in this case. The manifesto aims to raise awareness of the importance of *small cinemas*, due to "the need of every community to tell its own stories in its own languages."

The document contains a four-point agenda, with the aim of strengthening the activities of the cinematographic industry in small- and medium-sized languages:<sup>4</sup>

1. To create a formal workgroup.
2. To support meetings and cooperation among filmmakers.
3. To increase knowledge of the linguistic diversity of European cinema.
4. To increase the visibility of *small cinemas*.

The signatories agree to meet periodically in the framework of the European film festivals. Following the first meeting, the workgroup met again at the 66th edition of the Berlinale and will do so again at the next edition to set the roadmap for 2018. The Glocal Cinemas Network also participated in the European Film Forum held in Brussels in December 2016.<sup>5</sup>

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4 A novel feature of the last edition of the San Sebastian Festival with respect to the industry was the Focus on Glocal Cinemas, held during the V Europe-Latin America Co-production Forum. This was a meeting of professionals, set up in collaboration with the Glocal Cinemas Network, and is the starting point for creating a new activity in the industry in 2017. This will consist in screening European films in non-hegemonic languages in post-production to an audience of producers, distributors, sales agents, and programmers who can contribute to their completion and international circulation. This new activity will be called Glocal in Progress.

5 Information from an online interview with Jara Ayucar, coordinator of the Glocal Cinema project, during the 64th San Sebastian Festival.

## Cinema made in Basque

### Basque cinema or cinema made in Basque? To be or not to be

Although this chapter focuses on fiction feature films in Euskera (Basque), the first film made in that language (partly in Spanish) was not fiction, but the documentary *Ama Lur (Tierra Madre)* (Néstor Basterretxea and Fernando Larruquert).<sup>6</sup> It was premiered in 1968 during the debate over what should be considered Basque cinema.<sup>7</sup> For some the language employed is, from the outset, the key factor in defense of a Basque cinematography. One author who defended this position was Antton Ezeiza, a filmmaker from San Sebastian recently returned from exile, who “argue[d] for a Basque national filmography whose first condition is Euskera” (Roldán, 1996: 166). An initial step in developing this Basque-language cinematography was the production of the series *Ikuska*, produced between 1978 and 1984 by the producer Bertan Filmeak. This series was coordinated by Ezeiza himself and consisted of 20 shorts directed by different Basque directors.

A decade after the premiere of *Ama Lur*, the first Basque-language fiction feature film, *Balantzatxoa*, reached the cinemas. From then until 2015 a total of 38 fiction films were produced in Euskera. The production and development of Basque-language cinematography is uneven, with periods of scant production and others that are more fruitful, directly related to the cultural policies in effect in each period.

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6 It is worth highlighting the recent discovery by Josu Martínez, a researcher at the University of the Basque Country (UPV/EHU), who found a mute copy of a documentary feature film titled *Gure sor lekua (Our Birthplace)*, which can be considered the first film shot in Euskera in the late 1950s and was believed lost. It was directed by General André Madré, who was born in Hazparne. According to Josu Martínez, this is the first film in Euskera, although it must be said that in researching his doctoral thesis, later published as a book (Martínez, 2015), he was unable to find the film’s soundtrack, which would have provided irrefutable proof that this is the first film shot in Euskera.

7 There are many publications defending various positions on the debate over the existence of a Basque Cinema and what its characteristics should be, a debate that was fervent in the 1970s and, above all, after the end of Francoism. There are more general publications, like those of Zunzunegui (1985), Unsain (1985), De Pablo (1996), and others, that focus more on the importance of Euskera in that definition of Basque Cinema, such as the articles by Roldán Larreta (1996 and 1997). It is also worth highlighting the work of Torrado (2004), who traces the evolution of the concept of Basque cinema through the bibliography, and one of the most recent articles published on the subject, Macías (2011).

Without going into whether or not the language defines a film as “Basque,” it is unquestionable that the development of cinema in Euskera has been (and currently continues to be) dependent on the mechanisms of protecting and funding the language.<sup>8</sup> In Josu Barambones’s analysis of Basque-language cinema, he observes that during the 1980s cinema made in Euskera “experienced what can be called ‘the golden age of Basque cinema’” (Barambones, 2011: 6). He attributes this boom in production to the grants policy established by the Basque government at that time, together with the grants awarded by the Spanish state, from the Ministry directed by Pilar Miró:

Within this context of institutional support, in 1982 the Department of Culture of the Basque government set up a project aimed at producing, with technical personnel from the Basque Country, six films based on literary works by Basque authors who write in Euskera. From this initial project, three medium-length films emerged during 1985 lasting approximately 55 minutes: *Zergatik Panpox* (*Why Cutie*) (1985), directed by Xabier Elorriaga and based on the novel by the writer Arantxa Urretabizkaia; *Ehun metro* (*One Hundred Meters*) (1985), by Alfonso Ungria, based on the novel by Ramon Saizarbitoria; and *Hamaseigarrenean aidanez* (*It Happened on the Sixteenth*) (1985) directed by Angel Lertxundi and based on his own novel (Barambones, 2011: 7).

These three films were joined by another two films shot in the late 1980s: *Oraingoz izen gabe* (*Still Nameless*) (1986) by José Julián Bakedano with a screenplay by Bernardo Atxaga and *Kareletik* (*Overboard*) (1987) directed by Angel Lertxundi; these were followed by *Ander eta Yul* (*Ander and Yul*, Ana Díez, 1988) and *Ke arteko egunak* (*Days of Smoke*, 1989, Antton Ezeiza).

The 1980s, an exciting decade in terms of the number of productions, were followed by years when the production of films in Euskera virtually ceased. During the 1990s only three feature films were released, compared to the nine films shot in the previous decade: *Offeko maitasuna* (*Amor en Off*) (Koldo Izagirre, 1992), *Urte ilunak* (*The Dark Years*) (Arantxa Lazkano, 1993), and *Maitè*, a Basque–Cuban coproduction directed by Carlos Zabala and Eneko Olasagasti, where the Basque characters speak Euskera among themselves and Spanish with the Cubans on the island. Following the release of *Maitè* in 1994, no film was shot for over a decade due in large part to the “Basque government’s disastrous policy of subsidies” (Barambones, 2011: 7). During a large part of the 1990s, Euskal Media (Basque Government’s public society) ignored incomprehensibly the most interesting

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8 Miren Manias Muñoz has researched the production and funding of cinema in Euskera. In her doctoral thesis “*Euskarazko zinemaren produkzioa eta finantziazioa (2005–2012): hamaika fikziozko film luzeren azterketa ekonomikoa*,” she makes an economic analysis of 11 feature films produced in Euskera.

and box office projects of the Basque filmmakers, forcing many directors to disassociate themselves from Basque Country. There are cases of successes such as *Mutant Action* (1993) by Alex de la Iglesia, *Squirrels* (1993) by Julio Medem, *Stories of the Kronen* (1995) by Montxo Armendáriz, *The Day of the Beast* (1995) by Alex de la Iglesia, and *Tierra* (1996) by Julio Medem.

### ***Aupa Etxebeste! Go, cinema in Basque, go!***

The release of the film *Aupa Etxebeste! (Go Etxebeste!)*, the first work by Telmo Esnal and Asier Altuna in 2005, was a turning point in the production of feature films in Euskera for several reasons. After more than 10 years without the release of any films shot entirely in Euskera, the commercial success it achieved, with 71,972 spectators and box office takings of €341,462.88, encouraged many other creators to produce in Euskera, since “films like *Aupa Etxebeste!* demonstrate that if the public is offered a quality product and it is suitably promoted, the spectators will respond” (Barambones, 2011: 8). Screened in cinemas in the original version with subtitles in Spanish, *Aupa Etxebeste!* was selected for several international festivals and won prizes.

This film’s genre was also completely novel in Basque-language cinema. While the films from the 1980s and 1990s had mainly been dramas, Esnal and Altuna chose to produce a comedy,<sup>9</sup> with a fresher and more cheerful subject, removed from the socio-political problems that had been so prevalent in Basque cinema in previous decades, in both Euskera and Spanish. This was cinema whose subject matter was less politicized than that of earlier years:

[I]t is true that at first nationalist ideology loomed over the field in a truly obsessive way, and it was really difficult to find a film that was not focused on the convulsive reality of the country or that did not return to the past to delve into its historical origins. But this is something that was to be lost as time passed and the political situation was normalized (Roldán Larreta, 1999: 9).

From 2005 onward, at least one film in Euskera was made each year (except in 2008), thanks to the agreement signed by the associations of Basque producers (Association of Independent Audiovisual Producers of the Basque Country

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9 Previously only one comedy had been produced, *Maitè*, a Basque–Cuban coproduction by Carlos Zabala and Eneko Olasagasti, in 1994. Following the release of *Aupa Etxebeste!* in 2005, the tendency changed and other comedies were released in Euskera: *Kutsidazu bidea*, *Ixabel (Follow The Way, Ixabel)* (2006), *Eutsi! (Hold On!)* (2007), *Sukalde kontuak (Cooking Secrets)* (2009), *Zigortzaileak (The Punishers)* (2010), *Urteberri on, Amona! (Happy New Year, Granma!)* (2011), and *Bypass* (2012).

[IBAIA] and Basque Producers Association [EPE-APV]), the Basque government and the Basque public broadcasting corporation (EITB). This agreement established a production quota of one feature film in Euskera per year. This was widened in the agreement of 2008, which established that at least two films should be made in Euskera in subsequent years. In her research on the funding of Basque-language cinema, Miren Manías highlights the contribution of EITB, which she considers “has been a fundamental source of funding for the development of cinematography in recent years” (Manías, 2015: 92). The increase in the production of Basque-language cinema was notable in this final stage, and as many as five films in Euskera were released in 2011. Some authors cautiously speak of a “recovery of cinema in Euskera” and note that public investments in the creative, technical, and economic fields are of great help in laying solid foundations that will give long-term continuity to Basque-language cinema. However, they warn about the fragility of that recovery and that there is a danger of a drop in institutional support due to the cutbacks derived from the economic crisis (Manías, 2013).

Together with production, this last period has seen a notable increase in the technical and artistic quality of the films shot in Euskera. Young directors are starting to make a name for themselves, such as Asier Altuna (*Aupa Etxebeste!* 2005, *Amama* [*Amama – When a Tree Falls*] 2016), Telmo Esnal (*Aupa Etxebeste!* 2005, *Urteberri on, Amona!* 2011), and Jon Garaño and Jose Mari Goenaga (*80 egunean* 2010, *Loreak* 2014). A new crop of filmmakers who are opting, in spite of the difficulties, to make high-quality cinema in Euskera is receiving considerable recognition at festivals – even internationally in some cases – although without repeating the box office figures achieved in 2015 by *Aupa Etxebeste!* This is the case of *80 egunean* and *Loreak*.

### **Case study of *80 egunean* (80 Days): The film’s authors (directors and screenwriters)**

Jon Garaño (San Sebastian, 1974) and José Mari Goenaga (Ordizia, 1976) studied together in San Sebastian at the Sarobe Film School. In 2001, after completing their studies, they formed the Moriarti production company together with another four colleagues: Xabier Berzosa, Aitor Arregi, Asier Acha, and Jorge Gil Munarriz. Together and separately they have directed successful works, including the prize-winning shorts *Tercero B*, *Sintonía*, and *Lagun Mina*, which between them have won over 150 prizes. The animated feature *Supertramps* (nominated for the Goya award for Best Animated Film in 2005) and the feature-length documentary *Lucio* (premiered at the San Sebastian International Film Festival and nominated for

the Goya award for Best Documentary Film in 2007) were key works when it came to securing a place for the work of young Basque filmmakers in the Basque and European audiovisual market. *80 egunean* and *Loreak* are thus the result of a solid trajectory.

### **80 egunean**

The plot: Axun is a 70-year-old woman who reencounters her great friend from adolescence, Maite, a music teacher who lives outside the conventions of the women of her generation.

Filmed entirely in Basque, this is the only representation to date in Basque cinema of “older” women belonging to the LGBTI collective. It deals with the friendship that has existed between the protagonists since their childhood, their sexual attraction in the third age and the consequences of this on their family environment.

### **“Risky” cinema**

There is a common and inherent feature in making any film: the economic risk entailed in investing time and money in a highly uncertain market. In the case of *80 egunean*, the linguistic option – choosing a minority language as a vehicle – generates another series of difficulties. But in addition to the risk involved in producing a film in a non-hegemonic language, *80 egunean* adds other “risks” in the choice of subject and the profile of its characters: The protagonists are elderly, as well as being women who love other women with whom they have sexual relations (this is not a pornographic film). As Andrea Francisco observes in an interesting article on sexual diversity and educational inclusion “since the beginning of cinema and television, lesbian and bisexual characters have been almost non-existent and when a love story between two women was presented, it always ended in tragedy, depression, madness or perversion” (Amat Francisco and Moliner Miravet, 2011: 155).

### **Subject versus form**

Some of the main issues dealt with in the story of *80 egunean* emerge from the universal duality, life and death, to frame the story and differentiate between men and women, the countryside and cosmopolitanism, but above all to highlight the friction between the private and public spaces. The characters of Axun and Maite are constructed in that context. Axun is a housewife who feels desire for another woman, but she is married, attached to tradition and religion. Maite is a political

lesbian, a music teacher, single, empowered, and liberated. Both are portrayed by means of close-ups that underline their psychology. There are frequent shots in which both are in the same frame, stressing their emotional proximity. The camera also observes the characters from afar, in exterior space and into the public sphere. The form speaks of intimacy, the importance of liberation in the private space to achieve freedom in the public space.

This melodrama, a film about everyday life, generates a two-way flow between collective conflict and the individual. On the one hand, we have the conflict between the hegemonic sexuality versus *out-of-system* sexualities, and on the other hand, we have the individual fighting with socio-political issues in Basque Country.

At the end of *80 egunean*, in the last sequence, Mikel's funeral is portrayed as a kind of liberation from the Basque Conflict theme connecting with *La muerte de Mikel* (1984) by Imanol Uribe. Both films are tied with the link of LGBT characters in intimidating communities.

In *La muerte the Mikel*, we see a man, a left nationalist pharmacist, who is in love with a drag woman in a heteronormative society, fighting for his sexual identity.

In *80 egunean*, two women are in love in, also, a heteronormative society fighting for their love.

Thirty years later *80 egunean* works as a kind of relief from the past. Metaphorically it tells us that a new way of making cinema, with new themes, is just arriving when they buried Mikel in *80 egunean* (they are also burying the past that *La muerte de Mikel* represents), also a new society is arriving hopefully.

### **Case study of *Loreak (Flowers)*: Glocal cinema destined for the red carpet**

*Loreak* is the second fiction feature film directed by the duo Garaño–Goenaga and, like *80 egunean*, female characters are the protagonists. *Loreak* tells the story of three women whose lives are emotionally affected by the appearance of mysterious bouquets of flowers. It is a simple, moving film, completely shot in Euskera. Its unprecedented success makes it a landmark in Basque-language cinema.

Since it was premiered at Zinemaldia in 2014, the trajectory of *Loreak* has been intense: forty festivals, nominated as best film for the Goya awards and screened at a dozen festivals in the United States, amongst many other nominations, prizes and events. The result in terms of prizes has been lower than one might expect from the film's reception. Indeed, the film has been widely praised by the critics, who have described it as: "A true jewel of sensitivity, intelligence and beauty" (Fotogramas), "magnificent, simplicity made

into art” (El Mundo), “prodigious narrative” (Gara), “notable delicacy, sensitivity and poetry” (El País), a “superb” film (Deia) or “cinema in capital letters” (El Diario Vasco) (Rincón, 2016: 2).

With nearly twice as many spectators as the previous film (47,099) and nearly double the box office takings (€254,400.83), *Loreak* marks a turning point in Basque-language cinema for several reasons: It was the first film shot entirely in Euskera to be selected for the Official Section of the San Sebastian International Film Festival<sup>10</sup> and it was shortlisted by the Academy of Cinematographic Arts and Sciences to represent Spain for the Oscar for Best Foreign Language Film, although it was not finally selected. This circumstance was described as an “historic event” by the Basque government.

This news was greeted with surprise and great enthusiasm by everyone who formed part of the project. Selection for the prizes of the Hollywood Cinema Academy was described as an “historical event” by Cristina Uriarte, Counselor for Culture of the Basque government, at the briefing by the autonomous government’s spokesperson, Josu Erkoreka, which she interrupted to make the news known (Rincón, 2016: 2).

The decision by the directors to film in Euskera occurred as something “natural,” as they themselves have stated more than once. It was also conditioned by the cultural and subsidy policies of the public institutions, which carry out positive discrimination in favor of productions in Euskera.<sup>11</sup>

In the Basque Country, above all EITB, they carry out positive discrimination in favor of films in Euskera, and support them with greater subsidies, so it is true that perhaps one loses on one side, or it is more difficult to obtain funding through some channels, but one opens up others. Moreover, in this case, we were lucky in that the Ministry of Culture got involved, as did Spanish Television... it is a film that a priori, in spite of being in Euskera, has been well supported in terms of funding. Later on, the effect this might have on box office takings, we’re aware that this could somewhat restrict the takings in Spanish territory. But it is also true, for example, that if there is a vocation to reach other countries and for the film to be distributed elsewhere, then the language does not have such an effect. You go to international festivals and it doesn’t matter if the film is in Czech or in Romanian, in Euskera or in Spanish, they are going to treat you the same.

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10 *Loreak* opened up a path that was continued in the next edition of Zinemaldi, at which another film in Euskera also took part in the Official Section: *Amama* (Asier Altuna, 2015).

11 Source: José Mari Goenaga and Jon Garaño interviewed by Eloy Cabacas for Igecine, available online at the following link: <http://lgecine.org/2014/10/entrevista-jose-maria-goenaga-y-jon-garano-directores-de-loreak/>.



Furthermore, if it is a film in a minority language, that can even be a point in its favor (Cabacas, 2014, my translation).

Besides the language, another characteristic that defines *Loreak* is its simplicity with respect to both its content and form. *Loreak* is an intimate drama, but at the same time an “emotional thriller.” A mysterious bouquet of flowers serves as an excuse to unite the story of the three women protagonists. On one side, there is Ane (Nagore Aranburu), a young woman with a sad appearance, whose life changes unexpectedly when she begins to receive a bouquet of flowers each week from an unknown sender. The flowers contribute illusion to her gray and monotonous married life. On the other side, there are Tere (Itziar Aizpuru) and Lourdes (Itziar Ituño), whose lives are also affected by some flowers. Every week an unknown person places a bouquet at the site where someone of great importance to them died in a traffic accident (Tere’s son and Lourdes’s husband). In this case the meaning of flowers is very different; these flowers are for remembering, for not forgetting. This is the underlying theme in *Loreak*. It speaks of memory, of the conflict between remembering and forgetting. One of the characters chooses to preserve memories, while another believes that forgetting is the best way to heal wounds. The position of the film’s characters, with its clear political background, can be extrapolated to what is happening today in the Spanish state. Far from remaining at the local level, *Loreak* is a film that deals with a global, universal issue, that of (historical) memory.

Simplicity is a part of Goenaga and Garaño’s formal wager. With *Loreak*, they propose a cinematographic aesthetic where less is more, restrained like the film’s characters, carrying out a game of mirrors among the protagonists and through the framing. The composition of the majority of the shots used to portray the characters is symmetrical. Empty rooms, dim lights, rain, calm, impenetrability, secrecy, solitude. The female characters appear isolated, incommunicado, and encapsulated. Notable in this respect is the choice of locations, since two of the female characters work in cabins, in capsules, in small glass cages. They are characters who look inward, who seek within themselves and have problems communicating with the exterior. Sometimes it is the framing itself that isolates or oppresses the character.

Films like *Loreak* make it clear that *small cinemas* can go a long way, even reaching the edge of the red carpet, and that in spite of the difficulties involved in choosing to film in a minority language, they can aspire to a successful international trajectory.

## Conclusions: Toward a thematic and aesthetic evolution

### Thematic evolution

*80 egunean* contributes to creating a positive image that fights against the invisibility of lesbians in film, a novel undertaking that is linked to making visible and normalizing the image of the so-called “third age,” giving the characters desires and concerns as active beings.

*Loreak* addresses the need to remember in both the personal and collective fields, and makes a gesture toward the debate on historical memory in the Spanish state.

Women are the protagonists in both films, which deal with the characters’ place and role in the public and private spheres. The issues addressed have political and social importance (lesbianism, elderly people as active subjects, etc.), but at the same time they distance themselves from the issue of the Basque conflict or terrorism.

### Evolution of production processes

One of the most important features in the production processes of the films analyzed is the important presence of Basque production companies (Irusoin, Moriarti, and Txintxua) which, besides being relatively new, are based in the Basque Autonomous Community.

Irusoin is an independent production and post-production company located in Bilbao and San Sebastian founded in 1982. *Loreak* (*Flowers*) has managed to become the first entirely Basque-spoken film to compete in the San Sebastian International Film Festival and to represent Spain in the Oscar Academy Awards 2016. Their previous film *For 80 days* (*80 egunean*) has competed in more than 130 international festivals, and *Handia* directed by Aitor Arregi and Jon Garaño won The Special jury Prize 2017 in San Sebastian Film Festival.

Moriarti is an independent film Production company founded in 2001 by Jon Garaño, Jose Mari Goenaga, and Aitor Arregi among others. They produced and coproduced films and documentaries such as *Handia* (2017), *Loreak* (2015), *Lucio* (2017) or *80 egunean* (2010) together with Irusoin.

Txintxua Films S.L. is a film production company created in 2008 by Director and Screenwriter Asier Altuna and Producer Marian Fernandez Pascal. The company is based in Trintxerpe-Pasaia, near San Sebastian, and it produced films such as *Amama* by Asier Altuna (scored in 2015 in San Sebastian competition), *Ghost Ship* by Koldo Almandoz (scored in 2016 in Zabaltegi-Tabakalera San Sebastian Film Festival), and *Dantza* directed by Telmo Esnal (awarded with *Glocal In Progress* award 2017 in San Sebastian International Film Festival among others).

On the other hand, we would suggest that some of the Basque government's measures of positive discrimination in favor of films shot in Basque have contributed to the production of both films, together with EITB's coproduction.

### Aesthetic evolution

As a result of the evolution in both the subjects addressed and the production processes, there has been a notable change in the aesthetic of the films.

The audiovisual identity of the two films meets the requirements of formal minimalism (here the work of Javier Aguirre, cinematography, and Mike Serrano, art direction, should be underscored) and moves away from the more baroque proposals we find in other Basque films.

Finally, we can affirm that it is the confluence of everything described above that has led to the commercial success and international recognition of the two films (above all *Loreak*).

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## 6. The image of living of local people in the film *Timbuktu: Between the literal and the symbol*

**Abstract:** This chapter is an analysis of the Abderrahmane Sissako latest movie *Timbuktu* in the perspective of symbolic and interpretive anthropology. The author analyzes the meanings and symbols referring to myths, African traditional beliefs and contemporaneity hidden in the poetics of images. This analysis in view of a deeper cultural understanding ends with a conclusion that *Timbuktu* carries a universal content: it speaks to us, but also it says something about us.

**Keywords:** Timbuktu, Abderrahmane Sissako, interpretive anthropology, symbol, myth, African culture, terrorism

### Introduction

Vivian Sobchack, film theoretician writing on the phenomenology of cinema, in one of her latest book says that:

Whether or not we go to the movies... we are all part of moving-image culture and we live cinematic and electronic lives. Indeed, it is not an exaggeration to claim that none of us can escape daily encounters – both direct and indirect – with the *objective* phenomena of photography, cinematic, televisual and computer technologies and the network of communication and texts they produce. It is also not an extravagance to suggest in the most profound, socially pervasive, and yet personal way, these objective encounters transform us as embodied subject<sup>1</sup>.

In other words, “moving-image culture” has an enormous impact on our daily life. Not only does it affect our imagination, but it also defines what is important and what is not. It sets the trends and living standards and influences our beliefs, opinions and identity – the way we see “Ourselves” and “The Others.” What should be emphasized – texts that contemporary media produce “transform us as

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1 Vivian Sobchack, *Carnal Thoughts: Embodiment and Moving Image Culture* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2004), s. 136: 20 Jan. 2017 [https://monoskop.org/images/5/58/Sobchack\\_Vivian\\_Carol\\_Carnal\\_Thoughts\\_Embodiment\\_and\\_Moving\\_Image\\_Culture.pdf](https://monoskop.org/images/5/58/Sobchack_Vivian_Carol_Carnal_Thoughts_Embodiment_and_Moving_Image_Culture.pdf)

embodied subjects.” This statement provokes the question “how deeply can this transformation change individuals and society”; in fact, this is an important question about the role of “moving-image culture” in general – can it be a powerful tool for emancipation or does it rather strengthen stereotypes and exclusion? In this chapter, I would like to look at the story of local people told by Abderrahmane Sissako – a Mauritanian director, whose all cinematographic works aim at eliciting the shared destiny of Africans in the present, a destiny linked to a deterritorialized identity<sup>2</sup>. As Douglas Kelner notes:

Media culture can be an impediment to democracy to the extent that it reproduces reactionary discourses, promoting racism, sexism, ageism, classism, and other forms of prejudice. But media culture can also advance the interests of oppressed groups if it attacks such things as racism or sexism, or at least undermines them with more positive representations of race and gender<sup>3</sup>.

The story that Abderrahmane Sissako tells in *Timbuktu*, his latest film nominated for an Oscar, fulfills this second role mentioned in the previous quotation – that art is the way to create a universal language, common for every human being. Despite the fact that the plot is set in the exotic context of Mali, the director translates the events in the film in such a poetic and convincing way that the lives of the protagonists and the hardships they go through are convincing and effective in the emotional power they represent. Thus, his work, using the term proposed by Mary Louise Pratt, can be named as an “autoethnography”<sup>4</sup> – voices from another world. Global/local, center/periphery, national/transnational, outsiders/insiders, “postcolonial identity,” the making of homes away of homes, language barriers – all of these transcultural predicaments for the modernity are contemplated in Sissako movies. This dilemma is close to contemporary anthropology as it postulates a more reflective and deeper, cultural understanding of the identities in the context of globalization<sup>5</sup>. The question is: what new anthropological perspective

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- 2 Michelle Stewart, “Abderrahmane Sissako: Les Lieux Provisoires of Transnational Cinema,” in: *Film, History, and Cultural Citizenship*, ed. Tina Chen and David Churchill (New York: Routledge, 2007), pp. 199–216.
  - 3 Douglas Kellner, *Media Culture: Cultural Studies, Identity and Politics between the Modern and Postmodern* (London; New York: Routledge, 2003), p. 4.
  - 4 See Mary Louise Pratt, *Imperial Eyes: Travel Writing and Transculturation* (New York: Routledge, 2008).
  - 5 See Clifford Geertz, *Local Knowledge: Further Essays in Interpretive Anthropology* (New York: Basic Book, 1983) or James Clifford, *Routes. Travel and Translation in the Late Twentieth Century* (Cambridge, Massachusetts; London, England: Harvard University Press, 1997).

can be provided to film's interpretation or to what extent can a movie be an interesting material to research for anthropology? The simplest answer seems to be that cinema is a part of culture. As noted by Aleksander Jackiewicz, precursor of anthropology of film in Poland:

The material of the film are the images of registered reality... In this material, not only in ways of operating them, there are a lot of 'traces' of man, his world, culture. So literally impressed human fate in work, with all the biological, natural characteristic, there is in no art. If anthropology is one of the forms of our kind's awareness, the film can be valuable material for her<sup>6</sup>.

Anthropological perspective can also be valuable in interpretation, because of:

...specific bipolar nature of anthropological perception simultaneously focused on the archaics, the structure of long duration, and the contemporary. In this case too we are not dealing with the blurring of differences and extremities, just as in the equally concise definition of ethnography: Ethnography is a science about that, which connects people of different societies, cultures and epochs<sup>7</sup>.

Taking the above statements into account, the aim of this chapter is to look at the film *Timbuktu* not only as a record of contemporaneity but foremost to show what eternal mythological motifs and deep symbolic structures are hidden behind the poetics of images. In other words, what happened on the screen – the sensual experiencing of the actual perception of things (literal) and what goes beyond the frame of the movie and leads to something else (symbol).

## In the “real” and symbolic worlds

When in 2012 the eyes of the world turned to the Olympic Games in London, in one of local newspapers Sissako read about the public execution of the woman and the man who were sentenced to death by stoning for having children outside wedlock – one of the heaviest sins according to the terrorist organization Ansar al-Dine. Ansar Dine (Ançar Dine, Ansar al-Din, Ansar ul-Din) is an armed Islamist movement of the Salafi-jihadi strain, formed toward the end of 2011 by a veteran Tuareg rebel leader of 1990s named Iyad ag Ghaly. Ansar Dine fought in 2012 along with the National Liberation Movement of Azawad (MNLA) in the uprising in Mali. However, the Ansar al-Din in contrast to MNLA hadn't

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6 Aleksander Jackiewicz, *Antropologia filmu* (Kraków: Wydawnictwo Literackie, 1975), p. 15.

7 Zbigniew Benedyktowicz, “Antropologia filmu,” *Kwartalnik Filmowy*, Vol. 2 (1993), p. 17.

fought for the independence of Azwad but to establish Sharia law in Mali. In 2012, the organization took hostage most cities in Mali, including the historical city Timbuktu<sup>8</sup>. The public execution of the couple became a direct inspiration for Abderrahmane Sissako to portray life under terror experienced every day. As the director says in one of the interviews:

Their execution was posted online and this unspeakable atrocity took place without the media or the world noticing. This couple whose names we don't even know became a symbol. There is little interest in a tragedy that happens so far away, but not to pay attention would be to ignore that the earth is round; what happens far away isn't that far from home. People say: it's a scandal, why aren't people talking about this but they don't know what to do about it. I am one of those people that complains that no one is exposing such horrors but I'm also an artist, a filmmaker and my role is to be a conduit for some of that collective conscience of rebellion<sup>9</sup>.

Someone might think that the film will be another brutal drama about barbarian terrorism and its victims. Mostly, in media discourse, the phenomenon of religious terrorism and the heinous actions that it carries is considered in the context of numbers, places and new attacks. The numbers frighten and evoke a sense of fear and terror in us. We are overwhelmed by news about furious people, who in the name of religion dedicate lives to taking away the right to life of innocent victims. So, it is a discourse based on what Said called figuration – “we-they”<sup>10</sup>. In the world dominated by the media, this opposition seems to be simple – terrorists are Said's “they” – irrational, impetuous and unpredictable barbarians coming from the circles of Islam culture. We are a rational world of the West, whose mission is to fight terrorism, the mission intensifying when terrorism crosses its borders and directly threatens interests of the West. Mass media which belong to the “tests of culture” creating the knowledge of the world play a crucial role in the projecting of the figure “we-they.” By essentializing and exaggerating the nature of “the other,” they promote a specific vision of the world and influence the collective image of Islam, which treated as a monolith connotes an obvious association with terrorism. However, as Sissako shows, reality is more complicated – internal conflicts, mass reconfigurations of human world resulting in new forms

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8 For the insightful analysis of the conflict in Mali, see: Krzysztof Danielowicz *Terroryzm w Afryce: geneza oraz przebieg konfliktu w Mali w latach 2012–2014* (Oświęcim: Napoleon V, 2016).

9 Abderrahmane Sissako, “An interview” (2015): 20 Jan. 2017 <http://www.conversationsaboutcinema.co.uk/ioc/timbuktu/671/a-film-is-a-conversation-interview-with-abderrahmane-sissako/>

10 Edward Said, *Orientalism* (London: Penguin Group, 2003).



of citizenship and belonging, ethnic and religious divisions, local beliefs and above local content exchanges evade precise definitions and descriptions. They need another language, a deeper reflection and a search for new forms of expression in order to think about “We” and “They” in the context of the ambiguity of this dichotomy.

Media moreover, do not explain, do not problematize reality, but deal with guilt and responsibility. In other words, media coverage concerning religious terrorism is totally dehumanized. Abderrahmane Sissako in his work reverses this narrative. Not only does he show what is hidden behind numbers – ordinary people with their needs, beliefs, passion forced to live against their tradition (what usually escapes the attention of the media) – but also he “gives face” to “Islamic fundamentalism” and individuals, who withstand the terror, so demonized in the media. He both undermines Western stereotypes about Islam, jihad or Islamic fundamentalists and emphasizes what is universal to all, regardless of race, religion or language. Changing the optics in the way of presentation, the conflict portrayed in the film destabilizes our ideas about Islam, forces us to reinterpret them and leads us to deeper reflection. As was written in one of the film reviews:

*Timbuktu* is a film that should be urgently seen by audiences everywhere as it engages with a range of pressing issues, not least the application of laws justified by extremist religious doctrine. Now, over a year since its acclaimed screening at the Cannes film festival, it is a work that gains added pertinence with the growth of religious extremism across the globe. What is particularly interesting to us is that rather than choosing to create a film of great drama and conflict, in *Timbuktu* even a potentially tense scene of the transfer of a western hostage is given the aura of being an unremarkable and commonplace activity, Abderrahmane Sissako has chosen to create a work that focuses on the imposition of a version of Islamic law on the everyday, almost banal, aspects of daily life in and around Timbuktu<sup>11</sup>.

Those “banal aspects” of daily life – singing together, playing football, praying to one’s “own” gods, eating dinner with family – merge and interlace in reality, which gives spectators a feeling that what is so far away is paradoxically close at the same time. By connecting us to different stories of “ordinary people,” on the one hand, the director creates an impression that everyone can relate to the protagonists’ life, and, on the other hand, he draws global attention to the suffering of the local people.

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11 Andy Wills and Shivani Pall, “Timbuktu” (2015): 20 Jan. 2017 <http://www.conversationsaboutcinema.co.uk/ioc/timbuktu/711/culture-under-siege-everyday-life-in-timbuktu/>

Not coincidentally the plot of the story is set in Timbuktu – an intellectual and spiritual capital and a center for the propagation of Islam throughout Africa in the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries, and the UNESCO World Heritage Site. An old Islamic proverb from West Africa proclaims: “Salt comes from the north, gold from the south, and the word of God and the treasures of wisdom from Timbuktu”<sup>12</sup>. According to one tradition, Timbuktu was named for an old woman left to oversee the camp while the Tuareg roamed the Sahara. Her name (variously given as Tomboutou, Timbuktu or Buctoo) meant “mother with a large navel”<sup>13</sup>. That myth seems to be possible, because in traditional beliefs *omphalos* was the center of the body. The world in an archaic culture has its own *navel*, the central point from which began and spread further space. In that place, there was a central axis and people saw opening communication between the three levels of space: the earth, the sky and the realm of the underworld. The center of the world (*axis mundi*) is not a geographical place but mental and symbolic<sup>14</sup>. To destroy the culture, first strike its symbol.

Symbols have always played a tremendous part in the cultural and social lives of specific communities, be it territorial, religious, cultural or other. The consistency of symbolic universe is a need of every human being as it guarantees the order of reality and a feeling that one occupies one’s own world. Although symbols are individually interpreted, in traditional cultures they are manifested and experienced communally. The breakdown of a symbolic universe results in the loss of sense and quality as well as the communal meaning, the expression of which are symbols. Depriving of a human being of “the sense of being in the world” means the creation of a new order anew. So, the attack on Timbuktu – a cultural symbol of Mali – is not associated only with a physical invasion and takeover of the city but also with the destruction of the spiritual and material continuity of the city community.

The film is about a family from Tuareg who lead a quiet life at the outskirts of the city. The director shows us the beauty of the deserts at the borders of which they live. The family composed of Kidane (Ibrahim Ahmed) the shepherd, his wife Satima (Toulou Kiki) and his beloved daughter (Layla Walet Mohamed) take care of everyday duties during the day while they spend their evenings

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12 Wojciech Pastuszka, “Timbuktu. Miasto tysięcy manuskryptów” (2006): 20 Jan. 2017 <https://archoiwiesci.pl/2006/11/12/timbuktu-miasto-tysiecy-manuskryptow/>

13 Michał Tymowski, *Dzieje Timbuktu* (Wrocław: Zakład Narodowy imienia Ossolińskich, 1979), p. 14.

14 Mircea Eliade, *Traktat o historii religii*, trans. Jan Wierusz-Kowalski (Łódź: Wydawnictwo Opus, 1993), pp. 356–367.

singing, dancing and enjoying conversations under starry skies. Sissako builds this intimate portrait of a happy family living in peace and in harmony with nature by applying artistic shots, slow camera movement, quiet music fading into the background and short almost whispered dialogues. However, in later film sequences, the spectator realizes that behind these idyllic scenes with all their symbolic and poetic layers, dramatic stories hide. Slowly, the reality of horror reaches Kidane family as well: all the prohibitions exert a huge impact on all the inhabitants of Timbuktu, including Kidane family. Newly enforced rigorous Sharia law acquires the look and feel of a grotesque aptly illustrated by a scene when a fish merchant is ordered to wear gloves when selling fish. She asks a question: “to put gloves on when selling fish? So how can I pour water on this fish with my gloves on?” (dialogue from *Timbuktu*).

Sissako seems to be condemning literal interpretations of Koran by oppressors. Peace and an idyllic portrayal of the shepherd family, who appear a metonymy of life in harmony with the rhythm of the desert, gives way to fear for one's life. The internal anxiety of Kidane and Satima grows almost in a linear fashion along the power of terror when the initial timidity of oppressors changes into cruelty. The only person who is spared is the local shaman woman. It seems that oppression will not reach the family because they live at the outskirts of the city where the desert constitutes a protective barrier. This safe status of the family is maintained until Kidane gets into conflict with Amadou, the fisherman whom he accidentally fatally hurts. Despite the fact that Kidane repeats constantly that one cannot escape fate and that everything lies in the hands of God (*Timbuktu*), right after the accidental death of the fisherman, the fate of Kidane depends on the fighters who rely on their own code of rules. As already noted, Kidane family life constitutes the main axis of the plot, nevertheless the director skillfully introduces other subplots, other stories that illustrate the conditions of life under terror experienced by the inhabitants of Timbuktu every day. These stories not only draw our attention to the real events that took place in northern Mali, but also reveal other content, senses and symbolic meanings. The film becomes doubly referential. According to the double-track anthropological perspective, whereby one track deals with the archaic, with the structure of longevity, and the other with contemporaneity, I will try to interpret the symbolic layers of Sissako's film.

*Timbuktu* begins with silence and the sound of wind in the desert. The camera lens moves to the running antelope. It seems that we hear her breathing rapidly (il.1). In the background someone utters the words – “Do not kill, only torment.” The next scene shows a series of shots pointed at African cult figures.

As Sławomir Sikora, writing on *visual anthropology*, especially photography, noted about photographs, the observation that can be easily applied to film shots:

Some photographs are symbolizations as they transcend its realistic qualities, not losing it after all. In this duality they become specific symbols, whereby the meaning of the first image is necessary to understand the meaning of the second one<sup>15</sup>.

As far as the interpretation of film images is concerned, we may say that what happens on the screen goes beyond the frame and causes a whole range of reactions, meanings and values. Semantic openness and variation in the image creates multiplicity of meanings one can deduct from them. When reading a scene in a more obvious way, we can presume that a running antelope might symbolize freedom for local people who are forbidden music, dance, a sense of security, integrity and identity. But why did the director start the film story from an image of an antelope, not any other animal? This image may lead us to traditional beliefs and meanings ascribed to an antelope in local mythology. According to one legend of Bambara people – an ethnic group living at the borderland of Mauritania and Mali – one day there appeared an antelope Cziwara – a mythical creature, half human and half animal. She came down from heaven to teach people how to grow grain. But people forgot about her charitable deeds and the angry Cziwara hid in a deep pit. To appease it, the Bambara tribe began to make masks symbolizing the sacred animal. Antelope's ears represent the songs sung by women during the most difficult time for the tribe, the aim of which is to help survive hard times<sup>16</sup>. Both scenes, one with an antelope and the other with figures of cult, might signify not only a symbolic shooting but also an escape from an unsuccessful process of decolonization and from internal divisions.

Internal conflicts present in Malian society are also gently outlined by Sissako. The symbol of division between Tuaregs who live in the North (represented by Kidane, a herdsman) and ethnic groups of Black Africa in the South (represented by Amadou, a fisherman) became a river – a border between our world and an alien world.

In traditional, archaic cultures based on magical thinking, a person who crossed the river, a border between “orbis interior” (“our world”) and “orbis exterior” (“foreign world”), risked some sort of danger. Borders are often thought to be ambivalent – transcendental and demonic at the same time, and, human order

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15 Sławomir Sikora, *Fotografia: między dokumentem a symbolem* (Warszawa: Świat Literacki, 2004), p. 99.

16 For insightful myth knowledge, see: Zygmunt Komorowski, *Kultury Czarnej Afryki* (Wrocław: Ossolineum, 1994).

does not apply to them. A man on the border finds himself in a “borderline” place signed by “tabu.” As Kowalski puts it “A hasty, illegal crossing of the border has to end for the risk-taker with the worst consequences: death, insanity or sinking in alien world and assuming its identity”<sup>17</sup>. Probably Satima, the shepherd’s wife, anticipated inevitable consequences when in the scene preceding the incident taking place at the Niger river, she asks her husband not to take any weapons but only to talk to the fisherman.

Music, as Bambara’s myth, can help survive hard times and as such it constitutes a significant part of the film serving as an exemplification of peaceful resistance to the regime’s torturers. Dunduzu Chisiza one of African’s politicians says:

Another outstanding characteristic of our culture is our love for music, dance and rhythm. Our throats are deep with music, our legs full of dance while our bodies tremor with rhythm. The proper subtitle for Africa should have been “Land of music, dance and rhythm”. This three-pronged phenomenon is indeed the spice of our life<sup>18</sup>.

Dance and music – a tribute to local heritage, an everyday expression of feeling, a key part of the culture of nomadic people in the region – can be purifying and liberating. Once again, the director refers to spiritual beliefs by presenting Zabou, possibly a local shamanistic priestess walking around in brightly covered robes with her head and hands uncovered and a cockerel on her shoulder.

Zabou, a transcendent figure – a mediator between earthly world and underworld – is the only woman Jihadi soldiers allow not to cover her hands and head. The scene during which we get to know Zabou is greatly symbolic. The warriors get into town and begin to “patrol” Timbuktu’s streets. In one of the streets a shaman woman stands with spread arms against the car of the warriors. It would seem that the warriors are not going to pay attention to the shaman woman and will fulfill their patrolling mission nevertheless. However, when the fearless Zabou does not withdraw, they slowly go away. We could limit our interpretation of Zabou’s role as that of resistance and rebellion, but such a reading of this scene seems insufficient. The director shows the power of resistance in many other scenes in the film; likewise, Zabou also appears in another powerful scene. In the reading

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17 Piotr Kowalski, “Niezróznicowanie, czyli nasza byle jaka katastrofa,” in: *Powodzie, plagi, życie i inne katastrofy*, ed. Konarska Katarzyna (Wrocław: Colloquia Anthropologica et Communicata, 2012), pp. 7–26.

18 Dunduzu Kaluli Chisiza, “The Temper, Aspiration and Problems of Contemporary Africa,” Nyasaland Economic Symposium, July 18–28, 1962, as cited in Primus, “African Dance,” in: *African Dance. An Artistic, Historical, and Philosophical Inquiry*, ed. K. W. Asante (Canada: Africa World Press, 1996), p. 9.

of this particular figure, we have to turn to the area of bipolar anthropological view, that is, magical thinking. This is not about obvious analogies but rather, as Piotr Kowalski notes, “The discovery of cultural mechanisms which, in the changing historical conditions, *construct the world anew*”<sup>19</sup>. The borderline figure of Zabou has the power characteristic of those who are “in between,” those who are in contact with “sacrum.” In archaic cultures, “the other” generate ambivalent feelings because they represent the state of matters that are not contained by the order of this world and, moreover, nobody knows where this “otherness” comes from. These matters cause fear and fascination at the same time because sacrum itself is frightening, it is holy and demonic simultaneously, good and bad at the same time. Everything that happens to be “in between” is hybrid and constitutes a threat to the real tidy world. Initially, the warriors try to evade the woman, but for one of them, the fascination with sacrum is stronger than he thought. There is one scene in the film, which can be interpreted as “a rite de passage,” when one of the soldiers, away from his comrades, performs an expressive barefooted dance that seems to represent a kind of primeval connection, a spiritual desire to clean himself. He engages in an ecstatic dance that would illustrate a symbolic meaning of “ecstasy which is the time of exceptional rapture during which no conditions of ordinary everyday life are important any more (...) a human being in the state of ecstasy is someone who went beyond his body and the physical limitations of his body”<sup>20</sup>.

This “initiation” comes in the presence of the woman, just after she has broken a mirror. According to traditional beliefs a broken mirror is not an ominous prophecy but it heralds things much worse – the smashing of mirrors, breaking into pieces the image contained therein, means damage to man or the world<sup>21</sup>. In this damaged world, the only thing that is left is the power of imagination – here we come to the much-commented scene that shows a group of young men playing football match without a ball in a totally committed way. Abderrahmane Sissako comments on this part of the film in an interview:

Imagination is the last weapon for people who have lost all their bearings. This is what keeps them alive because nobody can do anything about it; it's the ultimate hope<sup>22</sup>.

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19 Kowalski, “Niezróżnicowanie, czyli nasza byle jaka katastrofa,” p. 11.

20 Kowalski, “Niezróżnicowanie, czyli nasza byle jaka katastrofa,” p. 9.

21 Piotr Kowalski, *Kultura magiczna. Omen, przesąd, znaczenie* (Warszawa: Wydawnictwo Naukowe PWN, 2007), p. 290.

22 Sissako, “An interview.”

Sissako not only portrays various peaceful forms of resistance of those who refuse to submit to a religious devotion hijacked by fanatic interpretation of Sharia law but also depicts jihadists as morally complex people, and exposes internal conflicts and hypocritical behavior in various forms. In the scene of recording propaganda film to gain new recruits, a young boy, who used to be a rapper, is trying to convince (perhaps more himself) that he walked a path of sin. He says that to the camera with a complete lack of conviction and to the question of older soldiers, "Does he believe in what he says" he replies, "I do not think so." This image seems to say with the words of Miron Białoszewski: "Look at me, so I guess I have a face. Of all the familiar faces I remember my own the least"<sup>23</sup>. The overall message of the film seemed controversial, but Sissako explains in one of his interviews for Al Jazeera:

The movie aims at condemning all forms of barbarism and efforts to cover up the truth. These people are condemned because of what they do. But I gave them some humanity because if you don't, the risk is that you will lose your own humanity... In my opinion there is always something to be saved in a human. Art must recognize what can save someone from going down the wrong path. But the group effect is condemnable (Sissako, Talk to Al Jazeera)

Finally, one of the most important protagonists in the film is the local Imam – mediator between local residents and terrorists. When a jihadist enters the mosque with weapons, he addresses them in the following way:

Here in Timbuktu, people who devote themselves to religion fill it with the head, not weapons. Stop your jihad. You dishonor Islam and others. Where is your mercy? Where is your forgiveness?<sup>24</sup>

This dialogue is not just a story about the real meaning of Islam for Muslims, but about Islam for the world and especially about religion for fundamentalists.

## Conclusion

At the end of the chapter once again I would like to quote Sikora:

The film can be a very interesting means of exploration of cultural boundaries in the modern world. Because it allows dissect the boundaries between what is local and what is global; or rather, different levels of interpenetration of local and global; allows to observe the centrifugal and centripetal movement<sup>25</sup>.

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23 Miron Białoszewski, *Autoportret odczuwalny, Obroty Rzeczy* (Warszawa: Państwowy Instytut Wydawniczy, 1957).

24 Dialogue from *Timbuktu*.

25 Sikora, *Fotografia: między dokumentem a symbolem*, p. 183.

Despite its local context, *Timbuktu* carries universal content: not only does it speak to us, but it also communicates something about us. The images that emerge from the frames painted by the director's sensibility become stories about the human experience of the world, its fragmentation, the lost unity and the integrity of being. In the final scene of the film, the running antelope appears in the frame again. It runs for a moment as if running failed to exhaust her as it runs toward freedom. A film is always only a reflection of reality, its metonymic reflection, but the work of Abderrahmane Sissako is a whole "book of quotations" from which everyone can choose the one most moving to him and everyone can read it in their own way. *Timbuktu* is an invitation to a dialogue – so much needed in today's world full of conflicts and mutual prejudices.

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