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This study stems from the project “*El
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The “Miró Decree” and its impact on the production of films dealing with ETA violence (1983–1989)

Abstract

In 1982 the Spanish Socialist Workers' Party (PSOE) came to power and put into place an ambitious cultural policy that had a considerable effect on the film industry. In 1983 the so-called “Miró Decree” was enacted. It offered generous measures to promote film production and establish a solid framework for the industry. At the same time, regional governments issued laws to boost the cinema. Both initiatives enabled debut directors to make more committed and personal films.

Our work analyses the impact of this legislation on the films that addressed the dramatic theme of ETA terrorism; films that could be made thanks to committed support from central and regional governments. It also looks into how these projects were accepted by Spanish society. The films share common elements such as the way the directors distance themselves from displaying a heroic image of terrorists or a one-dimensional point of view on the Spanish police, while passing judgement on the social and economical crisis that coincided with the beginning of the Transition to democracy.

Only four out of the twelve films shot during those six years did well at the box office, tripling their official costs. The rest did not elicit much audience interest, although they paved the way for a new generation of film directors and also established to some extent firmer foundations for the film industry, as was the goal of the Decree.

Keywords

Films, Spain, film policies, Spanish Transition, political violence, terrorism, economic policy.

1. Introduction

On 27 October 1982 the *Partido Socialista Obrero Español* (Spanish Socialist Workers' Party – PSOE) came to power in Spain with wide-ranging and innovative manifesto. From that moment on, cultural policy took a major turn by which the general ignorance of the population about its historic heritage shifted to an unprecedented examination of our cultural legacy and a promotion of artistic creation in all fields: music, theatre, museums, libraries, etc. The major financial investment and promotion of the cultural industry bore fruit, but also gave rise to

complaints and criticisms of cases of megalomania and misappropriations.

Cinema was also given a significant stimulus in order to consolidate the industry and in particular to improve its quality, so that it could be competitive with the upcoming imminent entry of Spain into the European Economic Community. Films were a bold attempt to open a window onto the world, through which to observe the achievements of the fledgling Spanish democracy. And the world responded positively: on 11 April 1983 director José Luis Garci and his film *Volver a empezar*, backed by the General Directorate for Cinematography, gained recognition from the Hollywood Academy and won the Oscar for best foreign-language film. The world had placed its seal of approval on Spanish daring.

The legal framework which enshrined this daring in the field of cinema was Royal Decree 3304/83, which was dubbed misleadingly the “Miró Law”. It established generous measures to encourage film production. The Government pledged itself to fund up to 65% of the production costs, provided that the film was of outstanding quality. The decree remained in force for five years, until Jorge Semprún, in the cabinet reshuffle of July 1988, was appointed Minister for Culture and issued Royal Decree 1282 of 28 August 1989.

The regional governments joined in to boost the Ministry for Culture’s initiative with the Miró Decree by supporting their own local cinema production, with a goal that was both economic and political: to promote a local cinema industry while constructing a new national identity in contrast to the centralist Spanish nationalism of the Dictatorship.

This work will deal with the changes in film production brought in by the Miró Decree and the impact of the new cinema policy on a specific group of feature films that addressed one of the most complex, painful and burning issues in Spanish life of those years: the political violence of the terrorist group ETA (*Euskadi Ta Askatasuna*, in English: “Euskadi and Freedom”) and the Basque pro-independence movement. Based on documents stored in the *Archivo General de la Administración* (AGA), the General State Archives, this article focuses on the public support through the state budget for the projects of filmmakers addressing this reality. The support provided for new film production companies and debut directors allowed films to be made that were more personal rather than commercial and reflected the ideological change in the government; but they did not always reflect Spanish society. We will therefore also examine the degree to which these films were accepted by the public and critics, gauging society’s response to the representation of political violence in the cinema.

2. “For Change”: the model for providing an economic boost to the cinema

Measured against the following decades, the 1960s, under the aegis of José María García Escudero at the General Directorate for the Cinema, were undoubtedly the best time for the Spanish cinema in terms of production volume and box office success¹. In those years the market share of the Spanish films was around 25%. But in the late 1970s, the mass entry of television, home video and new leisure options, led spectators to drift away steadily from the big screen. In general, profits fell as a result, the number of films screened shrank and the average quality of films declined. On top of this, the UCD’s liberalising policy which eliminated censorship by Royal Decree 3071/77 of 11 November triggered a slew of screenings of films that had been banned until that date. As a result, this policy of deregulation, albeit intended to put an end to the previous stale system of protection and censorship, almost brought down the whole Spanish cinema industry. Among other measures, the distribution quota (set until that date at one Spanish film for every four foreign ones) was done away

¹ It is not possible to compare figures for previous decades, as no automated box-office control was in place that would allow reliable figures.

with and replaced by a screening ratio of two foreign films for each Spanish one (Vallés Copeiro del Villar, 2000). The result of this liberalism was that at the beginning of the 1980s only a much reduced number of Spanish films won a significant market share, while the remaining production was a notorious failure.

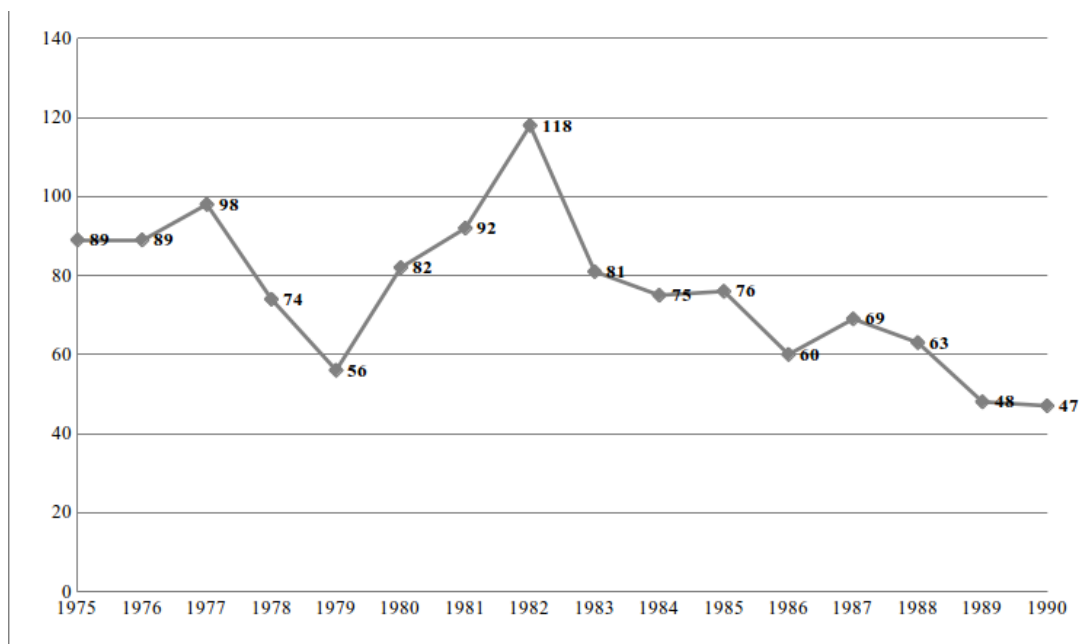
As a result, when at the end of November 1982, with the PSOE already in government, there was talk behind the scenes that film director Pilar Miró would take over at the Directorate General for the Cinema, jubilation in the trade was unanimous: at last, the position would be held by someone who was well acquainted with the finer points of the industry, its greatness and its darkest hours, as well as its acute problems. Here was someone who had experienced at first hand the severity of the law, because she had been charged with slander against the Guardia Civil in her film *El Crimen de Cuenca*.

In its election manifesto “For Change”, the PSOE had promised to address four challenges for a “progressive cultural policy”: to promote social participation in culture; to complete the process of linguistic “normalisation” in the autonomous regions with their own languages; to extend and protect freedom of expression; and to boost cultural and artistic production. In addition to these principles, in the case of cinema the strategy included the protection for quality national productions, a charter for collaboration with Spanish state-owned Radio and Television (RTVE), and commercial distribution facilities abroad.

The appointment of Pilar Miró as General Director was officially published on 15 December 1982. During her period in office until 30 December 1985, when she resigned to return to filmmaking after a very controversial period in government, she strove to transform the structure of the film industry.

When she took office, she discovered at first hand what she already knew: not only had the production of domestic films dropped from 89 in 1975 to 81 seven years later (Chart 1), but 20% of them were actually a sub-class labelled “S” (a designation applied to soft porn) included in the production figures in order to generate dubbing licenses which would allow imports of foreign films. Also, the number of working cinemas had declined from 5,076 in 1975 to 3,939 in 1982; moreover, while in 1975 the average frequency of attendance had been 7.2 times per person per year, in 1982 it had dropped to 4.1. But not only that: the 78.8 million audience for Spanish films in 1975 had shrunk by more than half in 1982 to only 36 million. The only small consolation was that in much of Western Europe the situation was relatively similar.

Chart 1. Feature films produced between 1975 and 1999



Source: Ministry of Culture. Institute for the Cinema and Audiovisual Arts (ICAA).

But all that was about to change. Javier Solana, Minister for Culture, worked to secure a significant budget increase in his department, which in the first three years of PSOE rule grew an average of 111% compared with the average 19% for the rest of the ministerial departments. For the cinema, the 1,490 million pesetas budget assigned for 1982 had risen to 3,439 million in 1984. Most of this increase was allocated to fund productions (Rubio Aróstegui, 2003: 54): the 1,200 million pesetas budgeted in 1982 grew to 2,522 in 1986, in a bid to consolidate the atomised movie industry, maintain production companies stable and strengthen their economic situation.

In barely one year the new General Director, along with a large group of representatives from the industry, took a series of actions that followed the French model of *Avance sur Recettes*, i.e. advances on box office receipts. Royal Decree 3304/1983 introduced this idea for the first time for quality films, films from debut directors, experimental films and children's films. All of them could obtain up to 50% of the film's recognised cost upon submitting the project, this amount being refundable after commercial release. Also, another subsidy was introduced for Special Quality films. This was a subjective award, granted by a committee, amounting to 25% of the estimated gross box-office receipts in advance. In addition, if a producer could prove investment of over 55 million pesetas based on an approximate draft budget, it would receive a further additional percentage calculated in accordance with a fixed mathematical formula. Lastly, there was a non-refundable payment of 15% of gross box-office receipts for every Spanish film during the four first years of commercial release. Thus, through the Protection Fund, total subsidies could amount to 65% of the recognised cost (Table 1). In line with the German idea of *Filmverlag der Autoren*, this promoted the figure of director-producer at the expense of traditional producers. It undermined second-rate commercial cinema, and turned it against Pilar Miró, by supporting creators who until then had had no opportunity to produce their films or had encountered huge difficulties to do so. Thanks to institutional financial backing, 43 debut filmmakers had a chance to direct films in Spain between 1985 and 1988.

Table 1. Guidelines on the protection of Spanish cinema 1980-1989²

Item	1980-1983	1983-1989	1989-1992
Screen share	1 Spanish film per 3 foreign ones (four-monthly periods)	1 per 3 (four-monthly periods) 1 EEC per 2 from 1986 on	1 EEC per 2
Distribution quota (dubbing)	5 licenses per 1 Spanish (per capital premiering provincial capital and box-office receipts)	4 licences per 1 Spanish (by box-office receipts) Exclusively EEC films from 1986 on	4 licences per 1 Spanish (by box-office receipts) Exclusively EEC films from 1986 on
Automatic subsidy	15% of gross box-office receipts after 5 years	15% of gross box-office receipts after 4 years	15% of gross box-office receipts after 2 years
Additional subsidy on cost	More than 35 million pesetas (cost-related scale)	More than 55 million pesetas (max. 25% of gross box-office receipts)	-----
Special Quality subsidy	Additional 10% (50% for technical-artistic team)	25% on gross box-office receipts	10 grants of 30 million pesetas per year
Advance Subsidy	-----	Maximum 50% of the cost	Maximum producer's investment of 85 million pesetas (exceptionally, 200 million pesetas)
Legislation	Royal Decree 3071/1977 11 Nov. Law 3/1980 10 Jan. Royal Decree 1465/1981 19 Jun.	Royal Decree 3304/1983 28 Dec. Royal Decree 1257/1986 13 Jun. Ministerial Order, 8 Mar. 1988.	Royal Decree 1282/1989 28 Aug. Ministerial Order, 12 Mar. 1990 Royal Decree 1773/1991 13 Dec.

The fact that the subsidies would be awarded depending on quality meant that it was essential to develop the aspect of the Decree establishing the composition and functions of the two ministerial committees: the Film Rating Committee and the Technical Evaluation Committee. Their composition was clearly very controversial, because members were selected on a subjective basis and their decisions involved many personal interests (Monterde, 1993: 103). From the very first award, “the shadow of corruption and cronyism became a heavy burden.” (Ansola, 2004: 112) But if the intention was that “the problems of the cinema should be solved by people in the cinema,”³ then it also had to be accepted that the producers should also continue with their projects during the two years they were at their posts, and they could at the same time be awarded subsidies. The political cost of this decision for the General Director and for the Government itself was very high.

To these subsidies were added, first, the agreements signed between the Ministry for Culture and RTVE in 1983, assuring a 25% share of broadcasts for Spanish feature films as

² Borrowed from (Álvarez, 1993: 207).

³ Statements by Pilar Miró to *El País*, 28 November 1984, cited in (Ansola, 2004: 113).

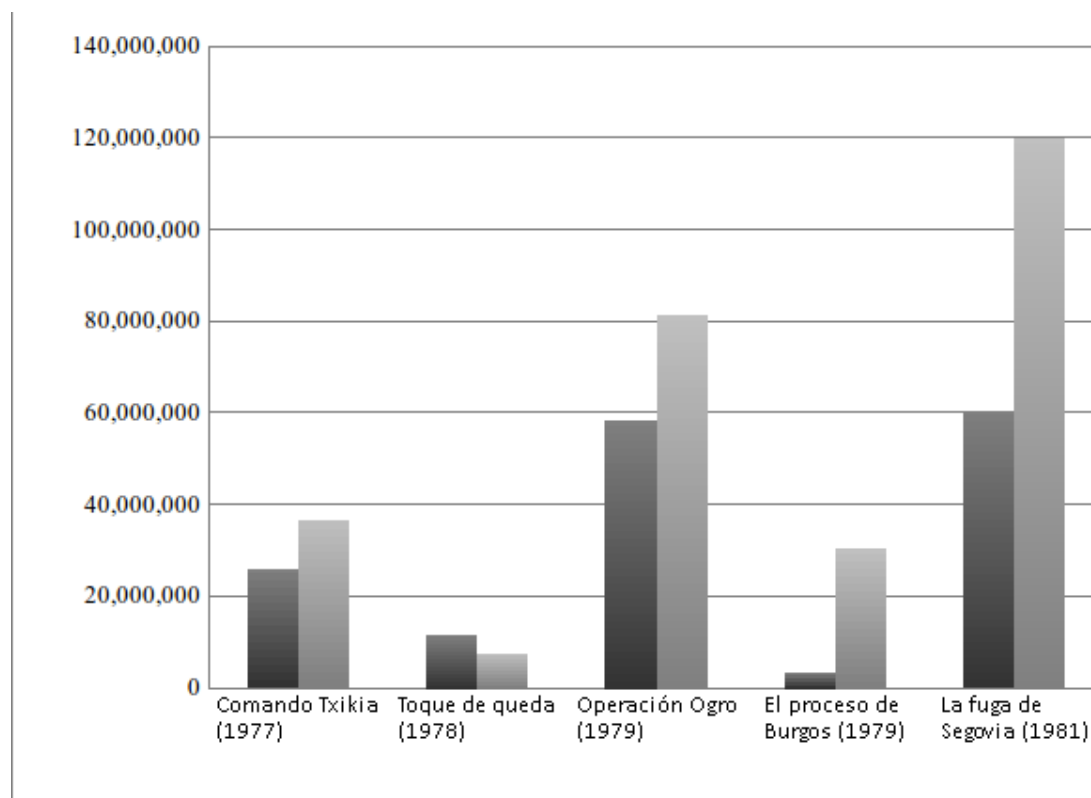
well as the power to acquire broadcasting rights; and, second, subsidies from the regional governments. In the case of Basque Country, despite the lack of a cinema industry comparable to the one in Catalonia, and with only 20% of the population being Basque speakers, the Department for Culture of the Basque Government encouraged productions by awarding non-refundable grants of up to 25% of the budget to films shot in 35mm and in the Basque Country, on condition that the majority of the crew members lived there and that a copy of the film in the Basque language was provided in deposit. Between 1981 and 1989, 35 feature films received financial support through these incentives, besides the collaboration of the regional TV broadcaster Euskal Telebista (De Miguel, Rebollo & Marín, 1999). Although it was ironic that most of the filmmakers lived in Madrid and moved to the Basque Country for filming, a number of companies were created, with convergent interests in producing films on political violence, among other issues. Some production companies went on to have a long life (Table 2), such as Lan Zinema, founded in 1974 by Javier Rebollo and Juan Ortuoste, which produced *Golfo de Vizcaya* in 1984; Ernesto del Río's Sendeja Film, established in 1986 to produce *El amor de ahora*; Imanol Uribe's Aiete Film which in 1983 produced *La muerte de Mikel*; and Bertan Filmeak, which in 1989 produced Antonio Eceiza's *Días de humo* (Riambau & Torreiro, 2008).

Returning to the earlier period, from 1977 to 1982, during the five years of UCD government, five full-length films related to ETA's activity were made: the feature films *Comando Txikia* (by J. L. Madrid, 1977), *Toque de queda* (by I. Núñez, 1978) and *La fuga de Segovia* (by I. Uribe, 1981); one full-length documentary, *El proceso de Burgos* (I. Uribe, 1979); and a feature co-produced with Italy, *Operación Ogro* (G. Pontecorvo, 1979) (Martínez, 2017a: 213–234). All five filmmakers focused on the most significant milestones of terrorist activity during the Franco regime: the assassination of Carrero Blanco in *Comando Txikia* and *Operación Ogro*; confrontation with and victory against the judicial apparatus in *El proceso de Burgos*; escape from the prison system in *La fuga de Segovia*; and the ideological and political reasons which justified the armed struggle in *Toque de queda*. All of them were presented from the terrorists' point of view. The archetypal main character was portrayed almost as a hero leading his people to independence by combating tyranny, thus justifying his actions.

The public welcomed these projects with interest. Except for the failed debut film *Toque de queda*, which had numerous problems related to structure and direction, they were notably successful in terms of tickets sold (Chart 2)⁴.

⁴ In the case of *Operación Ogro* the table only shows the Spanish producer's input of 58 million pesetas; the total budget amounted to 118 million pesetas.

Chart 2. Budget and box-office receipt of films about ETA (1977-1982) in pesetas during the UCD government



Source: Evaluation Committee files.

The arrival of the PSOE government and the improved economic and political situation led to twice the number of projects related to political violence being submitted by production companies for funding. Six of these companies were based in the Basque country, five in Madrid and two in Barcelona (Table 2). In addition, the Basque Government's subsidies had a great influence on the development of screenplays and the locations for the action. The terms set by the Basque government influenced the plots and boosted the number of films related to the difficult situation in the Basque Country (Roldán, 1995).

Table 2. Location of production companies

Year	Title	Director	Production company (years in operation)	Location ⁵
1983	<i>El pico</i>	E. de la Iglesia	Ópalo Films (1983-1991)	BCN
1983	<i>La muerte de Mikel</i>	I. Uribe	Aiete Film (1983-2005)/ Cobra Film (1979-1988)/ José E. Alenda (1982-1997)	SS / MAD / MAD
1983	<i>Los reporteros</i>	I. Aizpuru	Cooperativa Leizarrak (1983)	AL
1983	<i>El caso Almería</i>	P. Costa	Multivideo S.L. (1982-1992)	BCN
1984	<i>El pico 2</i>	E. de la Iglesia	Ópalo Film (1982-1991)	BCN

⁵ Abbreviations: BCN: Barcelona; SS: San Sebastian; MAD: Madrid; AL: Alava; MEX: Mexico; BI: Bilbao.

1984	<i>Goma 2</i>	J. A. de la Loma	Golden Sun (1982-1991)/ Esme	MAD / MEX
1985	<i>Golfo de Vizcaya</i>	J. Rebollo	Lan Zinema (1974-2001)	BI
1986	<i>El amor de ahora</i>	E. del Río	Sendeja Film (1986-2017)	BI
1987	<i>La rusa</i>	M. Camus	Pedro Masó P.C. (1986-2003)	MAD
1988	<i>Ander eta Yul</i>	A. Díez	Igueldo Producciones (1985-1991)	BI
1988	<i>Proceso a ETA</i>	M. Macía	Séptimo Arte Exhibición (1985)	MAD
1989	<i>Días de humo</i>	A. Eceiza	Bertan Filmeak (1979-2017)	SS

Source: Prepared by author

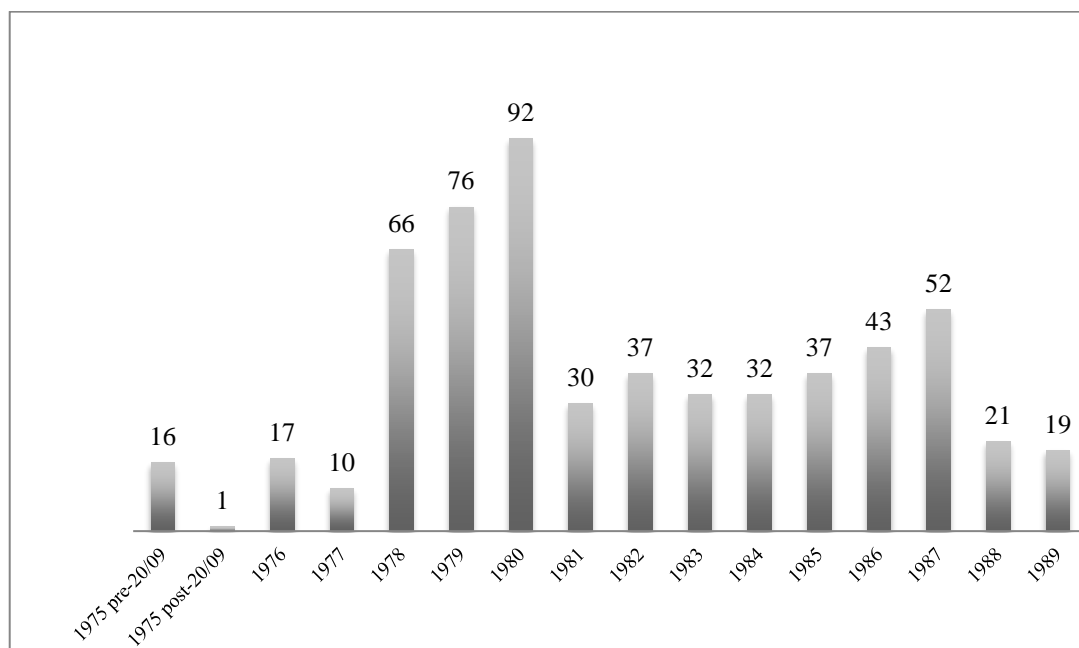
Among the directors who tackled the dramatic situation of terrorism in their films, only Imanol Uribe had done so previously, and took it up twice again: in his very successful *Días Contados* (1994), and in *Lejos del mar* (2015). The rest did so only once, except for Mario Camus, who, besides *La rusa*, filmed during the period under study here, returned to the topic twice in *Sombras en la batalla* and *La playa de los galgos*, released in 1993 and 2002 respectively, where he delved into stories and characters depicted with great sensitivity. In the five years that the Miró Decree was in place only one woman, the Navarre-born director Ana Díez, dared translate into images her personal view of the Basque reality, stressing the ravages caused by industrial conversion and restructuring, drugs and terrorism.

3. The filmmakers' first projects: economic success with government support

When the PSOE came into power in October 1982, nearly 340 people had been killed by ETA (Chart 3). In Italy, after the massacre of 2 August 1980 at Bologna railway station, Francesco Rosi questioned in *Tre fratelli* the justification of terrorist violence from a position that was strongly opposed to it. In September 1981, Margarethe von Trotta won the Golden Lion at the Venice Film Festival and premiered in Berlin her film *Die bleierne Zeit* (The leaden years) (in Spain the title was *Las hermanas alemanas*, in the USA "Marianne and Julianne", and in the UK *The German Sisters*). The film analysed the divergent attitudes of two sisters, one a journalist, the other a terrorist, in the troubled Federal Republic of Germany of the 1960s. The film became so iconic that its original title was used to define worldwide terrorist violence between the end of the 1960s and the mid-1980s.

The screenplays of the Spanish films already released in 1984 reflected the proliferation of assassinations. But although shifting from the previous view of terrorism, films still continued to stress the excesses committed by the forces of law and order rather than the crimes of ETA.

Chart 3. Assassinations by ETA between 1975 and 1989



Source: Ministry of the Interior

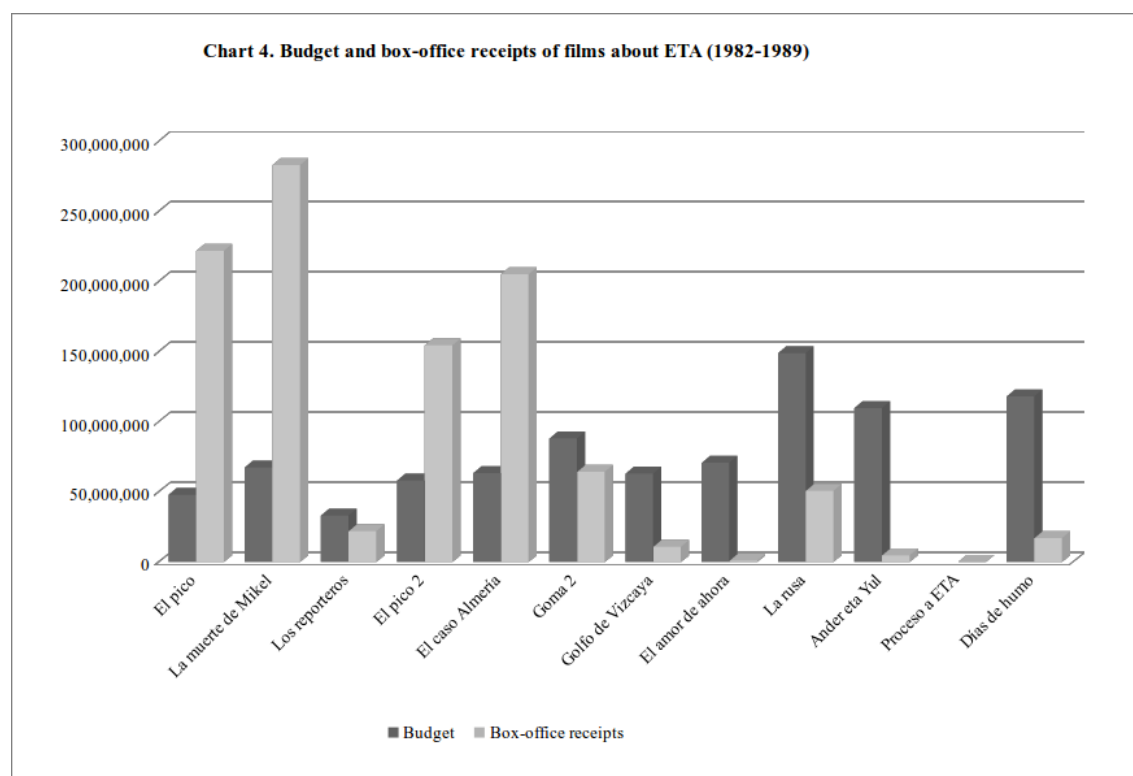
In 1983 three productions related to ETA’s political violence were screened: *El pico*, *La muerte de Mikel* and *Los reporteros*. In all three the action took place in the UCD period, with the discouraging conclusion that, despite the arrival of democracy, things remained much the same as, or even worse than, under Franco. All three films denounced the drama of drug addiction, the inflexible attitudes to sexual diversity, the economic crisis and the role of the media, while also highlighting the specific problems of Basque society, such as the “treason” of the moderate parties, and even the radical ones, with respect to the desires for Basque independence. But they also contained emotional and more personal aspects, such as the uncompromising defence of friendship, caring for children, integrity, freedom and justice.

Although ETA violence was a continuous backdrop for the plots, none of the directors considered that this violence could have a significant influence on the general oppressive atmosphere. The fight for freedom through terror instead of through the tools of democracy appeared basically justified by police violence.

Of the 12 feature films dealing with the subject of ETA made under the aegis of the Miró Decree⁶, the three produced in the first year were rather successful in terms of box-office receipts (Chart 4). From then on, except for *El caso Almería*, the rest aroused only a discreet interest among the public, either because they were rather personal works or because they were artistic failures. Almost ten years had to pass before ETA terrorism again aroused public interest, when Imanol Uribe released *Días Contados* in 1994.

⁶ Also dealing with ETA, a 16 mm. documentary film *Euskadi hors d’État*, was made in 1983 in co-production with France, produced by Ángel Amigo and directed by the American Arthur Mac Craig. In 1986 Alfonso Ungría directed a short film (55 minutes) *Ehun metro* (100 metres) for Euskal Telebista.

Chart 4. Budget and box-office receipt of films about ETA (1982-1989)



Source: Evaluation Committee files

If we look at the three films of that first year of the Socialist Government, it could be considered that the directors reflected the increase in the armed struggle as the result of the frustration caused by the lack of independence for the Basque Country, an independence which seemed closer to fulfilment after Franco's death, but was cut back in the years of democracy due to the lack of interest among the political parties.

El pico, the first of the three films, cannot fail to impact viewers. The proposal for production was submitted to the Ministry before the Miró Decree was passed. With an estimated budget of 47 million pesetas, Ópalo Films applied for the Special Quality subsidy “for its artistic values”⁷ and the additional subsidy for costs, granted at the time to films whose costs were above 35 million pesetas. On these figures it would receive 10% of box-office receipts, in addition to the general 15%. Screened in September 1983 with 27 copies, its great popularity among audiences earned the production company an additional subsidy of 5% on a recognised cost of 48 million, because the film had earned more than 100 million pesetas in the box office. The interest aroused by the film abroad enabled it to be included in the foreign films import quota to Argentina, which had purchased the distribution rights, as well as in Uruguay and Paraguay.⁸

El pico was presented at the 1983 San Sebastian Film Festival and released in October of that year. Its experienced director, Eloy de la Iglesia, insisted that his film was “a family story [...]. I'd like the public to come and see my film as if they'd never heard of it.”⁹ Defined in these terms, one could guess that it was just another typical drama, but some scenes portrayed by De la Iglesia scandalised a section of society and the whole spectrum of the

⁷ AGA, 42, 3566, 16

⁸ *Ibid.*

⁹ Statement by Eloy de la Iglesia in *El País*, 4 October 1983.

press. The film was accused of being even “pro-coup and destabilizing”.¹⁰ The main plot revolves around the dilemma faced by two men: a major in the Guardia Civil, with cast-iron principles but ready to do anything to save his son, and an *abertzale*¹¹ deputy, a rather more schematic character, who discover that their respective adolescent sons are heroin addicts. De la Iglesia enters Bilbao’s underworld of drugs, delinquency, murder and police corruption. With great visual realism *El Pico* calls into question the impact of industrial restructuring, underlining the continuous violence which debases the “lost generation” and which literally and metaphorically is consuming the Basque society and its future.¹²

Although the critics disliked the film and labelled it as being, to say the least, “bad and dishonest”,¹³ nearly a million spectators saw it. Its success led Ópalo Film to make a second part, *El Pico 2*, whose action was set in Madrid, far from the Basque Country’s claustrophobic atmosphere.¹⁴ Released in November 1984, it did not achieve the success of *El pico*, but nearly 700,000 people went to see it, and it earned 154.7 million pesetas in the box office, almost three times the 58 million final budget. Besides the topics previously dealt with in *El pico*, in this case De la Iglesia denounced the seedy prison regime and scheming in the justice system and the press. More focused on family drama and the hardships of prison, there are few references to political violence in *El pico 2*, although De la Iglesia let himself go when he put into words through the former ETA terrorist and drug dealer how the Guardia Civil had offered him to work “in some groups that are hunting down ETA terrorists who are on the other side of the border”. It was the first time that such practices were mentioned in a film. Beyond police corruption, De la Iglesia insisted through this character on the good conscience and decency of the murderer, drug dealer and former ETA terrorist who claims: “I’ve got some old friends among those in ETA, and I think it sucks if you go and screw them”. In essence, according to the film, loyalty and courage are values recognised on both sides of the law.

The second film, *La muerte de Mikel*, also delves into social denunciation, political manipulation and aspirations for independence. Director Imanol Uribe did not shirk from openly showing the violence, hypocrisy and repression present in wide sectors of the Basque society. Mikel himself represents a cruel anti-hero who, although evolving as the film progresses, vents his frustration by attacking those he loves. At the very beginning of the story, while practicing cunnilingus on his wife in the privacy of their bedroom, he bites her brutally; also brutal is his slap of the transvestite he has fallen in love with, after their first night of love; and brutal is the expression on his face as he is driving his car frantically and tries to commit suicide. Then, once he comes to terms with his relationship with the transvestite and made it public, he experiences the intolerance of those who represent the established order. Indeed, his *abertzale* friends, progressive but dogmatic and moralist, withdraw his credentials to stand for an election, and his mother, traditionalist and dominant, rejects her son’s homosexuality and, in an intense but controlled scene, it is even suggested that she kills her son. Only his victims, his ex-wife and the transvestite, as well as a priest,¹⁵ accept his sexual choice. Uribe goes even further and denounces the manipulative exploitation of Mikel’s death by his friends, who, after having marginalised him, turn him

¹⁰ Ibid.

¹¹ Radical Basque nationalist.

¹² For a wide-ranging analysis on the films discussed here, see especially (De Pablo, 2017).

¹³ Fernández-Santos, A. “La película de Eloy de la Iglesia considerada oportunista y comercial”. *El País*, 18–09–83.

¹⁴ AGA, 42, 3606, (67–86N). With a declared cost of 75,110,275 pesetas the Evaluation Committee granted it Special Quality and the Special Cinematographic Interest status for the purposes of screen share, with 34 copies being released.

¹⁵ In the original screenplay the priest was just another “reactionary and seedy guy” (Aguirresarobe, 2004, 104), but later, when during the shooting the crew met a film-loving and enthusiastic parish who worked with them, the character was modified.

into a martyr for the cause. And Uribe does not hold back when he showed gratuitous violence by the police at a road block, at night, when they shoot without looking; and when, in a flashback, we see the torture Mikel experienced in the past and the threats he must endure in the present, when he is arrested for questioning under the Anti-Terrorist law because he was a member of an ETA intelligence commando unit in 1975; or the charges by the Guardia Civil against demonstrators. Finally, Uribe seizes the chance to denounce the PNV's sloth, embodied in Mikel's brother. In essence, *La muerte de Mikel* is a revealing kaleidoscope of the suffering and aggravation of all the characters, an allegory on the limits of freedom, a “parable on intolerance and the use of human beings to suit political interests” (Zunzunegui, 1985: 261).

Its risk and sincerity earned *La muerte de Mikel* great commercial success. Released in February 1984, with 32 copies in circulation, an audience of more than 1,170,000 people went to see it and the box-office receipts were 283,245,210 million pesetas, which more than quadrupled the recognised cost of 67,611,985 million pesetas.¹⁶ The Ministry awarded a 25% for its Special Quality, the Special Interest subsidy and subsidy for a budget of over 55 million pesetas,¹⁷ as well as the additional subsidy on box-office receipts. The Basque Government, for its part, had awarded a subsidy of 25% on the project. Pilar Miró was “enthusiastic about the film” (Aguirresarobe, 2004: 111) and proposed that it be presented in a parallel section at the Berlin Festival, to which the festival agreed; it was also distributed in other countries such as France, the Federal Republic of Germany, Italy and Argentina. The critics, for their part, acknowledged Uribe's effort in trying “to achieve an impossible tone of neutrality,”¹⁸ between drama and social comment, leaning more to the former, as Santos Zunzunegui said. According to Ángel Inurria, Uribe was trying to move away from folkloric themes.¹⁹ Even *Egin* praised *La muerte de Mikel*, acknowledging that “Basque cinema is beginning to emerge from its “local parish”.”²⁰ It is true that the biggest criticism by this *abertzale* media outlet focused on the fact that the demonstration protesting against the death of the leading character was “notably small.”²¹

Los reporteros was even more political than the previous films. With a modest budget of 26 million pesetas, and thanks to the non-refundable subsidy from the Basque government, its director and producer Iñaki Aizpuru launched a project showing that things had turned even worse with democracy. In this case, the friendship between two free-lance journalists –as Aizpuru himself was – breaks down because of their conflicting political views. They grow more and more apart from each other, with the implication that the more radical of the two is about to engage in the armed struggle, justified for the sake of Euskadi's independence. The artistic failure of the film led to its commercial loss, although it reflected an obvious reality: the ideological arguments of young people to join the terrorist group. Presented in the New Directors section of the 1984 San Sebastian Film Festival, it was “coldly received by both spectators and critics.”²² Released in Madrid on 22 November, the 22 million pesetas in box-office receipts covered only two thirds of the 33 million final cost. Aizpuru applied for recognition of Special Quality status, alleging that it was the first film in

¹⁶ AGA, 42, 3569, 45. The initial budget presented amounted to 42 million pesetas. Once the film finished, the Evaluation Subcommittee estimated the cost at 67 million and awarded it both Special Quality and Special Interest status. For its part, the Basque Government awarded it a subsidy of around 25% of the film's budget.

¹⁷ That year five films applied for the additional subsidy based on their high box office figures: *La muerte de Mikel*, *Los santos inocentes*, *Últimas tardes con Teresa*, *Las bicicletas son para el verano* and *El caso Almería*.

¹⁸ *Contracampo*, 37, 1984, p. 96. Cited in (Barrenetxea Marañón, 2009: 978).

¹⁹ *Casablanca*, 39, 1984. Cited in (Barrenetxea Marañón, 2009: 979).

²⁰ *Egin*, 10-01-84. Cited in (Barrenetxea Marañón, 2009: 979).

²¹ *Egin*, 10-02-1984. Cited in (De Pablo, 1998:186).

²² *Los reporteros*. Retrieved from <http://www.euskomedia.org/aunamendi/101295>

the Basque language filmed with direct sound. The subcommittee, acting in accordance with the guidelines of the government’s cultural policy, awarded the subsidy.²³

While the three films *El pico*, *La muerte de Mikel* and *Los reporteros* had alluded to the gratuitous violence of the security forces, *El caso Almería* focused exclusively on it, denouncing the excesses committed in the fight against ETA. Initially called *Viaje al sur*, filming began in September 1983, before the Miró Decree was enacted. *El caso Almería* was based, as announcement at the start of the film reads, on the court judgement relating to the tragic events of May 1981: in the wake of the attempted assassination of General Valenzuela, three young men from Cantabria driving to attend a First Communion celebration in Almeria were mistaken for three ETA terrorists by the Guardia Civil, who tortured them to death. The debut film director Pedro Costa presents us with two contrasting characters: the dark Lieutenant Colonel of the Guardia Civil in Almeria and the progressive attorney presenting the private prosecution on the part of the victims’ families. It was premiered on 26 January 1984 at the Benlliure cinema in Madrid, and the film distributor cautiously released only 14 copies.²⁴ The main cinemas in Madrid “didn’t dare screen it”²⁵ because of strong pressure, despite Costa’s careful attempt to differentiate between individuals and the institution; the latter, at any rate, did not emerge well. Again, the film’s thesis was that the security forces inherited from Franco’s regime remained unchanged.

With an initial budget of 71 million pesetas the production company applied for the category of Special Quality, and also for the extraordinary subsidy. The Committee recognised a cost of 63.5 million, a sum which Pedro Costa disagreed with, arguing that the final amount had exceeded the initial budget and that he had run a considerable risk because it was a “very dangerous film, and it featured new artistic values”.²⁶ In spite of its restricted launch receipts were good, with nearly one million spectators and more than 205 million pesetas in box-office receipts. The radical right, outraged by the film’s ambiguity in highlighting malpractice by the Guardia Civil (considered support for ETA) launched Molotov cocktails in the cinemas screening the film. Nevertheless, the success of *El caso Almería* resulted in it being selected for the Taormina Festival (Italy), where it won the prize for the best debut.

The only co-produced feature film in the whole period under review containing aspects related to ETA was also made in 1984: *Goma 2*. With an international cast featuring Margaux Hemingway, Lee Van Cleef, Jorge Rivero and Ana Obregón (who at the time was a successful presenter of the TVE programme *¿Qué apostamos?*), its director and producer José Antonio de la Loma thought he could make big money abroad. The initial budget was around 160 million pesetas, 70% of it contributed by the Spanish production company Golden Sun. In the end, a series of incidents with the co-producers and the international distributor reduced the final cost to 118 million, of which 88 were contributed by Golden Sun. De la Loma himself contributed 6 million of his own money in order to complete the film. When explaining all these difficulties to Pilar Miró, he explained that given his interest in making exportable films, he should be granted the Special Quality status, to make up for the huge losses incurred.²⁷ The Evaluation Committee did not agree. De La Loma alleged that the production company’s penury had precluded a good publicity campaign in Spain, and this

²³ AGA, 42, 3575, (65–83N).

²⁴ Idem.

²⁵ Statements by Pedro Costa on the 30th anniversary of *El caso Almería*. Retrieved from http://www.acemiadecine.com/la_academia/noticia.php?id_noticia=1169

²⁶ AGA, 42, 3590, (206–83N). The Committee maintained its decision.

²⁷ Letter by José Antonio de la Loma to Pilar Miró, 22–VII–1984. AGA, 42, 3598, 14A. The difference between the 118 million final cost and the 88 million contributed by Golden Sun was due to the international cast fees, paid through an advance on the international distribution

had resulted in the low box-office revenues. Indeed, the ratio of costs recovered in Spain was poor in relation to its high budget, as the film had an audience of only 300,000. But it was not the same abroad. Under the title *Killing machine* it was released in the Federal Republic of Germany, the Philippines and Japan, and was also screened in Denmark, Portugal, Peru, Argentina, Canada, the United Kingdom, Greece, Hungary and the USA,²⁸ a much more extensive distribution than for other Spanish films, mainly thanks to its international cast. *Goma 2* was a violent thriller, in which a former ETA terrorist begins a new life as a lorry driver carrying fruit to Europe. The film denounces, on the one hand, the huge problems faced by Spanish farmers and hauliers, harassed at the time by French farmers; and on the other, the main character's own problems, threatened by his former fellow-terrorists and the mafias, who finally kill his wife and against whom he uses the weapon he has mastered, *Goma 2* explosives. The harassment of those who accepted reintegration was the only criticism by the makers against the terrorist organization.

4. A more personal view: the commitment to auteur cinema

The films shot between 1985 and 1988 by Basque directors Javier Rebollo, Ernesto del Río and Navarre-born director Ana Díez are defined more by their “cultural interest”²⁹ than by their commercial value, so they were released in cinemas dubbed *Arte y Ensayo* (Art and Experiment). These works reflect the directors' concern to translate to the screen a more personal view of the process experienced in the Basque Country, although it affected the whole of Spanish society. The films are virtually debuts, financed by modest film production companies and scanty budgets. Box-office receipts were also lower than those of the films discussed earlier.

The first of them, *Golfo de Vizcaya*, Javier Rebollo's second feature film, focused on the yearning to return to one's birthplace, a leitmotiv in several subsequent films: *El amor de ahora*, *Ander eta Yul*, *Días de humo*, *Yoyes* (H. Taberna, 1999) and *La casa de mi padre* (G. Merchán, 2009); a return which, in the two last cases, leads to death.

From the beginning of their careers in the 1970s, both Javier Rebollo and Juan Ortueste (respectively director and producer of *Golfo de Vizcaya*) harboured the certainty that they could make cinema in the Basque country (Roldán, 1995: 30–31). With that certainty, after filming some documentaries and the feature film *Siete Calles*, they undertook *Golfo de Vizcaya*. However, although they had maintained their production centre in Bilbao, and were determined to show the specific local features, they were in fact labelled as being pro-Spanish, and accused of “disengaging from the struggle of a people in defence of its identity” (Zunzunegui, 1985:247). The project they presented to the Ministry in 1984, initially titled *La aguja de marear*, focused on the homecoming of a journalist of a certain age who, after having lived in exile in France for fifteen years, returns to Bilbao and occupies the job left vacant by a female colleague who has fled after she is discovered to be a member of ETA. The journalist initiates a love affair with a young woman who is the partner of an ETA terrorist in hiding in France. The police, ETA itself and HB all believe that the journalist knows something which in fact he does not. *Golfo de Vizcaya* denounces the intolerance of those who had remained and “who regarded as traitors and tried to control every aspect of the private lives of their supporters” (De Pablo, 2017: 265), meaning the former exiles who wished to reintegrate themselves. In this complex political plot the director included other aspects related to industrial restructuring and the subsequent social conflicts.

The Ministry took on the challenge of contributing the advance subsidy on a 50.5 million pesetas budget. The Evaluation Subcommittee awarded 15 million, roughly 30%. For

²⁸ *Killing machine*. Retrieved from <http://www.imdb.com/title/tt0087350/>

²⁹ See Law 1/1982 24 February. Government of Spain.

its part, the Basque government also awarded 15 million, the state-owned bank Instituto de Crédito Oficial (ICO) granted a loan of 10 million pesetas, shareholders of Lan Zinema contributed 5 million, and a final 5 million pesetas came from the production company's cash balance.³⁰ All those funds made it possible to complete what was a rather difficult film for the spectators, who were forced to address very specific cases they often did not know about.

Golfo de Vizcaya was premiered on 26 November 1985 in Barcelona and on 2 December in Madrid, with 15 copies released, two of them in Basque. Despite the negative criticism from all camps, and the poor box-office receipts of slightly more than 10 million pesetas leading to a loss of almost 40 million pesetas, it applied for the Special Quality, the Special Interest and Special Effort subsidies, all of which were awarded by the Subcommittee. Lan Zinema carried on business as a production company, partly achieving the goals set out by the economic policy of both the central and the Basque government to establish a solid film industry network. The film won the prize for best photography at the San Sebastian Film Festival and was shown at other international festivals such as Toronto and Moscow.

El amor de ahora, the first feature film by Ernesto del Río and the production company Sendeja Film (still active today), also dealt with the topic of a homecoming. In this case, it is a couple of ETA terrorists who benefit from the amnesty. Their return is welcomed by their families, but the social breach, now evident in the couple, and the ghosts of the past finally lead them to drift apart from each other. Here, once again, although showing threatening phone calls by ETA to young people who leave the organisation and the doubts about treason to the cause, the police repression is again more explicit.

With an initial budget of 70.8 million pesetas, it applied for the Ministry's advance subsidy, and was awarded 21 million pesetas, plus a further 20 million funded by the Basque government, and 10 million pesetas as an advance on distribution (the rights had been acquired by José Esteban Alenda), plus a 16 million loan from ICO and 10 million of own funds.³¹ Selected for the Valladolid Film Festival, the negative criticisms curtailed its commercial viability: it grossed barely one million pesetas and had an audience of only 3,500. Other factors worked against it: there had been nearly 500 ETA victims up to that time, among them Dolores González Catarain (*Yoyes*), killed on 10 September 1986, the first day of the film's shooting. The film coincided with the release in Italy of *The Moro Case* (Giuseppe Ferrara), a film which touched the audience's hearts. They were moved by the 55 days of captivity of the Christian Democrat president of Italy, the immovable position of the Government and the decision taken by the terrorists. Gian Maria Volontè took the role of an Aldo Moro, as neither hero nor martyr, weakened and morally abandoned, and confronted with the enigma of his own death. Like in Italy, in Spain too a large part of society was gradually drifting away from support for terrorism, though still in silence (Martínez Álvarez, 2017b).

In a way, Ana Díaz's *Ander eta Yul* also dealt with the theme of homecoming, but in this case after serving a sentence for drug dealing. The producer and Screenwriter, Ángel Amigo, who had founded his company Igueldo Producciones in 1985, did not apply for the Ministry's funding, but he obtained the TVE broadcasting rights as well as subsidies from the Basque government and Euskal Telebista.³² Ángel Amigo was so sure about *Ander eta Yul* that he boldly undertook the production with only the 1.5 million pesetas prize awarded by the Basque government to the screenplay (written with the collaboration of Ángel Fernández-Santos). *Ander eta Yul* reflected for the first time a view “from inside ETA: how the attacks

³⁰ AGA, 44, 3622, 202–84. The Basque Government had granted his previous film, *Siete Calles*, one million pesetas.

³¹ AGA, 42, 3926, (244–85N).

³² AGA, 42, 3777, (130–78N).

were planned, without any mythologising (...) how the commandos followed internal guidelines to the letter.” (Angulo, Martínez-Vasseur & Santamarina, 2012:217). The authors wanted to denounce how ETA had turned into a vengeful, parastatal organisation that combats drugs, and how the terrorist targets also aimed at “people who were pro-Spanish, and anyone who happened to be around.”³³ Topics such as homosexuality, (less traumatically dealt with than in *La muerte de Mikel*), the everyday life of terrorists, doubts that arise as to whether or not to kill a friend, and the terrorist’s passionate conviction, are all shown with honesty and courage. Also, policemen were for the first time shown as individuals, not as the usual threatening stereotypes: after this film several police commissioners would adopt a lonely and untiring battle to confront evil in the cinema.

Presented at the San Sebastian and the Valladolid Cinema Festivals, *Ander eta Yul* won the Goya prize for Best New Director Goya in 1989 and the Best Film prize at the Bogota Festival. In line with its expectations of the possible audience, the film was released with 7 copies. Premiered in Madrid on 1 January 1989 at the Renoir cinemas, and in spite of positive reviews, it had only 13,000 viewers. The 4.7 million pesetas in box-office receipts were far below the 110 million budgeted, as declared by the producer when applying for the film’s classification for a subsidy. Although TVE had acquired the broadcasting rights, the film was never shown on TV; due to be broadcast on 19 April 1995, the very day of ETA’s attempt on the life of José María Aznar, the film dropped out of the television schedule and was replaced by *The Simpsons* (Angulo, Martínez-Vasseur & Santamarina, 2012:139).

5. The public’s distancing from the terrorist problem

Before the abovementioned 1989 Decree modified the rules for cinema subsidies,³⁴ three further films related to terrorism were produced: *La rusa*, *Proceso a ETA* and *Días de humo*. *Proceso a ETA* has given rise to more fiction than fact. Presented at the 1989 Murcia Cinema Week and with only 410 spectators in the cinemas, it has virtually become an unreleased film.³⁵ In essence the story centres on the doubts of a man, who, by family tradition, has joined the terrorist group. In Madrid he kidnaps the daughter of a Basque businessman and falls in love with her; when the father, who has gone into exile to avoid paying the “revolutionary tax”, does not deliver the 800 million ransom, the terrorist refuses to kill her. Many other elements included in the plot eclipse this critical treatment of ETA violence: the mobsters hired by the father to set his daughter free torture and kill radical nationalists; or some dreamlike scenes which divert the spectator from the core plot. In these sequences the comparison between ETA violence and state violence appears justified by the oppression suffered in Euskadi from the Transition on. Directed by first-timer Manuel Maciá, the film intended to “convey a message of peace with information which may be tough but is also true.”³⁶

The process that gave rise to *La rusa* was very different. Director Mario Camus had just been awarded the National Cinema Prize and was at the zenith of his career after the successes of *La colmena* and *Los santos inocentes*. The screenplay was an adaptation of the book with the same title by Juan Luis Cebrián, editor of *El País*, one of the most prestigious newspapers at the time. With a 200 million budget, producer Pedro Masó applied for an

³³ Ibid.

³⁴ The Basque government also modified its terms in 1990 by founding Euskal Media, a limited liability company, under the aegis of the Department for Culture. The ultimate aim was to recover the invested funds through direct participation in the productions (Decree 174/1990 26 June, Basque Government).

³⁵ <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=3opkjrNZ72c> There is a version on the Internet. The file in the public records contains no details about its budget. The film production company did not provide any specific answer when contacted.

³⁶ Interview with Manuel Maciá. *El País*, 11 March 1989.

advance on the project and was granted 80 million pesetas, 40% of the budget, plus the participation of TVE. Shooting began in Paris on 23 February 1987.³⁷ The plot contained all the elements capable of holding the viewers' attention: an honest politician charged with negotiating with ETA to put an end to terrorism, a cold and beautiful female spy, heartless bosses, shady policemen, an love story, disappointments and lies... a mix which in the end resulted messy and blurred. Thirty years later Camus confessed: “I was wrong about everything: the screenplay, the actress...”³⁸ Wanting to mesh a plot involving politics, the police and romance, the film focused rather more on secondary characters, as the director wished to highlight subtly the dark side of the democracy, specifically the actions of the GAL (*Grupos Antiterroristas de Liberación*) anti-ETA death squads. It was released on 11 September 1987 with 30 copies. With little positive criticism and a low attendance (around 166,000 spectators) it was denied the Special Quality status applied for. Pedro Masó said he would file an appeal and the Directorate General ordered that a new Committee examine it. This time it was granted the Special Quality up to a maximum 25% of the cost, set at 150 million pesetas, as well as the rest of the subsidies applicable. Box office receipts were slightly above 51 million pesetas, a third of the recognised investment.

The last film to benefit from subsidies under the Miró Decree was *Días de humo*, which raised doubts about the Ministry for Culture and TVE, as funding the works of film maker Antonio Eceiza, closely linked to Herri Batasuna (Angulo, 2009; De Pablo, 2017: 272–273). In February 1989 Eceiza's own production company, Bertan Filmeak, applied for an advance grant on a 177 million peseta budget. The Subcommittee granted 30 million, in addition to the 25 million awarded by the Basque government and the acquisition of broadcasting rights by TVE.³⁹ *Días de humo* focuses again on the topic of homecoming. In this case, the main character returns from Mexico (as Eceiza himself had done) after twenty years of absence. He is faced with an unknown, tough world, which drives him to alcohol abuse. Everybody has carried on with their own lives: his ex-wife is concerned about freeing their daughter, who has been jailed for political reasons; his old friends, now holding high positions in the new regime, hardly pay any attention to him. The peace that has been longed for and dreamt about for so long is shown as a pipedream. The last shot of the film superbly portrays the main character's reality, in a hostile, strange San Sebastian, where he walks alone down the Maria Cristina bridge enveloped by the smoke of the gas canisters thrown by the police. He has gone to the railway station to welcome his daughter, by then set free, but she doesn't see him, look at him, or recognise him. The film was released on 7 September 1990, and the negative criticisms of the politics and film itself buried a work which made almost everybody feel ill at ease, because Eceiza insisted that the police repression and lack of freedoms were still the same as in the past. The 17 million pesetas box-office receipts hardly exceeded a tenth of the 118 million pesetas of its recognised cost. Only six copies were distributed, with 51,000 spectators. The Committee refused it Special Quality status.

In July 1988 the writer Jorge Semprún took over from Solana at the Ministry. Bearing in mind the Miró Decree's allegedly negative consequences, a new Royal Decree was issued in August 1989. It forced producers to choose between subsidies on tickets sold or advance subsidies. The linking of subsidies to the budgets presented had rocketed the average costs of films from 30 million in 1977 to 135 million in 1990. Moreover, the major government investment had not resulted in good box-office figures: only 42 out of the 142 films which had received advance subsidies between 1984 and 1987 obtained enough box-office receipts to repay the subsidy; the rest were failures and in some cases the films were not even made.

³⁷ AGA, 42, 3947, 261–8.

³⁸ Author's own interview with Mario Camus, 17 May 2016.

³⁹ AGA, 42, 3790, (232–88N).

Apart from this, the market share of Spanish cinema was in freefall, plummeting from 21.8% in 1984 to 10.9% in 1991.

Under the new regulations, productions dealing with political violence were reduced by half in the following five years. Only five films were made, two of which (Mario Camus’s *Sombras en una batalla* and Imanol Uribe’s *Días contados*) succeeded in earning back their production costs. The end of the Miró Decree’s generous benefit regime was mainly the result of very controversial and costly productions which had not always achieved the expected quality levels, and were not well received by the public. The high volume of contributions by central and local government did not act as a spur. In fact, a culture of subsidies became established in the Spanish cinema industry, mainly due to the producers’ attitude, who instead of risking their funds, focused on financing their films through public subsidies.

6. Conclusions

Thanks to the significant support from government, filmmakers were able to make films which would otherwise have been impossible. The PSOE’s commitment to culture enabled more personal works to emerge, reflecting issues that concerned Spanish society and that the filmmakers transformed into film without concern for their commercial aspect.

The new economic policy, essentially aimed at reducing the gap between Spanish and the EU cinema and establishing a stable film industry, led to the creation of several production companies in the Basque Country and ensured that debut directors could make their first feature films. The regional governments’ subsidies and what they expected in return had an influence on plots, which became more locally based: thus, homecoming to the Basque Country became a recurrent topic, expressing the difficulties in adapting to a society that is in the process of change. But the ultimate goal of setting up a sustainable industry was not achieved. The largesse of public agencies was not replicated by private investors to the same extent; in fact, the subsidies became a disincentive for an industry that had been drained of capital.

One third of the twelve films analysed here obtained good results in terms of box-office receipts, tripling the recognised production cost. The other two thirds, eight films, made by practically first-time directors were neither welcomed by the critics nor the public; they were auteur works which met the goal set out in the Royal Decree of building up a pool of filmmakers. Moreover, political violence was a complex and difficult topic, so producers did not want to risk much capital on making the films, whose production in the end was virtually a product of the support of national and regional governments.

As regards the subject-matter of the films, while during the UCD government only the fight for freedom during the Franco period was portrayed, in the first period of Socialist Party rule, films dealing with ETA dealt with other problems, such as the lack of personal freedoms, the economic crisis and drug addiction. Nevertheless, either because of the lingering heritage of the Dictatorship or because of the special situation in Basque country, it took a long time for filmmakers to stand up to ETA. It was not until the following decade or even the turn of the century to find directors and screenwriters who, with some exceptions, denounced ETA’s terrorism in their films.

The films made in those five years emphasized in particular the lack of change in the security forces, which in most of the films are portrayed as depersonalized entities and the cause of violence. The directors concurred in denouncing the excesses committed by the state security apparatus rather than the murders committed by the armed group.

Both the filmmakers and the Spanish government itself were criticized by public opinion through the press for having supported these films: for some media they appeased the murderers and gave them a voice; others denounced the film’s lukewarm and “pro-

Spanish” attitude. These attacks, together with the ongoing terrorist actions, did not benefit these films commercially, but rather drove the public away from them.

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