

Jaume Martí-Olivella

Basque

an introduction

Cinema



Center for Basque Studies · University of Nevada, Reno

BASQUE CINEMA

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Basque Cinema
An Introduction

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CONTENTS

1 · Fictions and allegories	7
<i>Akelarre</i>	19
<i>The Conquest of Albania</i>	23
2 · Fictional wars and / or epic narratives	27
<i>Chronicle of the Carlist War, 1872–1876</i>	41
<i>Lauaxeta. To the Four Winds</i>	44
<i>Escape from Segovia</i>	47
3 · Euskadi's rural world	52
<i>Tasio</i>	58
<i>Cows</i>	62
4 · (En)gendering ETA and / in Basque politics	67
<i>Mikel's Death</i>	76
<i>Ander and Yul</i>	81
<i>Yoyes</i>	86
5 · The female gaze	91
<i>The Dark Years</i>	96
<i>Butterfly's Wings</i>	101
6 · Migrant mutations	105
<i>Leap into the Void</i>	118
<i>Maité</i>	124
<i>The Day of the Beast</i>	127
Index	132
Colophon	149

1 · Fictions and allegories

IN DORIS SOMMER'S influential analysis of Latin American national narratives, *Foundational Fictions: The National Romances of Latin America*, Sommer articulates Walter Benjamin's historical analysis using Fredric Jameson's notion of "national allegory" and explains that "I take allegory to mean a narrative structure in which one line is a trace of the other, in which each helps to write the other. ... If I read a double and corresponding structure between personal romance and political desiderata, it is not with any priority of either register. I am suggesting that Eros and Polis are the effects of each other's performance." (Sommer, 42-47)

In my own reading of Sommer's formulation and its possible application to the "foundational fictions" of Basque cinema, I substitute Eros with its opposite Freudian polarity Thanatos. It is the death of a culture and its struggle against death that get romanticized in these historical fictions; they become foundational insofar as they are conceived as cultural constructions of a national imaginary. In later sections I also use the Eros side of Sommer's argument, especially when thinking of Jameson's "national allegory" and its figuration as a family metaphor. Quite often, Euskadi is depicted as a split family whose inner divisions and struggles represent the divisions and struggles of the Basque Country. In films like *Akelarre* (1983) by Pedro Olea and *The Conquest of Albania* (1983) by Alfonso Ungría, a national myth is clearly articulated. And yet, Olea himself admits it is the personal, almost autobiographical element that is at the heart of his project. "Since I shot *El bosque del lobo* (*The Wolf's Forest*, 1970) I had this idea in mind. In that film I analyzed the origins of the legendary, why a man could be judged as a monster. My first memories of



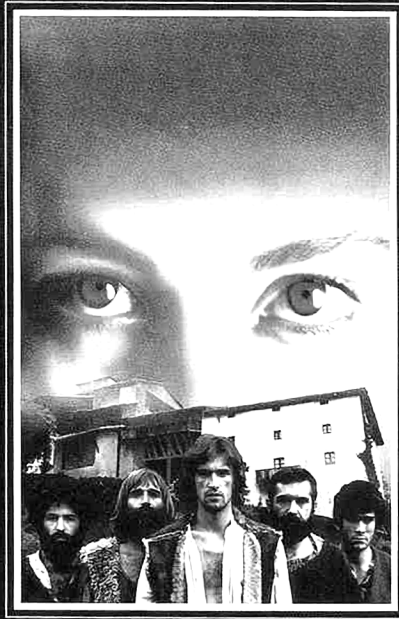
SILVIA MUNT JOSE LUIS LOPEZ VAZQUEZ MARI CARRILLO



AKELARRE

WALTER VIDARTE PATXI BISQUERT IÑAKI MIRAMON
fotografía JOSE LUIS ALCÁINE música CARMELO BERNAOLA
director PEDRO OLEA

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Poster for Pedro Olea's *Akelarre*, 1983, a powerful portrayal of the Spanish Inquisition's witch hunt in the Basque Country.

witches send me back to a cousin of mine, who was fat and ill and who used to drag me on the floor because he could not walk standing. He was the first one who told me horror and mystery stories." (Olea, *Fotogramas*, April 1983)

Olea's personal fascination with horror and gothic genre movies bespeaks a neo-romantic position that presents the struggle between the individual and a society as a machine that crushes deviance. Quim Casas and Mirito Torreiro suggest that *El bosque del lobo* "clearly shows the power relations that end up annihilating the individual, something that is recurrent in many of [Olea's] films." (Casas & Torreiro, 92). No wonder that Olea's story presents one of the western world's most persistent deviants, the witch. This historical and legendary figure incorporates all the elements of individual freedom that are always opposed to established power.

Moreover, Olea conceived of his project in clearly gender-specific terms. "In *Akelarre*, I tried to defend the position of the witches because I believe that their pagan ways had a lot to do with the Basque matriarchy that has always existed. What I showed in *Akelarre* was the struggle between a pagan way of life confronted by a Catholicism that is imposed from without; this confrontation expresses in my view the opposition between woman-cave-uterus and man-religion-Church. It is the struggle between patriarchy and woman's secular power, a fight that is at the origin of all the problems shown in my film." (Olea in Aldarondo, 76)

I OPEN THIS introduction to Basque cinema with a film that not only is a historical allegory but clearly establishes symbolic relationships between gender roles and political relations in Euskadi. Most of the films studied in this course will deal directly or indirectly with the interface between sexual and national identity.

Concerning the historicity of witchcraft in the Basque Country, it's worthwhile quoting Julio Caro Baroja, whom Olea and his co-screenwriter Gonzalo Goikoetxea repeatedly consulted in the pre-production research for the film. "Basque peasants were cut off and protected from the world outside by their strange language, and so they still clung to the same conception of the world as their forefathers, a view of life rooted in antiquity, full of mystery and poetry and even, at times, humor. Witchcraft and magic were still very much realities for them." (Caro Baroja in Zulaika's "Witchcraft," 110)

But Baroja also talks about the political motives behind the witchcraft persecutions. He cites Pierre de Lancre, a traditional French lawyer appointed in 1609 to the Basque region of Labourd. "Lancre did not like the Basques. He thought there were plenty of geographical, moral, and cultural reasons why Satan should have chosen the Basque region as the hotbed of witchcraft in Europe. He wrote: 'The people of Labourd, bad tillers of the ground and worse craftsmen, had little love for their country, their wives and children, and since they were neither French nor Spanish they had no established pattern of behavior to follow.'" (Caro Baroja in Zulaika, op. cit. 105)

Here the lack of a clear "national" identity is used to demonize Basques as deviants prone to all kinds of evil misbehaviors. We will be observing similar political processes throughout this course, and it is important to note how deeply rooted they are in the Basque imaginary.

CONCERNING the religious side of that ideological struggle referred to by Olea in his description of the male / Christian and female / pagan paradigms illustrated in his film, we will refer to the ethnographic and mythological investigations of Joseba Zulaika, who con-



Unai (Patxi Bisquert) being taken into the inquisitional tribunal in Olea's *Akelarre*, one of the "foundational fictions" of Basque cinema.

tinued the work of renowned Basque ethnographer J.M. de Barandiaran. According to these anthropologists, there exists abundant documentation of a popular cult devoted to a flying figure named Mari whose natural dwelling is quite often a mountain cave. These are some of her listed attributes: "Mari is often seen sitting in her cave's kitchen by the fire and having her hair done. ... Another of her major activities is spinning. In one representation she spins balls with golden thread, winding



The cruel inquisitor Azevedo (José Luis López Vazquez) staring at the torture of Amunia (Mari Carrillo) in Olea's *Akelarre*.

the skein on a ram's horns as a reel. She is also seen undoing the hank of wool. ... Mari forges storms. In each part of the Basque Country the origin of the storms is attributed to Mari's nearest cave dwelling, from where she sends them. At the time of the storm she is frequently seen crossing the air in the form of a horse." (Zulaika, 116)

Some of the most remarkable recurrent visual metaphors in many of the films we will see contain ele-

ments that are traceable to this mythical figuration. One which I term “the burning hole” has multiple variations, generally alluding to the matriarchal power over natural cycles. It is worth mentioning here how this figuration is also clearly inscribed in films as different as *Cows* (1992) by Julio Medem or *Yoyes* (2000) by Helena Taberna. The former features a spectacular montage sequence in which Catalina Mendiluce (Ana Torrent) spins on top of a haystack, a clear allusion to the witch-like powers that will ultimately allow her to transgress all the familiar limitations and elope with Ignacio Irigibel, a champion aizkolari (woodcutter) and her brother’s rival. In *Yoyes*, Helena Taberna uses the figure of the white horse to construct the beautifully haunting dream sequences in which Yoyes visualizes her sexual initiation and her impending death.

IN OLEA’S film *Akelarre* the allusion to Mari is present throughout, invoked directly by Amunia (Mari Carrillo) during the celebration of the cave dance: “Tonight we must be happy. Mari will listen to us and will protect us,” and later, on the occasion of the death of Osoa de Ochoa, Garazi’s (Silvia Munt) mother, who had come from Iparralde (French Euskadi) fleeing the witch hunt there: “Osoa, let your spirit go so that it may encounter Mari’s chariot of fire and she may take you to heaven for ever!” It is this spiritual power that Zulaika says “represents an antagonism to Christian ideology” and becomes perhaps the first figuration of the “invisible enemy” in Basque commercial cinema. This notion of a ghostly or invisible enemy occupies the narrative center of Alfonso Ungría’s *The Conquest of Albania* (1983), the second foundational fiction we will study in this section.

Indeed, there will be practically no description of Ungría’s film that does not underline the peculiar invisibility of the Albanian enemy. The authors of *Ilusión y*

realidad. La aventura del cine vasco en los años 80 describe it this way: “The preparations and the campaign of the Great Company from Navarra that sets out to the conquest of the remote country of Albania are told in an extended flashback by one of its protagonists, Hamet, the blind man who tells the story to a girl after don Pedro’s death. ... A nice cinematography and an efficient mise-en-scène create many moments where the landscape merges interestingly with the story and some of its most brilliant dramatic situations, such as the sequence when the young Albanian woman, who believes don Pedro will assault her, kills herself. The tale often reaches a metaphysical register, especially when it takes place amidst an arid and unfriendly territory wherein the enemy always remains invisible and attacks by treason, thus progressively sapping the spirit and the resolution of the Basque expedition.” (de Miguel, et. al, 73)

IN CARLOS ROLDÁN’S critique, it is precisely this “invisible” enemy and the “dead spots” in the narrative that unbalance Ungría’s film. “The story loses its energy precisely when the troops from Navarra land in Albania and start their aimless search for the ‘invisible’ enemy. Such a narrative scheme was brilliantly resolved by Werner Herzog in his *Aguirre, the Wrath of God*, but fails completely in Ungría’s film. If in Herzog’s film the impossible search for Eldorado throws Aguirre’s men sinking into an eternal river while wrapping the audience in a sickly lyrical register that impregnates every single shot, in Ungría’s case, all the dead spots break up the rhythm of the story once and again thus making it impossible for the dramatic tension to build up to a final climax.” (Roldán, 203)

British critics Barry Jordan and Rikki Morgan-Tamosunas: also offer a harsh appraisal: “In *La conquista de*

Albania (1983), Alfonso Ungría (with Angel Amigo as producer), presented a striking historical parable of the region. Set in the fourteenth century, the film followed the obsessive attempts of a Navarrese warrior (disturbingly reminiscent of the deranged figure of Lope de Aguirre, explored in Werner Herzog's *Aguirre, der Zorn Gottes / Aguirre, la cólera de Dios* (1972) and Carlos Saura's *El Dorado* (1988) to achieve imperial conquest by invading Albania. Very much a panegyric to the obstinate character and determined spirit of the Basque race in the face of impossible odds, the film rather worryingly seemed to endorse a medieval notion of *führerprinzip*, a blind faith in the qualities of a Basque caudillo (leader), seen as spiritual core of the Basque nation." (Jordan and Morgan-Tamosunas, 188–9)

THEIR CRITICAL approach aside, Jordan and Morgan-Tamosunas clearly understand the foundational character of Ungría's film. Despite the disavowal of both Ungría and producer Angel Amigo—or thanks to it—the film is generally seen as a refiguration of contemporary Euskadi. It is one of the clearest examples, in Jordan and Morgan-Tamosunas words, of "Basque filmmakers [who] have gone in search of parables, metaphors and analogues for the condition, problems and cleavages of contemporary Basque society." (188)

Casilda de Miguel and the other authors of *Ilusión y realidad. La aventura del cine vasco en los años 80*, however, are sharply critical of such refiguration. "That same voiceover narration is used to tell the spectator a final message, as explicit as it is arguable: 'Los de este país como así / In this country we're like that,' that is to say, people who after a series of logical decisions end up in an absurd situation. Instead of trying to get closer to that time by means of the universal and suprahistorical problems of the individuals and their relationships, the

film pretends to actualize history through its most problematic aspect, namely through ideology and politics.” (de Miguel et, al, 73)

NONETHELESS, it was precisely this notion of a logical enterprise gone wrong that attracted the attention of producer Angel Amigo, who got interested in these medieval Navarrese warriors lost in Albania while he was a Basque political prisoner in the Francoist prison in Segovia. Amigo tunneled out of that prison in April of 1976, together with a group of 27 other ETA prisoners and a Catalan anarchist, Oriol Solé Sugranyes, who died during the final chase in the Pryenees.

Amigo wrote a book, *Operación Poncho*, that was the basis for a film by Imanol Uribe, in which Amigo and other four actual escapees share the stage with professional actors. We will analyze this film in our next section, which deals with fictional wars and contemporary epic narratives. But for now here’s Amigo’s own words about the Albanian warriors: “I felt attracted by the story of a group of men who undergo an extraordinary effort in order to fatten their leader’s dowry just to see him die in the final battle and their whole enterprise lose any sense. I was attracted by this narrative scheme of being so logical, of doing something so logically prepared as a military operation to conquer a faraway territory that finally becomes in itself a non-objective goal.” (Amigo in Roldán, 202)

Needless to say, the parallel with Amigo’s own situation and the whole radical enterprise of ETA’s armed struggle is obvious, which was well noted in the critical reviews after the film opened at the 1983 San Sebastián International Film Festival. As often proves to be the case in the Basque Country, contemporary political parallels are perversely admitted in the form of a disavowal. “Afterwards, I have read that the film has been

LA CONQUISTA DE ALBANIA



ACHE

Una producción de A. AMIGO y L. CALPARSORO para FRONTERA FILMS IRUN S. A.
dirigida por ALFONSO UNGRÍA

con
XABIER ELORRIAGA CHEMA MUÑOZ KLARA BADIOLA
WALTER VIDARTE EÑAUT URRESTARAZU
Miguel Arribas, Patxi Bisquert, Ramón Balenziaga

Ramón Barea, Jesús Sastre

Fotografía: A. F. MAYO

Decorados: W. BURMANN

Maquillaje: J. A. SANCHEZ

Canciones: X. LASA



William Layton, Amaia Laso

Montaje: J. PEÑA

Figurinista: J. ARTIÑANO

Música: A. IGLESIAS

Dirección de Producción: A. SANTANA

Productor Ejecutivo: A. AMIGO. Guion: A. URRETAIVIZCAYA, A. AMIGO, A. UNGRÍA

eastmancolor

Poster for Alfonso Ugría's *La conquista de Albania* (*The Conquest of Albania*), 1983, another "foundational film" supported by the Basque government.

interpreted as a parable of the impracticality of ETA's military struggle. I was greatly surprised. ... Could I have been influenced by some type of parallelism? Probably, but I never under any circumstances tried to engage in a critique against Herri Batasuna or the military branch of ETA. Once again, they decided for me. ... Now, there's nothing to do about it. This forms part of the film. It is integrated in it." (Amigo in Roldán, 204)

To conclude my introduction, I would like to call attention to yet another central tenet of Basque cinema (commercially) inaugurated in Pedro Olea's *Akelarre* and Alfonso Ungria's *The Conquest of Albania*: its migrant quality. When Jordan and Rikki-Tamosunas study the evolution of Basque cinema in the context of other non-Castillian cinematographies within Spain, they reach the following conclusion: "The historical fiction film has been the other major trend in Basque cinema. As mentioned previously, whereas Catalan cinema has tended to concentrate on events occurring in the last 100 years or so, emphasizing the origins, development and betrayals of modern bourgeois Catalan nationalism, the most significant movies to emerge from recent Basque cinema, which have also enjoyed reasonable success nationally, tend to be set in pre-modern times, particularly in the Middle Ages or the Age of Discovery." (188)

THE NATIONAL imaginary in the case of Euskadi seems to be grounded in a "migrant" or prehistorical sense of time and place. Home, both in familiar and political terms, is predicated as a form of migrancy, impossibility or invisibility. This cultural condition finds its most common expression in different forms of disavowal. Basque films return uncannily to familiar narratives paradoxically disguised in ghostly and defamiliarizing ways.

Lesson one

Akelarre (Pedro Olea, 1983)

REQUIRED READING

Henningsen, Gustav: *The Witches' Advocate*. (Reno: University of Nevada Press, 1980). Chapter 1: "Introduction: Theories of Witchcraft" and Chapter 2: "The Witches of Zugarramurdi"

Roldán, Carlos: "El lento afianzamiento (1983)," In *El cine del País Vasco: De Ama Lur (1968) a Airbag (1997)*. (Donostia: Eusko Ikaskuntza, 1999): 201–212

Zulaika, Joseba: "Lesson Twenty: Witchcraft" and "Lesson Twenty-One: Basque Mythology" (Basque C466: Basque Culture and Politics: University of Nevada, Reno, Division of Continuing Education): 103–120

OPTIONAL READING

Aldarondo, Ricardo: "La experiencia vasca: crónica de un desencanto." In Jesús Angulo et al, eds: *Un cineasta llamado Pedro Olea*. (Donostia: Euskadiko Filmategia, 1993): 71–83

Caro Baroja, Julio: *The World of the Witches* (Chicago: University of Chicago, 1964). Chapters 1 and 2

Casas, Quim and Mirito Torreiro: "Entrevista a Pedro Olea." In Jesús Angulo et al, eds: *Un cineasta llamado Pedro Olea*. (Donostia: Euskadiko Filmategia, 1993): 85–111.

INTRODUCTORY NOTES

1. Cinematic historical refiguration of the patriarchal violence against the remnants of a matriarchal culture in seventeenth-century Navarra.
2. The Inquisition and the Spanish religious intolerance in the context of rural Euskadi.



Navarrese warriors search for the ghostly enemy in Ungria's *La conquista de Albania*.

-
3. *Akelarre* and the national allegories of Basque cinema's historical recreations.
 4. Pedro Olea's (problematic) position within Basque cinema and its / his migrancy.
 5. Silvia Munt and "narrative casting" in *Akelarre*.

STUDY QUESTIONS

1. What are some of the male and female cultural and gender stereotypes that clash in Olea's film? Do the

cave and the castle as opposing meeting places emblemize such a clash?

2. Olea uses two Basque traditions, the “irrintzi” (ancient Basque warriors’outcry) and the “txalaparta” (popular music played with narrow wooden poles on a board) as background to many of the films’ festive and / or epic sequences. Comment on a couple of these scenes.
3. How are the cultural, political and linguistic differences between don Fermín de Andueza, the feudal lord of the rural village in Navarra (Walter Vidarte) and the Inquisitor Azevedo (José Luis López Vázquez) established?
4. Amunia (Mari Carrillo)’s final outcry burning at the stake is replicated by Garazi (Silvia Munt) who is hiding in the cave. What is the narrative and symbolic significance of that final outcry? How does it incorporate Silvia Munt’s narrative casting via her persona as Natalia, the unforgettable protagonist of Mercè Rodoreda’s novel and Francesc Betriu’s cinematic version? (re: *La plaça del Diamant*, 1982)
5. How are the historical parallelisms between the seventeenth century and today’s Euskadi established? Give some examples.
6. In his analysis of Olea’s film, Carlos Roldán writes: “The inquisitor, truly mischievous, does not symbolize the Spanish repression against Euskadi. He is only a tool used by the local feudal lord, the authentic repressive force, in order to achieve his goals.” (Roldán, 210). Do you agree with this statement? How well do you think Olea integrates the class struggle into the national allegory of *Akelarre*?
7. Do you think that the mise-en-scène and the technical approach used by Olea are successful in portraying the sense of mystery and intensity required by

the central topic of the film? Provide specific examples for your response.

8. What do you think of the film's scopic regime—that is, is there a voyeuristic position in *Akelarre*? And if there is, who is bearing it? Pay special attention to the torture sequences.
9. "Alcalá is a brilliant city with an Arabic name, if I'm not mistaken. The names of our towns and villages are all Basque. We don't have any converts here as you do in Aragon or Castille. Here we don't need special certificates or tribunals." What is the historical and narrative significance of these words from the abbot of the local monastery? Explain his role in the film, and contrast it with the local priest.
10. "You took her away so that nobody knew that she was your *barragana* (mistress)." What are the implications of Amunia's accusation against Angel (Mikel Garmendia), the local priest? What occasions Amunia's words? How do they inscribe the priest's hypocrisy in his (the Church) accusation of sexual misconduct in the witches' *akelarres*?
11. "In *Akelarre*, I tried to defend the position of the witches because I believe that their pagan ways had a lot to do with the Basque matriarchy that has always existed." (Olea in Aldarondo, 76). Does he achieve this goal? Using Caro Baroja's (and Zulaika's) description, how would you characterize Olea's historical treatment of the witches in the film?
12. Today we use the expression "witch hunt" to signify an (institutional) prosecution of cultural or ideological dissidence: is it fair to say that Olea uses his film to inscribe the Spanish prosecution of Basque difference and / or dissidence?

Lesson two

La conquista de Albania / The Conquest of Albania
(Alfonso Ungría, 1983)

REQUIRED READING

Jordan, Barry and Rikki Morgan-Tamosunas: "Basque Cinema." *In Contemporary Spanish Cinema* (Manchester and New York: Manchester University Press, 1998): 182–204.

Sommer, Doris: *Foundational Fictions: The National Romances of Latin America* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1991): 1–47.

OPTIONAL READING

Caro Baroja, Julio: *Los Vascos*. (Madrid: Istmo, 1971)
Chapter 1 and 4.

Sánchez Albornoz, Claudio: *Orígenes y destino de Navarra*. (Barcelona: Planeta, 1958). Chapter 1 and 3.

INTRODUCTORY NOTES

1. First large-scale epic film sponsored by the Basque Government (Production cost: approximately \$100 dollars).
2. *The Conquest of Albania* in the context of Basque cinema's self-conscious construction of a national imaginary.
3. Euskadi's contemporary territorial and political split allegorized in a medieval historical and legendary setting.
4. *The Conquest of Albania*: "A panegyric to the obstinate character and determined spirit of the Basque race in the face of impossible odds" (Jordan & Morgan-Tamosunas, 189), or a critique of (Basque / Spanish) imperial madness?

-
5. Alfonso Ungría's film and the creation of a star system and narrative casting in Basque cinema: Xabier Elorriaga : *Escape from Segovia* (1981), *Mikel's Death* (1983), *Lauaxeta. To the Four Winds* (1987). Klara Badiola: *Akelarre* (1983), *Eskorpion* (1988), *Cows* (1992) and Patxi Bisquert: *Escape from Segovia* (1981), *Tasio* (1984), *Kareletik / Overboard* (1987).

STUDY QUESTIONS

1. In what sense can it be said that *The Conquest of Albania* is a foundational fiction (re: Doris Sommer's concept)? What kind of national imaginary does it evoke and why?
2. "Clearly, in their exploration of the more remote past, Basque filmmakers have gone in search of parables, metaphors and analogues for the conditions, problems and cleavages of contemporary Basque society." (Jordan & Morgan-Tamosunas, 188). How does Ungría's film fit that description? Can you mention a few of the historical parallelisms it suggests?
3. "Por Dios, Juana, no resucitéis fantasmas del pasado!" (By God, Jeanne, don't revive old ghosts!) When and why does Luis de Beaumont say this to his wife, Duchess Jeanne d'Anjou?
4. How is Jeanne d'Anjou characterized by some of the captains and soldiers in don Luis de Beaumont's expedition? Relate this characterization to her role in the film and to Pedro Olea's *Akelarre*.
5. How is the "woman-nation" (reductive) metaphor employed in the film? How does Ungría contrast Albania and Euskadi?
6. One of the film's most significant close-up shots is that of don Luis de Beaumont's cut hand. Can you analyze the symbolic import of that sequence? How was it anticipated earlier in the film?

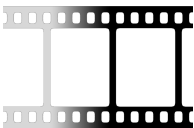


A moment of relief in the ghostly struggle between the Navarrese soldiers and their invisible enemies in Ungria's *La conquista de Albania*.

-
7. Why does Ungria use a freeze frame shot in the battle sequence when we hear don Pedro Lasaga's outcry: "Estamos todos locos. Esto es una matanza!" (We're all mad. This is a butchery!)?
 8. Analyze the use of Basque music in some of the group scenes, such as the one in the tavern. How does it contribute to the film's epic register?
 9. "En fin, no hace falta ser catalán ni genovés para desear el Mediterráneo!" (Ultimately, one doesn't

need to be from Catalonia or Genoa in order to desire the Mediterranean.” These are the final words of the royal council debate on the usefulness of the Albanian campaign. How do they resonate visually throughout the film, especially in Ungría’s recurrent use of the stagnated water motif? What is the historicity of the Basque maritime expeditions in the Mediterranean?

10. “Dust, dust everywhere. If they’re ghosts, I’ll still have to finish them off!” Why does Ungría choose to present a ghostly enemy in the film? Give examples of this spectral presence.
11. How is the cruelty and madness of the imperial endeavor portrayed? Which filmic intertext is suggested that establishes an analogy with Spain’s imperial conquest of Central and South America?
12. There are three old Basque traditions hinted at in Ungría’s film: the Bertsolaritza (popular improvised singing), the aizkolariak (woodcutters) and the male-only gastronomical societies. Can you give examples of these traditions and show how they are evoked?



2 · Fictional wars and / or epic narratives

THE THREE films brought together in this section share a common project: to use the popular appeal of the cinematic idiom to offer historical lessons about the recent past in Euskadi and in Spain. Alberto Herrero, in his enthusiastic review of José María Tuduri's *Chronicle of the Carlist War, 1872–1876*, says: "Dar una lección de historia, conseguir un film apasionante, veraz, divertido, ágil, lúcido, siendo un principiante y con cuatro perras. ¿Cómo se ha conseguido el milagro? Dejándose la piel, la vida, los dineros y apasionándose hasta la médula, lo que desde luego se refleja y traspasa conmovedoramente la pantalla. (To teach a history lesson, to make a lucid, agile, entertaining, truthful and passionate film, while being a newcomer and with a few bucks. How has this miracle been achieved? By leaving one's own life, money and skin and by getting passionate to the marrow bone, a fact that is clearly visible and touchingly present on the large screen). (Herrero, *DEIA*, August, 23, 1989) Herrero brings up two significant elements that recur in many of the films we will study: the fact of being "operas primas" and the absolute dedication of their directors.

Tuduri's case is certainly one of the most spectacular. After five years of historical research, he started to shoot his film in February of 1985 and could not finish it until July 1987. The actual shooting time was 35 days spread over nearly three years. The total cost of the film was 54 million pesetas, less than half the average budget for any Basque and Spanish film of the period. Tuduri started the shooting without knowing if he would be able to raise the money to continue filming. As he himself declared: "Es increíble el miedo que existe en algunos estamentos a asumir nuestro pasado y las bar



CRONICA DE LA GUERRA CARLISTA

(1872-1876)

KARLISTADAREN KRONIKA

ZAULI FILMS una producción de José María Tuduri

Presenta a

PACO SAGARZAZU - RAMON AGUIRRE - RAFAEL ENRIQUE - PATXI BARCO

Director de Fotografía: GONZALO FERNANDEZ BERRIDI Montaje: ANGEL DIEZ

Música original: BIVENTE MARTINEZ Jefe de Producción: IÑAKI EPELDE Sonido: AURELIO MARTINEZ

Guión y Dirección:

JOSE MARIA TUDURI

Película Subvencionada por el MINISTERIO DE CULTURA

y por el DEPARTAMENTO DE CULTURA Y TURISMO DEL GOBIERNO VASCO

A Carlist soldier takes aim in the poster of José María Tuduri's *Crónica de la guerra carlista, 1872–1876* (*Chronicle of the Carlist War, 1872–1876*), 1988.

baridades o no que en él cometimos.” (It’s unbelievable to see the fear that still exists in some social strata to assume our past and the cruelties that we did or did not commit. Tuduri, “*Navarra Hoy*.” September, 15, 1989)

This is the real issue: The political fear of remembering one’s own history. And it is this fear that explains the historical paradox visible during the transition to democracy in Spain which seemingly combined a fervor to recover the historical past with a passion for surface movements that favored a sort of collective amnesia.

In their remarkable survey of Spain’s contemporary cinema, Barry Jordan and Rikki Morgan-Tamosunas write: “One of the most prominent features of Spanish cinema since the end of the dictatorship in 1975 has been its obsessive concern with the past. ... On the one hand, this cultural trend may be read simply as a local inflection of the widespread nostalgia boom which characterizes contemporary society throughout the Western world. ... However, in Spain, such activity also responds to a very culture-specific need to recuperate a past which for forty years had been hijacked and aggressively refashioned by Francoism.” (*Contemporary Spanish Cinema*, 15–16)

THIS NEED is obviously felt with a stronger urgency in the Basque Country where the Francoist historical erasure was even more dramatic than in the rest of Spain. And yet, as Tuduri’s words recall, there were many resistances to be overcome in order to find public support for those needed historical lessons. And among those resistances one has to take into account the fact that cinema in Euskadi had been an ideological tool in the hands of the ruling Basque Nationalist Party. Casilda de Miguel notes: “El cine vasco de los ochenta ofrece una de las manifestaciones más visibles del cambio narrativo del concepto ‘nación,’ un cambio que, por otra

parte, es evidente en el espectro de la vida social. Mientras que en el Estado buena parte de los directores recurrían a la adaptación de textos literarios para acceder a la subvención, aquí nos encontramos con que más de la mitad de los filmes se realizaron a partir de guiones originales basados en hechos reales o históricos. ... Además el cine vasco, a la búsqueda de su propia identidad, opta también por ofrecer una visión nacionalista de la historia, excluida durante tiempo del discurso dominante." (Basque cinema in the eighties offers one of the most visible manifestations of the narrative change of the concept of "nation," a change, on the other hand, quite visible in the social sector. While in the Spanish state most directors chose literary adaptations in order to get official subventions, here we find that more than half the films were made with original scripts based on real or historical facts. ... Moreover, Basque cinema was in search of its own identity and chose to offer a nationalist vision of history that had been absent for quite long from the dominant discourse. *Los Cineastas. Historia del cine en Euskal Herria, 1986–1998*, 219–220)

BECAUSE of its interference in the process of imaginary nation-building, a project like Tuduri's might be more open to ideological resistances. José Luis López de la Calle is quite clear about the source of those resistances. "El documento cinematográfico de Tuduri es iconoclasta con cierta historiografía del país. Es una aportación para la interpretación racional de nuestra historia. Es sobre todo, nada más porque se ajusta a la objetividad, un mentís a la pretendida teoría de que llevamos 150 años de guerra con Madrid." (Tuduri's cinematographic document is iconoclastic towards certain local historiography. It is a contribution to a rational interpretation of our history. It is above all, and only because its objectivity, a denial of the alleged theory



Carlist fighters on their way to the battle front in José María Tuduri's *Crónica de la guerra carlista, 1872–1876*



The Loyalist front in Tuduri's *Crónica de la guerra carlista, 1872–1876*.

according to which we have been fighting against Madrid for over 150 years. López de la Calle, *El Diario Vasco*, October 7, 1988)

The contemporary debate about Basque history and cultural identity may be better understood in the light of an earlier debate around the *fueros*, the ancient privileges that always emerge as the central historical difference between the Basque Country and the rest of Spain. Joseba Zulaika summarizes this traditional debate in

these terms: “The nub of the issue turns on the interpretation of a series of laws called *fueros* in Spanish and *fors* in French. These are ancient statutes whose origins are lost in the midst of time. However, they spelled out local political privilege and process, questions that became increasingly relevant in the late Middle Ages as the Basque areas were drawn into the orbit of the emerging Spanish and French nations. According to the Basque nationalists the *fueros* were ancient, almost sacred, charters antedating political alliances with Spaniards and Frenchmen. When such alliances were forged the Spanish and French monarchs were forced to recognize them as the law of the land and repository of local political independence in the Basque Country. The centralists dispute this interpretation and regard the *fueros* as a list of privileges conceded by the monarchs as an incentive to the Basque to enter into a wider political federation. As concessions they were subject to revocation.” (Zulaika, 127)

OTHER HISTORIANS and cultural critics interpret the *fueros* not as constitutive of a differential fact between the Basque Country and Spain but as an almost ideal realization of the political project of traditionalists throughout Spain. Jon Juaristi, in his influential volume *El linaje de Aitor. La invención de la tradición vasca* (*Aitor's Lineage. The Invention of a Basque Tradition*), argues that “No hay contradicción, no puede haberla, entre fuerismo y régimen moderado por la sencilla razón de que el fuerismo es la expresión vascongada y navarra del moderantismo español. ... En rigor, para los moderados, las Provincias Vascongadas y Navarra constituyen el testimonio vivo de que su ideal político es realizable. ... El País Vasco es la utopía de la España conservadora.” (There is no contradiction, there can be none, between “fuerismo” and the traditional



The Guernica bombing serves as the background for the poster for José Antonio Zorrilla's *Lauaxeta, a los cuatro vientos* (*Lauaxeta, to the four winds*), 1987, a historical drama about the famous poet-soldier's final days.

[moderate] regime for the simple reason that “fuerismo” is the expression of Spanish traditionalism in Navarra and the Basque Provinces. ... Strictly speaking, for the moderates or traditionalists, the Basque Provinces and Navarra constitute a living testimony to the fact that their political ideal is a possible one. The Basque Country is the utopia of conservative Spain.

Linaje de Aitor, 26)

WHATEVER the interpretation, the fact remains that a sense of historical difference and a corresponding political right to special treatment has always pervaded the imaginary of the Basque Country. In my opinion, the three films that form this section, while doubtlessly contributing to the strengthening of a national imaginary, are also social texts that invite us to see the motivations of all the sides in the struggle. Their interweaving of fiction and document constantly calls attention to themselves and to those inevitable subjective “filters” that open up the space of interpretation. As Jordan and Morgan-Tamosunas put it aptly: “Historical film, perhaps more than any other generic category, places the question of the relationship between reality, perception and representation firmly in the spotlight. And since historical reality is itself an elusive concept, accessible only through the imperfections of memory and representation, the mediation of that reality (such as it is) inevitably interposes a series of lenses or filters which both facilitate and obfuscate its interpretation.” (*Contemporary Spanish Cinema*, 16)

Tuduri, Zorrilla and Uribe, the directors of the films included in this section, were all extremely aware of the interpretive difficulties before them. That is why, while touting his thorough historical research and his effort to be faithful to the utmost detail in his historical reconstruction, Tuduri declared: “[Mi película] es una obra

de lectura abierta y eso no quiere decir que sea objetiva porque es imposible tratar de encontrar la objetividad en un tema tan complejo." ([My film] is an open work, and that does not mean that it is objective because it is impossible to try to find objectivity in such a complex topic.. Tuduri, *Navarra Hoy*, September 15, 1989) In another interview, Tuduri said, "La recreación de toda aquella época ha intentado ser exacta, tanto en los vestuarios y la fusilería y los datos históricos. De todas formas es una historia atípica en la que se mezcla el documental con la narrativa." (The recreation of all that period has tried to be exact, as much in terms of attrezzo (clothing, arms, etc.) as in terms of historical data. However, it is an uncommon history, since it merges fiction with documentary. Tuduri, *El Correo Español. El Pueblo Vasco.*, November 7, 1989).

Interestingly enough, Tuduri's appraisal of his film as an "uncommon history" emphasizes what constitutes, in fact, the most common element in the three historical lessons of this section: their successful merging of historical document with narrative fiction. They are all acutely aware of the need to be entertaining in order to capture the (younger) audience they hope to educate. The wars and struggles they represent are indeed historical, but the histories told are highly subjective and cinematically focused in specific characters through whose identification or rejection the audience may find his or her own historical narrative.

ANOTHER very important element in the three films is how their collective significance is achieved by the precise means of individual focalization. This focalization, as in Zorrilla's *Lauaxeta. A los cuatro vientos* (1986), is based on recovering a historical figure who despite his prominence had been almost forgotten, specially by those who, like Zorrilla himself, were coming



Esteban Urquiaga (Lauaxeta), interpreted by Xabier Elorriaga, strolling among the refugees in the company of his lover (Anne Louis Lambert) in *Lauaxeta, a los cuatro vientos*.

from families who belonged to the side of the winners. "A *Los Cuatro Vientos* todo lo que cuenta es real, aunque tampoco he pretendido un excesivo rigor histórico. Al poeta yo no lo conocía, como creo que casi nadie, pero su figura sirve para explicar los muchos dramas que se vivieron en la guerra civil. ... La película responde a la memoria histórica de los vencidos, de los que perdieron la guerra y, en cambio, mi familia provenía del campo de los vencedores. Yo soy un

‘regenerado’ y asumo voluntariamente la memoria histórica de los vencidos.” (In *To The Four Winds* everything told is real although I did not try to have an excessive historical accuracy. I did not know the poet, as is the case with almost everybody else, but his figure allows me to explain many dramas that were lived during the civil war. The film responds to the historical memory of the vanquished, of those who lost the war. My family, however, belonged to the side of the winners. I am a “regenerated” one that assumes willingly the historical memory of the vanquished. Zorrilla, *SUR*, May 6, 1987).

WHO WAS that poet whom Zorrilla and many others did not know? Why could he be so significant a figure as to emblemize an entire collective struggle in himself? Jon Kortázar gives us an initial and significant answer: “Esteban Urkiaga cursó estudios con los jesuitas de Durango. Fue novicio de la Compañía de Jesús en Loyola. Ganó el premio del Día de la Poesía Vasca en Rentería (1931). Trabajó como redactor-jefe en el diario *Euskadi* hasta el estallido de la guerra civil. Dejó la pluma y tomó el ‘fusil.’ Como comandante se encargó de la propaganda, dirigiendo la revista *Gudari*. Hombre dialogante, Esteban Urkiaga—conocido como Lauaxeta, que en euskera significa ‘abierto a los cuatro vientos’—fue considerado como el Lorca vasco.” (Esteban Urkiaga studied with the Jesuits in Durango. He was a novice of the Jesuit Company in Loyola. He was awarded the prize of the Day of Basque Poetry in Renteria (1931). He worked as editor-in-chief in the daily *Euskadi* till the break of the war. He left the pen for the “gun.” As commander he was in charge of propaganda and directed the journal *Gudari*. An understanding and flexible man, Esteban Urkiaga—best known as Lauaxeta, which in Basque means “open to the four winds”—was consid-

ered the equivalent to Lorca in Basque literature. Kortázar, *Diario 16*, April, 16, 1987: 38)

The fact that Lauaxeta, like Lorca, was assassinated by the Francoist forces only helps to strengthen the collective significance of these two historical figures. Lorca, however, unlike Urkiaga, never changed his pen for the gun. And this is a difference that recalls another important commonality in the three fictional wars or epic narratives that form this section of our course. Their focalization of the conflicts through individual figures depicts in each of the three cases a “poet-soldier” who combined the pen with the gun.

In *Chronicle of the Carlist War, 1872–1876*, Policarpio Amilibia is also working for a Bilbao daily, the *Irurak Bat*, whose editor-in-chief sends him to cover the Carlist war in the Navarra and Gipuzcoa front. Later, he tells us, he joined the active forces of the Liberal side.

In *Lauaxeta. To the Four Winds*, Esteban Urkiaga will occupy that same position of poet-soldier in an even larger role than that of Policarpio. He will carry the whole weight of the audience’s identification, which is one of the film’s major shortcomings, given the lack of emotional registers in Xabier Elorriaga’s performance.

IN IMANOL URIBE’S *Escape from Segovia* (1981), on the other hand, this focus on the poet-soldier comes indirectly through the character of Angel Amigo, who together with other five ex-ETA members were actual participants in that escape. Amigo, moreover, was the writer of *Operación Poncho*, the story of the real escape that was the basis for Uribe’s film.

It is this merging of real history with a fictional format that forms the peculiar commonality of these three stories, the Basque poet-soldiers in search of their own national imaginaries. And yet, as that “fear” recalled by Tuduri suggested, the three films also become powerful



Lauaxeta (Xabier Elorriaga), standing beside President José Antonio Aguirre during a patriotic address in Zorriola during a historical biopic *Lauaxeta, a los cuatro vientos*.

testimonies of the opposing historical impulse to demystify Euskadi's inner ghosts, the enemies within a country that has lived a form of collective split through most of its history. At the heart of their historical lesson, these films stand as documents against political and social intolerance. And, in viewing them, one needs to revisit the question best formulated by Joseba Agirreazkuenaga: "Cabe preguntarse hasta qué punto la guerra civil, la crónica de las guerras carlistas del siglo

XIX y XX no constituyen una característica permanente y dramática de la contemporaneidad vasca." (One should ask oneself to what extent the civil war, the chronicle of the Carlist Wars in the XIX and XX centuries, do not constitute a permanent and dramatic characteristic of contemporary Euskadi. Agirreazkuenaga, Egin. April 7, 1989) It is, perhaps, the fear of such a parallelism and the fear of the rupture of historical myths that explains why these films are so important and why they have awakened such contrasting reactions.

Lesson three

Crónica de la Guerra Carlista, 1872–1876 / Chronicle of the Carlist War, 1872–1876 (José María Tuduri 1988)

REQUIRED READING

Juaristi, Jon: *El Linaje de Aitor. La invención de la tradición vasca*. (Madrid: Taurus, 1987): 15–75

MacClency, Jeremy: *The Decline of Carlism*. (Reno: University of Nevada Press, 2000). Chapter 1: "Introduction" and Chapter 13: "The Legacies of Carlism to Basque Nationalism."

Zulaika, Joseba: *Basque Nationalism*, Lesson Twenty-Three. "Basque C466: Basque Culture & Politics." (University of Nevada, Reno): 126–135

OPTIONAL READING / VIEWING

De Pablo, Santiago, ed: *Los Cineastas. Historia del Cine en Euskal Herria, 1896–1998*. (Vitoria-Gasteiz: Fundación Sancho El Sabio, 1998): 211–238

López de la Calle, José Luis: "Crónica de la Guerra Carlista" (*El Diario Vasco*: October 7, 1988)

Tuduri, José María: *Santa Cruz, el cura guerrillero* (1990)

INTRODUCTORY NOTES

1. The historical trauma of the Carlist Wars and its first filmic revision.
2. First feature film by Tuduri who had to play all the roles: producer, screenwriter and director.
3. One of the longest (and cheapest) shootings in the production of New Basque Cinema.
4. Good critical reception both by special audiences (historians, social critics) and by the general public.
5. Tuduri's "objective" historical recreation and the possible parallelisms with the ideological conflicts still pervasive in contemporary Euskadi.

STUDY QUESTIONS

1. Can you analyze the initial sequence where the silent panning of the snow-capped mountains is broken up by the Carlist soldier's "irrintzi" (ancient Basque warriors' chant)?
2. "Dios, Patria, Fueros, Rey" (God, Fatherland, Privileges, King) reads the Carlist battlecry, as we are told in the first voiceover narration of the film. Can you explain the basic characteristics of the opposing sides: the (Republican) Liberals and the Carlists?
3. How are the two narrators-protagonists (Policarpio Amilibia, the journalist from Bilbao and Inaxio Zatarain, the small landowner from Oyarzún) formally introduced by Tuduri? Why does he choose the interview format for two fictional characters?
4. Analyze the sequence with the first sermon by a traditional priest. Which ideological elements are introduced? Why is Euskera used in this sequence? Please, compare it with the rest of priests' sermons in the film. Why the language change in the last ones? What is the general role of religion in Tuduri's revision of the conflict?

-
5. How and why does Tuduri use historical illustrations and pictures? What do they add to the film's narrative? Give examples.
 6. "You're either with the King or against him!" How do those words uttered by one of the washing women illustrate the basic intolerance of the war? Which other forms of division appear in the film?
 7. "Bilbao. El viejo sueño carlista." (Bilbao. The old Carlist dream). Analyze the international elements of the conflict as they relate to the Carlist obsession with conquering Bilbao.
 8. How is Bilbao's siege or blockade portrayed in the film? Why does Tuduri cut from Policarpio's chronicle of the senseless "cruel acts" to Inaxio's own narrative? Is it historically significant that one of the Carlist battalions in Bilbao's siege was from Guernica? How does it emphasize / make more confusing the parallelisms with the events of the Spanish Civil War?
 9. Can you suggest some of the visual, ideological or narrative elements introduced by Tuduri's film that seem likely to reappear in other films in our course?
 10. Marmullo's execution emblemizes the decline of the morale in the Carlist camp. How and why does it become a Goya-like emblem of the horrors of the war?
 11. How does the final montage of the verbal clash between Policarpio and Inaxio summarize the central tenets of the conflict? Give some specific examples. Do you think that some of those ideas are still present in Euskadi (and Spain) today?
 12. Analyze the final sequence of the film, in which Policarpio and the surrendered Inaxio exchange gazes in the streets of Tolosa. Why does Tuduri close the film

with the shot of the man leading a horse up the hill
in the morning mist?

Lesson four

Lauaxeta. A los cuatro vientos / To The Four Winds (José Antonio Zorrilla, 1987)

REQUIRED READING

De Miguel, Casilda, et, al, eds: *Ilusión y realidad. La aventura del cine vasco en los años 80*: 181–186

Kortázar, Jon: “El Lorca Vasco se llamó “Lauaxeta.”

Diario 16 (April 19, 1987): 37–44

Steer, George L: *The Tree of Gernika. A Field Study of Modern War* (London: Hodder & Stoughton, 1938).

Chapters XX–XXII: 234–264

OPTIONAL READING

Carr, Raymond: *Modern Spain 1875–1980*. (Oxford, Oxford University Press, 1983). Chapters 1 and 2

Payne, Stanley: *Basque Nationalism* (Reno: University of Nevada Press, 1986). Chapters 1 and 3

INTRODUCTORY NOTES

1. At 175 million pesetas, this was the second most expensive production in the Basque cinema of the eighties, as well as the second biggest commercial loss at 155 million pesetas.
2. Multilingual production stresses the international aspect of the Spanish Civil War.
3. Guernica as foundational symbol.
4. Epic story of Euskadi’s struggle for survival against Franco’s blockade of Bilbao.



ETA prisoners before their escape from the Segovia prison in Imanol Uribe's action docudrama *La fuga de Segovia* (*Escape from Segovia*), 1981.

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5. Individualization of the conflict. The personal parable or historical metaphor: Lauaxeta and the Basque people.

STUDY QUESTIONS

1. As a contemporary (male / female) spectator, can you identify with Esteban Urkiaga, "Lauaxeta," through Xabier Elorriaga's performance? Why or why not? Is it productive to portray a collective struggle via a focalized individual viewpoint?

-
2. Would you argue that the film constructs a (patriarchal) narrative of national sacrifice? Why is the feminine role in the film so marginal?
 3. How does the sequence where Lauaxeta's first front-line shooting occurs express both his inner conflict and the Basque conflicts with the Spanish Civil War?
 4. How is the tree as symbolic icon and visual metaphor first presented and why? How does the film present Guernica's Tree as Euskadi's foundational symbol?
 5. Cinematically, the film is conventionally structured as a chronological narrative. This linear structure is once interrupted by a very prominent flashback. Which is the occasion and what is its emotional impact?
 6. What is the significance of the sequence where the Holy Catholic Pope denies an audience to the Basque priests in Rome? What role does religion play in the film? How would you compare it with Tuduri's use of the religious element in *Crónica de la Guerra Carlista, 1872–1876*?
 7. Why does Zorrilla include the marked contrast between George Steer and Monsieur Saint Préux, the two international journalists from the British *Times* and the French *France Chrétienne*?
 8. What do the close-up shots of Esteban Urquiaga's eyeglasses and Georgina Jones' hands in the school sequence anticipate at a symbolic and at a narrative level?
 9. Which narrative and structural elements do *Lauaxeta* and *Crónica de la Guerra Carlista, 1872–1876* share? How do they help establish the parallelism between the two historical times described?
 10. Why does Zorrilla use a birds-eye shot for General Mola's announcement about the bombardments?

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11. Is the multilingual approach to the film useful? Why or why not?
 12. Can you interpret the final montage of the film with the “double exit” of Lauaxeta in the Francoist prison and the kids on the boat out of Bilbao’s blockade? Which are the visual metaphors combined in the three final sequences? What kind of narrative closure do they effect?

Lesson five

La fuga de Segovia / Escape from Segovia (Imanol Uribe, 1981)

REQUIRED READING

Clark, Robert: *The Basque Insurgents* (Madison: University of Wisconsin Press, 1984). Chapter 4: “ETA in Post-Franco Spain.”

Losilla, Carlos: “Del documento histórico a la historia indocumentada: realismo, género y mito.” In Angulo, Jesús et. al. eds: *Entre el documental y la ficción. El cine de Imanol Uribe*: 69–83

Onaindía, Mario: “Telón de fondo para la radiografía fílmica de Euskadi.” In Angulo, Jesús, op. cit: 45–53.

OPTIONAL READING

Amigo, Angel: *Operación Poncho. Las fugas de Segovia* (Donosti / San Sebastián: Hordago, 1978)

Angulo, Jesús, Carlos F. Heredero and José Luis Rebordinos: *Entre el documental y la ficción. El cine de Imanol Uribe* (Donosti: Euskadiko Filmategia, 1994): 13–23, 93–147

Elorza, Antonio et al. ed: *La historia de ETA* (Madrid: Ediciones Temas de Hoy, 2000)



ETA prisoners escape from the Segovia prison in Uribe's *La fuga de Segovia*.

INTRODUCTORY NOTES

1. First post-Franco feature film financed and produced with the direct support of the Basque autonomous government.
2. First example of a Basque film conceived as a migrant subject, that is, with a local and a global audience in mind. It entered successfully the San Sebastián 1981 Film Festival where it won the International Critics Award before touring a series of international festi-

vals (Orleans, Vitel, Cairo, Los Angeles, Teheran, Sao Paulo).

3. *La Fuga de Segovia* as Uribe's first instance of genre bending (historical document, fictional epic and escape thriller).
4. *La Fuga de Segovia*: partisan nation-building, collective myth-making or impartial storytelling?

STUDY QUESTIONS

1. When does Uribe use high angle shots to create a claustrophobic effect? How does he technically establish the inside / outside polarity central to a prison escape story?
2. One of Uribe's recurrent techniques is counterpoint. Can you analyze a couple of instances when this technique is constructed both visually and in the musical score?
3. In her review of the film in *The New York Times* (June 6, 1984), Janet Maslin wrote: "*Escape from Segovia* makes less attempt to shape or analyze the event than simply to describe it. The rebellion of the Basque separatist movement against Spanish authority is only indirectly examined. But what the film lacks in larger political context is made up for in quiet excitement." Harry Haun takes exception to this view and writes: "*Escape from Segovia* is a considerably less-than-great escape. ... Filming-it-like-it-was is no excuse for the dramatic flatland traversed here." (*Daily News*, June 6, 1984). What is your own judgment? Do you also think that Uribe toned down the political implications of the film? Why or why not?
4. In his essay, Mario Onaindía, an ex-member of ETA, writes: "*La fuga de Segovia*, con todo, mantiene un tono épico, de lucha de todos los vascos contra la

dictadura franquista, que ya se daba únicamente en la pantalla" (*Escape from Segovia*, however, keeps an epic tone of the struggle of all the Basques against Franco's dictatorship, which, in fact, was by then only happening on screen. 48) How do Onaindía's words reflect the lost ideal of a political unity in the Basque struggle? How is that "epic tone" created in the film?

5. Illustrate with a brief example each one of the three genres merged in the film (historical document, fictional epic and escape thriller).
6. How and why does Uribe emphasize the character of Oriol Solé Sugranyes, the Catalan anarchist played by Ovidi Montllor? How is his death anticipated in the film? Analyze the sequence of his actual death and the "processional" that follows it.
7. One of the film's most interesting montages is the one that includes the sudden cut to the train stop at Zumárraga where the two women are waiting. What's the narrative significance of the fast jump cuts that feel like the quick turning of a page? How do they relate to a means of communication employed by the ETA members inside the Segovia prison?
8. A recurrent shot in the film is through the central staircase in the Segovia prison. How and why is that shot mirrored near the end of the film?
9. How does the final sequence of the border crossing with the shining light over the calm waters compare and contrast with the tunnel escape from prison and the hectic human hunt in the forest? How does it inscribe the sense of a continued struggle?
10. Why does Uribe use the narrative flashback and the journalistic framing of the interview with one of the



Lineup of ETA prisoners in the Segovia jail in Uribe's *La fuga de Segovia*.

escapes to tell the story? Why does he insert historical TV clips throughout the film?

11. Please analyze the sequence of Iturbe's civil wedding to Nerea inside the prison. How does Uribe portray it? Why does he offer the ensuing contrast between the noisy party of the prisoners and the sullen meal of Nerea's family? Does his focus on Iturbe diminish the collective protagonism of the film?
12. Does *La Fuga de Segovia* suffer or benefit from the inclusion in its cast of five of the actual ETA members, including Angel Amigo, co-screenwriter and producer of the film?

3 · Euskadi's rural world

Two opposite views

THE NEXT two films in our course share a series of significant elements: a common rural setting, a quasi-ritual representation of family life, a cyclical structure that emblemizes time passing, and a clearly identifiable Basque geographical and cultural context. Moreover, they are both highly successful first feature films by two of Euskadi's leading directors, Montxo Armendáriz and Julio Medem. But the two films present opposing views of the rural world and the Basque Country. Basque cinema itself follows a thoroughly paradoxical tradition whose inner workings seem to combine recognition and denial perfectly. Medem says: "Otra película que me gustó mucho fue *Tasio*, con aquel clima poético. Me pareció una película muy sincera y me conmovió mucho." (Another film I liked a lot was *Tasio*, with that poetic atmosphere. I thought it was a very sincere film and it moved me a lot. *El Diario Vasco*, February, 18, 1992)

It's difficult to imagine two more radically different films than *Tasio* and *Vacas*, despite their common setting. And yet, as Medem suggests, they both attempt to portray an inner world with an utmost filmic sincerity which, as both directors claim, has nothing to do with traditional notions of cinematic realism. Armendáriz was very explicit: "Mi planteamiento era una fotografía construida pero sin que se notara. Yo no buscaba una fotografía realista, sino que quería crear un tono y un clima que parecieran realistas." (My plan called for a constructed cinematography that did not show itself. I was not looking for a realistic photography. I wanted to create an atmosphere and a mood that seemed realistic." *Secretos de la elocuencia*, 221)

Medem also clearly rejected realistic cinema effects in his film: "Yo no he querido hacer una película para mostrar el ambiente rural. Vacas es un mundo imaginario, de locura, es el mundo interior de un personaje. Es un lugar entre la vida y la muerte al que el protagonista accede tras una experiencia traumática." (I did not want to make a film to show the rural world. Vacas is an imaginary world, one of madness. It shows the inner world of a character. It invents a place in between life and death to which the protagonist has arrived after a traumatic experience. *El Diario Vasco*, February 18, 1992) Neither Armendáriz nor Medem, therefore, wanted to portray (realistically) Euskadi's rural world; yet their films are the clearest and most successful representations of that world in Basque cinema, proving once again its paradoxical nature.

What is specific of the *baserria* as an institution is the systemic interaction of a stern family, animals, and a unit of production experienced as a way of life." (Joseba Zulaika's *The Baserria Institution*, 56) Zulaika's concise definition of the Basque traditional farmstead offers itself as a perfect cultural framing for an understanding of the common setting shared by *Tasio* and *Vacas*. Indeed, these films are powerful illustrations of a way of life bound by nature's unchanging cycles. And, most certainly, they both convincingly dramatize a stern family dependence on the surrounding land and animals for survival. However, they differ most markedly in what Zulaika would refer to as their "neighbor relationships" (60). Armendáriz and Medem employ dramatically different techniques to portray the sense of danger inherent in the ways of life of two significant Basque rural professions: *aizkolari* (woodcutter) and coal worker.

Una producción **Elías Querejeta**

Tasio



Tasio adulto	Patxi Bisquert
Tasio adolescente	Isidro José Solano
Tasio niño	Garikoitz Mendigutxia
Paulina, mujer de Tasio	 Amaia Lasa
Hermano de Tasio	Nacho Martínez
Amigo de Tasio	José María Asín
Guarda, enemigo de Tasio	Paco Sagarzazu
Padre de Tasio	Enrique Goicoechea
Madre de Tasio	Elena Uriz

Fotografía	José Luis Alcaine
Música	Angel Illarramendi

Director **Montxo Armendariz**

Subvencionada por el Departamento de Cultura del Gobierno Vasco · Con la colaboración de TVE S.A.

Three generations lined up in the poster for Montxo Armendáriz's *Tasio*, 1984.

In their representation of the gender labor division, the two films part ways even more markedly. Whereas *Medem* shows women's central role in sustaining the *baserria* or farmstead, Armendáriz reduces that role to the most traditional vision of woman as mother and wife. Armendáriz's choice, however, might have been justified by Tasio's "other profession," that of furtive hunter. In his study *Caza, símbolo y eros (Hunting, Symbol and Eros, Madrid, Nerea: 1992)*, Zulaika writes: "Con una excepción notoria: apenas hay mujeres cazadoras. ¿Qué dice ese dato acerca de la definición cultural del ser hombre y del ser mujer, sobre sus relaciones, en concreto sobre la identificación entre el hombre y la caza?" (With a notable exception, there are no women hunters. What does this fact tell about the cultural definition of being a man or a woman, about their relationship, and, specifically, about the identification between being a man and hunting? 15).

The radically different treatments by *Medem* and Armendáriz of their male protagonists, Manuel Irigibel, the "coward *aizkolari*", and Tasio, the fearless and independent coal worker and furtive hunter, emblemize the opposing viewpoints emphasized in this section.

ANOTHER interesting contrast between these two films is that they are products of very different production systems. *Tasio's* film marks the beginning of the fruitful collaboration between Montxo Armendáriz and Elías Querejeta, the most influential producer in Basque cinema. Armendáriz said: "Me pesaba muchísimo el hecho de ser absolutamente nuevo, de no venir del medio cinematográfico. ... De repente, encontrarme con la producción de Elías Querejeta, con Alcaine en la fotografía, con Gerardo Vera en la dirección artística, era muy fuerte. Yo estaba completamente apabullado." (I felt like a big weight was on my shoulders: the fact of

being totally new, since I did not come from the cinematic milieu. ... Suddenly, facing Elías Querejeta's production, Alcaine's cinematography and Gerardo Vera's artistic direction was really too much. I felt completely overwhelmed. *Secretos*, 219) Besides showing Armendáriz's honesty and modesty, those words tell us also of the trust placed on him by the most professional team available at the time. And they point out how a newcomer was chosen by Querejeta, the producer of the most relevant anti-Francoist films by directors such as Carlos Saura or Víctor Erice, in order to create the most attractive new Basque cinema for export to national and international markets. It is this need for an international audience that has established the migrant subject as a central motif for Basque cinema.

With *Vacas*, a newcomer, Medem, was again chosen, this time by Sogetel, Spain's newest and most daring producing company, in order to avoid the limitations of the national market while projecting a radically different cinematic image. John Hopewell summarizes the situation: "With Spain's video market in ruins, international markets have suddenly become crucially relevant to the Spanish film industry. *Vacas* will have to rely substantially on foreign sales to recoup even its modest pta160 (\$1.5) million budget." (*Moving Pictures International*. September 19, 1991)

AS I SUGGESTED above, the two films differ markedly in their treatment of gender. In fact, it's reasonable to conclude that *Tasio* betrays a male-gaze attitude, despite its subtle treatment of sex and violence. In several sequences, Paulina is framed like a classical painting in order to bring to life young Tasio's words: "más bonita, ni en pintura" (prettier than a picture). In *Vacas*, on the contrary, there is a self-conscious and metafictional attempt to deconstruct the traditional



Tasio (Patxi Bisquert) atop the dangerous charcoal pit in Armendáriz's renowned first feature film, *Tasio*, 1984.

male gaze. Structurally, Medem's film is organized around the metonymic (con)fusion of the eyes of the cows with the camera-eye and the (burning) hole of the tree trunk located in the midst of the forest. From a feminist perspective, however, Medem's attempt seems to fall prey to what Julia Kristeva termed "the power of the abject."

Manuel Irigibel, the coward *aizkolari*, says: "Once I killed a wild sow with my ax, she was pregnant and I

threw her into that hole which then burned all summer long." Who would not hear, in these terrible and primitive words, like in many of the film's blendings of the "burning hole" and "truncated tree" metaphors, an echo of that recurrent patriarchal fear of the monstrous-feminine, of that collusion of sex, maternity and death denounced by Kristeva as the power of the abject?

IN THEIR formal conception, *Vacas* and *Tasio* present opposite views of Euskadi's rural world and its endemic ritualized violence. Whereas *Tasio* is a classically patriarchal "bildungsroman," *Vacas* is a postmodern and metafictional oeuvre that (de)constructs an idealized and nostalgic view of the nation's rural origins.

Lesson six

Tasio (Montxo Armendáriz, 1984)

REQUIRED READING

Angulo, Jesús et al: *Secretos de la Elocuencia: El cine de Montxo Armendáriz* (Filmoteca Vasca: Donosti, 1998): 13–37, 215–232

Zulaika, Joseba: *Basque Violence. Metaphor and Sacrament* (Reno: University of Nevada Press, 1988), Chapter 11: "Primordial Metaphors of Savagery, Enclosure and Ascent."

Wood, Guy H: "*Tasio* y el mito del cazador negro." (unpublished essay)

OPTIONAL READING

Zulaika, Joseba: *Caza, símbolo y eros* (Madrid: Nerea, 1992)

———: "The Baserria (Basque Farmstead) Institution." Lesson Nine of Basque C466 (Basque Culture and Pol-

itics). On-line Course (University of Nevada, Reno. Division of Continuing Education, 1999): 55–58

INTRODUCTORY NOTES

1. From live documentary (*Nafarroako ikazkinak / Coal Workers from Navarra*, 1981) to fictional testimony (*Tasio*, 1984)
2. Rural Euskadi's most celebrated filmic representation. Second largest grossing Basque film of the eighties (62 million pesetas at the box-office).
3. *Tasio* as geographically focalized *Ama Lur / Mother Earth*. Ethnographic and nostalgic nation building.
4. Patrilineage and the national allegory or family metaphor.
5. Recurrence of the narrative death and its predominant visual metaphors: "burning hole," "truncated tree" and "dumpsite."

STUDY QUESTIONS

1. *Tasio* is in the opposite position to the migrant subject: how does Armendáriz visualize *Tasio*'s rootedness to the land?
2. Conservative film historian and critic José María Caparrós Lera, echoing other critical voices, praised *Tasio* for having avoided "el extremismo ideológico del que hicieron gala otras producciones vascas recientes (The ideological extreme position showed in other recent Basque productions)." Which "extremismo" might he be referring to and why would *Tasio* be a counterpoint and an antidote to it?
3. Why has Armendáriz structured *Tasio* as a filmic bildungsroman where masculinity and the rite of passage to adulthood are intertwined with a life-threatening craft?



Tasio (Patxi Bisquert) kisses his wife (Amaia Lasa) during the rural wedding banquet that symbolizes natural and familial harmony in Armendáriz's *Tasio*.

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4. Can you comment on the narrative and symbolic significance of the burning hole in Armendáriz's film? How and why does Armendáriz conflate the images of maternity and mortality through that burning hole?
 5. Which filmic resources does Armendáriz employ in *Tasio* to give the film its poetic quality?
 6. Comment on two of the film's most powerful time elisions.

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7. The first time Tasio meets Paulina, at the village dance, he tells his friend: "más bonita ni en pintura / prettier than a picture." When and why does Armendáriz bring that phrase to life on the screen? Is Paulina (and the spectator) always framed by Tasio's (the director's) male gaze?
 8. The image of the truncated tree, like that of the burning hole, is often used to represent the presence of death in the midst of life's natural cycles. Analyze Armendáriz's use of such images. Analyze the sequence where Paulina shoots a gun to deceive the forest guard so that Tasio may chop up the tree downed by the storm.
 9. In *Tasio*, hunting is represented both as a real-life activity and as a metaphor for man's struggle for survival. The hunting metaphor has an important role in Basque culture and in recent Spanish cinema (Carlos Saura's *La caza / The Hunt*, 1965), J.L. Borau's *Furtivos / Furtive Hunters*, 1975 and Mario Camus's *Los santos inocentes / The Holy Innocents*, 1983). Discuss Armendáriz's treatment of the subject from the perspective of Guy Wood's article and Joseba Zulaika's essay.
 10. Analyze the final sequence. Why does Armendáriz choose the same actress to perform the roles of Paulina and her daughter? What is the significance of the wine toast with the forest guard and Tasio's throwing the guard's rope to the air? Why does Armendáriz emphasize that gesture with a slow-motion shot?
 11. In what ways does *Tasio* constitute a patriarchal and nostalgic reconstruction of an idealized rural Euskadi? How does it compare with Julio Medem's vision in *Vacas / Cows*, 1992?

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12. Compare *Tasio* to *Lauaxeta* in terms of their epic tone and their common attempt to become Basque foundational narratives.

Lesson seven

Vacas / Cows (Julio Medem, 1992)

REQUIRED READING

- Cilleiro Goiriastena, Javi: "Intertextual Elements in Julio Medem's *Vacas*:" The Portrayal of a Rural Setting in a Postmodern Context." *Journal of Basque Studies of the Americas*, Vol. IV. 1997: 1–19
- Martí-Olivella, Jaume: "(Un)Masking War and Violence in Medem's *Vacas*." (unpublished essay)
- Rodríguez, María Pilar: "Dark Memories, Tragic Lives: Representations of the Basque Nation in Three Contemporary Films." *Anuario de Cine y Literatura en Español* (Villanova University. Vol. III. 1997): 129–144

OPTIONAL READING

- Martí-Olivella, Jaume: "La mirada femenina del nuevo cine vasco." (unpublished essay)
- Kristeva, Julia: *The Powers of Horror. An Essay on Abjection* (Columbia University Press, New York, 1982): 1–31, 56–90
- Yraola, Aitor: "El discurso de la muerte en *Vacas* de Julio Medem." In George Cabello-Castellet, Jaume Martí-Olivella and Guy H. Wood, eds: *Cine-Lit II. Essays on Hispanic Film and Fiction* (Corvallis: Oregon State University Press, 1995): 163–168

 INTRODUCTORY NOTES

1. Remarkable first feature film by Julio Medem, the most internationally acclaimed director of the "New Basque Cinema." The film toured several international festivals and was awarded the Gold Prize for New Directors at the 1992 Tokyo Film Festival.
2. Disturbing and stylized representation of natural and emotional hidden drives (re Medem's ground level and subjective camera work).
3. Postmodern and metafictional revision of Euskadi's (and Spain's) endemic historical violence.
4. Radical filmic viewpoint: collusion of the cow's gaze with the camera's eye.
5. *Vacas* as the family metaphor and national allegory (de)constructed.

STUDY QUESTIONS

1. Which narrative elements do *Tasio* and *Vacas* have in common? How are they similar and how are they different? In what ways do they offer opposite views of Euskadi's rural world?
2. In my essay "(Un)Masking War and Violence in Medem's *Vacas*" I state that despite Medem's irony and his postmodern aesthetics, his film still belongs in the patrilineal tradition of what Julia Kristeva terms "the devotees of the abject." Discuss this claim.
3. How is Euskadi's internalization of violence visualized in Julio Medem's *Vacas*?
4. Why has Medem chosen the profession of "aizkolari" (woodcutter) for his protagonist(s)? How does he present the metaphor of the (truncated) tree? Analyze the visual connection between the close-up of the cut trunk in the initial Carlist War sequence and Manuel

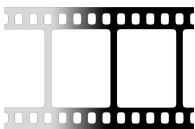


With six award-winning feature films to his credit, Julio Medem, the director from Donostia, has become one of the leading figures in the new Basque cinema.

Irigibel's broken leg and his mysterious painting of the Txargorri cow as another broken trunk.

5. What are the intent and effect of Julio Medem's ground level (subjective) camera work?
6. "Peru becomes a line of flight rather than a lineage of the arborescent type; he is not associated with trees like his father, his uncle or his grandfather: he does not perpetuate the tradition of the *aizkolaris*." He becomes a photographer instead, recording metamorphosis, changing places, and he defines his identity only in relation to the camera: "I am nothing without my camera." Could you comment on María Pilar Rodríguez's words in connection to question number four? How do they reflect the theme of the "migrant subject" in Basque cinema?
7. Analyze the montage sequence where Catalina Mendiluce (Ana Torrent) is on top of a haystack when Ignacio Irigibel, the champion woodchopper, returns home triumphantly driving his new car. How and why does Medem create a witch-like image? Which other references to the witch figure do we find in the film? How can we read that figure from a feminist perspective? How does it relate to Pedro Olea's historical reconstruction of that figure in *Akelarre*?
8. "That's very important, very important!" Why does the grandfather Irigibel say these words to Cristina and Peru while the latter is filming insects and (poisonous) mushrooms in the forest? How and why does this sequence intertextually allude to Víctor Erice's *El espíritu de la colmena* (*The Spirit of the Beehive*)?
9. Analyze the sequence in which Juan Mendiluce chases Peru while the latter is shouting: "Juan has killed my mother!" How and why does Medem's camera take Peru (and us as viewers) to the very edge of the burning hole?

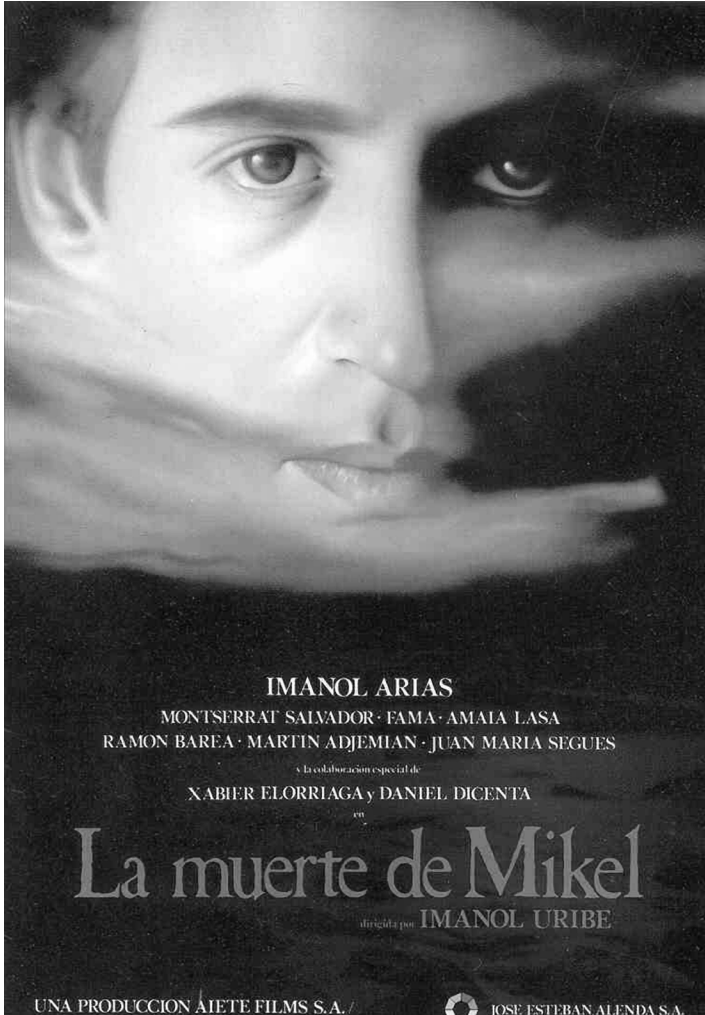
10. Comment on the metafictional and intertextual aspects of Manuel Irigibel's paintings, paying special attention to the attic sequence when Cristina shows Peru the painting entitled "War."
11. How is motherhood portrayed in *Vacas*? Why does Ignacio Irigibel ask his wife Madalen (Klara Badiola) to stand by La Pupille during the taking of the family picture?
12. How do you interpret the film's ending? Why does Medem show a close-up of Cristina's mouth that resembles the burning hole? Does this ending become a reframing of Manuel Irigibel's story? Does it point to a break with the violent cycle?



4 · (En)gendering ETA / Basque politics

THE THREE films introduced in this section of our course deal in different ways with ETA, doubtless the historical referent that has become coextensive with Euskadi in the contemporary mass media. In Part II, we already saw some of the social and historical dimensions of the armed struggle in the Basque Country, as they were portrayed in Imanol Uribe's *Escape from Segovia* (1981). Here, I would like to show some complexities of Basque and ETA politics using a theoretical approach that combines feminism, psychoanalysis and cultural studies. That is why I have brought together three films that symbolically "engender" ETA. They portray ETA's struggle as a problematic relationship between sexuality and violence, political or otherwise.

Imanol Uribe, for instance, has been very adamant in refusing the label of "political" cinema *strictu sensu* for his film. "*La muerte de Mikel* refleja sobre todo la actitud de una persona que busca su libertad sexual, asumiendo su propia personalidad y enfrentándose a los obstáculos que le impiden realizarse. La película habla también de la intolerancia social y de la manipulación política, pero no puede ser identificada como cine político, salvo que se le conceda a este término un sentido muy amplio." (*Mikel's Death* reflects above all the attitude of a person who is searching for his sexual freedom and assuming his own personality by confronting the obstacles that prevent him from doing so. The film speaks also of social intolerance and political manipulation, but it cannot be identified as political unless one gives the widest sense to that term. *El País*, February 18, 1984: 29)



Poster for Imanol Uribe's box-office hit *La muerte de Mikel* (Mikel's death), 1983, the third and final entry in his ETA trilogy.

While offering a fine illustration of affirmation by denial, Uribe expresses a vivid need to detach himself and his work from a political reading that could be taken for partisan and propagandistic. Only once that I know of did Uribe accept a political label for one of his films, *Ez / No* (1977), his short film dealing with the political struggle over the construction of the nuclear plant in Lemóniz: “Es que este corto es un panfleto y está pensado como tal. Curiosamente funcionó muy bien, porque el debate ‘nucleares, sí / nucleares, no’ estaba en la calle.” (That short film is a pamphlet and it is conceived as such. Curiously it worked very well because the debate “nuclear plants, yes / nuclear plants, no” was in the streets. Uribe in *Entre el documental y la ficción*: 100). In fact, one might say that Uribe and his cinema constitute a perfect case study of the problematic of the migrant subject within Basque cinema.

Uribe was born in San Salvador of Basque parents. He was sent to Spain when he was only seven years old in order to get a better education. Uribe’s educational itinerary went from Jesuit boarding schools to the first year at the University of Valencia Medical School and an (unwanted) degree in Journalism in Madrid, where he finally landed in and graduated from the Escuela Oficial de Cine (Official Cinema School).

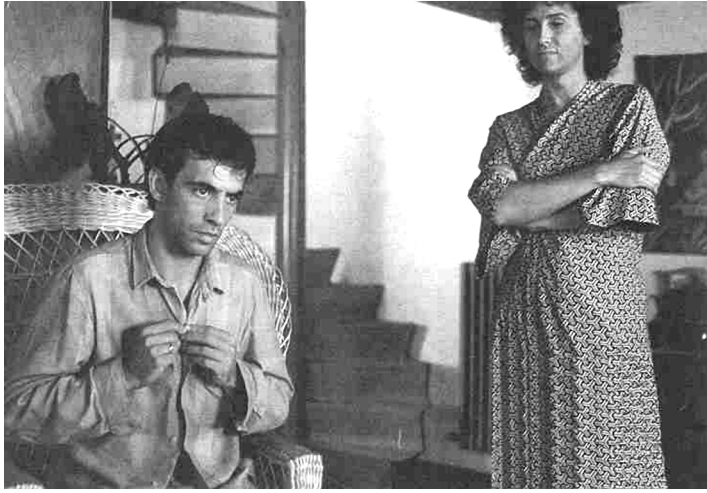
URIBE, WHO has mostly lived in Madrid, is a migrant in Euskadi. However, as he himself declares, it may very well be this position that has allowed him to navigate the deep waters of imagining ETA on the screen. “Creo que pude hacer *El proceso de Burgos* porque no tenía ninguna vinculación con nadie. Era un marciano que aterrizó allí y que quería hacer algo con la inocencia y la estupidez del que no sabe dónde está. Yo quería investigar el tema vasco y a ETA. Si hubiese tenido alguna filiación política, probablemente no hubiera

podido seguir adelante.” (I think I could shoot *The Burgos Trial* because I was not connected to anyone. I was a Martian who landed there and who wanted to do something with the naiveté and innocence of a person who does not know where s / he is. I wanted to research the Basque theme and ETA. Had I had any political affiliation, I probably could not have followed my goal. Uribe, *Entre el documental y la ficción*, 108)

Uribe’s goal materialized in what Vidal Estévez’s called “la trilogía vasca del cine español” (Spanish cinema’s Basque trilogy). Even if it was not his clear intent from the beginning, and despite his disavowal of political commitment, Uribe has become an example of yet another paradox in Basque cinema: the outsider / insider trying to “engender / imagine” ETA and / in Basque politics. With his *Mikel’s Death* (1983), moreover, he has imagined one of Euskadi’s most unsettling and enduring family metaphors, or national allegories, to use Fredric Jameson’s term. That the film went on to be the highest grossing Basque production of the eighties reinforces its social and symbolic significance in Euskadi’s (national) imaginary.

THE CRITICAL and commercial success of Uribe’s *Mikel’s Death* cleared the way for other filmic representations of current events in the Basque Country, especially for the possibility to “imagine ETA,” or to say it differently, to make visible the spectral reality of Basque political violence.

In fact, *Ander eta Yul* (1988) and *Yoyes* (2000), the other two films included in this section of our course, are strong illustrations of this visible “invisibility” insofar as they articulate the “fantastic reality” described by Begoña Aretxaga. “In this sense I suggest that violence in the Basque Country is better understood as a fantastic reality than as an ideological product. To speak of



The morning after the encounter between Mikel (Imanol Arias) and his transvestite lover (Fama) in Bilbao. Mikel's ultimate acceptance and public display of his homosexuality is the turning point in Uribe's *La muerte de Mikel*.

violence as fantastic reality is not to say, however, that it is illusory, or the product of some kind of social pathology; rather, it means that in the Basque Country the experience of violence corresponds to a different mode of reality, one whose visibility is that of the invisible, a spectral mode not unlike that of witchcraft. I use fantasy here in a psychoanalytic sense—that is, neither as a deformation of an original event nor as a purely illusory construction, but as a form of reality in its own right,

one that structures the lives of subjects and that might become, in fact, the only truly Real." (Aretxaga: 117)

Aretxaga's double reference to the psychoanalytic "subject" and to witchcraft in her analysis of the historical violence in Euskadi brings together the ghost of history—the way in which historical and patriarchal intolerance may be illustrated by the witch hunt, as we analyzed in our first section—and the historical ghosts of a split subject whose "imagined community" has been radically shifted. Aretxaga is explicit in this regard: "Because the violence occurring between Basque police and radical-nationalist activists falls within the 'imagined community' of the Basque nation (in contrast to a former symbolic structure in which the 'Basque people' was opposed to the 'Spanish state'), such violence has evoked for many Basques the specter of fratricide and a corresponding deep anxiety over national (Basque) identity." Aretxaga, 116)

It is indeed that "specter of fratricide" that becomes the narrative center of the three films in this section. The basic split in Basque politics between the PNB (Nationalist Basque Party) and the leftist *abertzale* groups is allegorized in the rivalry between the two brothers that live by the shadow of the overpowering matriarch in the (Oedipal) family metaphor that structures Uribe's *Mikel's Death*.

THE CAINITE motif is further explored by Ana Diez's *Ander eta Yul* (1988), in which the two friends of the film's title were "religious brothers" since they were best pals in the Divinity School of their youth. Diez's film recalls the sacramental level of the familiar specter, an aspect that has been studied in depth by Joseba Zulaika, who describes his own "return" in this way: "The true return to Itziar has implied for me revisiting the Catholic symbolism in which I was raised and

observing its iconic imagery and sacramental aspects as constitutive elements of nationalist violence.”
(Zulaika, xxvi)

Yoyes (2000), finally, takes a further narrative step by representing the fratricide inside ETA’s own family. If, Ander and Yul had parted ways only to find themselves in the opposing trenches (as a drug dealer and as an ETA member in charge of the “cleansing” campaign against “camellos” (dealers), Yoyes is an ex-member of ETA’s leading structure who wants to benefit from Spain’s policy of social reinsertion of “repented terrorists.” After a long exile in Mexico and Paris, she wants to come back to Ordizia and to her family in Euskadi. That return is interpreted as a political betrayal by her ex-comrades, and she is killed by one of them.

HELENA TABERNA’S daring film pushes the envelope of the denunciation of the spectral violence of terrorism by including not only ETA’s own inner violence but the Spanish state-sponsored violence of the GAL (Armed Legal Groups), who were responsible for the killings of several ETA members in the French part of Euskadi. Yoyes, moreover, culminates the process of (en)gendering ETA in film by asking, perhaps for the first time in the context of Basque cinema, the “unanswered question” described by the editors of *Nationalisms & Sexualities*, one of the most influential collections to have emerged in the United States, which deals with the relationship between the discourses of gender and national identities: “A significant and largely unanswered question here is the relationship between nationalism, women’s political movements and the representation of sexual difference(s).” (Parker, et al: 7)

If *Mikel’s Death* and, to a lesser extent, *Ander eta Yul* included homosexuality as the sexual difference that triggered the violence of the intolerant forces in



Street demonstrations against the death of Kepa and Itziar at the hands of the *guardia civil* in Uribe's groundbreaking allegorical drama *La muerte de Mikel*.

Euskadi, *Yoyes* foregrounds María Dolores González Cataráin's femininity in order to analyze the reactions to her gender difference in the midst of a political structure dominated by men. In Helena Taberna's portrayal, the historical figure of the first woman to have access to ETA's top command has to face frequent patronizing remarks from her male comrades, such as "No está nada mal, para una tía!" (Not too bad for a woman!). Such remarks bespeak *Yoyes'* comrades' traditional position of power while inscribing her reduction to a sexually marked other. The film emphasizes the role that this rejection has in offering personal motivations to carry out the final vengeance against *Yoyes'* ultimate rejection: her "betrayal" of the ETA brotherhood.

FROM THIS perspective, *Yoyes* constitutes both an exception and a confirmation of Casilda de Miguel's analysis of the "narrative construction of the concept of 'woman' in Basque cinema:" "El cine vasco de los ochenta, aunque pone en cuestión el sistema de valores y el poder patriarcal, no se atreve a presentar un modelo de hombre y / o mujer nuevos más a tono con los tiempos. Cuando la protagonista rompe con los códigos femeninos' establecidos de agradar, aceptar o servir, queda fuera del sistema, sufriendo, como consecuencia, la soledad, la sobrecarga de responsabilidades y el continuo enfrentamiento con lo masculino, que se resiste a aceptar esos cambios. Esta mirada, desde el lugar del otro, nos ubica en el espacio de la violencia, la hostilidad y la agresión." (Despite questioning patriarchy's power and value system, the Basque cinema of the eighties does not dare to present a model of a new (wo)man more in tune with the times. When a female protagonist breaks away from the "feminine" codes of acceptance, service and pleasantness, she becomes an outcast and suffers, as a consequence, from loneliness, too much

responsability and a constant clash with the men who resist such changes. This gaze from the place of the other locates us [women] in the space of violence, hostility and aggression. de Miguel, 229)

Helena Taberna's film defies that reductive gaze while stressing the critique of the patriarchal condemnation, in this case articulated in the guise of a political rejection by the (male) ex-comrades of ETA. In the context of Basque cinema, *Yoyes* culminates the process of imagining and / or (en)gendering ETA, thus rendering visible parts of that invisible and spectral historical violence.

THERE IS, to conclude, another spectral quality to the three films brought together in this section. They all foreground death in their narratives. Or, to put it differently, all these films, like García Márquez's memorable short novel, tell the "chronicle of a death foretold." In doing so, they invite us to be witnesses and accomplices of a social and a narrative death whose historical meaning is at once both visible and invisible.

Lesson eight

La muerte de Mikel / Mikel's Death (Imanol Uribe 1983)

REQUIRED READING

Jameson, Fredric: "Third-World Literature in the Era of Multinational Capitalism." In *Social Text* 15 (1986): 65–88

Kinder, Marsha: *Blood Cinema. The Reconstruction of National Identity in Spain* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1993): 197–275

Vidal Estévez, Manuel: "La trilogía vasca del cine español" In Jesús Angulo, Carlos F. Heredero and José Luis Rebordinos, eds: *Entre el documental y la*



Mikel's family during the funeral in Uribe's allegorical drama *La muerte de Mikel*. The stern figure of Mikel's unflinching mother (Montserrat Salvador) is surrounded by his afflicted wife (Amaia Lasa) and his conservative older brother (Xabier Elorriaga).

ficción. El cine de Imanol Uribe (Donostia-San Sebastián: Euskadiko Filmategia, 1994): 31–44
 Watson, Cameron: “Imagining ETA.” In William A. Douglas, Carmelo Urza, Linda White and Joseba Zulaika, eds: *Basque Politics and Nationalism on the Eve of the Millenium* (Reno: University of Nevada Press, 1999): 94–114

OPTIONAL READING / VIEWING:

de la Iglesia, Eloy: *El Diputado / The Deputy* (1978)
 Deosthale, Duleep C: “Sex, Society and Oppression in Post-Franco Cinema: The Homosexual Statement in Iglesia’s *El Diputado*.” In George Cabello-Castellet, Jaume Martí-Olivella, and Guy H. Wood, eds. *Cine-Lit. Essays on Peninsular Film and Fiction*. (Corvallis: Oregon State University Press, 1992): 10–17.
 Uribe, Imanol: *El proceso de Burgos / The Burgos Trial* (1979)

INTRODUCTORY NOTES

1. Box-office hit of the eighties. (Declared cost: 51 million pts. Total box-office returns: 282 million pts).
2. *La muerte de Mikel* and Imanol Uribe’s Basque trilogy. Importance of the ETA referent in the three films.
3. First fictional attempt to deal with current events in Euskadi.
4. ETA (en)gendered in film: sexuality, armed struggle and the construction of a national imaginary.
5. *Mikel’s Death* as a Foucauldian / Jamesonian national allegory.

STUDY QUESTIONS

1. Was Uribe successful in portraying the position of the homosexual subject as untenable for a committed

abertzale (left-wing Basque nationalist), or did homosexuality stand for something else in his film? Compare Uribe's treatment with that of Eloy de la Iglesia in *El diputado / The Deputy*, (1978).

2. Why do you think *Mikel's Death* was the highest grossing film in the Basque production of the eighties?
3. Can it be said that *Mikel's Death* completes Uribe's Basque trilogy? Does it present a counterpoint to his earlier *El proceso de Burgos / The Burgos Trial*, 1979 and *La fuga de Segovia / Escape from Segovia*, 1981? How does Vidal Estévez present the trilogy?
4. How does Uribe "imagine ETA," in Cameron Watson's sense? Why is the political fight a historical background that frames the theme of homosexuality in the film?
5. What is the intent and the effect of Uribe's use of flashbacks as his major narrative technique? Why has he structured his film as a sort of *Chronicle of a Foretold Death* (García Márquez)?
6. How do you interpret the film's ending? Why did Uribe leave the mystery of Mikel's death unresolved? Or did he? Are there any visual and narrative indications of Mikel's mother's possible role in his demise?
7. Why has Uribe included the figure of an understanding priest if his film is about social and religious intolerance?
8. Comment on the town festival sequence. How does it portray the sense of ritual sports activity in Euskadi? How does the sequence relate to Mikel's subsequent outburst of violence aimed at his wife, Begoña?
9. Marsha Kinder reads Mikel's sexual aggression against his wife Begoña as one of the most disturbing sequences in Spanish film. She also includes the



Poster for Ana Díez's *Ander eta Yul* (*Ander and Yul*), 1988, one of the first feature films about the ETA struggle and the political divisions in Euskadi.

figure of Mikel's mother in the category of "phallic mothers" as yet another illustration of her argument concerning the Spanish Oedipal narrative.

What is your reaction to her critical assessment?

10. Analyze the sequences of Mikel's encounter with the transvestite Fama in Bilbao. Why does he beat him? Which visual metaphors become more prominent in Fama's house?
11. Analyze the figure of Martín, the Chilean doctor whose advice Mikel seeks several times during the film. How does he embody the recurrent figure of the foreigner? Is he a father figure? Why does his voiceover complete the police report concerning his and Mikel's involvement in offering medical services to a runaway ETA member?
12. "You're all a bunch of fucking priests!" When and under what circumstances does Mikel utter these words? How do they function as an ideological counterpoint to the progressive priest?

Lesson nine

Ander eta Yul / Andrew and Yul (Ana Díez, 1988)

REQUIRED READING

Aretxaga, Begoña: "A Hall of Mirrors: On the Spectral Character of Basque Violence," In William A. Douglas, Carmelo Urza, Linda White and Joseba Zulaika, eds: *Basque Politics and Nationalism on the Eve of the Millenium* (Reno: University of Nevada Press, 1999): 115-126

Camí-Vela, María: "Entrevista a Ana Díez." In *Mujeres detrás de la cámara. Entrevistas con cineastas españolas de la década de los noventa* (Madrid:

SGAE. 13 Festival de Cine Experimental. Ocho y Medio, 2001): 66–73.

Martí-Olivella, Jaume: “Invisible Otherness: From Migrant Subjects to the Subject of Immigration in Basque Cinema.” In William A. Douglass, Carmelo Urza, Linda White and Joseba Zulaika, eds: *Basque Cultural Studies* (Reno: University of Nevada Press, 1999): 205–226

OPTIONAL READING / VIEWING

Calparsoro, Daniel: *A ciegas / Blindly* (1997)

de Miguel, Casilda: “El cine vasco de los ochenta: A la búsqueda de una identidad propia.” In Santiago de Pablo, ed: *Los Cineastas. Historia del Cine en Euskal Herria*, 1896–1998: 209–239

Zulaika, Joseba: *Basque Violence. Metaphor and Sacrament* (Reno: University of Nevada Press, 1988): Chapter 12: “The Amabirjina: Icon and Sacrament” and Chapter 13: “Ritual Forms and Performances in Basque Mythology and Political Violence”

INTRODUCTORY NOTES

1. First feature film by Ana Díez, who is also the first woman director in the New Basque Cinema movement. She got her cinema degree in Mexico.
2. *Ander eta Yul* is based on a script written by Angel Amigo (co-author with Imanol Uribe of the script for *Escape from Segovia*, 1981). Amigo’s text won the Basque government’s 1997 screenwriter’s contest. It was fully financed with public funds from the Department of Culture of the Basque Country and was shot in Euskera with Spanish subtitles.
3. *Ander eta Yul* was entered in the Zabaltegui (New directors) section of the 1988 San Sebastián International Film Festival, where it got critical attention but



Ander (Miguel Munarriz) and Yul (Isidoro Fernández) ride to their old divinity school in Díez's *Ander eta Yul*. The deep divide between these characters functions as an allegory for Euskadi's political divisions.

a cold public reception. Amigo and Díez decided to open the commercial run of the film outside Euskadi.

4. Ana Díez's film is the first Basque production to (successfully) merge ETA's armed struggle with the illegal drug trade. This merger is again taken up by Daniel Calparsoro in *Salto al vacío / Leap into the Void* (1993) and *A ciegas / Blindly* (1997), and by Imanol Uribe in *Días contados / Counted Days* (1994).
5. *Ander eta Yul* narrativizes the themes of social invisibility (re: Martí-Olivella's essay) and of the spectral



The love story between Ander (Miguel Munarriz) and Sara (Carmen Pardo) is beautifully rendered by Ana Díez in *Ander eta Yul*.

absence-presence of violence (re: Aretxaga's essay) while offering a dramatic convergence of the excremental / sacramental dialectics in Basque culture (re: Zulaika's *Basque Violence, Metaphor and Sacrament*).

STUDY QUESTIONS

1. Why does Ana Díez use candles to illuminate both Ander's (impossible) return to his parents' house

and the love-making scene? In what ways do both scenes represent his own symbolic wake?

2. Elaborate on the ways Ana Díez's *Ander eta Yul* conflates the excremental and sacramental narratives. What's the significance of Ander's sacramental sarcasm amidst the ruins of the old seminary? (re: Martí-Olivella's "Invisible Otherness," 215)
3. Is the radical personal and political split between the two main characters already inscribed in the Basque title of the film? If so, how?
4. List the three times we see the old vagabond in the film. Discuss his narrative and symbolic significance.
5. During Ander's bus ride from Algeciras to Rentería we see a close-up of his father's lighter for the first time. When do we see it again, and what is its symbolic import?
6. How is the absent father figure introduced in the film, and what is its relevance to Ander's and Yul's relationship?
7. "I always work at night and sleep during the day. I never fall asleep until the sun rises; but here the sun rises so rarely. I've been thinking of going South." Who says that and to whom? What's the significance of this dialogue in the film's poetics of space and geopolitics? Why does Díez make this intertextual allusion to Ernest Hemingway's *The Sun Also Rises*?
8. In connection with the previous question, analyze the sequence where Yul comes to Ander's house. Why is this house, which belonged to *el flamenco*, the homosexual drug dealer from the South, drenched in sunlight? Is this visual fact an excuse for Yul's failure to recognize his old friend Ander?
9. One of the most prominent visual intertexts in the film is the close-up of the dead donkey's head after the explosion of the bomb planted by the ETA

members and picked up accidentally by the vagabond. Which pictorial and filmic references are alluded to by Díez, and why?

10. What is Ataún's political justification for the drug-dealer cleansing campaign? In what sense does it become a form of spectral violence that replicates that of the State? (re: Aretxaga's "A Hall of Mirrors: On the Spectral Character of Basque Violence")
11. How does Ander's and Yul's final misencounter visualize and / or thematize the notion of "invisible otherness" explored in Martí-Olivella's essay "Invisible Otherness?"
12. Comment on some of the (dis)continuities between Imanol Uribe's *Mikel's Death* (1983), Ana Díez's *Ander eta Yul* (1988) and Daniel Calparsoro's *Leap into the Void* (1995) and *Blindly* (1997).

Lesson ten

Yoyes (Helena Taberna, 2000)

REQUIRED READING

Aretxaga, Begoña: "The Death of Yoyes: Cultural Discourse of Gender and Politics in the Basque Country." *Critical Matrix*, Special Issue n.1

Camí-Vela, María: "Entrevista con Helena Taberna." In *Mujeres detrás de la cámara: Entrevistas con cineastas españolas de la década de los noventa* (Madrid: SGAE. 13 Festival Cine Experimental. Ocho y Medio. 2001): 165–175.

Rodríguez, María Pilar: *Mundos en conflicto. Aproximaciones al cine vasco de los años noventa*. (Donosti: Universidad de Deusto / Filmoteca Vasca, 2002): 135–171

OPTIONAL READING / VIEWING

Bosch, Eduard: *El viaje de Arián / Arian's Journey* (2001)

González Katarain, María Dolores: *Desde mi ventana*
(Pamplona: Pamiela, 1988)

Ortega, Eterio: *Asesinato en febrero / Assassination in February* (2001)

INTRODUCTORY NOTES

1. First feminist approach to a cinematic representation of ETA and its gender structure.
2. *Yoyes* is partially based on María Dolores González Katarain (*Yoyes*)'s own journal, *Desde mi ventana (From My Window)*, where she denounces the organization's neo-fascist methods.
3. Taberna's masterful use of "narrative casting" in Ana Torrent's performance of *Yoyes*.
4. *Yoyes* dramatizes the constitutive split in Basque culture and politics by placing it at the heart of the ETA "family."
5. *Yoyes* becomes one of the strongest emblematic figures of the two most recurrent characteristics of Basque cinema: its "invisible otherness" and its migrant subject position. (The historical character of *Yoyes* having to become invisible and migrant in order to survive).

STUDY QUESTIONS

1. What is *Yoyes* doing when we first see her in Iparalde (French Euskadi), in the flat with the other ETA members? How and why does she confront Kizkur and dispute his petition to have some women moved to the flat where he is staying? How does this confrontation inscribe a traditional sexist relationship within the organization?



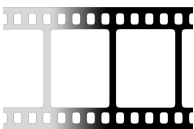
Dramatic close-up of Yul (Isidoro Fernández) in Ana Diez's strong portrayal of Basque political and social divisions in *Ander eta Yul*.

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2. Do you think that Taberna's technique of narrating through frequent flashbacks and flashforwards is effective? Give specific examples.
 3. Another essential technique in the film is the inclusion of frequent narrative counterpoints, inscribed primarily through sharp cuts from violent moments to highly personal ones. Can you find examples that illustrate this point?

4. "El día de mañana vamos a necesitar más políticos que gudaris." (In the future we'll be needing more politicians than soldiers.) Who says that and to whom? How does it mark the split inside ETA between the political and the military branches? In what way is that split partly responsible for Yoyes' decision to leave the organization?
5. Why is Simone de Beauvoir's *Les Mandarines* the text chosen by Helene to give Yoyes as a present? What is de Beauvoir's symbolic role among feminists? What is that text about and how does it relate to the feminist issues discussed by the two friends in that sequence?
6. The title of Yoyes' diary, *Desde mi ventana*, is directly visualized in the film. Can you indicate when and why? Illustrate other instances of symbolic "framing" using windows.
7. Why does Taberna include the sequence of the *aurresku* (Basque homage dance) offered in honor of Kizkur, the ex-ETA member who clashed with Yoyes because of his complaint about the uneven housing arrangements and the lack of women in his flat in Iparralde? What is the narrative contrast with Yoyes' final return?
8. Analyze the sequence that shows Koldo's and Yoyes' reunion after her return to France from Mexico. Which (natural) elements does Taberna choose to frame that meeting? How does the meeting symbolize both the personal and the collective situation of the protagonists?
9. How does Yoyes embody two of the most salient characteristics of Basque cinema itself: its position as migrant subject and its invisible otherness?
10. Analyze Taberna's use of the puppets to forebode Yoyes' death. How do they relate to the use of other

symbols in the film, such as the white horse? Does Eduard Bosch's *Arian's Journey* (2001) plagiarize Taberna's metaphorical use of the puppets?

11. How is the anti-ETA terrorism of the GAL (Armed Legal Groups) presented in the film? And how does Taberna illustrate the media's collaboration with the Spanish government and its fight against ETA?
12. Why does Taberna emphasize the traditional Basque sports (*pelotaris* and *aizkolaris*) in the festive background of the dramatic sequence where we see Yoyes being shot while holding her little daughter beside the white horse?



5 · The female gaze

and / in Basque cinema

THE CENTRAL topic of this part of our course is the appearance of a “female gaze” in Basque cinema. (This subject has already been introduced earlier, especially in Part III, where we discussed the importance of gender representation in Montxo Armendáriz’s *Tasio* and Julio Medem’s *Vacas*.) Here we consider it in depth and relate it to a wider theoretical framework.

Julio Medem, Arantxa Lazcano and Juanma Bajo Ulloa, the most interesting of the first wave of new Basque directors, transgress the patterns of Hollywood’s classic text, as defined by Claire Johnston: “The classic text is a heavily closed discourse, characterized by its linearity, transparency, the necessity for coherence of action and character and the drive towards closure and resolution in terms of a final, full truth augmented and affirmed by a process of identification between reader / viewer and character.” (Johnston, 64)

Kaja Silverman furthers Johnson’s implications in terms of what she and other feminist film critics call “suture,” a semiotic reformulation of the Romantics’ “suspension of disbelief”: “The classic cinematic organization depends upon the subject’s willingness to become absent to itself by permitting a fictional character to ‘stand in’ for it, or by allowing a particular point of view to define what it sees. The operation of suture is successful at the moment that the viewing subject says, ‘Yes, that’s me,’ or ‘That’s what I see.’” (Silverman, 222)

It is this need for coherence, transparency and suture that the new Basque directors transgress, by constructing their films around an ambiguous, fluctuating and / or suspended gaze. This gesture was radicalized, as we saw, by Julio Medem who, in *Vacas*, merged his



Itziar (Eder Amilbia), another extraordinary case of a child protagonist in Arantxa Lazcano's *Urte illunak* (The dark years), 1993, one of Euskadi's most poetic renderings of the post-Civil War period.

subjective camera with the mute expression of the absent-present gaze of the cows. In breaking the narcissistic illusion of suture or self-identification in the narrative of their films, these directors transgress the privileged male gaze. And yet, as Annabel Martín's, Pilar Rodríguez's and my own critical readings suggest, their gesture establishes yet another level in the Basque cinema paradox.

In their construction of a female gaze they mask, erase or at least problematize the possibility of a truly inde-

pendent new (female) subject position. Annabel Martín, describing the character of Gloria, Itziar's mother in *Urte Illunak*, writes: "Much goes unsaid and misunderstood in Itziar's family relationships, but the unhappiness that derives from these situations—or so the film's narrative logic implies—stems from Gloria's self-interest, lack of generosity, and overt sexuality. Thus, the cold, unaffectionate mother is never more than the Francoist cultural construct whose actions also turn her into the castrating Sphinx who 'unmans' her husband in political terms, in his fight in the anti-Francoist pronationalist cause." (Martín, 19)

BAJO ULLOA'S first film, *Alas de mariposa / Butterfly Wings* (1991), offers an even more pronounced manifestation of the traditional Oedipal mother. There is a distinction, however, between Medem and Bajo Ulloa on the one hand and Arantxa Lazcano on the other.

However, and to narrow my reference to the works of Julio Medem and Juanma Bajo Ulloa, it is not so much in their reappropriation of the anti-Franco Spanish Oedipal narrative but in their common representational collusion of death and maternity that I see their strongest ideological limitation. To put it simply, despite their progressive gesture of breaking away from traditional (and patriarchal) ways of story-telling, both Medem and Bajo Ulloa seem to be working still from within the patrilineal filiation and its traditional monsters. Or, to say it in Julia Kristeva's terms, they are still "devotees of the abject." (Martí-Olivella's "(M)Otherly Monsters," 95)

That is not the case, I insist, in Arantxa Lazcano's construction of her female gaze insofar as it rests on Itziar's viewpoint, which will be clearly established in the subjective, initial ground level shots that follow the baby

girl crawling into the kitchen. In fact, the radical transgression of Lazcano's film is emblemized in the title of her film: *The Dark Years*. All the irony of the film centers on the theme of (children's / other's) invisibility, since that invisible darkness is always viewed through the shining and luminous eyes of Itziar (Eider Amilbia), the girl who captures all the sadness and all the innocence of those years. It is one of the most beautiful examples of the paradoxical nature of Basque cinema.

UNLIKE AMI (Laura Vaquero), the protagonist of Bajo Ulloa's excellent *Alas de mariposa*, who uses silence, aggression and self-mutilation to fight the radical invisibility to which she is condemned by her Oedipal mother and the surrounding patriarchal society, Itziar will own not only her independent gaze but her bilingualism as a means to combat the double and opposing linguistic and social oppressions of the two competing nationalist discourses.

Lazcano was very adamant in defending that choice. When asked "why a bilingual film?", she responded: "The story of *The Dark Years* happens in Euskadi at the end of the fifties. It tells of an eight-year-old girl who knows nothing of the most recent political and cultural past. In school she hears everybody speak in Spanish and at home she hears Euskera. Using only one language, the film would not be understandable. To me, it is very important that the story looks real and I need to show both worlds through the eyes of a girl." (*El Pais*, October 28, 1993)

Annabel Martín, alluding to Jacques Derrida's analysis of imposed monolingualism, expands on Lazcano's views: "For the children of Zumaia, there is no fixed, 'orthopedic,' mythological Basque or Spanish reality in their universe. They live their reality in two languages, as two fluid and nomadic options of their uniqueness as

Basque subjects, because contemporary Basque subjectivity implies a painfully negotiated arena between two 'loves.'" (Martín, 16) *Urte Illunak* is Lazcano's loving and painful representation of this constitutive linguistic and emotional split. And, in its feminist gesture of merging the private and the public spheres, it opens up a much-needed dialogue between nations and narrations inside Spain's multicultural and plurinational political space.

Bajo Ulloa's central symbol in his *Alas de mariposa* functions as a response to his critical and ideological need to represent and exorcize the ghosts in the Basque cultural split, if at a more abstract than linguistic level. The butterfly becomes the symbol of an inner duality that Ami, his protagonist, experiences in dramatic ways. "What I was looking for here was something that would contain in itself both beauty and ugliness, something that was very beautiful outside but that held a horrible inside. That is how I found the butterfly. ... The butterfly is also the symbol of metamorphosis, since it is a being with two lives: first as a worm and then as a butterfly. These two very different lives, first as a girl and then as an adolescent, are also the ones that Ami lives." (Bajo Ulloa in Heredero, 142-3)

IN PILAR RODRÍGUEZ'S critical reading, the butterfly also signifies the "in-between" stage characterized by Gilles Deleuze and Félix Guattari as the "line of fugue" that defies all the societal constraints imposed during the process of subject formation. She writes that "Ami es visualmente percibida siempre en los balcones, en la transición entre el espacio interno y el externo, amenaza siempre con escapar, desaparecer." (Ami is visually perceived always on balconies, in transition between inner and outer spaces. She is always threatening with escaping, disappearing. Rodríguez, 111) This is certainly a

characteristic that Ami shares with Itziar, who was also portrayed in hiding, in between spaces that belonged to others, to the adults, such as the staircase of her apartment building or the cracked walls of the dancing studio. This commonality in the representation of the two girls will be further stressed in the ambiguous endings of both films, which defy any classic sense of closure. They offer themselves as open texts which may be read in contradictory ways, as “strong affirmations of an inner language that endures and transgresses the ‘social death’ of the protagonists” (Martí-Olivella’s *Regendering*, 231) or as testaments to the sacrifice of what Annabel Martín calls the national child. (Martín, 8)

ULTIMATELY, in bringing together Lazcano’s *Urte Illunak* and Bajo Ulloa’s *Alas de mariposa* despite their differences, I want to emphasize their common critique of patriarchal violence and their shared capacity to tell in poetic ways a private story with public relevance. In doing so, they do succeed in constructing a “female gaze” in Basque cinema.

Lesson eleven

Urte Illunak / The Dark Years (Arantxa Lazcano, 1992)

REQUIRED READING

Martín, Annabel: “Postnationalism, Identity Politics, and the Reconfiguration of Transgression in Recent Basque Cultural Production.” Forthcoming in Alejandro Varderi et al, eds: *Cinematic Representations in Spanish and Latin American Literature*

Martí-Olivella, Jaume: “Regendering Spain’s Political Bodies: Nationality and Gender in the Films of Pilar Miró and Arantxa Lazcano.” In Marsha Kinder, ed:



The striking female gaze of Ami (Laura Vaquero), the child protagonist of Bajo Ulloa's spectacular debut in *Alas de mariposa*.

Refiguring Spain: Cinema / Media / Representation.
(Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 1997): 215–238

OPTIONAL READING

Buckley, Christina A: "Los años oscuros: Silence Against Micro / Macro Nationalist Ideology." In George Cabello-Castellet, Jaume Martí-Olivella and Guy H. Wood, eds: *Cine-Lit III. Essays on Hispanic Film and*

Fiction (Corvallis: Oregon State University, 1998):
131–143

Johnston, Claire: "Femininity and the Masquerade: Anne of the Indies." In E. Ann Kaplan, ed: *Psychoanalysis & Cinema* (New York and London: Routledge, 1990): 64–72

Rodríguez, María Pilar: *Mundos en conflicto. Aproximaciones al cine vasco de los años noventa*. (Donosti, Universidad de Deusto / Filmoteca Vasca, 2002):
35–72

INTRODUCTORY NOTES

1. Another remarkable first feature film that premiered at the Zabaltegui (New Directors) section of the 1992 San Sebastián International Film Festival and toured a series of international festivals successfully
2. Lazcano's allegorical double vision or the transgression of essentialist national(ist) narrative.
3. Historical invisibility visualized through the poetic imagination of a (female) child's gaze.
4. Diegetic bilingualism as a means to represent multiculturalist identity politics.
5. Feminist conflation of private and public spheres in order to create new (female) subject positions in the Basque (Spanish) body politic.

STUDY QUESTIONS

1. What's the visual and narrative irony implicit in portraying the pain and sadness of Euskadi's "dark years" through Itziar's (Eider Amilbia) luminous eyes? How does it relate to the notion of "female gaze"?
2. How do you interpret the film's ending? Is Itziar symbolically killed by the double violence of Euskadi's and Spain's patriarchal national narratives?

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3. Does Arantxa Lazcano offer a fair representation of Euskadi's linguistic split? Why do Itziar's parents speak Spanish among themselves while demanding Euskera from their children? Do you agree with Annabel Martín's assessment of this issue in her essay?
 4. Can you analyze Sofía's and Itziar's blood sisterhood and their shared secret under the emblematic tree? Why is Sofía missing from the second part of the film?
 5. What's the importance of the initial handheld shots that follow little Itziar in the house? How do they establish Itziar's role and (subject) position in the film?
 6. Comment on my assessment of Arantxa Lazcano's (and Pilar Miró's) regendering of Euskadi's / Spain's political bodies. What is the political significance of their filmic proposal?
 7. Can you describe the three moments in which Itziar utters her significant *zergatik?* (Why?). Who is she addressing the question to? How do you interpret this repeated question?
 8. Which are the film's poetics of space? How is Itziar's (and the other children's) liminal position visualized?
 9. There are three meaningful closeups of shoes in *Urte Illunak*. Can you recall them and interpret their connection to the narrative?
 10. Juan Lasa (Itziar's father) is often portrayed as a variation on the absent or fantasmatic (spectral) father. Can you describe some of those representations in the film? Can you relate Juan's spectral presence to the fact that he makes a living as a travelling salesman in Spain?

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11. The film has four “mirror-scenes” in which we see Gloria twice tending to herself, Juan washing his tired face in the train station bathroom, and Itziar contemplating her adolescent features after her night spent in the dark room as punishment for having arrived late. Can you compare and contrast those “mirror-scenes?” Why is Itziar’s shot through a blue filter?
 12. What is the visual and narrative connection between the *Marcelino, pan y vino* filmic intertext and the following cut to Itziar’s encounter with don Cosme on the way to the mountain? Why does Cosme improvise verses to Itziar’s reaching out call for “Manuel, Manuel?” Which tradition does the grandfather embody? How does he contrast with the rest of the male figures in the film? What is Annabel Martín’s reading of this sequence in her essay?

Lesson Twelve

Alas de mariposa / Butterfly Wings (Juanma Bajo Ulloa, 1991)

REQUIRED READING

Martí-Olivella, Jaume: “(M)Otherly Monsters: Old Misogyny and / in New Basque Cinema.” *Anuario de Cine y Literatura en Español* (Villanova University. Vol. III, 1997): 89–101

Rodríguez, Maria Pilar: *Mundos en conflicto. Aproximaciones al cine vasco de los años noventa*. (Donosti,: Universidad de Deusto / Filmoteca Vasca, 2002): 105-131

OPTIONAL READING

Arocena Badillos, Carmen: "El cine vasco de la década de los noventa" in Peio Aldazabal et. al. eds: *Los Cineastas. Historia del Cine en Euskal Herria, 1896–1998* (Besaide-Bilduma, Vitoria-Gasteiz, 1998): 241–271

Hirsch, Marianne: *The Mother / Daughter Plot: Narrative, Psychoanalysis, Feminism* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1989): 1–68

INTRODUCTORY NOTES

1. Another extremely interesting and successful first feature film. Winner of the 1991 San Sebastián International Film Festival, remarkable considering that Juanma Bajo Ulloa was 24 years old.
2. Self-conscious and highly stylized narrative based on precise framing and editing.
3. Genre bending in a story that (con)fuses a psychological (Hitchcock's style) thriller with a family melodrama with clear allegorical undertones.
4. *Alas de mariposa*: a feminist revision of the Basque national allegory?
5. Highly interesting use of Basque cinematic intertexts and of narrative casting (Silvia Munt, Txema Blasco, etc).

STUDY QUESTIONS

1. In what sense can we be talking about a female and an innocent gaze in Bajo Ulloa's *Alas de mariposa*? How would you compare it to Lazcano's *Urte Illunak*?
2. How is the central visual metaphor incorporated into the film's narrative?
3. Does Bajo Ulloa use the convention of the psychological drama? Explain.



A still from *Alas de mariposa*. The troubled sleep of Little Ami (Laura Vaquero) at the edge of her bed is a visual metaphor for her own edgy and marginal situation.

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4. Analyze Bajo Ulloa's use of the "Spanish Oedipal narrative" (Marsha Kinder) in relation to previous films in the course. Does it constitute a feminist revision or transgression of such a narrative, or reinforce it?
 5. What is the significance of the grandfather's persistent knocks with his wooden cane? Comment on their recurrence. How do they relate to the truncated tree metaphor given the narrative casting of Txema Blasco, the same actor who impersonated the figure

of Manuel Irigibel, the coward *aizkolari* in Julio Medem's *Vacas*?

6. Can you analyze the sequence in which Carmen, Ami's mother, stands captivated in front of the revolving washing machine?
7. When can Ami finally draw a butterfly? Why can she do it? How did she previously create the figure of the butterfly and what was the consequence?
8. Why is Ami's father a garbage collector? How does Bajo Ulloa's treatment of the garbage metaphor compare to the use of this metaphor in Basque films as a whole? Why is the father ultimately represented as another variation of the absent father figure?
9. Carmen forbids Ami to touch her pregnant belly and later to be in the room while she is feeding her baby boy Alejandro. Why? Does it represent her suppression of the "mother / daughter plot" (Marianne Hirsch)? Does that gesture place her in the position of yet another Oedipal "terrible mother"?
10. How is Ami's rape anticipated? How and why is Gorka's (sexual) violence visually linked with the grandfather's initial cane knocks?
11. Analyze the Christian imagery of the film, especially the framed picture of Christ in Ami's room and the final reversed pietàs.
12. Does the film's ending imply a critique of motherhood as a patriarchal imposition, or does it imply a continuation of the social entrapment? How do you read Bajo Ulloa's film allegorically? Comment on the different critical readings of this ending and the film as a whole (Martí-Olivella, Rodríguez, etc.).

6 · Migrant mutations

OUR COURSE closes with a section that brings together the concepts of migrancy and mutation. Basque cinema has been analyzed mostly as a migrant subject from within and without. Its international projection in the current globalized cultural environment is best understood from the vantage point of a Hollywood mutation, even a Hollywood mutant, to push the analogy.

Daniel Calparsoro and Alex de la Iglesia are two new Basque directors who have faced the challenge of creating Basque films that address Hollywood's most popular genres. Both belong to the long Basque tradition of affirmation by denial. Calparsoro says: "Creo que no existe. No hay entidad de cine vasco, cero." (I think it does not exist. There is no Basque cinema entity, zero. *El País*, May 5, 1996: 37) Despite their constant disavowals, both de la Iglesia and Calparsoro are constructing a cinematic idiom that resonates within the cultural parameters we have delineated in this course. Even their dialogue with Hollywood's traditional genres is common in Basque cinema, as can be seen in Uribe's and Urbizu's genre movies. With *Maité* (1995), on the other hand, we have another example of the migrant subject and its relevance to the current nostalgic and neocolonial refiguration of Cuba both in Euskadi and in Spain.

Iain Chambers calls the most significant predicament for the contemporary migrant subject "the impossible homecoming" and distinguishes him / her from other historical forms of migrancy, such as political exile and diaspora. "For to travel implies movement between fixed positions, a site of departure, a point of arrival, the knowledge of an itinerary. It also intimates an eventual



Daniel Calparsoro standing by the promotional poster of his shocking feature film debut, *Salto al vacío* (*Leap into the void*), 1995.

return, a potential homecoming. Migrancy, on the contrary, involves a movement in which neither the points of departure nor those of arrival are immutable or certain. It calls for a dwelling in language, in histories, in identities that are constantly subject to mutation. Always in transit, the promise of a homecoming—completing the story, domesticating the detour—becomes an impossibility.” (Chambers, 5)

IN HIS ESSAY “migrancia:memoria:modernidá / Migrancy: Memory:Modernity,” Abril Trigo, building on Chambers’ analysis, suggests a further distinction between the migrant and the cosmopolitan subjects. This distinction retakes the Baudelarian figure of the *flâneur* and opposes it to the radical version of today’s uprooted cultural migrant. “El migrante habita el espacio-tiempo como un habitat móvil, porque la migrancia, en su ir y venir, siempre en tránsito, termina por disolver la identificación inalienable y certera con un espacio-tiempo particular, y por ello, la promesa del regreso a casa se vuelve imposible. Esto implica que en el proceso el migrante termina enajenándose de ambos mundos, experiencia que se caracteriza por un vital sentimiento de *homelessness* [Heidegger], de orfandad [Said], de forasterismo [Arguedas], de extrañamiento social, cultural y existencial por el cual no se siente en casa en parte alguna, y que lo diferencia del cosmopolita.” (The migrant inhabits his / her time-space as a mobile habitat because migrancy, in its ups and downs, always in transit, ends up by dissolving any certain and inalienable identification with a given time and space and, in so doing, it makes an impossibility of any promise of homecoming. This implies that during the process the migrant finishes by alienating himself / herself from both worlds, an experience that is characterized by a feeling of *homelessness* [Heidegger], of orphan-

hood [Said], of foreignness [Arguedas], of social, cultural and existential estrangement by which he / she cannot feel at home anywhere. And it is this experience that differentiates the migrant from the cosmopolitan subject. Trigo, 7)

Basque cinema can be seen as a form of dual migrancy. One tendency wants only to replicate the cosmopolitan position, that is, to be fully aware of its migrancy and self-consciously construct an international audience that implies a theoretical homecoming. The other tendency can never be at home, since home is always disavowed, or predicated as violent or non-existent.

IT IS THIS second form of migrancy, I believe, that best embodies the peculiar split at the heart of Basque consciousness and exemplifies what Trigo calls an *Id / entidad / Id / entity*. “La migrancia, a diferencia de la inmigración, no conduce a síntesis, fusiones e identidades estables, sino a una suspensión de culturas en conflicto, siempre en vilo, en las cuales el migrante es un ave de paso enajenada de todas. Y si admitimos que el lenguaje constituye un espacio privilegiado donde se gesta, condensa y disputa la *id / entidad* ... así, el discurso del migrante yuxtapone lenguas y sociolectos diversos en una dinámica centrífuga, expansiva, que dispersa el lenguaje, contaminándolo con tiempos y espacios otros, con experiencias otras que lo atraviesan en múltiples direcciones. ... Este modo metonímico, casi rizomático de producción social y cultural promueve una *id / entidad* esquiza. [Stonequist 145]” (Migrancy, unlike immigration, does not lead to any synthesis, fusions or stable identities but to a suspension of cultures in conflict, always alert, among which the migrant is but a passing bird that is alienated from all. And if we accept that language becomes the privileged site where

id / entity is formed, condensed and disputed, ... thus, the migrant's discourse juxtaposes different languages and sociolects in a centrifugal and expansive dynamic that fragments any language by contaminating it with other times and spaces and with other experiences that criss-cross it in multiple directions. ... This metonymic, almost rhizomatic way of social and cultural production promotes a split id / entity. Trigo, 8–9)

BASQUE CINEMA marks the persistence of the "id" in that "id / entity" of Euskadi's collective imaginary, since it becomes its most spectral figuration of both its basic cultural split and its migrant condition. Or, to continue building on the Freudian model implied in Trigo's argument, one might add, as Joseba Gabilondo does, that the most salient characteristic of contemporary Basque cinema is its uncanniness. "As Freud explains, uncanny identity is a negative identity, an othered identity that, in its negativity, returns to haunt the attempt to foreclose or repress its being. ... Freud adds that the origin of the recurrence has to do specifically with the familiar or even familial origin of a repressed affect: 'We can understand why linguistic usage has extended *das Heimliche* [homely] into its opposite, *das Unheimliche* [un-homely, uncanny]: for this uncanny is in reality nothing new or alien, but something which is familiar and old-established in the mind and which has become alienated from it only through the process of repression.' (1955: 241) Hence, the uncanny is defined by the repression of a familiar affect that then recurs as repressed and consequently frightening. Following Freud's definition, I shall argue that Basque identity and its filmic representations are uncanny in the sense that the Spanish state and its nationalist system (in which I include both Spanish and peripheral nationalisms) tend to repress them. As a result, Basque identity and its

visibility recur with a violence that is clearly uncanny: familiar in its affect and yet frightening. ... My claim in what follows is that the logic of the uncanny affects most areas of Basque cinema's visibility: from its economic organization to the specific cinematic representations themselves." (Gabilondo's *Uncanny Identity*, 7–8)

I FULLY AGREE with Gabilondo's characterization, although I would add to his final claim that the uncanny also affects Basque cinema's invisibility. Or, as I argue in the Introduction to my volume *Basque Cinema: The Shining Paradox*, continuing the Freudian / Lacanian paradigm, Basque cinema may be seen as a cultural metaphor for the necessary lack in the process of formation of the Basque / Spanish national self. And yet, as Elizabeth Grosz suggests: "A self that cannot abide its own non-mastery of the world fears and hates the other for concretising its own specificity and limits, and seeks to reduce otherness at every opportunity to a form of sameness and identity modelled on itself." (Grosz's "Judaism and Exile, The Ethics of Otherness." *New Formations* 12, Winter, 1990: 81) The definitional debate over Basque cinema's (lack of) identity betrays this constant attempt to reduce its otherness to the logic of the same, by arguing that it either belongs to a Spanish cinematic tradition or that it embodies a series of imaginary figurations of a Basque national self.

The three films that I have included in this final section constitute critical inscriptions of yet another form of invisible migrancy, perhaps the most radical one, that of the immigrant worker who is racially differentiated. Indeed, at the core of these filmic migrant mutations there is a common gesture of making visible those historical subjectivities that had had no access to cultural representation. Daniel Calparsoro's *Leap into the Void* (1995), Carlos Zabala and Eneko Olasagasti's *Maité*



Julio Medem, making his first feature film *Vacas* (*Cows*), 1992, a portrayal of the rivalry between two neighboring families of *aizkolaris* (woodcutters).

(1995), and Alex de la Iglesia's *The Day of the Beast* (1996), although in radically different formats, all share in that attempt to represent the otherness within.

INTERESTINGLY, even in Calparsoro's radical presentation, which places that racially marked other at the very narrative center of his film, racial differentiation is ignored in the critical reception. I am referring to the character of Javi, the leader of the youth gang that rambles around Bilbao's industrial ruins, who belongs to a

family of Brazilian immigrants and who is loved by Alex, the young female protagonist who is interpreted by Najwa Nimry, herself the daughter of a Basque-Jordanian family.

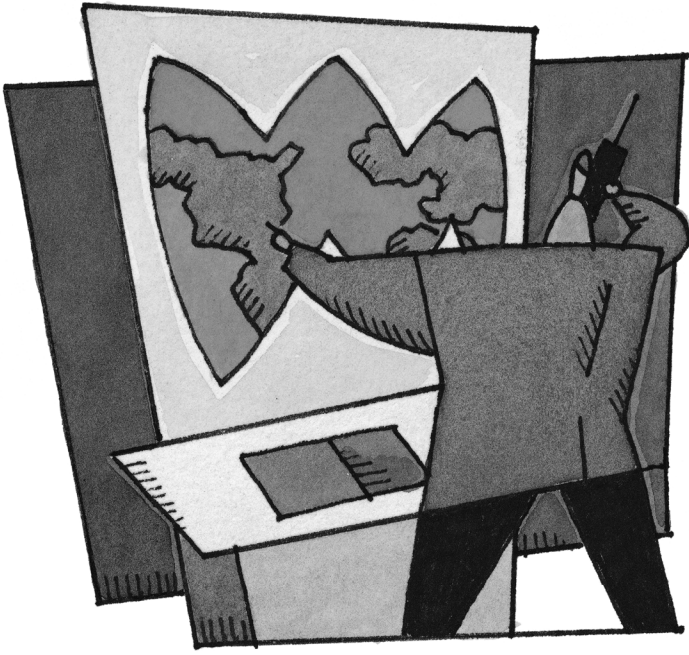
None of the film reviews that I have had access to mentions the element of their being (im)migrants, while most of them emphasize Javi's sexual impotence and Alex's position as male surrogate. Javi, often referred to as a strange type, is therefore symbolically emasculated twice, once inside Calparsoro's narrative and then in the critical reception that obliterates his historical condition as a racially differentiated immigrant. (Martí-Olivella's "Invisible Otherness," 211–12)

YET CALPARSORO'S film becomes another powerful example of Basque cinema's shining paradox: to render visible its own invisibility. Justin Crumbaugh offers a Benjaminian analysis. "The very site of this symbol of Bilbao's economic decline was to be later selected by architect Frank Gehry as the location for the new Guggenheim Bilbao Museoa. That is to say the industrial ruins were to become the building blocks of Bilbao's chic new international image. ... Much like the 'unpredictable architectural forms, apparently coincidental and metal-plated,' of the museum [Tellitu 166], the surprising plot twists and the raw, edgy camera-work of *Leap into the Void* tell a story of the chaotic urban space that is Bilbao. In fact these two Bilbaine works of contextual disorder constitute separate attempts to make art of their constitutive discard. One might say that both projects generate a certain beauty from what Walter Benjamin described as the 'harsh contrast between the content and the preciousness of the diction.' [89]" (Crumbaugh, 5–7)

Joseba Zulaika also engages Walter Benjamin's elaborations on the allegorical condition of historical ruins.

“No la tristeza nostálgica de riquezas e imperios desvanecidos sino la conciencia crítica de la fragilidad de un orden social que requiere de semejantes catástrofes para perpetuarse. Ante el caos de la naturaleza decadente y las paradojas insolubles del mundo estético, la alegoría barroca deserta de la historia y la naturaleza para hallar una salida teológica de refugio en el mundo del espíritu. Benjamin se rebela contra este idealismo que hace que la alegoría se convierta en un mito y se propone una construcción anti-idealista del mundo inteligible. Esta especie de Teología del Infierno, que se fija en tipos preferidos como el tirano, la prostituta, el especulador, es la que nos interesa también a nosotros a la hora de repensar la Euskadi en ruinas que estamos presenciando.” (Not the nostalgic sadness of long gone richness and empires but the critical conscience of the fragility of a social order that requires such catastrophes in order to perpetuate itself. In front of the chaos of a decadent nature and of the unsolvable paradoxes of the aesthetic world, the Baroque allegory gives up nature and history to find an outlet in the theological refuge of the spiritual world. Benjamin rebels against this idealism that turns allegory into a myth and proposes an anti-idealist construction of the intelligible world. This sort of Theology of Hell, that pays attention to preferred types such as the tyrant, the prostitute or the speculator, is the one we are also interested in when it comes the time to rethink the ruinous Basque Country that we are witnessing. Zulaika’s *Ruinak / Peripheries / Transizioak*, 5)

THE MIGRANT mutations of the three films in this section all include a variation on this “theology of hell” and / or ruinous refiguration of Euskadi’s historical moment. De la Iglesia’s *The Day of the Beast* with its “Satanic comedy” format is indeed the clearest, if most



Young Basque filmmakers such as Daniel Calparsoro and Alex de la Iglesia are directly engaging Hollywood's idiom in their cinematic explorations of the mutations of migrant subjectivities.

Illustration by Robin Jareaux, Artville LLC.

mutant example of such a common condition. Its protagonist, Angel Berriartua (Alex Angulo) is indeed a professor of Theology from the Jesuit University of Deusto (a self-parody given the fact that de la Iglesia himself studied sociology there.) These are the words used to describe him in the film's press book: "Professor of Theology at the University of Deusto, Angel has spent half of his life deciphering the prophetic message concealed in the sacred pages of 'Revelation.' His endless drive has led him to a terrifying conclusion: the Antichrist will be born in Madrid, in the pre-dawn hours of December 25th, 1995, in a secret place. There is barely time to do anything about it. On his arrival in the city, Angel begins to observe the signs that indicate the coming of the Son of Satan to Earth." (17)

It's not hard to guess that de la Iglesia would choose farce to present the uncanny return of the repressed in the Basque (and Spanish) imaginaries: the foreign elements that take shape in the hellish and chaotic social mores of the modern city. Angel, moreover, is the ultimate migrant, insofar as he migrates from the spiritual condition of a Bible decipherer to a rampant evildoer in search of the place where the Antichrist is to be born.

DE LA IGLESIA'S masterful use of the postmodern KIO towers and their inverted V-shape to mark the emblem of the Satanic forces is another example, like Calparsoro's use of Bilbao's industrial ruins, of the capacity to make art of the constitutive discard or contextual disorder of our urban spaces. In the context of our course, *The Day of the Beast* is a brilliant postmodern parody of religious intolerance and the witch hunt repeatedly presented in Basque cinema.

Connecting the first and last films of our course, de la Iglesia's burlesque *Akelarre* constitutes a mordant refiguration of many familiar ghosts from Basque and

Spanish cinema, as can be seen in its construction of a quite peculiar Oedipal family. A family that includes an almost caricaturesque phallic mother and a stereotypical absent father whose empty space is occupied by Angel, the “father” who will adopt José María (Santiago Segura), whose arms “are filled with tattoos representing satanic symbols, demonic creatures and anagrams of his favourite band, Satannica,” a fact that “doesn’t stop him from becoming the Apocalypse obsessed priest’s fiercest ally.” (Press Book, 19)

The foreign bad influence is embodied in the figure of Professor Cavan (Armando de Razza) who emblemizes the worst side of Baudrillard’s notion of simulacra: “Cavan is a television star and parapsychologist who directs and hosts ‘The Dark Side,’ the most popular show on Tele 3, where he tells the future to the unwary viewers who call him. ... He looks like a mixture of Liberace and Dr. Strange. He has a swindler’s smile and his stare can melt metals. He was born to triumph by taking advantage of the majority’s irrational beliefs.” (Press Book, 18). De la Iglesia’s ultimate trick is to have Angel unmask the farcical nature of this popular savant by enlisting Cavan in his pursuit of the Antichrist.

IT IS, HOWEVER, in his original figuration of the spectral presence of ghostly enemies, the most recurrent of elements in Basque cinema, that *The Day of the Beast* achieves its parodic culmination. Indeed, by making the racist and neo-fascist gangs that attack immigrants and other minorities in the streets of Madrid the guardians of the Antichrist, de la Iglesia contributes powerfully to denouncing the immigrant’s invisibility and the most radical form of intolerance against otherness that we face amidst the social ruins of our metropolis.

With Zabala’s and Olasagasti’s *Maité*, on the other hand, Basque cinema’s migrant subject turns its gaze to

a transatlantic ruin, Cuba, the living ruins of a social revolution that dramatically endures its historical and political isolation. With this film, moreover, Basque cinema enlists itself in a historical Spanish gesture that I have described elsewhere: "With the introduction of the touristic subject in the Spanish cinema's migrant gaze on Cuba, we are faced with a case of recovering what is 'ours' through the consumption of a simulation of what is 'foreign.' That is to say, the spectacular consumption of Cuban otherness allows 'us,' the Spaniards, to recover spectrally 'our' own identity and historical property. ... Cuba incorporates this doubly spectral and atemporal condition described by Derrida in his *Specters of Marx* by having the historicity of the Marxist revolution coexist with its spectral virtuality. (...) In the current nostalgia boom, therefore, Cuba offers a double and contradictory stimulus for the new Spanish migrant subject: to be able to satisfy at the same time, almost unconsciously, his / her historical-imperial and / or erotic-revolutionary frustrations and appetites. (Martí-Olivella's "Cuba and Spanish Cinema's Transatlantic Gaze," 162-3)

AND YET Eneko Olasagasti says: "Havana is not only the backdrop of our story. She has become almost a character, with whom we deal with the same tenderness as with all the rest, without judging her." (Gurpegui, 15) It is the conciliatory approach of *Maité* what marks a possible difference within the sameness of that Spanish neo-colonial nostalgic gaze set on Cuba. And, in this way, it becomes yet again a parable for Euskadi's own situation, since the tolerance and brotherhood desired by the two Basque directors is not something that necessarily only exists between these two distant countries, but between the countries that form the Basque Country and the Spanish State, always postnationally split by the national narrative of intolerance and rejection of

otherness. Zabala's and Olasagasti's filmic migrancy projects itself onto the deforming mirror of humor and distance in order to renegotiate the ideological and identity problems that haunt a national history full of violent and intolerant gestures.

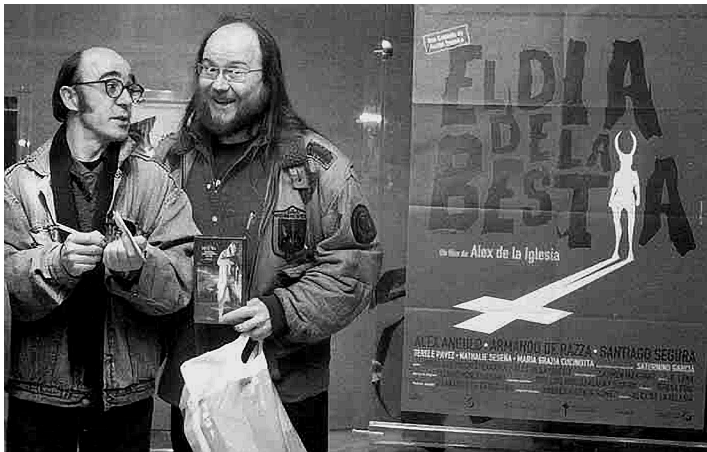
What *Maité* shares with de la Iglesia's *The Day of the Beast*, finally, is the capacity to break an inner barrier in the cinematic self-representation of Basque people by employing humor and (self)-parody. Contrary to the tradition we have visited in this course, *Maité* is a melodramatic light comedy—a genre almost non-existent in Basque cinema but prevalent in oral culture, theater, and television (Gabilondo, "Before Babel" 32–7)—which bets on humor, tropical light, and the celebration of an imaginary union. Without fully departing from the Basque aesthetic of contraries and from its cultural tradition of affirmation by denial, *Maité* constitutes a variation or mutation of the present exploitative migrant gaze in the context of Spanish cinema, although ultimately it cannot entirely escape the "collective neo-imperial and nostalgic gesture of Spanish cinema's transatlantic (re)construction of its (post)national identity." (Martí-Olivella's "Cuba and Spanish Cinema's Transatlantic Gaze, 174) Or, to recall Abril Trigo's formulation, it cannot escape from that foregrounding of the historical "id" in Euskadi's and Spain's "id / entity."

Lesson thirteen

Salto al Vacío / Leap into the Void (Daniel Calparsoro, 1993)

REQUIRED READING

Chambers, Iain: *Migrancy, Culture, Identity* (London and New York: Routledge, 1994): 1–8



Alex Angulo and Santiago Segura, the lead roles in Alex de la Iglesia's irreverent comedy *El día de la bestia* (The day of the beast), 1995.

Crumbaugh, Justin: "An Aesthetic of Industrial Ruins in Bilbao: Calparsoro's *Salto al vacío / Leap into the Void* and the Guggenheim Bilbao Museoa." (unpublished essay)

Gabilondo, Joseba: "Uncanny Identity: Violence, Gaze and Desire in Contemporary Basque Cinema." In Jo

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- Labanyi, ed: *Constructing Identity in Twentieth Century Spain: Theoretical Debates and Cultural Practices* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, forthcoming)
- Martín, Annabel: "A Corpse in the Garden:" Bilbao's Postmodern Wrapping of High Culture Consumer Architecture." In Teresa Vilarós et, al, eds: *Brokering Spanish Postnationalism*, forthcoming

OPTIONAL READING

- Ballesteros, Isolina: "Juventudes problemáticas en el cine de los ochenta y noventa: comportamientos generacionales y globales en la era de la indiferencia." In *Cine (ins)urgente. Textos filmicos y contextos culturales de la España postfranquista* (Madrid: Fundamentos, 2001): 233–269
- Rodríguez, María Pilar: *Mundos en conflicto. Aproximaciones al cine vasco de los años noventa*. (Donosti: Universidad de Deusto / Filmoteca Vasca, 2002): 175–216
- Trigo, Abril: "migrancia:memoria:modernidá." "New Perspectives in / on Latin America: The Challenge of Cultural Studies Conference." (University of Pittsburgh, March 19–22, 1988, forthcoming)
- Zulaika, Joseba: *Crónica de una seducción. El museo Guggenheim Bilbao* (Madrid: Nerea, 1997)
- : "Ruinas / peripheries / transizioak." In *Mundializazioa eta Periferiak: Mundialización y periferias*, edited by F. Jarauta. (San Sebastián: Arteleku, 1999): 109–122

INTRODUCTORY NOTES

1. Another remarkable first feature film by the youngest of the "New Basque Cinema" directors. Calparsoro's debut reflects his dialogue with Hollywood's inner-

city turmoil action movies. He got his degree in film production from New York University.

2. *Leap into the Void*, like many of the Basque films included in this course, had a successful international exposure in important festivals. It was first shown at the 1995 Berlin Film Festival where it won praise from Steven Spielberg and Pedro Almodóvar. Almodóvar went on to produce Calparsoro's second film: *Pasajes / Passages* (1996), which was invited to the New Directors competitive section of the 1996 Cannes Film Festival.
3. In *Leap into the Void*, Calparsoro offers an unsettling portrayal of urban decay and violence in a highly stylized way that has had critics compare his film aesthetics to those of Quentin Tarantino. He has rejected that comparison, claiming that his portrayal of violence is never frivolous.
4. Refiguration of some recurrent visual metaphors (burning hole, dumpsite) and of traditional elements of the Oedipal family narrative (absent father, castration anxiety).
5. Calparsoro's foregrounding of Bilbao's industrial ruins and its comparison to Frank Gehry's similar gesture in the Guggenheim Museum. The local / national / global interface.

STUDY QUESTIONS

1. What is your position regarding the alleged similar stylized treatment of urban violence between Daniel Calparsoro and Quentin Tarantino? Does Calparsoro glamourize violence? Give examples.
2. Another critical reaction to Calparsoro's *Leap into the Void* is his allusion to ETA's anti-drug violence. The sequence where Juancar, Alex's brother, is shot to death by Esteban is often quoted in this sense.



Recent Basque filmmakers present a cinematic “poetics of chaos” in response to their violent environment.

Image from Photodisk, Inc.

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- What is your reading of that sequence and, in general, of Calparsoro’s use of the ETA referent? You can also compare it to Ana Diez’s *Ander eta Yul* or to Calparsoro’s third film, *A ciegas / Blindly* (1997).
3. How and why does Calparsoro create “lyrical spaces” in the midst of his frantic and violent narrative? Analyze at least a couple of instances from *Leap into the Void*.

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4. Daniel Calparsoro uses counterpoint technique in *Leap into the Void*. Illustrate his technique with examples. How does Calparsoro's use of counterpoint compare with other directors in the course, such as Julio Medem or Imanol Uribe?
 5. What is the social and symbolic significance of Javi's sexual impotence? How does this character compare with the other two "castrated" male figures in the film, Alex's father and junkie brother?
 6. Why has Calparsoro chosen a (Brazilian) immigrant to be the leader of the urban youth gang? Why have most reviewers silenced Javi's (im)migrant condition?
 7. Why does Calparsoro inscribe the word "Void" on Alex's head? What is the relationship between this gesture and Alex's position as head of the family? How does it all relate to the castration complex pervasive in the film?
 8. Analyze the sequence following the shooting at Esteban's trailer. What is the significance of Alex's running after the ambulance holding Esteban's finger?
 9. Analyze and comment on Justin Crumbaugh's essay, especially his analogy between Bilbao's contextual disorder and its industrial ruins. Do you agree with his argument concerning a shared poetics of chaos (Crumbaugh, 16)? Explain.
 10. In his volume *Migrancy, Culture, Identity*, Iain Chambers writes: "Migrancy involves a 'discontinuous state of being,' a form of picking up a quarrel with where you come from." (Chambers, 2). In what way does this phrase bespeak the condition of the characters in Calparsoro's film and the director's own position concerning Euskadi?
 11. Comment on the local / national / global interface and its impact on Calparsoro's *Leap into the Void*,

as analyzed in Annabel Martín's essay "A Corpse in the Garden: Bilbao's Postmodern Wrappings of High Culture Consumer Architecture."

12. Calparsoro's trademark camera work shows a fascination for low- and high-angle shots. Comment on the significance of these shots. Also analyze the sequence where Alex aims her gun at the camera in the green bathroom booth before her dramatic drug-selling round in the park. Which recent films come to mind that also incorporate such frantic (angular) camera work?

Lesson fourteen

Maité (Carlos Zabala and Eneko Olasagasti, 1995)

REQUIRED READING

Gurpegui, Mikel: "Nuestros hombres en La Habana."

DEIA, July 31, 1994: 15–16

Hooks, Bell: "Eating the Other: Desire and Resistance."

In Bell Hooks, *Black Looks. Race and Representation* (Boston: South End Press, 1992): 21–39

Martí-Olivella, Jaume: "Cuba and Spanish Cinema's Transatlantic Gaze." In Joseba Gabilondo, guest editor: "The Hispanic Atlantic", *Arizona Journal of Hispanic Cultural Studies*. 5 2002: 161–176

OPTIONAL READING / VIEWING

Baudrillard, Jean: *Simulations* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1983)

Colomo, Fernando: *Cuarteto de La Habana / Havana's Quartet* (1999)

Vázquez Montalbán, Manuel: *Y Dios entró en La Habana* (Madrid: Ediciones El País, 1998)

 INTRODUCTORY NOTES

1. Basque cinema's first transatlantic (migrant) production. Spanish-Basque-Cuban co-production with the participation of Senel Paz, one of Cuba's best known screenwriters. (re: *Fresa y Chocolate / Strawberry and Chocolate*, 1993)
2. *Maité*, the largest grossing Basque film since Imanol Uribe's *Mikel's Death* (1983) and the breaking of Basque cinema's social invisibility at home.
3. Olasagasti and Zabala: From popular Basque TV sitcom (*Bi eta bat*) directors to *Maité*, a romantic comedy with a (benevolent?) social commentary.
4. *Maité* in front of (Bell Hooks') "Eating the Other" and Baudrillard's "simulacra." The commodification of otherness and the spectacle of postnational gastronomy or cultural cannibalism.
5. *Maité* as cinematic ethnography. (re: Vázquez Montalbán's' "Spaniards in Cuba today are divided basically between tourists and industrialists. Tourists, themselves, are composed of two 'espeleologies': searchers of sex and searchers of revolutionary archeologies." *Y Dios entró en La Habana*, 441)

STUDY QUESTIONS

1. *Maité* is the first light-hearted movie in our course. Illustrate a few of its humoristic techniques. How does it relate to the sit-com genre so well known by Olasagasti and Zabala, the co-directors of the film?
2. "Havana is not only the backdrop of our story. She has become almost a character, with whom we deal with the same tenderness as with the rest, without judging her." (Gurpegui, 15) Illustrate with specific examples how Havana becomes both a backdrop and a character in the film.

-
3. How is the local / global interface expressed in this film? Why does the restoration of the familial patrimony of the Oraiola household depend on this transatlantic transaction? How does it all relate to the family metaphor as national allegory that we have seen throughout the course?
 4. The comedic tone of the film is broken several times to emphasize some of the difficult social circumstances at home and in Cuba. Analyze the initial exchange between Juan Luis (José Ramón Soroiz) and Mikel (Agustín Arrazola), the two Oraizola brothers. How does this film revisit the traditional split in Basque culture and society?
 5. To follow up on the previous question: Analyze and comment in detail on the sequence of the “Spanish” party at Clemente’s (Raúl Eguren) house. What is the historical irony that he complains about?
 6. How is the theoretical notion of the cultural commodification of otherness via simulacra (Hooks / Baudrillard) intertwined with the surface narrative of a commercial swindle?
 7. *Maité* is told as a sort of social dream or fairy tale of historical reconciliation between the ex-colony and its old colonizer. These opposing positions are comically emblemized in the racial and social contrast between Txomin (Mikel Garmendia) and Obdulio (Ildefonso Tamayo). Examine some of their interactions. Especially analyze the sequence with the crane at the harbor and its up and down movements.
 8. Does Olasagasti’s and Zabala’s film belong to the new Basque cinema tradition of the female gaze? What is the narrative and symbolic role of Maité (Nadia Moreira), Daisy’s (Ileana Wilson’s) daughter? Give specific examples to illustrate your response.

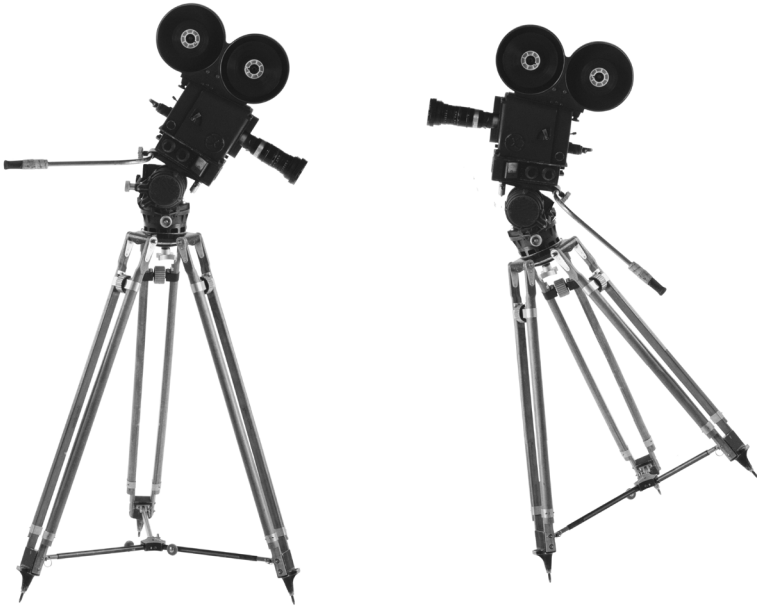
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9. Why did Olasagasti and Zabala choose Jorge Peruggorría, the Cuban actor of Basque ascendancy well known for his role in *Strawberry and Chocolate*, to play Cary, the photographer? What is the significance of the family photo sequence? Do you agree with Martí-Olivella's reading of it?
 10. Senel Paz was the screenwriter of *Strawberry and Chocolate* and also contributed to *Maité's* script. Establish some of the connections between the two films and their debt to Senel Paz.
 11. "Oiga gallego, yo sólo tengo pesos, pesitos cubanos, el peso más ligero del mundo." (Listen up, gallego [Spaniard], I only have pesos, Cuban pesos, the lightest peso in the world.) When does this comic remark happen? How does it emblemize the light-hearted approach to Cuba's difficult economic and social situation?
 12. How would you place *Maité* within the current Spanish cinema interest in Cuba? Does it offer an alternative to the neo-imperialist nostalgia and the sexual and economic exploitation underlying so many other films?

Lesson fifteen

El Día de la Bestia / The Day of the Beast (Alex de la Iglesia, 1996)

REQUIRED READING

- Compitello, Malcom A: "From Planning to Design: The Culture of Flexible Accumulation in Post-Cambio Madrid." *Arizona Journal of Hispanic Cultural Studies* 3. 1999: 199–219
- Karras, Pete: "The Making of *The Day of the Beast*" (Production Notes): 5–18



Basque cinema faces the representational risk of confronting the historical “contextual disorder” of its society.

Cine-camera image from Photodisk, Inc.

Payán, Miguel Juan: “Alex de la Iglesia.” In *El cine español actual* (Madrid: Ediciones JC, 2001): 117–133

OPTIONAL READING / VIEWING

de la Iglesia, Alex: *Acción Mutante / Mutant Action* (1992)

Gabilondo, Joseba: “Before Babel. Global Media, Ethnic Hybridity, and Enjoyment in Basque Culture.” *Revista Internacional de Estudios Vascos* 44.1 (1999): 7–49

Zamora, Andrés: “El cine vasco o la fatalidad fronteriza” (unpublished essay)

 INTRODUCTORY NOTES

1. Box-office hit in the Basque Country and Spain that opened up space for a series of outrageous genre comedies with strong social impact and visibility, such as Juanma Bajo Ulloa's *Airbag*, (1996) and Santiago Segura's *Torrente, el brazo tonto de la ley / Torrente, the Dump Arm of the Law* (1998).
2. One of the clearest and most successful illustrations of Basque cinema's double migrancy (Spain and Hollywood) and its local / global interface.
3. *The Day of the Beast* is a Satanic action comedy that reworks parodically several recurrent narrative elements in Basque and Spanish cinema: the (Oedipal) family metaphor as national allegory, the spectral presence of ghostly enemies and the foreign (bad) influence.
4. "Enseñar cómo es el mundo de un lado de la frontera y cómo es el otro mundo" (To show how is the world both sides of the border. Pagán, 124) De la Iglesia's comment refers to his third long feature film, *Perdita Durango* (1998), but can also be taken as a characterization of his entire cinematic career: to bring Basque and Spanish cinema to the "edge" and to show the two sides of reality, as *The Day of the Beast* does in its peculiar interpretation of the Apocalypse.
5. *The Day of the Beast* uses a primarily heavy metal soundtrack and pop culture framework to create a postmodern *esperpento* (caricature) of Spain's ancestral stereotypes.

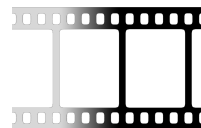
STUDY QUESTIONS

1. *The Day of the Beast* makes fun of many Basque and Spanish cultural stereotypes. Particularly relevant in the context of this course is the parody of the Oedipal family narrative. How are the figures of the absent

-
- father and the phallic mother presented in the film? Give specific examples.
2. Another recurrent element in Basque cinema is the spectral presence of the enemy at home. How does de la Iglesia play with that spectrality in his Satanic comedy?
 3. Why does de la Iglesia choose a Professor of Theology from the University of Deusto to be the protagonist of his film? Which social and personal ironies does that gesture evoke?
 4. De la Iglesia's film is a genre bender: Give at least three examples of popular genres parodied in the film. Mention as well some of the films intertextually evoked in *The Day of the Beast*.
 5. Another recurrent element in many Basque films is the presence of a foreign character who may become a central figure. Why has de la Iglesia chosen the Italian parapsychologist Ennio Lombardi / Professor Cavan (Armando de Razza) to occupy that position in his film? Which social elements does de la Iglesia parody with the inclusion of that character and his TV reality-show?
 6. The film abounds in angular shots that underline some of the most visually distorted moments of violent action. Give examples and comment on the use of violence in the film in relation to stylized Hollywood violence.
 7. Where and why does Angel Berriartua (Alex Angulo) encounter the group of gypsies singing and begging in his initial hellish walk through the night in the city? What does this sequence foreshadow?
 8. What is the significance of Santiago Segura's character José María, the naïve heavy-metal fan? What relationship does he establish with Angel the priest? And with Cavan the futurologist? Do these characters

form a peculiar version of the Christian Holy Trinity? Explain.

9. Throughout the film, we witness a series of brutal neo-fascist attacks against immigrants, drug-addicts and other marginal members of society under the slogan *Limpia Madrid* (Clean Madrid). How does de la Iglesia turn this ethnic and social cleansing into the devil or Antichrist that Angel, José María and, ultimately, even Cavan, try to exorcize? Incidentally (or not), what are the weapons used by these neo-fascists? Why?
10. Analyze the sequence where de la Iglesia frames the two famous postmodern KIO towers at the end of the Castellana in Madrid as the mark of the devil and the place where the Anti-Christ will be born. Can you offer both a local and a global reading of this sequence? How do they relate to the billboard sign of the Gates to Europe that we saw during the gypsies' sequence? Comment on Malcolm Compitello's reading of that sequence and of the entire film.
11. De la Iglesia's film becomes both a celebration and a criticism of the current process of cultural commodification and media dependency in most of Western society. Give examples of this double gesture in the film.
12. How and why does de la Iglesia use traditional Christmas carols to counterpoint some of the most terrible scenes in his comedic apocalypse? Give some examples and relate them to the entire film narrative.



Index

A

- affirmation by denial, belong to the long Basque tradition
 - of, 105
- Aguirre, the Wrath of God*, Walter Herzog in his, 14
- aizkolaris* (woodcutters), portrayal of the rivalry between two neighboring families of, 111
- Akelarre*, 5, 7, 9, 11, 13, 18–22, 24, 65
 - mordant refiguration of many familiar ghosts from Basque and Spanish cinema, 115–116
 - narrative casting, 20
 - national allegories, 20
 - portrayal of Spanish Inquisition witch hunt in the Basque country, 8
- Alas de mariposa*. See *Butterfly's Wings*
- “allegory” of Doris Sommer, narrative structure in which one line helps to write the other, 7
- Ama Lur / Mother Earth, Tasio* as geographically focalized, 59
- Ami, protagonist of *Alas de Mariposa*, 94
- Amigo, Angel, 15, 16, 39, 47, 51, 82
- Amilibia, in *Chronicle of the Carlist War, 1872–1876*,
 - joined active forces on the Liberal side, 39
- ancestral stereotypes, heavy metal soundtrack and pop culture framework to create a postmodern esperpento (caricature) of Spain’s, 129
- Ander and Yul* or *Ander eta Yul*, 5, 70, 72, 73, 80–86, 88, 122
 - divide between these characters functions as an allegory for Euskadi’s political split, 83
 - financed with public funds, 82
 - first feature film by Ana Díez, 82
 - merge armed struggle with illegal drug trade, 83
 - poster for one of the first feature films about the ETA struggle and the Euskadi political split, 80
 - themes of social invisibility, spectral violence and dialectics, 84
- Andrew and Yul*. See *Ander and Yul*
- Angel. See Mikel Garmendia

-
- Angel the father, 116, 130, 131
- Angulo, Alex, 115, 130
- Aretxaga's double reference to the psychoanalytic "subject" and witchcraft
 brings together ghost of history and historical ghosts of split subject, 72
- Armendáriz, Montxo
 importance of gender representation in *Tasio* and Julio Medem's *Vacas*, 91
 reduces women's role to the most traditional vision as mother and wife, 55
- Armendáriz, Montxo and Elías Querejeta, collaboration on *Tasio* by, 55
- art of the constitutive discard or contextual disorder, 115
- aurresku*, Basque homage dance offered in honor of Kizkur, 89
- B**
- Bajo Ulloa, Juanma, 93–98, 101–104, 129
- baroque allegory, finds outlet in theological refuge of spiritual world, 113
- baserria*, systemic interaction of a stern family, animals, and a unit of production experienced as a way of life, 53
- Basque (and Spanish) imaginaries, uncanny return of the repressed in, 115
- Basque autonomous government, first film produced with support of, 48
- Basque cinema
 creation of star system and narrative casting in, 24
 cultural metaphor for necessary lack in process of formation of Basque / Spanish national self, 110
 double migrancy and local interface, 129
 shining paradox: to render visible its own invisibility. 112
 tend to be in pre-modern times, particularly in Middle Ages or Age of Discovery, 16
- Basque films return uncannily to familiar, disguised in ghostly and defamiliarizing ways, 18

Basque national
allegory, feminist revision of, 102
self, series of imaginary figurations of a, 110

Basque Nationalist Party, cinema an ideological tool in the hands of, 29

Basque race in the face of impossible odds, Barry Jordan and Rikki Morgan Tamosunas panegyric to obstinate character of, 14–15

Baudrillard's notion of simulacra, emblemizes the worst side of, 116

Berriartua, Angel, as ultimate migrant from biblical decipher to rampant evildoer, 115 betrayal of the ETA brotherhood, Yoyes' ultimate rejection of her male comrades by, 75

between sexuality and violence, political or otherwise, ETA's struggle as a problematic relationship between, 67

beauty, harsh contrast between content and preciosity of diction is, 112

Benjamin, Walter, 7, 113

Benjaminian analysis, 112

Berriartua, Angel. *See* Angulo, Alex

Bilbao, *Leap into the Void* tell story of chaotic urban space that is, 112

Bilbao's chic new international image, industrial ruins were to become the building blocks of, 112

Bilbao's industrial ruins
Calparsoro foregrounding and Frank Gehry with Guggenheim Museum, 121
Javi leader of youth gang that rambles within, 111

bilingualism, as a means to combat double and opposing linguistic and social oppressions of two competing nationalist discourses, 94

body politic, feminist conflation of private and public spheres in order to create new subject positions in, 99

"burning hole," alluding to matriarchal power over natural cycles, 13

Butterfly's Wings or *Alas de mariposa*, 5, 93–98, 101–103

C

- Calparsoro, Daniel, 82, 83, 86, 105, 106, 110–112, 115, 118–124
 affirmation by denial, 105
 counterpoint technique, 123
 ETA's anti drug violence, allusion to, 121
 make art out of constitutive discard, 115
 migrancy involves a "discontinuous state of being," 123
 racial differentiation is ignored in the critical reception, 111
- Carlist fighters on their way to the battle front in *Crónica de la guerra carlista*, 31
- Carlist soldier takes aim in the poster of the *Crónica de la guerra carlista*, 28
- Carlist wars, historical drama of, 42
- Catalina Mendiluce (Ana Torrent) spins on top of a haystack, 13
- Cavan. See Armando de Razza
- centralists dispute this interpretation and regard the fueros as
 central tenets of the conflict, clash between Policarpio and
 Inaxio summarize the, 43
- centralists regard fueros as list of privileges conceded by
 monarchs as an incentive to Basque to enter wider political
 federation, 33
- children of Zumaia, live reality in two languages as options of
 uniqueness as Basque subjects, 94–95
- Chronicle of the Carlist War, 1872–1876*, 5, 27, 28, 31, 32,
 39, 41
- cinema in Euskadi, ideological tool in hand of ruling Basque
 Nationalist party, 29
- cinematic
 exploration of the mutations of migration subjectivities, 114
 intertexts and narrative casting, 102
 "chronicle of a death foretold," all these films tell the, 76
- collusion of death and maternity, 93
- Conquest of Albania*, 5, 13, 17, 18, 23, 24, 25
- constitutive elements of nationalist violence, Catholic symbol-
 ism as iconic imagery and sacramental aspects as, 72–73
- consumption of Cuban otherness allow us to recover own
 identity, 117

contemporary Basque society, Basque filmmakers [who] have gone in search of condition, problems and cleavages of, 15
content and the preciousness of the diction, harsh contrast between, 112
cosmopolitan subject, of estrangement by which cannot feel at home anywhere making a migrant different from, 108
critical conscience of the fragility of a social order requires catastrophes in order to perpetuate itself, 113
Crumbaugh, the symbol of industrial decline to be selected as site of new museum, 112
Cuba
 having historicity of Marxist revolution coexist with spectral virtuality, 117
 offers double and contradictory stimulus for Spanish migrant satisfying fluid and nomadic options of their uniqueness, 94
cultural constructions of a national imagery, death of a culture as, 7
current events in Euzkadi, first fiction attempt to deal with, 78

D

Dark Years, The, 5, 92–96, 99, 100, 102
Day of the Beast, 5, 111, 113, 115, 116, 118, 119, 127, 129–131
 caricature of Spain's ancestral stereotypes, heavy metal soundtrack and pop culture framework to create, 129
 satanic comedy with family metaphor as national allegory, spectral presence of ghostly enemies and foreign influence, 129
 two sides of reality, to show, 129
death of a culture, that get romanticized in these historical fictions, 7
De la Iglesia, Alex, 105, 111, 115, 116, 118
 an attempt to represent the otherness within, 111
 employing humor and self-parody, 118
 satanic action comedy, 129
De la Iglesia, Eloy, 113, 155
Derrida, Jacques, 94, 117
Deusto, University of, 115

-
- “devotees of the abject,” 63, 93
 Díez, Ana, 81, 82, 83, 85, 86, 122
 disavowal, contemporary political parallels are perversely
 admitted in the form of a, 16
 discourse, characterized by linearity, transparency, coherence
 of action and drive resolution in terms of truth, 91
 Dramatic close-up of Yul (Isidoro Fernandez), in Ana Díez’s
 strong portrayal of the Basque political and social divide, 88
 dwelling is often a mountain cave, flying figure named Mari
 whose, 11

E

- each helps to write the other, allegory means a narrative struc-
 ture where, 7
El bosque del lobo power relations that end up annihilating
 the individual, 8
 employing humor and (self)-parody, capacity to break an
 inner barrier in the cinematic self-representation of Basque
 people by, 118
 endemic ritualized violence, Vacas and Tasio present opposite
 views of, 58
Escape from Segovia (1981), 5, 24, 39, 45, 47–51, 67, 79, 82
 Angel Amigo actual participant in, 39
 essentialist nationalist narrative, transgression of, 99
 Esteban Urquiaga (*Lauaxeta*), strolling amidst the refugees in
 the company of his lover, 37
 ETA in film: sexuality, armed struggle and national imagi-
 nary, 78
 ETA’s struggle, as a problematic relationship between sexual-
 ity and violence, 67
 Euskadi
 as a split family whose inner divisions and struggles repre-
 sent the divisions and struggles of the Basque Country, 7
 ideological conflicts, “objective” historical recreation and
 possibleparallelisms with, 42
 inner ghosts, enemies that has lived a form of collective
 split though most of its history, 40
 inquisition and religious intolerance in rural, 19

Euskadi...

national imaginary, reinforces its social and symbolic significance in, 70

rural world and its endemic ritualized violence, 58

F

“female gaze” in Basque cinema, common critique of patriarchal violence and to tell a private story with public relevance, 98

film (Tuduri), open but not objective, 36

filmic migrancy, renegotiate ideological and identity problems that haunt a national history full of violent and intolerant gestures, 118

filmic representation, rural Euzkadi’s most celebrated, 59

films being studied have in common, being “operas primas” and the absolute dedication of their directors, 27

fluid and nomadic options of their uniqueness, 94

focalization, precise meaning of, 36

Fouauldian / Jamesonian national allegory, *Mikel’s Death* as, 78

fruitful collaboration between Montxo Armendáriz and Elías Querejeta, 55

frustrations and appetites, Cuba allows new Spanish migrant to satisfy historical-imperial and / or erotic-revolutionary, 117

Fuga de Segovia : partisan nation-building, collective myth-making, or impartial storytelling, 49

‘fuerismo’

expression of Spanish traditionalism in Navarra and the Basque Provinces, 35

testimony to the fact that political ideal is a possible one, 35

fueros,

ancient privileges that emerge as the central historical difference between Basque country and the rest of Spain, 32

ancient, almost sacred, charters antedating political alliances with Spaniards and Frenchmen, 33

fusions or stable identities, migration leads but to a suspension of cultures in conflict and not to, 108

G

- Garmendia, Mikel, 22
- genre bending psychological thriller with clearly allegorical family melodrama undertones, 102
- Uribe's first instance of, 49
- genre comedies with strong social impact and visibility, 129
- ghostly struggle between Navarrese soldiers and their invisible enemies, 25
- González Cataráin femininity, reactions to her gender differences in the midst of a political structure dominated by men, 75

H

- haunting dream sequences with Yoyes visualizes her sexual initiation, 13
- highest grossing Basque production of the eighties, 70
- reinforces its social symbolic significance in Euskadi's imaginary, 70
- historical document with narrative fiction, 36
- historical film places the question of the relationship between reality, perception and representation firmly in the spotlight, 35

I

- iconoclastic towards certain local historiography, iconoclastic towards certain local historiography, 30
- immigrant invisibility, denounce radical form of intolerance against, 116
- imperial madness, critique of, 23
- "impossible homecoming," most significant predicament for contemporary migrant, 105, 107
- Inquisitor (José Luis López Vázquez) staring at Amunia's (Mari Carrillo) torture, 12
- Irigibel, Manuel, the "coward aizkolari," 55
- Itziar (Eder Amilbia), another extraordinary case of a child protagonist in Arantxa Lazcano's *Urte Illunak*, 92

J

Jameson (Frederic) "national allegory", 7, 70, 78

Javi, emasculated in Calparsoro's narrative and in critical reception, 112

José María. *See* Santiago Segura

K

Kizkur, the ex-ETA member who clashed with Yoyes, 89

Kristeva, Julia, "the power of the abject," 57

L

Lancre, Pierre de; plenty of reasons why Satan would chose the Basque region, 10

Lauaxeta, 5, 24, 34-40, 44-47, 62

equivalent to Lorca in Basque literature assassinated by Francoist forces, 38-39

foundational symbol, Guernica as, 44

Individualization of the conflict, 45

second most expensive and second biggest loss, 44

Spanish Civil War, international aspect of, 44

struggle for survival against Franco's blockade, 44

Lazcano, Arantxa, 91-96, 99, 100, 102

allegorical double vision, 99

loving and painful representation of constitutive linguistic and emotional split, 95

leader's dowry, group of men who undergo an extraordinary effort in order to fatten, 16

Leap into the Void, 83, 86, 106, 110, 112, 118, 119, 121-123

portrayal of urban decay and violence in a highly stylized way, 121

Liberace, 116

"line of fugue" that defies all the societal constraints imposed during the process of subject formation, 95

Little Ami (Laura Vaquero)'s troubled sleep at the edge of her bed as visual metaphor of her own edgy and marginal situation, 103

local and global audience, first Basque film conceived with, 48

local historiography, Tuduri's cinematographic document is iconoclastic towards certain, 30
 love story between *Ander* (Miguel Munarriz) and *Sara* (Carmen Pardo), 84

M

Maité, 5, 105, 110, 117, 118, 124–127
 cinematic ethnography, 125
 commodification of otherness and spectacle of cultural cannibalism, 125
 constitutes a variation or mutation of the present exploitativemigrant gaze, 118
 male as furtive hunter, Tasio's "other profession" that of, 55
 Mari
 a flying figure named, 11
 allusion, 13
 as origin of storms, 12
 Mari's chariot of fire will take to heaven, 13
 matriarchal culture in Navarra, patriarchal violence against remnants of, 19
 Medem, Julio: 13, 52, 53, 55, 61–66, 91, 93, 104, 124
 chosen, this time by Sogetel, Spain's newest and most daring producing company, 56
 Irigibel, Manuel, the "coward aizkolari," 55
 "power of the abject," 57
Vacas: filming portrayal of the rivalry between two neighboring families of *aizkolaris*, 111
 medieval setting, Euskadi contemporary territorial and political split allegorized in, 23
 migrancy
 does not lead to any synthesis, 108
 makes an impossibility of any promise of homecoming, 107
 Miguel, final message as explicit as is arguable, 15
Mikel's Death, 5, 24, 67, 68, 70–74, 76–79, 86, 125
 death, 77
 reflects above all, 67
 ultimate acceptance and public display of his homosexuality, 71

Mikel's Death...

model of a new (wo)man more in tune with the times,
Basque cinema of the eighties does not dare to present
a, 75

Montxo Armendáriz and Elías Querejeta, *Tasio's* film marks
the beginning of fruitful collaboration between, 55
multicultural identity politics, diegetic bilingualism as a
means to represent, 99
musings about "poetics of chaos" and violence, 122

N

narrative death, recurrence of visual metaphors such as
"burning hole," "truncated tree," and "dumpsite" for, 59
narratives, Doris Sommer's influential analysis of Latin Amer-
ican national, 7

"nation," narrative change in the concept of, 30

national imaginary, 7, 23

nationalist version of history, Basque cinema chose to offer
a, 30

nationalist violence, observing its iconic imagery and sacra-
mental aspects as, 73

Navarrese

soldiers and their invisible enemies, 26
warriors search for the ghostly enemy, 20

New Basque Cinema, longest shootings in the production
of, 42

non-objective goal, logically prepared as a military operation
to conquer a faraway territory, 16

Not anti-Franco Spanish Oedipal narrative but in common
representational of the notion of a logical enterprise gone
wrong, 16

O

Oedipal

family narrative, reconfiguration of traditional elements and
visual metaphors, 121

mother, 93

Olasagasti, Eneko, 110, 117, 118, 124-127

Olea, Pedro, 7, 8, 10, 11, 12, 13, 18–22, 24, 65
 migrancy and position, 20
 personal fascination with horror and gothic genre movies, 9
 opposing linguistic and social oppressions, bilingualism as a
 means of combatting, 94
 original figuration of the spectral presence of ghostly ene-
 mies, 116
 otherness within, all share in that attempt to represent,
 111–112

P

parody of religious intolerance and the witch hunt,
The Day of the Beast is a brilliant postmodern parody
 of, 115
 past which for forty years has been hijacked and aggressively
 refashioned by Francoism, 29
 patriarchy and woman's secular power, struggle between, 8
 poetic imagination of a child, historical invisibility visualized
 through, 99
 political split, one of the first films about ETA struggle and
 the Euskadi, 80
 popular appeal of the cinematic idiom to offer historical les-
 sons about the immediate past, 27
 power of the abject, collusion of sex, maternity and death, 58
 precision framing and editing, self-conscious and highly styl-
 ized narrative based upon, 102

R

radical invisibility to which she is condemned by her Oedipal
 mother uses silence, aggression and self-mutilation to
 fight, 94
 Razza, Armando de, 116, 130, 131
 realidad, told in an extended flashback by one of its protago-
 nists, 14
 recent past in Euskadi and in Spain, offer historical lessons
 about, 27
 remembering one's own history, political fear of, 29
 render visible its own invisibility, 112

representational risk of “contextual disorder,” 128
rupture of historical myths, cinematic idiom to offer, 41

S

Sara (Carmen Pardo), love story between Ander (Miguel Munarriz) and, 84
satanic comedy, parody of religious intolerance and witch hunt, 115
Satannica, 116
Segura, Santiago, 116, 119, 129, 130
social invisibility, *Maité* the largest grossing and breaking of, 125
Sogetel, Spain’s newest and most daring producing company, 56
Sommer, Doris
 Foundational Fictions: The National Romances of Latin America, 7
“specter of fratricide,” narrative center of the three films, 72
Specters of Marx, 117
spins on top of a haystack, allusion to witch like powers, 13
Strange, Dr., 116
striking female gaze of Ami, child protagonist of Juanma Bajo Ulloa’s spectacular debut in *Alas de mariposa / Butterfly’s Wings*, 98
struggle between a pagan way of life confronted by Catholicism that is imposed from without, 9
“suspension of disbelief”, 91
suture, a semiotic reformulation of the Romantics suspension of belief, 91

T

Taberna, Helena, 13, 73, 75, 76, 86–90
 portrayal of first woman with access to ETA’s top command, 75
Tasio, 5, 24, 52–63, 91
 betrays a male-gaze attitude, 56
 classically patriarchal ‘bildungsroman’, 58
 atop the dangerous charcoal pit, 57

Tasio...

kisses his wife (Amaia Lasa) during the rural wedding banquet, 60

Tasio and *Vacas* : rural setting, representation of family life, cyclical structure, and Basque geographical and cultural context, 52

"theology of hell," anti idealist construction of intelligible world, 113, 115

Torrent, Ana, performance as *Yoyes*, 87

Tuduri, José María, 27–32, 35, 36, 39, 41–43, 46

Carlist fighters on way to battle front, 31

Chronicle of the Carlist War, 1872–1876, 27

loyalist front, 32

producer, screenwriter and director, 42

U

Unai (Patxi Bisquert) being taken into the Inquisitional tribunal in Pedro Olea's *Akelarre* (1983), 11

uncanniness

most salient characteristic of contemporary Basque cinema, 109

repression of affect that recurs as frightening, 109

"uncommon history," merges fiction with documentary, 36

Ungria, Alfonso, 7, 13–15, 17, 18, 20, 22, 24–26

Conquest of Albania (1983), 7, 13

"invisible" enemy and "dead spots" in narrative that unbalance, 14

Uribe, Imanol, 16, 25, 39, 45, 47–51, 67–74, 76–79, 82, 83, 86, 105, 123, 125

could shoot The Burgos Trial because was not connected to anyone and wanted to research the Basque theme and ETA, 70

Escape from Segovia, 39, 67

Mikel's Death, 70–74, 76–77

Operación Poncho, basis of film by, 16

Urkiaga, despite his prominence, almost forgotten, 36

V

- Vacas*, 5, 52, 53, 56, 58, 61–63, 66, 91, 104, 111
- collusion of cow's gaze with camera's eye, radical filmic viewpoint, 63
 - disturbing and stylized representation of natural and emotional hidden drives, 63
 - endemic historic violence, postmodern and metafiction revision of, 63
 - place between life and death which protagonist arrived after traumatic experience, 53
 - postmodern and metafictional oeuvre that (de)constructs an idealized and nostalgic view of nation's rural origins, 58
 - remarkable first feature film of Julio Medem, 63
 - rely substantially on foreign sales to recoup even its modest peseta (\$1.5) million budget, 56
 - self-conscious and metafictional attempt to deconstruct traditional male gaze, 56–57
- Vaquero, Laura, 94
- violence in the Basque Country,
understood as fantastic reality rather than as ideological product, 70

W

- ways, narratives paradoxically disguised in ghostly and defamiliarizing, 18
- white horse to construct the beautifully haunting dream,
13, 90
- why these films are so important, fear of rupture of historical myths, 41
- witchcraft and magic, realities for Basque peasants, 10
- witchcraft persecutions, political motives behind, 10
- with his transvestite lover (Fama) in Bilbo, 71, 81

Y

- Yoyes*, 5, 13, 70, 73, 75, 76, 86, 87, 89, 90
- culture and politics, constitutive split in, 87
 - first feminist approach to ETA and its gender structure, 87
 - fratricide inside ETA's own family, 72, 73

Yoyes...

“invisible” otherness and migrant subject position,
strongest emblematic figurations of, 87

“narrative casting,” 87

neo-fascist methods, denouncing of ETA, 87

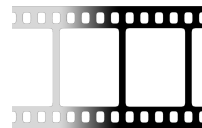
visualizes her sexual initiation and her impending death, 13

Z

Zabala, Carlos, 110, 117, 118, 124–127

Zorrilla, José Antonio, 34–38, 40, 46

Lauaxeta, 5, 24, 34–40, 44–47, 62



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