

A modified representation of truth through the use of editing in the documentary *La pelota vasca*

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Abstract: The objective of this article is to establish how director Julio Medem conveyed the overall meaning of *The Basque Ball: Skin Against Stone* (2003), a feature length documentary about terrorism that generated both controversy and commercial success in the Spanish cinema. Through an analysis of the documentary's editing, this study aims to establish the guidelines and narrative structures used by the director to build the filmic text and thus influence viewers' opinions. To achieve this, we created a database that facilitates a meticulous quantitative and qualitative analysis of the interventions and discourses used in the film. This methodology can also be used to examine other documentaries with similar narrative characteristics. The analysis showed that the director uses the structure of the documentary and the interviews to different personalities from the Basque Country to configure his own meaning of the so called Basque conflict, and that this meaning is very close to the nationalist thesis. It is established how Medem criticises the Popular Party's governmental actions and its role in the deterioration of the image of the State, mainly through 80% of negative references about the State's security forces. The article also shows that the credibility of the interviewees depends on their location within the film's structure, and on whether their statements are refuted or endorsed by other interviewees.

Keywords: documentary; terrorism; editing; Basque country; Medem; ETA.

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Translation by Cruz Alberto Martínez-Arcos

1. Introduction

La Pelota Vasca. La Piel contra la Piedra (The Basque Ball: Skin Against Stone), directed by Julio Medem (2003) [1] is arguably the most influential documentary produced so far on the topic of terrorism by ETA (Euskadi Ta Askatasuna - Basque Country and Liberty). It was seen by 377 094 viewers in Spanish cinemas, which is a very prominent figure if one takes into account the smaller number of spectators for documentaries in general and, specifically, for documentaries dealing with terrorism, already a subgenre on its own [2]. *La Pelota Vasca* also generated a lively controversy in society. Never before, a documentary had caused so many comments, articles, and reactions among politicians, journalists and filmmakers (Barrenetxea 2006).

The disparity among opinions is sometimes striking: After watching the documentary in a private screening Iñaki Ezquera and Gotzone Mora, both interviewed and threatened by ETA, asked Medem to remove their participations from it and accused the director of having “planned it as a justification for violence”; Javier Elzo, also interviewed and threatened by ETA, confessed the documentary had excited him and praised Medem’s courage; the Association of Victims of Terrorism (AVT) consider it was inadmissible to treat “the security forces as torturers”; the director of the Festival of San Sebastian, Mikel Olaciregui, praised the film for reflecting a view shared by many: “The public has adopted Medem’s view and has embraced his proposal” (Barrenetxea, 2006: 162).

For these reasons, it is necessary to analyse *La Pelota Vasca* and to apply a precise method to establish with concrete and demonstrable data and percentages, Medem’s position towards ETA terrorism and the so-called Basque conflict, and the possible interpretations that can be made from this film text which, in any

case, are not unlimited and have their base and explanation in the narrative structure selected by the director (Zumalde 2008).

Is it possible to prove, beyond the personal views and historical errors that appear in the documentary (De Pablo, 2008: 198-200) whether *La Pelota Vasca* endorses or supports the nationalist theses about the Basque conflict? And if so, how does the director manages to create this nationalist reading? Which narrative resources did he use? It must be taken into account that 81 people were involved in the documentary [3] and there are 419 interventions lasting approximately 115 minutes in total. All these interventions respond to the expositive model of the interview, which constitutes, therefore, the most important audiovisual material, quantitatively and qualitatively.

Obviously a rigorous analysis of this documentary should focus basically on the testimonies of those interviewed, not so much in its content (that is also absolutely inevitable), but above all in the organization of the interviews. The “what is being said” or “how is it being said” are decisions that depend on the personal and free mind of each protagonist that agreed to be part of the documentary, but deciding who is going to talk about a given topic, how long is it going to be, where to locate it within the documentary, and whether the opinion of the interviewee is supported or refuted by other characters are decisions that belong to the (also free) director, whose meaning construction controls and evaluates the individual meaning- constructions.

One must keep in mind that a documentary does not only describe reality, but also “asserts a belief about an aspect of the events that happen or happened in the real world” (Torregrosa, 2008: 308). During the editing, the director must “assert”, choose a meaning.

Therefore, this research aims, through the analysis of the interviews in *La Pelota Vasca*, to discover the patterns, schemas, or narrative structures used by the director to build the film text and to influence the opinion of the audience. The method used and the conclusions drawn also serve to understand other documentaries where the interview is the main expositive tool.

2. Methodology

This study uses the term character to define the person that becomes a testimony within a documentary and thus in the material selected by the director to help create a meaning that aims to show, tell, or analyse a particular reality. This

person is under the control of a director who must decide how much recorded time will be integrated, where, and how. These decisions determine decisively the viewers' reception of the meaning.

The character is the central unit of analysis, more exactly each of the statements made by the different characters, from the start of the intervention to its conclusion within each sequence. In other words, the unit of analysis is not the total of each of the interviews conducted, and later fragmented, but precisely each of these assembled pieces.

Thus, a quantitative study was carried out to determine whether the number of characters that appeared, and their ideological, social, or political affiliation, determines the creation of a specific meaning in the documentary. A database was created with 419 entries, where each entry corresponds to a character's intervention since it starts until there is a cut in the film and another statement starts or the same statement resumes. This database contains the following fields: name of the interviewed character, identification within the documentary (profession/ political affiliation), words pronounced and topics covered.

All the characters appear in environments or places that are representative of the Basque country. There are only 9 interviews conducted indoors. Thus the majority of shoots are in outdoors locations, that are always associated with nature (forests, meadows, beaches, mountains, cliffs) or representative elements of the Basque culture or history (Basque pelota courts, shipyards, farmhouses, etc.).

Regarding the topics covered in the documentary, 43 were counted and all were related to what is generically known as the "Basque conflict" [4]. This division of topics is important because it determines the structure of the documentary which is organized into thematic blocks. Small videos and usually the image of pelota players from various disciplines (Jai alai, Basque pelota, Hand ball Basque style, the remonte) operate exceptionally as thematic blocks separators:

“(...) To mark rebound or responding ideas, or as punctuation marks, creating the sensation that the debate of ideas is being played in the emptiness of a metaphorical pelota court in which the pelota player has the role of pushing, almost hitting the opinions forward, so that the following player receives them” (Medem 2003: 52).

While there are characters that appear only to talk about the topic in which they are “experts”, others are more difficult to confine to one single topic. This problem has been corrected by linking the character to the topics covered in its intervention.

Regarding the qualitative analysis of these topics, it is impossible, given the length limitations, to detail all topics, and thus the study only deals in depth with ETA and the police. These two themes have been chosen for several reasons: their importance in the narrative development of the documentary, the fact that they represent two opposite realities and because they are addressed by characters of different ideological and sociological affiliations. Also because they are the issues stressed the most by the social debate generated by this documentary.

This analysis was completed with another more structural one: it was necessary to assess when the character appeared in the documentary, in relation to which other characters, and to say what words. The study of the documentary has led to the creation of a typology of characters which depends directly on the different relationships (of support or discredit) that a given character establishes with others who speak before and after him, and the value or authority held by that character.

This value or authority is based on its previous interventions in the documentary, its definition as expert in a particular area, or its clear affiliation to a given political option. For example, when talking about credibility of the ETA announcements of the abandonment of weapons, Txema Montero says literally: “I do not believe them”. Someone who is patriotic do “not believes in them”, so it is difficult that someone believes them. As one can see, the weight of the meaning is based both on what is said and on how it is said.

The following typology emerged from the study of *La Pelota Vasca*: the consequent character, the paradoxical or “traitorous” character, the isolated character and the exemplary character.

The analysis of the use of interviews, through this typology, is important to give the maximum responsibility to the director in creating the meaning of his documentary, a work as creative and subjective as any other film. The results of this research are interesting because they not only show the ideological tendencies of this documentary, but also highlight the mechanisms - legitimate and natural – of each documentary-maker to describe the reality: the concrete

communicative strategies through which the director conditions the interpretation of reality and which are extrapolated to other documentaries.

3. Results

3.1. Quantitative analysis: themes and identification of characters

Medem presents the documentary as “a human polyphony in which all the people sing their song” (Medem: 2003: 52). This is what he calls an “anti-chorus”, which does not seek all voices to be one, but all the opposite. He neither aims to establish a “hierarchy” among those voices. According to him, *La Pelota Vasca* should present different opinions from people who defend a variety of ideologies and, therefore, viewpoints that do not match. It should also be impartial towards all the positions. The purely quantitative analysis, without detecting the ideological inclinations of those characters that are not identified with acronyms, confirms the expression of such polyphony in some aspects.

In the documentary there are 43 (10.2%) interventions of characters of the Spanish Socialist Labour Party (hence PSOE), and 52 interventions (12.4%) of the Basque Nationalist Party (hence PNV); Felipe González has 13 interventions, while Arzalluz has 16; Eduardo Madina, a victim of an ETA attack, spoke in 11 occasions, Anika Gil, victim of torture by the police - according to her own story- had 9 participations. Relatives of victims of terrorist appear 26 times, while relatives of terrorists appear 13 times. Different characters threatened by ETA appear 32 times (7.6%) and the Basque pro-independence left, represented by several members of Aralar and Arnaldo Otegui, General Secretary of Batasuna, intervened 18 times (4.2%).

Xabier Arzalluz is the character with the second largest number of participations (16), while Felipe González had the fourth largest number (14). There are two former Presidents of the Basque government from the PNV that appear repeatedly: José Antonio Ardanza (14) and Carlos Garaikoetxea (10). But it is also true that Eduardo Madina, the General Secretary of the Socialist Youth of Euskadi had 11 participations and Gregorio Peces Barba, close to the ideological positions of the PSOE, had 10. Txiqui Benegas, former President of the alliance Socialist Party of Euskadi and the Spanish Socialist Labour Party (hence PSE-PSOE), has 8 in total, while Arnaldo Otegui appears 6 times. The Mayor of San Sebastián (PSE-PSOE), Odón Elorza, has 5 interventions, same as Juan José Ibarretxe, President of the Basque government at the time of filming the documentary.

Definitively there is a relative balance in terms of length and number of interventions of the political characters, except from the absence of testimonies of politicians from the Popular Party (hence PP).

The certification of such harmony of voices is already more difficult to detect in other groups such as, for example, journalists. There are, in total, eight journalists that together make 46 interventions (11.6%), but from a purely quantitative perspective a little more can be concluded from them as a group: 6 appear identified simply as “journalists”, Iñaki Ezkerra (5) also appears as “threatened” and Iñaki Gabilondo is the one with most appearances (13). The same happens with the historians or representatives of the Basque culture. The philosopher Javier Sádaba (11), the historian Juan Pablo Fusi (11), and the Psico-sociologist Ramón Alzate (11) are the ones with the largest number of participations, but their interventions cannot be linked to any group, at least a priori.

Regarding the topics covered by these characters, there is an immense variety and multitude of variables for the analysis. Of the 81 counted characters, Xabier Arzalluz, President of the PNV, covers the largest number of different topics: up to 16.

The other three characters that exceed the 10 topics are Javier Elzo, Professor of Sociology and threatened by ETA (13), José Antonio Ardanza, former President of the Basque Country from the PNV (12) and Felipe González, former President of the Basque Country from the PSOE (13). Thus, two of the four characters that address the largest number of different topics are two prominent representatives of the PNV. According to these data, it follows that their viewpoints have certain superiority over others because they are present in more topics, although this is always tinged by the large number of characters that appear in the film.

More interesting data is obtained if one counts who intervenes the most on each topic. Regarding the topic of threatenees, Gotzone Mora appears 6 times. She is threatened by ETA, which justifies she has a heavy weight in shaping this topic. On the other hand, the characters who speak the most about the PP are Iñaki Gabilondo, with 3 interventions, and José Antonio Ardanza, also with 3. Similarly, it is striking that the character speaking the most about the Statute is Juan José Ibarretxe with 4 participations (almost 25%) out of a total of 20. If one

considers that the so-called Plan Ibarretxe proposed the incapacitation of the Statute, the general tendency of their views on the subject is clear.

It is also worth analysing, simply by quantitative criteria, the topics that are given more space and those more marginal in terms of the number of statements made about them. In principle, *La Pelota Vasca* covers almost all of the issues associated with the Basque conflict, but as it happens every time politics is cited in the Basque Country (Canga, 2010), ETA is the theme that pervades everything: there are 163 interventions (38.9%) in which someone cites or speaks of the terrorist group. This is more than twice the second major theme: the Nationalists (67 in total; 15.9%), which contrasts with the 19 interventions (4.5%) which refers to Non-nationalists.

It is curious that there is no presence of members of the PP among those interviewed in the documentary particularly because the PP's governmental actions is the third most commented topic (with 30 in total; 7.1%). As a result, there are no statements in favour of the PP's positions, and thus the perception of this party in *La Pelota Vasca* is not surprising. In comparison, the PNV, as a party, is mentioned 18 times (4.2%); Batasuna or Herri Batasuna (aka HB) is mentioned 16 times (3.8%), and the PSOE 13 (3.1%). The threatenees are a subject of concern if we look at quantitative criteria, 28 mentions (6.6%), and so it is the topic of torture with 26 mentions (6.2%).

The prisoners are also represented within the documentary (26 mentions; 6.2%) and, although in principle the topic of victims may appear displaced (12 sections; 2.8%), one must be taken into account that its valuation must be much higher due to the existence of several categories that may also be considered as related to the victims: Consequences of an attack (10; 2.3%) and Explanation of an attack (9; 2.1%).

Table 1. Number of interventions and percentages in the themes covered

Themes	Number of interventions	%
ETA	164	39.1
Nationalists	67	15.9
Popular Party (PP)	30	7.1
Threatenees	28	6.6
Basque People in general (<i>Vascos</i>)	27	6.4
Tortures	26	6.2
Prisoners	26	6.2
Self-government	24	5.7
Statute	20	4.7
Non-nationalists	19	4.5
Police	18	4.2
PNV (Basque Nationalist Party)	18	4.2
State	17	4
<i>VascosEuskerra</i> (Euskera-speaking Basque people)	16	3.8
Batasuna or HerriBatasuna	16	3.8
Truce	15	3.5
Media	15	3.5
Basque people from Navarra	13	3.1
PSOE(Spanish Socialist Labour Party)	13	3.1
Constitution	13	3.1

Victims	12	2.8
Basque origins	12	2.8
Dialogue	12	2.8
Civil Guard	12	2.9
GAL (Antiterrorist Liberation Groups)	10	2.3
Consequences (of an attack)	10	2.3
Explanation (of an attack)	9	2.1
Neutral Basque people	8	1.9
<i>Elkarri</i> (Pro-dialogue social movement in EuskalHerria)	8	1.9
Sabino Arana	7	1.6
Polarization (ETA/Government of Madrid).	7	1.6
Basque people from France	7	1.6
Basque society	4	0.9
Politicians	4	0.9
Basque People-Carlism	3	0.7
Political parties	3	0.7
Church	3	0.7
Aznar	3	0.7
Patriotic Basque People (<i>Pueblo Vasco</i>)	2	0.4
Kale Borroka	2	0.4
Basque Artists	1	0.2
Spanish army	1	0.2

Source: Author's creation

The occasions in which the media are judged or cited are also revealing: 15 times (3.5%). This figure places the importance of the media over GAL (10 mentions; 2.3%) or even the Constitution (13 mentions; 3.1%). In turn, the Constitution is over other topics like Elkarri (8 mentions; 1.9%) or Neutral Basque people (8; 1.9%), and at the same level as Sabino Arana (7; 1.6%) or the Polarization ETA/Government of Madrid (7; 1.6%). Finally, it is paradoxical that a documentary intended to provoke dialogue gives relatively low attention to that topic of dialogue: 12 mentions (2.8%).

Undoubtedly, the film shows a multiplicity of viewpoints which are reflected in the number of topics and characters. However, the quantitative analysis showed that there is a greater presence of nationalist theses, through the appearance of prominent nationalist characters who talk about many aspects and through what the nationalists consider their viewpoints, their problems or conflicts.

For example, alone the topic Self-government (24, 6.4%) almost doubled the topic of Constitution (13, 3.1%) in number of mentions. Not in vain the topic of Nationalists (67 interventions; 15.9%) absolutely dominates not only over the Non-nationalist theme (19; 4.5%), but also over the overall structure of the documentary: it is second most important topic, only surpassed by ETA.

There is also a strong criticism towards the State if one takes into account the insistence on the subject of tortures (26, 6.2%), and the PP's action, while nobody from the PP defends the party and its image is fixed, largely, by the political competitors. Numerically, there is also a sensation of equal finish between the attention given to the victims of terrorism and the terrorists themselves or their environment: the subject of prisoners is addressed in 26 interventions (6.2%) against 31 interventions about the subject of Victims (including the topics Consequences and Explanation of an attack).

In summary, *La Pelota Vasca* shows some statistical equality in some parameters such as the number of participating politicians that can be identified as nationalists (PNV, 12.4%) and those that can be identified as non-nationalist (PSOE, 10.2%). Still, we must take into account that the nationalist pole predominates and is reinforced by adding the interventions of the Basque pro-independence left: 4.2%. This equality between blocks is also kept on some topics of major political significance as the Prisoners (26 interventions, 6.2%) and the Victims (31, 7.3%) or the Threatenees (28, 6.6%) and Tortures (26,

6.2%). But the equality is broken in others topics such as Self-government (24, 6.4%) versus Constitution (13, 3.1%), or Nationalists (67, 15.9%) versus Non-nationalists (19; 4.5%). Finally, it is interesting the lack of PP politicians particularly when the documentary speaks in detail (PP, theme, is the third in importance) of its political action during its time ruling the Government.

Now, the quantitative analysis (see Annex I) leaves out important aspects in the creation of meaning. For example, Bernardo Atxaga begins and closes the documentary, and this is very important because the end has superiority over the rest of the text. Similarly, there are only two interventions of Orson Wells, but the duration, the fact that it is a historical document, the authority of the director and his observatory character not involved in reality, makes the value of this material higher than the one given initially based on the insignificant number of interventions. On the same situation are the testimonies of relatives of terrorists or people killed by ETA: they have few interventions but their emotional impact in the audience is undoubtedly higher.

Therefore the data obtained from the quantitative analysis must be supplemented with a qualitative study taking into account all these aspects.

3.2. Qualitative analysis

3.2.1. Content

When the quantitative analysis is done and one passes to studying the contents of the interviews, the balance that exists in the presence of characters affiliated to certain ideologies does not necessarily translate into a balance of ideas.

The qualitative analysis seeks, on the one hand, to analyse the meaning of the words spoken by those interviewed, whether they are positive or negative comments, or whether they favour or attack somebody, and, on the other hand, it seeks to explore the meaning that the editing can introduce even above what each interviewee wants to say at any moment. The editing does not suppress a viewpoint, but it can make the viewpoint to be less valid or lose supremacy over others.

In *La Pelota Vasca* we can speak of a definition by accumulation and in a one-way sense, at least, in the two topics which have undergone a content analysis: ETA and the Police. *La Pelota Vasca* has 31 explicit references to various security forces of the State: the police (or ertzantza) is mentioned 18 times (4.2%); the Guardia Civil 12 times (2.9%), and the army only once (0.2%).

These 31 references placed the topic of security forces in the third place of importance only behind ETA and the Nationalists.

Beyond the percentage, the meaning of all these comments is more significant: 80% are negative; 12.9% are positive and only 6.4% are neutral. The characters commenting have different ideological and professional backgrounds, and refer to different circumstances, all of which strengthens even more the narrative's constructed truth about the nature of the Police.

The variety helps strengthening the credibility of the message. A historian, Juan Pablo Fusi, recalls that the police, in the Francoism, "favoured the radicalisation of the Basque process and therefore, also the radicalisation of the positions towards ETA"; a television presenter (unidentified) stresses that "between March 1976 and March 1978 the police killed 38 people in different manifestations", which also highlights possibly one of the strongest negative images, for spectators' configuration and beliefs about the Civil Guard, is in the trial against General Galindo. Medem chooses the following declaration, under the title "Condemned for double murder": "Miss, I can tell you, if I may, that with six men like me the full South America could have been conquered".

The relationship between the police, in the generic sense, and torture has great weight in the documentary. There are 9 interventions of Anika Gil [5] in which she tells how she was tortured by the Civil Guard. Other testimonies give credibility to her story indirectly:

"(...) People close to me was killed and tortured by the police, and that makes you perceive violence as an imposed necessity" (Txema Montero, former lawyer of the Basque pro-independence left).

"There are many people that have nothing to do with ETA (...) and have been tortured and arrested and their area is absolutely contaminated with violence provoked by the reaction of the security forces to the existence of ETA" (Eduardo Madina, victim of ETA and General Secretary of the Socialist Youth in the Basque country).

"We should be more belligerent [against torture] than we currently are" (Teo Santos, Basque police officer, and member of the Union ERNE [Independent union of the Basque Police]).

Yet, the construction of the image of the terrorist is perhaps most striking. Who is a terrorist? How are they? Why are they killing? These questions are answered

in *La Pelota Vasca*. First, and this is also the first thing in Medem's documentary, ETA is referred to as an "institution", as a group: ETA is not the problem, is part of the problem. The State is the other part: "These two shooting bands [ETA and the Government of Madrid] are making difficult something essential like it is the mutual understanding" (Ramon Saizarbitoria. Sociologist and writer in Euskera language); or "What cannot be done is to resort to a dogmatism backed by violence. Be it gun violence or the violence caused by the State's strength monopoly" (Carlos Garaikoetxea, former President of the Basque Government).

Second, ETA has a reason to exist. Julen Madariaga, co-founder of ETA and member of the collective Aralar, explains the origin of ETA as caused by the action of the Francoism: "we were persecuted" and "the first slaps, the first interrogations, the first signs of torture began and this forced us to move to the last phase, the military". Regarding the existence of ETA when Francoism no longer exists, Madariaga only clarifies: "we had an enormous attention in continuously saying, proclaiming and writing that the military arm would always be under the orders of the political head and not vice versa as it has unfortunately been happening". Third, the terrorist actions highlighted by Medem are consistent with that image of war against the State:

1. (00:27:46-00:28:15) ETA kills Admiral Carrero Blanco and many young people celebrate it at a bar and on the streets by throwing puppets to the air and chanting: "Died, died, Carrero died".
2. (00:28:00) A home video shows masked ETA terrorists practicing shooting in the field.
3. (00:33.48) A fiction film shows some people quietly seated at a bar, while the waiter is serving a glass. A bomb explodes, everything breaks out, there are pieces of glass falling down and a woman's shoe lays on the floor. Then there is a change to a scene with the title "French-Basque Country". A terrorist comes outraged with the newspaper in her hand, and throws it to another group of terrorists who are at a table and says "Can somebody explain this to me? Eight innocent victims and not a single objective accomplished".
4. (00:34:18) Another fiction film shows some terrorists practicing shooting and one of them explains the effects of a grenade. Immediately afterwards

we see how a pair of terrorists on a motorcycle plant a bomb on an official car carrying a senior member of the army. The car explodes.

5. (00:36:01) A fiction film shows a terrorist killing María Dolores Katarain Yoyes, a terrorist re-inserted, in the centre of Ordizia. She is accompanied by a girl. The terrorist comes from behind and, when she turns around, the terrorist shoots her in the head.

6. (00:48:36) A fiction film shows a terrorist shooting a national police in the neck.

Fourth, ETA is inherently bad as a terrorist organization, is a perverse concept: “ETA is fascism (...) They want to have the weapons and the last word“ (Felipe González); “shadowing of the intelligence by the patriotic emotion” (Javier Sádaba); “moral shipwreck” (Iñaki Gabilondo), etc. But terrorists have a different image within the documentary: terrorists are not the same as ETA.

A study on all news about terrorism published in *El País* and *El Mundo* between 1994 and 1997 showed that the attention to the victims is something historically new: *El País* published 84% of news about victims from 1996 onwards, and *El Mundo* accumulated 50% of this type of news from 2005 onwards (Sánchez, 2008: 3). Thus *La Pelota Vasca* constitutes an evolution in the treatment of victims, as it includes among the victims the relatives of ETA members suffering by their imprisonment.

The documentary simultaneously presents two conflicting stories: the woman of a terrorist (unidentified), and Cristina Sagarzazu, widow of the police officer Ramón Doral, killed by ETA. The two stories show their lives after a terrorist attack: each one has her pain. The woman of the terrorist [her baby appears on the shot] speaks on the bus in the middle of his journey of 2,000 kilometres to visit her husband: “poor baby, what it has to go through” (...) “This is its third journey”; “the poor thing was conceived in prison”, etc. Cristina Sagarzazu says she had a life project with Montxo, “in that sense they have stolen my project, my plans have been taken away from me”.

This editing defines the terrorist and its environment which, in part, is a definition of the terrorist itself. Cristina Sagarzazu takes the other’s place to nicely describe it and considers that the prisoners’ parents “suffer” not only for seeing their children in prison, but also for knowing they are killers. On the other hand, the most critical comment said by the terrorist’s woman against what he

did is: “these are contradictory feelings at all levels”. She recalls that the terrorist’s mother, “and many other relatives too”, evolved from the moderate nationalism (PNV) to radical positions (“it has been a great ideological and political evolution”). In conclusion, Cristina offers a nice definition, whether true or not, of how the relatives of ETA members are. To this definition another one is added: the one made by the woman about her terrorist husband:

(01:21:00-01:21:09): “A person so generous and capable of loving and at the same time to be capable of doing this type of actions, huh?”

(01:21:24-01:21:40): “It is normally the most altruistic individuals, the most generous that I know. And you see the person on the street and you see he is so loving, so full of friends, that you cannot conceive what he has done. You can agree or disagree, but you know that there is a strong motivation that led him to do it.

The victim also intervenes in the construction of the terrorist’s image, and her opinion has a great moral value. Curiously, the documentary only presents two references to revenge, both of them pronounced by Cristina Sagarzazu:

1. “My greatest fear was to not doing it well and that one day one of my sons would feel entitled to do the same that was done to him: to kill the father of another person”. If one of my sons killed anyone of course that would... He would sink his own life, sinking the life of others, but above all that would destroy my life”.

2. “He replied to me ‘I will kill them’. That was when I told him [that]...the fact that you think someone is bad is no reason to kill that person because you may be wrong”.

La Pelota Vasca gives some normality to the desire of revenge because the comments appear in two different times and with different tones, which increases the feeling of the pervasiveness of this desire in real life. This perception of revenge serves to further strengthen the existence of two colliding worlds, but it can also be interpreted as a draw in terms of hatred: terrorists kill, and the others also think about killing, even if they do not do it.

3.2.2. The structure

In any documentary, the amount of testimonials may not be as crucial to create meaning, because there is something that is above this accumulation of characters or statements: the selection of a viewpoint. We must not forget that the

truth of a narration comes from the general meaning that emanates from it, as a whole. Thus, it is not enough the respect for stylistic procedures, such as the no misrepresentation of the total quoting, to ensure the representation of truth (Muñoz-Torres, 2007).

Therefore, the following sections explore the different uses that Medem makes of his characters. The editing decides whether a character, and its testimony and vision of reality, is exalted, annulled or answered. Medem himself assumes the existence of these two realities: the one that the character exposes in the interview.

“My way of asking was to always go in favour of the respondent, always seeking his or her part of truth, his or her deep explanations, but without judging” (Medem 2003: 53).

And the reality that the director decides in the editing:

“If during the filming I preferred to diminish myself to erase certain prejudices and to become even more malleable, when I was in front of the 150 hours of material (including filmed material and archival images), I felt that I should embrace the delicate situation of absolute power granted by the editing, and to do so without any guilty complexes” (Medem 2003: 53).

A documentary's characters are not only conditioned by the way the director asks the question, but also by other characters and the relationship established with them, which is decided by the director in the editing phase by giving them a particular extension or location within the story. It is clear that although the director of a documentary does not direct the persons that agree to testify, as it happens in fiction, the director does at least limit them before, during and after the interview. The statement of a person is never something absolute, because its meaning depends on the part of the statement that appears and its contextualization within the narrative. The statement is only an audio-visual quoting, but with much more credibility (truthful appearance) than the printed journalistic quoting, but like the later, the former can even be used to subvert the meaning that a person wanted to convey.

The interviewees in *La Pelota Vasca* are characters that can reach importance or become irrelevant in the editing phase depending on their place within the narrative and on the extent to what their statements are strengthened or

questioned by the rest of the characters. Medem creates a “network of characters” (Truby, 2009: 78), in which each one helps defining the other.

3.2.2.1. The consequent character

The characters that appear in *La Pelota Vasca* are predictable, in the sense that simply by knowing who they are (name, profession and/or political affiliation) or what they think about some controversial aspects of the “Basque conflict” is easy to predict most of the times what they can say about certain topics. Therefore, if the director chooses some specific characters to speak about a topic, the meaning that will emerge from the editing of that section can be deduced beforehand by seeing who has been selected by the director.

For example, the section of the last truce of ETA shows a hegemonic creation of meaning. It all starts with a written legend over the images of the Basque pelota game: “ETA gave a year of truce between 1998 and 1999”. In this block 8 characters are interviewed: 3 of them (Ardanza, Garaikoetxea Arzalluz) are or were senior officials in the PNV; Patxi Zabaleta belongs to Aralar, the pro-independence left-wing democratic group, and other 4 characters appear, a priori, without a clear identification and simply labelled as a “journalist”, “musician”, or “Psico-sociologist”. Now, these four characters are clearly defined throughout the documentary by their statements, therefore, the orientation that their declarations will have can be predicted:

-Antonio Álvarez Solís appears as a “journalist”. His single previous intervention in the documentary focused on justifying the origin of ETA: “Perhaps ETA is a product of those unresolved matters”.

-Antoni Batista, “journalist and writer”, has a clear itinerary: he justifies the origin of ETA (“ETA is the latest manifestation of an atavistic problem”), stands against the PP (“Since the PP gained an absolute majority there has been a weight loss in the freedom of expression. But in general I think that there is a weight loss in freedoms in general. In my view, what the transition moved forward, then PP tries to move backwards”), criticises multiple times that the PSOE acts like the PP (ETA killed Ernest Lluch “to further throw the PSOE into the PP’s arms”), and believes that the media harms nationalism.

-Fermin Muguruza, a “musician”, and all the other characters who only speaks in the Basque language in the documentary are pro-nationalists. He

only intervenes once out of the section about the truce and serves as a counterpoint to the people threatened by ETA. He introduces himself as a person threatened by the other side: “Here is always said that only some people live threatened, but not others. I receive five e-mails each day: ‘We will kill you, we already killed a Muguruza, and you will be the second’. They killed Josu, we worked together, we are both Muguruza”.

-Javier Elzo is already marked since its first appearance by accompanying title: “Professor of sociology. Threatened by ETA”. Then his role as “threateneer” is strengthened with the presence of his bodyguards in the shot (“it is fucked up to live accompanied by bodyguards”) and with his confessions about the sensations of being threatened (“I have an escort because I am in the lists of ETA”; “The fear. One of the worst. If they planted a bomb and my wife was next to me. And my children would be left without father and mother”). He believes that he has been forced to choose between two very polarized options: to be with the victims or with the executioners. And, finally, he defines ETA terrorism as a “war” and creates a context of historical continuity to associate it with the Carlist Wars.

In summary, of the 8 characters selected to talk about the truce, 7 of them are nationalists: 4 are politicians of the PNV and 3 suggest being close to the nationalist postulates. The other character is a person threatened by ETA, but unlike the performances of the PP, which was another protagonist of the truce. The result of the editing of the section on why the truce was unsuccessful was not very difficult to guess.

In the section about the truce of ETA, the two parties that negotiated the truce (the PP and ETA) are criticised, but in different ways.

On the one hand, ETA is criticisable because it broke the truce. Ardanza says “ETA gave a year and a half of truce, but then broke it with its habitual blindness” and Muguruza ensures that “I thought it was a huge error to return to the arms”. The damages caused to ETA itself by the decision to end the truce are underlined: “When ETA broke the truce it made us dust, but it is very clear that it also made Herri Batasuna dust and the proof is that, in the following election, they lost 80,000 votes” (Arzalluz); “What we could not bear was that ETA, to which we were being supportive regarding the form of the resolution of the conflict through negotiation, somehow, was not being respectful towards the militants” (Zabaleta).

Regarding the performance of the PP, seen through the eyes of the characters, the editing is indisputable. For starters, the argument of the defeat of ETA without dialogue is questioned as a general approach. Ardanza doubts the effectiveness of this strategy: “You, gentlemen of the PP, believe that peace will be achieved by a police triumph over ETA. We are already fed up of military triumphs”. Then it is exposed why the PP, which could have put an end to ETA, failed. The meaning of the arguments is foreseeable if we see what characters intervene, their identity and their previous declarations:

1. The PP could have put an end to ETA, but did not do it, because the PP had no patience (“the popular party had a single meeting with ETA” (Batista)); “An issue like ETA is not resolved in a single conversation” (Elzo).
2. The PP could have put an end to ETA, but did not do it, because, it is alleged, the PP did not behave honourably in the negotiation process: “Immediately after ETA announced its truce Mayor Oreja as Home Minister left the meeting saying that that was a trap truce”. “They arrested two of the spokesmen of the only meeting” (Batista); “then ETA, well, felt deceived somehow and I do not want to make ETA angry, God forbids it, look where I am, eh” (Elzo).
3. The PP could have put an end to ETA, but did not do it, because that was not in the PP’s interests: “[explaining why the Government did not bring the prisoners together] But of course that already constituted a robust growth, politically more and more robust, of the nationalism. And this is with what the Government of Madrid was not prepared to compromise” (Álvarez Solís).

Standing out in this block of criticisms towards the PP are the conditional affirmations of the type what would have happened if... which present a future scenario that nobody is capable of knowing, but that the interviewees imagine to certainly be a happy ending with ETA destroyed, which shows as evident and inexorable something that is not, even if the PP would have acted differently. For instance, the combined interventions of Ardanza and María go along this line: “And I think that if there had been a man of the State (...)” (Ardanza), “(...) Well it is quite possible that, at this time, ETA would be finished” (Elzo).

As we can see, the break of the truce had two adversely affected groups (ETA and the PP), but only one guilty group. The PP could have put an end to ETA (Elzo Garaikoetxea) if it had trusted more on the intentions of the terrorist organization and the dialogue (Ardanza) and it had not acted deceitfully (Batista, Elzo) due to fearing a rise of nationalism (Solis).

3.2.2.2. The paradoxical or “traitorous” character

In *La Pelota Vasca*, Medem sometimes consecutively exposes two truths, that of the Nationalists and that of the Non-nationalists, which fighting each other to influence the spectators' point of view, but also, at times, Medem creates only one truth and makes all characters to agree with it, which reaffirms this truth as the absolute truth to the viewer. The strategy of the documentary is very simple. It uses a “traitorous” character, i.e. a character who abandons the alignment with his own “band” to corroborate the argument of the other, which he normally faces. Thus the importance lies not so much on what is said but on who says it.

Let's analyse two cases that exemplify the existence of this type of character and its great argumentative value in the explanation of events.

1. The section addressing the attitude of the PNV towards the victims of terrorism presents a very harsh criticism: the PNV has failed to address adequately the victims. Felipe Gonzalez states that: “Only when the PNV understands that the suffering of the non-nationalist is its suffering as a ruler, a giant step in understanding will have been taken”. Arzalluz responds exactly the same twice:

- (01:10:05) “I would distinguish one thing: the victims and the associations of victims”.
- (01:10:20) “those who suffer, the victim, is one thing, and those who take political advantage, here and there, from the pain of those victims, is another question”.

This is followed by the testimony of Ramon Etxezarreta, “Councillor of culture in San Sebastian (PSE-PSOE). Threatened by ETA”. Etxezarreta agrees with Arzalluz in two interventions, one of which is the last in this thematic block. First, he manifest he has always felt that he suffered “a double status of victim, because on one hand you are victim of violence and, on the other hand, you are a victim of the protectors and defenders of the victims”. And then he complains

that his party and the PP demand “you to be more a political argument than a person with rights and freedoms of expression”.

2. In the block addressing the Statute, Garaikoetxea affirms that the State is weaving a series of “corset” laws that removed power from the Statute. Ibarretxe speaks of a “sensation of fraud”. And Ardanza also insists on the same idea: “frustration, disappointment and a deep sensation to say once more that the Spaniards cheat”. Afterwards there is an intervention by Peces Barba, whose position is supposedly contrary to the nationalists’. If they abandoned the Statute, he should make people believe in it. Barba says literally the following:

“Why are the speeches of the King not retransmitted in the Basque television? The Spanish flag is not flying next to the Basque flag as the laws command. Then it is very difficult under these conditions to request a normal treatment, like the one that has been given to other autonomous communities, including the Basque community”.

Peces Barba implicitly recognizes, and based on the circumstances that occur in Euskadi, that the nationalists’ complaints are true. He does not refute the limitations outlined for the Statute, but rather explains why the State creates such limitations.

The credibility of the “traitorous” character is usually greater than the credibility of other characters because it is perceived as affirming something that could go against, what we interpret as, its interests, and for this reason the truth that it defends usually have more weight for the viewer.

3.2.2.3. The exemplary character

In a documentary, a character also acts as an example, as a proof of the normal. It is understood that if a character appears in a documentary is because it has a value that goes beyond itself, is a summary of a part of the reality that condenses in its voice, its image and its experience. There is a tacit projection: the character is not just himself or herself but also all those who are like him. It is a part of reality chosen by its representative value. *La Pelota Vasca* only presents one testimony of a person injured by ETA: Eduardo Madina, President of the Socialist Youth of the Basque country. The value of the example, and therefore the analysis that can be done on the reality to which the character belongs and represents is based on this character.

Eduardo speaks only once about the consequences of the attack: “The blast of the bomb made me lose a leg, the left leg, and today, thanks to the good fortune that I had and thanks to a prosthesis, my life can be the same, except in sports which I cannot longer practice”. Eduardo is young and optimistic, and intervenes in *La Pelota Vasca* 11 times. In 4 (36%) of these interventions, Eduardo sympathizes with the terrorist environment because of the tortures and the “tragedy” of seeing a beloved one in prison. The visual work that the director makes of this character is also remarkable. Medem shows only at the end of the documentary a detailed shot of Eduardo making some steps: a slight limp is noticed. Nothing else.

Paradoxically, in a part of the documentary, Medem integrates an old image from the archive which shows a man in crutches and without a leg playing Basque pelota (Min. 25). This part is more emotional than anecdotal due to its location in the film. The lame pelota player is placed between two film fragments dealing with severe assaults against the Basque country and its identity: the bomber from Guernika and a fiction movie about the brutal repression imposed by a Francoist professor on two teenage students, whose hands are smacked for speaking in Basque and insisting on saying they are Basque. The lame pelota player is interpreted not only as the passion of a certain player for a sport, but also as a symbol of people’s resistance to lose or abandon their identity, which makes them genuine and different.

The minor importance that Eduardo Madina gives to the loss of his leg is not only a proof of the courage of a victim to move forward and not letting the consequences of an attack limit his way of life more than necessary, but is also, at the same time, a relativisation of the effects of an attack. Eduardo’s optimism and strength do not exploit the audiences’ emotions of compassion or anger, as it would occur with the testimony of a victim whose life was destroyed by one of the ETA attacks.

It must be kept in mind that Eduardo is much more than a character, he is the archetype of a direct victim that is reflected in the documentary. The value of a character as an example is never absolute and depends on the network of characters chosen by the director.

3.2.2.4. The isolated character

Characters can also be isolated to prevent that the point of view of other characters may contradict, contextualise or complement what they say. In art

theory, an element that appears isolated in a composition has more weight (importance) than an object of similar appearance that is surrounded by other things. Theatre also uses isolation for the purposes of accentuation (Arnheim, 2001: 35). In *La Pelota Vasca* there is a character that is favoured by isolation: Alec Reid.

First, because Medem chooses a form of presenting the declarations that resembles a collage. Arguments and conflicts are created through pieces of statements: those which are in favour and those that are against. This usually happens in thematic blocks such as: Elkarri, Constitution, Statute, Prisoners, Gal, Victims, etc. The declarations are usually brief and rely much in the meaning of the preceding and subsequent declarations to create a dialectical game where two parties have conflicting views. A parenthesis is created here.

Before Alec Reid appears, there is a visual montage that mixes harsh images (dead people, fragments from movies where a terrorist shoots someone in the neck or there is an explosion, demonstrations, coffins with the Spanish flag, etc.) with pictures of Basque rural activities, which serve as a symbol for such heightened desire of Basque identity that leads some to kill. Everything ends with a bird's eye view that lasts 12 seconds (3 times more than the preceding shots) and shows an area of scorched land, where there is a lot of smoke and flames, which undoubtedly is a metaphor of Euskadi being a victim of terrorism. Then there is a clip of the Basque pelota game, which usually serves as transition between topics.

Afterwards the documentary integrates the appearance of Alec Reid, who speaks in English and is identified as a "Redemptorist priest. Spokesperson of peace talks in Northern Ireland". His arguments are extremely critical of Spain and have a very special value because Reid is presented to the viewer as an international, and presumably neutral, expert. In just over a minute (50:18 - 51:24) he firstly expresses his doubts about the Spanish democratic habits. Then he endorses a nationalist leitmotiv: "...the Spanish authorities do not want to talk to the moderate side of Basque nationalism, like the PNV". And this serves to question once again the role of the State: "For me, that is the denial of the democratic rights of the PNV and people that it represents".

Obviously, the argument suggests that nationalism is being oppressed; all kinds of nationalism, without distinguishing the terrorists ("the savages") from those who are not: "They not just say that they will not talk about the situation,

but also say that there is nothing to talk about, they say there is no conflict, that it is only a group of savages. For me this is almost a form of madness, because this is not the reality”. Alec Reid ends his intervention by perfectly delimiting what “reality” is, from his point of view: “They do not want to accept the fact that there are people who do not feel Spanish and they fear this poses a threat to the unity of the Spanish State”.

After Alec Reid, the documentary presents another clip about the pelota game and then a new set of characters who speak of a new theme: the Elkarri organization. There is a parenthesis in exhibition mode that the documentary was using so far. It does not play to see what the other person says nor it questions whether is true or not what was said. The character speaks alone and continuously, more than anyone in the documentary (01:06), without the intervention of another character. The exposition time is a stylistic resource that favours the possible hierarchy of the idea that is raised (Plantinga, 1997: 97-98). Therefore the words and arguments of Alec Reid are enclosed and isolated as the truth, since another point of view that can refute what he said is never presented.

3.3. Discussion and conclusions

The mixture of different perspectives on Euskadi is present in *La Pelota Vasca*. The quantitative analysis shows that there is indeed some balance, although always with the exception of the deterioration of the PP’s image and government: the documentary presents 19 politicians or former politicians belonging to different political formations, but never represents the PP. The nationalist perspective is omnipresent, and in fact this topic is the second most talked-about in the documentary. This situation ensures a greater emphasis on the conflicts, needs or visions of those with the nationalist perspective.

Although the documentary represents all sorts of topics and, with some proportionality, their importance to the Basque society, one might wonder whether the sum of viewpoints is also a sum of ideas. It is also necessary to discern which of these ideas are refuted, supported, or simply presented.

Medem uses three resources that modify the ideas presented. One of these resources involves presenting a topic from a unique perspective. For example, the negative image of the State security forces. This fact affects the perception of the security forces through reinforcement, through the continuous exposition of the same viewpoint expressed by different people and in different historical moments and circumstances.

Another resource used by the director is the selection of actions: a character in action is always more effective dramatically, i.e. it fixes an idea better than an interviewed character does. Medem's particular selection of actions has a great impact in the perception of the terrorist activity, because they define the terrorist as a combatant, a guerrilla fighter or, in short, as a gudari. In these actions, killing children or women is showed as an error and not as something aimed - terrorist do not want that-, which helps contextualize these actions as an act of war, and not as an act of savagery.

The insistence on the motivation that leads to this act and the lamentation for the death of the supposedly "innocent people" –assumedly by the hands of others that are not innocent– protects the terrorist actions from being classified as absurd or meaningless. This is suggested by a terrorist's wife: "you can agree or not, but you know that there is a strong motivation that led them to do that". The documentary shows the terrorist killing in three actions: killing a high command of the army, a national police officer and Yoyes, a former terrorist. This last death can also be understood within the logic of the gudari: Yoyes is the soldier who decides to cross the lines and join the other side, and his former team mates act against him because they interpret his actions as a betrayal.

Obviously all these actions are part of the narration of the reality presented by the Basque pro-independence left, which is one of those voices that Medem wanted to present to better understand what is happening and why is happening, and also a voice that Medem decided not to confront with another kind of reading of those same actions.

The third resource used by the director is the manipulation of interviews and the debate on the sacredness that is often made of the quoting (in the case of the full statement). It is understood that the statements made by a character in a documentary, unlike fiction, are not scripted by anyone and that their content belongs exclusively to them, but, paradoxically, the final meaning of their opinions belongs to the director; and this is where the character emerges as part of a larger structure: the movie.

In short, *La Pelota Vasca* is a documentary where the nationalist perspective dominates over any another viewpoint, more due to the prevalence of nationalists in the topics, conflicts and concerns, than due to a clearly superior percentage of characters affiliated to that ideology. This study has explained the resources that demonstrate that what matters is not what enters the editing room

but what comes out of it; the creation of meaning achieved through the use of editing.

The director is responsible for this assemblage, which gives him an “absolute power”, as Medem himself says. Being a documentary based almost exclusively on interviews, the network of characters (relations or connections) that can protect, attack, doubt, or give credibility to the interviewee is decisive. The manipulation made by the director, in the most natural and inevitable sense of the term when referring to editing, leads the characters to serve as a unique reference of reality (exemplary character), to be more or less convincing depending on what they say in relation to who they are (significant or “traitorous” characters), or to be more credible depending on their location within the edited narrative (isolated character).

The function a character or another within the film depends solely on the decisions of the director and they are very important because reality is being constructed through them.

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5. Notes

[1] Production credits of *La pelota vasca. La piel contra la piedra* (English title: *The Basque Ball, Skin Against Stone*). Directed by Julio Medem. Produced by Julio Medem and Koldo Zuazua. Production Company: Alicia Produce, S.L. Direction Assistant: Montse Sanz. Additional interviews: Ione Hernández and Maider Oleada. Writer: Gorka Bilbao. Camera operators: Javier Aguirre, Jon Elicegui and Ricardo de Gracia. Edited by Julio Medem. Additional editing: Carlos Rodríguez. Music by Mikel Laboa, Pascal Gaigne, Josetxo Silgero and Iker Goenaga. Sound recordist: Pablo Bueno and Álvaro López. Sound edition: Sounders Creación Sonora and Alfredo Díaz. Duration: 115 minutes.

[2] Other documentaries addressing ETA terrorism were not even close to the box-office success of Medem's work: *Asesinato en febrero* (Murder in February), directed by Eterio Ortega (2001), was seen by 15,714 spectators; *Trece entre mil* (Thirteen in one thousand), directed by Iñaki Arteta (2005) by 8,474 spectators; and *El infierno vasco* (Basque hell), also directed by Iñaki Arteta (2008), by 6,439. Regarding Spanish documentaries on any topic, the comparison is still absolutely favourable for *The Basque ball: El milagro de Candeal* (The miracle of Candeal), directed by Fernando Trueba (2004) was seen by 55,769

spectators; La silla de Fernando (Fernando's Chair) directed by Luis Alegre and David Trueba (2006) by 3,137 spectators; Caminantes (Walkers), directed by Fernando León de Aranoa (2001), by 1,398; and Asaltar los cielos (Assaulting the heavens), directed by Jose Luis Lopez and Linares Javier Rioyo (1996), by 36,977 (<http://www.mcu.es>).

[3] This number includes not only those interviewed by Medem, but also characters and personalities of films and voices of presenters of News-documentaries and television.

[4] The topics sometimes are announced in the documentary, and other times they simply appear. The classification of topics does not reflect whether the character is in favour or against it, it simply shows the influence of this subject matter within the documentary. Some issues may overlap in their content and they have simply been separated by the exact term used by the character to refer to them.

[5] The legend that accompanies Anika Gil is as follows: "Arrested by Pamplona's Civil Guard for alleged collaboration with ETA. Released without charges (in May 2002) after 5 days of police detention".

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Annex 1: Number of interventions and issues addressed by each of the characters interviewed in *La pelota vasca*

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