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The Effects of Spanish Civil War on Spanish Cinema: Cinema under the Political Pressure of Two Eternal Enemies

Los Efectos de la Guerra Civil Española en el cine español: Cine bajo la Presión Política de Dos Eternos Enemigos

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Abstract

This article focuses on how the Spanish cinema was shaped during and after the Spanish Civil War (1936-1939) by the two sides of the war: the political left and the political right. Firstly it examines the power struggle between two sides during the war and their effort to make their own propaganda. Secondly it tries to understand the new rules of the cinema under the dictatorship of Franco. Then it discusses the

Resumen

Este artículo se centra en cómo se formó el cine español durante y después de la guerra civil española (1936-1939) por los dos bandos de la guerra: la izquierda y la derecha. En primer lugar, examina la lucha de poder entre dos bandos durante la guerra y su esfuerzo por hacer su propia propaganda. En segundo lugar trata de entender las nuevas reglas del cine bajo la dictadura de Franco. Luego discute los

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changes of vision after the death of Franco and lastly summarizes the effects of the war on the modern Spanish cinema of today.

cambios de visión después de la muerte de Franco y por último, resume los efectos de la guerra civil en el cine español moderno de hoy.

Keywords / Palabras clave

Spanish Cinema, Spanish Civil War, censorship, cinema under pressure

Cine español, Guerra Civil Española, censura, cine bajo presión

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Introduction: How It All Started.

César Vallejo, Peruvian poet, writer and journalist, explains in Valencia in 1937 when the war has just started (Aznar Soler & Schneider, 1987: 118-119):

“Those responsible for what happens in the world are writers and artists, because we have the most formidable weapons that are the word and image [...]. It is our turn to move the world with these weapons.”

Mass communication refers to the distribution of an idea to a large number of people and the cinema is one of the most important mass communication tools of our modern societies. Films have a strong influence on the thinking of the people. They may create a new social or political trend and may change the ideas we have. In two hours they are able to make their own propaganda and show us their own reality and make us believe. Since the birth of the cinema this power has been used all over the world; sometimes by the politicians and sometimes by the popular brands.

Of course, it was not an exception for the Spanish cinema history.

The political situation in Spain under the dictatorship of Francisco Franco for almost 40 years led Spanish cinema to create a chaotic, censored and repressive atmosphere. This article will then try to explain the main changes and trends between the years of 1936-2018 according to the political changes in the

country and its effects on the cinema.

Before continuing with the research I also believe that taking a glance at main historical events of the era will make it easier to understand why, how and by whom the cinema was influenced.

The loss of power and territory in two continents in the beginnings of 20th century, Africa and the Americas, resulted in distrust and instability in Spanish political society. In 1931 elections were held and the republicans won the major cities which meant the end for the monarchy and the King, Alfonso XIII had to leave the power and the country. However there were four main problems for the Republic: the request of Catalonia and Basque Country for independence, the hostility between the Roman Catholic Church and the Republicans, the ongoing economic crisis and the unemployment.

The working class lost its faith in the Republic and the politicians couldn't decide on what to do to set the things right. Anger in the society rose day by day and the four powerful groups of the society (the military, industrialists, land owners and the Roman Catholic Church) withdrew its support for the Republic.

In 1932 an unsuccessful military coup was held by General José Sanjurjo and

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a new right wing party was founded, CEDA. The instability of Azana's government was followed by strikes and riots. Azana resigned and another elections were called in November 1933 which resulted in the victory of CEDA. The first thing done by CEDA was to over-turn all the changes of left wing government. This approach caused anger among left parties and Popular Front was founded. They organized so many actions together. The most important action was the general strike in 1934 which was organized in Asturias by the coal miners and he was Francisco Franco who put down the strike using his military power. To avoid the chaos another election was called and Popular Front became the governor of the country again.

However, right side politicians were not satisfied with the results and they supported a military dictatorship. The military was ready to take control of Spain and Franco was the leader of the armed forces. The left had nothing to do but resist. The civil war started in July 1936. The war ended when the Republicans lost Madrid in March 1939. It is one of the most devastating conflicts in Spanish history.

The Characteristics of Spanish Cinema Between 1936-1939

During the war, the cinema was used as a political propaganda tool by two sides. The main intention was clear: to persuade the audience to fight against the enemy and to justify their actions (or decisions they made) during the war. Therefore, it was impossible to watch an action movie at the cinema those days. The type of the movies was generally the same, documentary. Another important point is that the cinema industry was settled

in the republican cities like Barcelona and Madrid. This led right wing to find alternatives to produce new movies or to control the cinema which resulted in the founding of National Cinematography Department in 1937. On November 2, 1938, by Ministerial Order (B.O.E. 5/11/38), the cinematographic censorship cabinet is established. Its main function was to observe and (if needed) censure the films which had social, political or religious propaganda that were contrary to the moral or the ideas of the regime.

Between 1936-1936 there are 34 films released about the civil war. Ten of these films were shot abroad like in U.S., France, United Kingdom, Mexico etc. The rest belongs to Republican Spain. A great majority of the films are documentaries. However there are also love story films like *First Love* (U.S., 1939), *Love Under Fire* (U.S., 1937) or dramas like *The Last Train from Madrid* (U.S., 1937). It would be an accurate hypothesis to say that movies from the Republican side are very varied and more artistic while the Francoist movies are generally monotonic without artistic concerns. To prove this theory I will try to study on two examples; one from the left wing and one from the right.

España Heroica - Estampas de la Guerra Civil (1938)

Original title: España heroica
Year: 1938
Running time: 87 min.
Country: Germany
Director: Joaquín Reig
Screenwriter: Paul Laven
Music: Walter Winning
Cast: Documentary
Producer: Co-production Spain-Germany;
Falange Española Tradicionalista y de las JONS /

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Hispano Filmproduktion

Genre: Documentary. War | Spanish Civil War

The documentary tries to explain the war from the point of view of the National band. It starts with a brief military story of Spain and later on continues with the conflictive Republican era of the country. The main propaganda of the film is to show the successive acts of the Francoist army during the war. Besides that, it is obvious that Nationalist producers' only idea was to make themselves heard rather than to create an artistic result which gives us an idea about the cinematographic tendencies of the era.

Sierra de Teruel (1939)

Original title: L'espoir

Year: 1939

Running time: 88 min.

Country: France

Director: André Malraux

Screenwriter: Antonio del Amo, Denis

Marion, Boris Peskine, Max Aub (Novel: André Malraux)

Music: Darius Milhaud

Cinematography: Louis Page (B&W)

Cast: Andrés Mejuto, Nicolás Rodríguez, José Sempere, Julio Peña, Pedro Codina, José María Lado, Serafín Ferro, Miguel Del Castillo

Producer: Co-production France-Spain;

Les Productions André Malraux/Productions

Corniglion-Molinier/Subsecretaría de

Propaganda del Ministerio de Estado

Genre: War, Drama, Spanish Civil War,

Propaganda

Today "Sierra de Teruel" is seen as one of the most successful productions of the era. It is based on the Battle of Teruel. The Republicans, with the help of the villagers, try to locate and destroy a hidden Nationalist airfield while the politicians try to provide them logistic help to achieve the goal.

The movie started to be shot in Barcelona, Tarragona y Collbató. However, because of the invasion of Francoist army in Catalonia, the production was suspended and then was moved to France to be able to finish it. On the other hand, that was not the only difficulty it faced. The censorship policy of Franco did not let the movie be released in Spain until 1978. (Amo García 1996: 811-812)

In terms of cinematographic aspects España Heroica has less quality in camera angles, light distribution, voice recording and scenario than Sierra de Teruel.

As seen above, the Spanish during the war experienced a real change in means of theme, gender and aim. In addition to this, there was a major difference of style between the two bands of the war.

Spanish Cinema during the Dictatorship (1940-1975)

Towards the end of the war the victory of Franco was highly predicted. The most of the Republican directors, producers, actors and screenwriters have nothing to do but leave the country. They generally migrated to countries like France, Mexico or Argentina where they went on working and producing new films. In those years the Spanish Cinema was under an intense transition on a political, ethical and philosophical basis. Official state newsreel, film censorship and compulsory dubbing were the basis of this transition.

Bienvenido Llopis, writer of the book "La Censura Franquista en el Cartel de Cine" underlines that:

"But it was just as important to control

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movie advertising. Major Hollywood stars who embraced the Republican cause - James Cagney, Joan Crawford or Robert Montgomery - had their names pulled from Spanish movie posters, while titles that might suggest a double meaning were changed.” (Llopis, 2013)

Film censorship had already started when the war was going on. As a result of film censorship all Spanish movies were required to have an exhibition license and an authorization for dubbing, subtitling, soundtracks etc. Censors were used so carefully that it was sure that there would not be any film containing any negative attribution to religion, the regime, the army, prostitution or sex.

Another change was the compulsory dubbing of the international movies. The Spanish audience had a tendency to watch foreign movies rather than Spanish ones. Dubbing made it easier for everyone to watch them and thus it opened a way for the economic devastation of the Spanish film production. This choice of the Spanish public and the equal position of the foreign movies with local ones permitted the use of the cinema as a way of gaining money for producers, distributors and exhibitors.

The last but not least regulation was the introduction of NO-DO (Noticieros y Documentales Cinematograficos). NO-DO was an obligatory newscast in the Spanish cinemas before the film, between 1942 and 1976. The first images emitted by the NO-DO were the falling of the troops against Francisco Franco and the images of the prisoners who were arrested. NO-DO was used as a propaganda and also aimed to spread the Francoist values and to glorify the figure of the dictator. In NO-DO, a basic and simple narrative was used so that anyone could understand it regardless of

their social class.

Themes of the new regime's movies were generally religion, victories of the Nationalist side, drama and folkloric comedy. Franco aimed to “hispanicize” the culture, to go back to the roots and used again the cinema to promote it. In consequence, for example, so many films about bullfights (an important symbol in Spain's history) were shot. *Currito de la Cruz* (Luis Lucía, 1949), *Chantaje a un Torero* (Rafael Gil, 1963), *Tarde de Toros* (Ladislao Vajda, 1956), *Sangre y Arena* (Rouben Mamoulian, 1941) are some of these movies.

The idea of “how to be a perfect Spanish citizen” was imposed by the regime. For example *Raza* (José Luis Sáenz de Heredia, 1941) was a film written by Francisco Franco himself for only this purpose. The film represented the preferred ideal character of a Spanish citizen through the story of three brothers and their choices during the Civil War. God, family and loyalty to the country were three principles of Spain Franco dreamed of, thus, the film was built on these principles.

Since the early 1950s a new generation started to involve in the cinema. Directors like Luis García Berlanga and Juan Antonio Bardem adopted Italian Neorealism and applied it to the ongoing Spanish cinema culture. The characteristics of the Italian Neorealism in the cinema were an extra effort to catch realistic elements, non-professional actors, shooting with natural lightning, open-ended movies, deep focusing, different camera techniques etc.

In Spain's case, more than the technical part, the social ideology of the movement was appreciated. The directors started to

treat social problems in a Neorealist manner. Their first exit, also seen as the first great production of Spanish cinema, was *Welcome Mr. Marshall* (1953). The film tells the story of a Spanish village preparing a welcome ceremony for the American Marshall Plan committee. The movie which criticizes Spanish-American stereotypes and social structure of 1950s' Spain was awarded an international prize in Cannes Film Festival in 1953.

Another important example of this era was *Death of a Cyclist* (Juan Antonio Bardem, 1955). It is the story of a university professor and his lover, a married woman of the bourgeoisie, accidentally hit a cyclist. As they feared of the discovery of their secret love, they decide to run away without helping the cyclist. *Death of a Cyclist*, which is a mixture of Italian Neorealism and American Dark Cinema, was classified as severely inappropriate by Francoist censorship and even banned due to its opposition to the ethical principles of the day. However, it achieved an international recognition at the Cannes film Festival.

The year 1955 was a turning point for the Spanish cinema industry. A group of young graduates gathered in Salamanca to discuss the future of the modern Spanish cinema. General Director for film and theater José María García Escudero and the director José Luis Sáenz de Heredia were also present to represent the regime. This was the first encounter of the two distinctive opinions; the traditional one and the modern ideals of the students of Instituto de Investigaciones y Experiencias Cinematográficas (the first official school of cinema in Spain). The idea was to reconstruct the Spanish cinema to make it more critical and real. Juan Antonio Bardem discussed the following a summary

of what he thinks about the national Spanish cinema: "Spanish cinema is: Politically ineffective. /Socially false. /Intellectually negligible. /Aesthetically null. Industrially stunted" The conclusion of the talks was as listed below;

- 1- The cinema should reflect the reality of Spain showing its conflicts and social panorama
- 2- The state should propose a policy to support the artistic quality of Spanish films.
- 3- A clear determination should be established for censorship and untouchable issues.
- 4- The censorship shouldn't make distinctions between national and foreign movies.
- 5- An honest and free critique body should be developed and a Cineclub Federation must be founded.

At first, the discussions seemed to be ineffective. However, in a long run, a real change in the cinema was evident such as labor contracts, co-productions, journalistic criticism, the NO-DO's monopolistic situation, the application for scholarships etc. As a consequence Spanish cinema started a journey to adapt European tendencies. These attempts led it to invent a new genre called "New Spanish Cinema". This category included movies that underline the social problems, criticize and reflect them with a natural reality and these movies were screened all over Spain. However, the continuation of censor authorities' restriction caused anger and frustration among directors and the government decided to regulate the screening of New Spanish Cinema movies defining the

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halls they might be screened at: art theatres.

One of the most successful example of this category is *El extraño viaje* (1964) by Fernando Fernán Gómez. It is the story of two siblings living in a village and their elder sister trying to sell family's belongings and get rid of her siblings. Actually it is a real story known as the crime at Mazarrón and the original title was *El crimen de Mazarrón*. However, Spanish authorities censored this title. Nacho Jarne Esparcia writes:

“This film, cursed, unseen and absolutely atypical for the time it was performed, represents all the obsessions and interests that Fernán-Gómez had as author. The inexorable of destiny, the representation of the Spain more grotesque and Vallenclanesca, the apology of the loser, the repression and the half-truths, the inability to communicate the feelings... all these subjects are articulated in the tape with an absolute expertness.” (Esparcia, n.d.)

What differs this movie from the traditional ones is the way the director shows us the reality of the villagers, their fears, the pressure they are exposed by the neighbors and the way he describes the social classes. The film, today, is seen as a masterpiece black drama movie.

At the end of this era, Spanish movie sector had great changes, more freedom but less audience and more debts for the industry. Even so, the cinema started to be seen as a fine art rather than a propaganda tool.

Spanish Cinema between 1975 and 2000

Another breaking point in Spanish cinema was the death of Francisco Franco in 20th November in 1975. It was certain that nothing was going to be same in Spain; neither politically nor socially. In 1977, censorship laws were abolished and directors for the first time in 50 years were free to shoot any kind of

movie. That freedom led Spanish production companies to stay up to date and bring together all the forbidden movies with Spanish audience.

Late in 1980 a new movement came into sight: *Movida Madrileña*. Started in music, the *Movida* jumped into the cinema and had a modern, innovative, liberal character. Sex, drugs, politics, critics, homosexuality, woman body even kissing scenes, now, could be shown freely on the big screen. This movement, different from Neorealists, had its own manner to express its opinion. Well-known Spanish director Pedro Almodóvar was one of the young talented members of this movement. His early works like *Pepi, Luci, Bom y otras chicas del montón* (1980) and *La ley del deseo* (1987) can be counted as the examples of *Movida Madrileña* due to their context.

The cinema in transition times reflected the anger and frustration of the directors after forty years of censorship. Movies like *Pascual Duarte* (Ricardo Franco, 1976) or *Furtivos* (José Luis Borau, 1975) expressed these feelings in a fierce manner. Forty years of political restriction caused a brutal portrayal of Franco era on the cinema screen.

To be more concrete, I will try to study a case as an example of the cinematographic trends of the transition.

La Colmena (1982)

Original title: *La colmena*

Running time: 105 min.

Country: Spain

Director: Mario Camus

Screenwriter: José Luis Dibildos (Novel: Camilo José Cela)

Music: Antón García Abril

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Cinematography: Hans Burmann

Cast: José Sacristán, Victoria Abril, Luis Escobar, Charo López, Ana Belén, Fiorella Faltoyano, Concha Velasco, José Luis López Vázquez, Francisco Rabal, José Sazatornìl, Antonio Resines, Francisco Algora, Mary Carrillo, Emilio Gutiérrez Caba, Elvira Quintillá, Luis Ciges, Imanol Arias, Agustín González, María Luisa Ponte, Camilo José Cela

Producer: Ágata Films

Genre: Drama, Spanish Post-War

La Colmena, based on the novel of Camilo José Cela, is a heartbreaking movie of the stories of the people living in Madrid in 1942. The main theme of the film is the uncertain fate of the poets, the survival in the Franco's regime, the emerging social class with double standards, the hunger, the memory of war, misery, repression, and fear. There is not an individual character, a single story or a rush to come to a solution / conclusion. The movie contains a basic language for everyone to understand easily instead of a classical language. The place where the film was shot is quite plain, a café. The director keeps the scenes and the scenario as simple as possible. The deep and complex part of the movie is hidden in its message and the emotions it wants to transmit and also the network it creates with the stories of all the actors going to that café. The camera is used to show the reality of these people and the scene as the way it is and finally the realism is achieved. The movie has an open final, distinctly from its antecedents. The last scene finishes at starting point, the café, displaying the spiral routine of these people; boring, repetitious, poor and problematic.

La Colmena was an innovative movie in this aspect and even so it received a good reputation from the public. Postwar Spanish

audience caught up perfectly with the new cinema style.

The 90's started well for the Spanish cinema industry. In 1990 the government published "National Plan for the Promotion and Development of the Audiovisual Industry" to strengthen the foundation of the industry which had been having hard times because of the 40-year dictatorship and this initiative was received positively by the whole sector. The famous director, Juan Antonio Bardem, stated: "It is the first statement of a government on film policy since I have remembered" Also Antonio Cuevas, the president of The Film and Television Producers' Union, added: "For the first time in the history of Spain a government declares what the sector has been claiming for years and also focuses on its solution from a European perspective" (Prados, 1990).

In the last years of 20th century, Spanish cinema had changed completely from what it was fifty years ago. Its struggle to catch up with the American cinema resulted in Oscars, variety of the topics, the number of the new directors in the sector and many globally appreciated movies.

Movies like Belle Epoque (Fernando R. Trueba, 1992), Tacones Lejanos (Pedro Almodóvar, 1991), Tesis (Alejandro Amenábar, 1996) showed the improvement of the style of new-era Spanish cinema.

Besides, the blockbuster Spanish movie of all times was released in 1998: Torrente, El Brazo Tonto De La Ley, by Santiago Segura. José Luis Torrente, the protagonist of the movie, is a Francoist, racist, macho, sometimes a drug user, alcohol consumer policeman. It takes place in Madrid's conflictive neighborhoods. The movie is a

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parody of the rival American cinema's action movies and at the same time a criticism of the current Spanish society. Being able to watch a movie like *Torrente* on the big screens in Spain indicates the point arrived from the Civil War's mentality till the 2000's modern vision of cinema. The increase of the audience makes clear the preferences of Spanish audience: to laugh at what they had fear of years ago.

Late in 1990s the propagandist mentality gave place to a reflective attitude in Civil War themed movies. Instead of justifying what each side did during the war, the new movies focused on the pains of the people who lost their homeland, their families and their hope for a better future. It was also the beginning of the condemnation of the war, taking no side. Generally the movies aimed to push the audience to empathize with the actor suffering from the consequences of a cruel war. That approach continued to reveal itself in the following years.

Spanish Cinema between 2000 and 2018

The 21st century for Spanish cinema industry has been a great success in every sense. Stable political situation in the first 10 years (until the outbreak of economic crisis in 2010) enabled the cinema industry to grow and vary. The Federation of Audiovisual Producers Associations (known as FAPAE) celebrated its 25th birthday in 2016 and published a report to demonstrate the development of Spanish cinema in the last 25 years. According to the FAPAE's report (2016) in the last 25 years the characteristics of the cinema are as following:

- The number of the producers increased

In 1991 there were almost 55 active producers and now this number is around

276 and each one releases at least one movie in a year.

- The average cost per movie decreased

The average cost of shooting a film has been reduced to the levels of the year 2000, around 1.8 million euros.

- Categories are varied

In 90s' Spain the most popular genres were drama, documentary and comedy. Now, a diversified production in genres as animation, thriller, suspense or horror movies is highly appreciated in the cinema.

- The number of the co-production movies has tripled

- The number of cinema halls decreased while, on the other hand, the number of screens has doubled thanks to multiplex theaters.

- The number of Spanish cinema viewers in 1991 was 9.1 million, while in 2015 this figure has duplicated reaching 18 million.

- The funds to cinematography were increased to protect and support the national cinema.

- The number of international sales of Spanish film doubled up in the last 15 years. Europe, Latin America and The United States were the major clients.

- The International Awards for Spanish cinematography increased by 803% despite the decrease in the presence of Spanish cinema in international festivals.

From the year 1991 up to the date, 5 Spanish productions have been honored

with an Oscar. *Belle Epoque* (Fernando Trueba, 1992) as Best Foreign Language Movie, *Todo sobre mi madre* (Pedro Almodóvar, 1999) as Best Foreign Language Movie, *Hable con ella* (Pedro Almodóvar, 2002) as Best Original Screenplay, *Mar adentro* (Alejandro Amenábar, 2004) as Best Foreign Language Movie. Vicky Cristina Barcelona (Woody Allen, 2008) awarded to Penelope Cruz for Best Supporting Actress.

The Civil War has been losing its effect on the modern Spanish society and cinema lately. Nowadays, the War is a background of a love story or of a story line. Propagandist goals are invisible. Nevertheless, the movies try to give a point of view to the audience about the sorrow the country experienced in the past. What matters in a modern Spanish-Civil-War movie is the story ongoing in the foreground, not the historical part.

A successful example of this new trend is *El Laberinto del Fauno* (Guillermo del Toro, 2006). The movie is the story of a little girl named Ofelia in 1944, the period when the war was over but resistance was continuing. Her, severely ill, pregnant mother, had to travel where her stepdad, a Falangist Captain, was on duty. Her stepdad represents all the characteristics frequently-cited about Francoist frame of mind. In the background of the movie the director illustrates the dark side of a war but in the foreground it is a dark fantasy film influenced by fairy tales, spiritual symbols, religion and Roman mythology. This new style was highly appreciated and awarded not only in Spain but also all around the world.

The Spanish Civil War is still used in Spanish cinema as plot, theme or sometimes as main story. However every year there are less movies on that line and the Spanish cinema improves itself in other genres such as thriller, mystery

and comedy.

Results & Conclusions

This part of the article is dedicated to summarize the results obtained from the investigation based on Spanish cinema and movies about Spanish Civil War and to reflect on these results.

From 1936 to 2018 Spanish cinema went through several changes due to political fluctuation. In the first period it was used as a tool of propaganda by the regime rather than as a branch of art. For this era the artistic value had less importance. The political side was just interested in its communicational power. The popular genre was documentaries mostly produced by Republican side. In the second period, during the dictatorship, with the exile of many promising directors and actors, Spanish cinema ended up in a complex situation; one-sided documentaries (Francoist regime), censorship, NO-DO's repressive propaganda, films without artistic concern - mostly dramas, documentaries and historical movies about Franco's victory and the impossibility of competing with the U.S. cinema. In the third period, with the death of Francisco Franco, Spanish cinema started from scratch to build itself and started to rise in the international market. The movies began to have an artistic value and vary in genres. The abolishment of censorship laws led the cinema to use so many erotic elements which was forbidden during years.

When the years passed by, the audience lost interest in Spanish Civil War themed

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movies. For this reason, over years, less Spanish Civil War themed movies were shot although even today, almost every year at least one movie as mentioned is released. Alongside of the number of movies, the way the War was discussed changed dramatically. Instead of justifying the decisions made during the War (as seen in the first examples), now, developing an empathy to understand the people's pains is the main storyline of this kind of movies.

As a result, more than the War's itself, the mentality of the War affected the Spanish cinema and the evolution of the society afterwards was playing a crucial role in the construction of the new modern cinema. I also find useful to underline the communicational power of the cinema on society and how harmful it may become if it falls into the

wrong hands. As the cinema has a capacity to shape the public's opinion; directors, sponsors, politicians, screenwriters should be aware of the power they hold. Today, modern cinema all around the world uses this power for economic, political and ideological purposes. However, this approach is not as evident as it was in the 20th century. In place of making a propaganda openly, transmitting the ideology esoterically is preferred by the production companies.

Spanish Civil War had, has and always will have a significant impact on every level of the Spanish society. The transformation of attitude toward the interpretation of the War on the big screen from 1936 to 2018 demonstrates that in the near future the effect of the War may vary and may reach to a point we cannot imagine today.

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