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The promotion of democracy in political cartoons. The themes of cartoons in the Basque newspaper *Egin* (1977)

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Abstract

Introduction. This article aims to identify the different themes explored in the comic strips published by the Basque newspaper *Egin* (1977/98) during its first year of operations. This nationalist newspaper had a great impact on the Basque society during the Spanish transition to democracy because it was the first left-wing publication in the Basque Country and because it devoted a whole page to graphic humour. **Method.** The study is based on the thematic analysis of the comic strips published in the entertainment section of the aforementioned newspaper throughout 1977. Quantitative techniques were used to identify and measure the frequency of occurrence of the diversity of issues and themes. **Results and conclusions.** The results show the clear preference of cartoonists for issues related to the promotion of democracy, as well as the existence of an opposition within the premises of traditional Basque nationalism against the new form of nationalism promoted by leftist movements.

Keywords

Democratisation; graphic humour; press; local identity; critical view; artistic production.

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Translation by **CA Martínez Arcos** (PhD in Communication from the University of London)

1. Introduction

1.1. Object of study

Graphic humour, which is a journalistic genre that emerged in the second half of the 19th century, has a long tradition in Spain. Authors such as Iván Tubau have defined it as “the best in the world” (Tubau, 1973). From the perspective of social communication, graphic humour is an opinion genre in journalism (authors like Armañanzas and Díaz Noci have also termed it “iconographic opinion”) that is used to express certain ideas that otherwise would be difficult to transmit.

“In a publication, opinion cannot only be delivered through texts, but also through illustrations (...). In the opinion section of a newspaper, illustrations have an iconographic character - portraits, caricatures and cartoons, with or without text. A simple and apparently innocent drawing can be full of intention and become an ironic, acid or critical opinion piece when it is accompanied by humour. These cartoons are usually placed at the bottom of the editorial pieces or accompany other opinion articles, which are placed in pages that are fundamental to know the positioning of a newspaper on the most varied events”. (Armañanzas & Díaz Noci, 1996: 111)

In Spain there are very well known illustrations, like the ones drawn by the Bécquer brothers, which were published in Madrid in the 19th century in underground almanacs and in the 1991 book *Los Borbones en Pelota* (“The Bourbons in the Nude”), which showed pornographic cartoons and illustrations of the court of Isabel II. In this regard, Ramón Reig recalls some curious anecdotes that took place in Spain during the Franco regime as a result of graphic humour:

“When serving as Minister of the Interior and Mayor of Barcelona, Manuel Fraga Iribarne and Joaquín Viola, respectively (...), the Kings of Spain, Juan Carlos and Sofia, visited the Catalan city. A humorous publication titled this news event more or less in the following way: “Fraga receives the King and Viola [which means “rapes”] the Queen” [...]. He was kidnapped. Sometime before, when Laureano López Rodó was the Minister, the weekly newspaper *La Codorniz* published a comic strip in its front page: In it a farmer, allegedly named López, climbed a hill carrying a pig (...). Suddenly, he loses strength, the pig falls from his shoulders and goes down the mountain. The following title appeared at the end of the strip: “And López’s pig rolled down” [which can be also read as “López pig rolled down”]. And again, more problems with censorship arose” (Reig, 2008: Introduction, paragraph 1)

Similarly, in modern times, we have witnessed the bickering between *El Jueves* magazine and the Spanish Crown, as well as the bloody attack of 2015 on *Charlie Hebdo*, the French satirical magazine. All these conflicts have been caused by the “threat” of cartoons and illustrations.

This is because graphic humour as a social phenomenon does not only seek to make people laugh, but it often aims to sublimate the personal situations of the creator, in order to get rid of an internal burden that otherwise would not be overcome.

One of the most prominent authors in aesthetic theories, the German Juan Pablo Richter, who has also written a benchmark essay on humour, argues that after every pathetic tension, people ordinarily experience the need for the rest that humour provides (Richter, 1812: 147). In the same way, the Spanish author Gil Fernández, who studies Aristophanic comedy, concludes that:

“Comedy involves a sort of compensatory reaction to an inferiority complex, through the self-affirmation of reality. To survive in adverse conditions, slaves need time to make fun of their masters: men, gods; mediocrity, intellectual superiority; the ordinary citizen, the politicians who govern them. Laughter releases stress, which otherwise would be unbearable” (Gil Fernández, 1996: 18)

Finally, Galician Professor Siro López, in a book that precedes the essay by Celestino Fernández de la Vega, *O segredo do humour* (“The secret of humour”), argues that:

Subtlest humour comes from the oppressed minorities who use it to pause their difficult existence (...). People who suffer or have suffered often have defence mechanisms that manifest in the great talent of using humour as evasion” (López, 2005: 22)

If all of this is true, there is no doubt that the authoritarian pressure practiced through the centuries on Spanish people could have given them acute sense of humour, which has been reflected by their best artists through their iconographic opinion. This is the focus of this study, taking as a starting point one of the most conflictive regions of Spain in political and social terms: The Basque Country. The study will focus on the socially tense transition of 1977, and the graphic humour of one of the most combative newspapers that have ever existed in the region: *Egin*.

1.2. Objectives

- a) Examine the graphic humour published by the *Egin* newspaper throughout 1977, and identify the themes represented by cartoonists.
- b) Identify the preferred themes of each cartoonist.
- c) Determine whether the newspaper’s ideology is related to the themes addressed by cartoonists.

1.3. The interests and graphic humour of *Egin*

Egin (“make” or “making” in Basque language) was a leftist, nationalist, bilingual, newspaper, which was launched on September 29, 1977 by the publishing company Orain (from Hernani, Guipúzcoa). Its emergence changed, together with *Deia* (“call”), the Basque newspaper landscape, firstly, because both newspapers changed the geographical scope of dissemination; although at that

time the “Basque press”, which would cover at least the Basque provinces, did not exist as such [1]. Like *Deia*, *Egin* started with editions in the Basque provinces and Navarre, but also had offices in the French Basque Country, thus covering the space culturally known as “Euskalerría” [2].

“To those who think that Euskal Herria, our Basque Country - Álava, Lower Navarre, Guipúzcoa, Labourd, Navarre, Vizcaya and Soule - not only has a common history in so many essential elements, but also a present that needs to be clarified and a future to build together, for the good of all” (*Egin*, front page, 29/09/1977)

They were nationalist newspapers that aimed to “serve their country”. While *Deia* was close to the Basque Nationalist Party, *Egin* was an ally of the broad spectrum of the Abertzale left, which devoted large spaces of expression to certain groups hitherto silenced by the official press.

“[*Egin*] seeks to capture especially the young audience, located close to the area of influence of the Abertzale left, and has made it clear that it will devote large spaces to inform on subject matters traditionally ignored by other media: women, environment, marginalised groups, etc.” (Coca & Martínez, 1993: 69)

Egin also had a strong impact on the newspapers of that time, of which only *El Correo Español-El Pueblo Vasco* and *El Diario Vasco* adapted themselves to the modern times. These newspapers are currently the senior media of Vizcaya and Guipúzcoa, respectively. In 1980, *Egin* had a circulation of 41,400 copies per day (OJD, 1981), and its limit was always of approximately 50,000 (Mainer & Juliá, 2000: 214).

Initially the newspaper responded to the multi-faceted spectrum of the Abertzale left, but during its last year its editorial board split in two due to an attack perpetrated by ETA in Pamplona [3]. The condemnation of this event resulted in the resignation of then-director Mariano Ferrer, and the subsequent radicalisation of the newspaper, which became an advocate of the then outlawed “Herri Batasuna” (Coca & Martínez, 1993: 31). The paper was closed by the National Court of Spain on 15 July, 1998, for its relation with the terrorist group. The accusation was later dismissed but the newspaper was never reopened.

1.3.1. Socio-political context of the Basque Country and Navarre in the late 1970s

According to data provided by Coca and Martínez, the 1970s were a particularly conflicting time in the Basque Country:

“The 1970s were particularly tense. More than anywhere else, in the troubled Basque Country, where to the actions of ETA we have to add the strong underground anti-Franco movement and the frequent popular mobilisations, which were always banned and therefore suppressed by the police, and the frustration closely experienced by journalists with the media’s coverage, which was controlled and rigged by the civilian governments”. (Coca & Martínez, 1993: 18)

The repression by the regime began to weaken during the last years of the dictatorship, which contrasted with the social desire to overthrow Franco. In the Basque Country the terrorist group ETA

began to take shape and assassinated Carrero Blanco in 1973. The move towards democracy was especially rough, because the direction of the new regime was unclear. However, this direction was gradually clarified as the transition began. It is precisely in this period in which this research is framed.

On 15 December, 1976, Adolfo Suárez called for general elections for the so-called Political Reform, which paved the legal path to a new Constitution. The broad social support for this reform resulted on 16 January 1977 in the first general elections for delegates to the Spanish to courts, in which Suarez's party was successful.

However, despite the political efforts to advance towards democracy, there was certain inertia inherited from the recent dictatorship. At the social level in the Basque Country, new movements emerged to promote amnesty for political prisoners and there were constant demonstrations of workers, including the one of 3 March 1976 in Vitoria, in which the State police forces killed 5 workers and injured more than 100 in an assembly of workers on strike.

At the journalistic level, the *Prensa del Movimiento* publishing group selected and leaked pieces of journalistic information, with the help of the civilian governments, yet to be democratised. They selected the versions of the events and their dissemination through the official press, being the national news agency *Cifra* the only one that provided information to the media at the national level. Specifically, the Association of Journalists of Vitoria made public their unease towards the framing of the events of 3 March by the official press (Díaz Noci, 2012: 199). As the freedom of the press became obvious, anti-regime publications like *Deia* and *Egin* began to emerge, and to receive attacks from far-right groups, as it is the case of *Punto y Hora de Euskal Herria* magazine, edited in Pamplona and attacked in October 1977. At the national level, it is important to mention the attacks against the satirical magazine *El Papus* in September of the same year, also by extreme-right groups.

The factor of national identity should be added to this tangled socio-political context in the Basque Country. In this sense, the case of Navarre deserves special attention because, as it will be shown later, the territorial conflict was particularly difficult to solve here because its provincial government, in the hands of Traditionalists, and the Members of the Courts elected in 1977 by the Union of the Democratic Centre (3 of 5), wanted to maintain its provincial government and strongly opposed sharing their statute with the Basque provinces, in opposition to nationalist and left-wing forces, which sought the political and administrative union of the two regions. The problem, which prevails to this day, had a special force during the transition to the current state of the autonomous communities, in which Navarre is finally left out of the Statute of Guernica (1979). References to this issue are a constant in *Egin*, as we will later see.

Therefore, 1977 is a year in which the transition to the current Constitution is near and the inertias of the previous regime continue to slow down the democratisation process of the country. In the Basque Country, the territorial conflict, labour tensions, the lack of freedom of expression and a society divided in the political realm made the content of *Egin* to be special academic interest during the selected year.

1.3.2. The “Solasjaipausa” section

Without a doubt one of the most interesting aspects of *Egin* was the “Solasjaipausa” (“Funnies”) section, which dedicated an entire page to graphic humour. It is worth noting that this section made many readers to begin reading the newspaper backwards because it was located in the last page (Lorente, 2015: 532). It is also important to remember that democracy was not yet consolidated at this time, so that graphic humour magazines such as *El Papus* were closed and attacked by extreme-right groups. In this context, *Egin*’s bet on this genre was, therefore, highly risky.

An immediate antecedent of “Solasjaipausa” is found in the Basque magazine *Anaitasuna* (“brotherhood”), which included a page with cartoons and pastimes, titled *Zapaburua* (“tadpole/little guy”), which included the work of the cartoonists who later joined *Egin*. This is the case of the then well-known cartoonists Juan Carlos Eguillor (from Bilbao), whose illustrations were already published in posters and the press, and Jon Zabaleta (from Guipúzcoa), who was also a prestigious illustrator of children’s books and didactic material for the teaching of the Basque language. Meanwhile, Antonio Olariaga, who created the character “Kaléko” (“Street child”) for *Anaitasuna*, began his career as a cartoonist in the Basque press in *Egin*, given that so far he had only worked as cartoonist and illustrator in Valencia’s *Las Provincias* newspaper (GFA, 1998, paragraph 1).

It was Olariaga who created the popular character of “Zakilixut” (“Stiff- penis”), which still appears in the last page of the Basque-language *Berria* newspaper. He also designed the structure of the page itself. The top of the page contained Zabaleta’s comic strip series, titled “Barraskiloa eta Elefantea” (“Elephant and snail”), which represents, with a childish drawing style, a dreamlike world where elephants and snails interact, usually in a silent way, and imply stories with sometimes not-so innocent messages.

The following comic strip was a Spanish series with a Basque name created by Eguillor: “Beltza-Superbeltza” (“Black-Superblack”), which satirised the vast urban typology of Bilbao through mass movements and crazy characters who spoke a type of Spanish that is full of Basque idioms. After this comic, Olariaga included his series “Zakilixut”, where the main character, a solitary young man obsessed with sex, compares everything he sees with obscene figures.

Next to these artists, and next to the comic strip of Eguillor, journalist Angel Lertxundi created, with the help of Olariaga, a daily comic text in Basque, titled, “Juana Bixenta Olabe, parlamentarien neska” (“Juana Vicenta Olabe, the parliamentarians’ maid”). Juana Bixenta Olabe is a character who writes to members of Parliament who gathered in the Basque General Council, which was responsible for drafting the first statute of autonomy. With a particularly sarcastic tone, Juana Bixenta Olabe criticises the activities of her bosses and the political situation of the time. It is an editorial text in a newspaper that did not make use of this section, which constituted an action of greater openness.

The bottom of the “Solasjaipausa” page contained a pastimes section that included alphabet soups, crosswords, puzzles and brain games designed by Olariaga, both in Basque and Spanish. Therefore, the page was divided in four sections, and three of them were exclusively dedicated to comic strips.

Graphic humour was also commonly found in the inner pages of the newspaper, in the form of cartoons and illustrations by the abovementioned artists, as well as other cartoonists such as

“Endika” and his “Txingurritxoak” (“Little ants”) series. In October 1977, the aforementioned artists had the opportunity to publish educational comics for children in the pages of the newspaper, under the collective name “Ipurbeltz” [4], which also had the participation of Jesús Lucas, Tomás Hernández Mendizábal, Mikel Plazaola, Alemán Almundarain and Hilario Urkia.

Figure 1. The “Solajaipausa” page from the first issue of *Egin*.

The page is titled "solajaipausa / 39" and "egin" (October 1977, issue 29). It features several sections:

- Cartoon:** "Barrakliba eta elefantea" (The elephant and the man). A drawing shows a man with a large head and a small body, and an elephant. The text asks: "Barrakliba eta elefantea horiek dagorren ba al dakizue?" (Do you know about the man and the elephant?).
- Puzle (Puzzle):** A grid puzzle with clues in Basque. The clues include: "1. Jostea Rionero (1846), puztearen lehen eratorria..." and "2. Zirkoko enanoa..."
- Beltrán Superbeltrán:** "ALGUNOS PERSONAJES DE LA HISTORIA". It features portraits of historical figures: Fernando III, Juan de los Rios, Zorita, and others.
- zakilixut (Comic Strip):** A four-panel comic strip showing a character thinking about a riddle: "LURRA EMAN DEHIA DUTARRA EDA?"
- Crucigrama (Crossword Puzzle):** A crossword puzzle with clues in Basque. The clues include: "1. HIRIKONTALES: 1. C. abuztuaren 11. eguna..." and "2. Plazaren izena..."
- Zirkoko enanoa (Dwarf in the Circle):** A drawing of a dwarf in a circle with a riddle: "Zirkoko enanoa... Zirkoko enanoa..."

Source: Newspaper section of the Central Library of the Leioa Campus of the University of the Basque Country.

1.4. Graphic humour as academic discipline

There are numerous studies about graphic humour as the symptomatic representation of a culture or social situation, usually in unsettling periods of history that allow for the development of a discourse around the portrayed society. All of these studies usually describe the themes and symbols reflected in graphic humour and this study follows this tradition.

Graphic humour should not be confused with comic. The former can use the narrative and expressive techniques of the latter, but not all graphic humour is translated to the publication in the form of comic. In our case, as it will be shown in the methods section, graphic humour appears in the form of comic strips or lineal sequences of drawings, which use the expressive resources of the short illustrated story. Therefore, and although they sometimes blend, it is important to differentiate the literature about comics and about graphic humour in particular.

In relation to graphic humour, at the Basque level the leading work is a brief article by JM Tápiiz (2002), which collects the graphic humour appearing in the most popular periodical publications of the Basque provinces: *Euzkadi*, *El Liberal*, *La Gaceta del Norte*, *Euzkadi Roja* and *La Lucha de Clases*. The author points out that the comic strips published in these newspapers were almost small propaganda posters, which aimed to convince readers to agree with certain political ideas, which was exactly what the Spanish government, and even some Latin American countries, did throughout the 19th century (Ávila, 2002: Presentation, paragraph 4).

Another key reference is JM Unsain, who has carried out several studies on comics in the Basque Country from the second half of the 19th century to this day. For this study, we reviewed his article on graphic humour in the press of Bilbao and San Sebastian (2004), which identifies the main authors and their works in the press of both capital cities, from 1865 to 1936. This article does not focus on the analysis of content, but on the descriptive compilation of the history of graphic humour in the territory, based on previous research carried out by other authors and himself, such as his book on the history of comics in Euskadi (1990).

At the national level, important works are J Moreiro's 2007 article about the artistic work of Miguel Mihura and Antonio de Lara Tono, which was published in the brochure titled "María de la Hoz", of *La Ametralladora* ("The machine gun"), a magazine that supported nationalists during the Civil War. This work explains the graphic jokes and humorous texts contained in these works.

There are various works about the transition that are of particular interests, like those that examine Spanish society and its conflicts to achieve democracy. This is the case of Segado Boj's 2008 doctoral thesis on the representation of the Spanish transition in the graphic humour of the daily press, from 1974 to 1977. This thesis combined quantitative and qualitative methods to identify the main themes of the comic strips and cartoons published by five major national newspapers. Segado Boj published several articles that were based on his doctoral thesis but they will not be mentioned here due to length restrictions. Equally relevant is Melendez-Malave's 2005 doctoral thesis, which examines the graphic humour of *El País*, one of the newspapers with the largest circulation, during the Spanish political transition, from 1976 to 1978, based on content analysis and interviews to graphic artists.

Without leaving the Spanish context, Manuel Barrero, one of the creators of *Tebeosfera*, a website about Spanish-language comics and graphic humour (www.tebeosfera.com), published an article in 2008 (in *Mundaiz* journal) about the cartoons published by the Danish newspaper *Jyllands-Posten*, which depicted Mohammed with symbols related to terrorism and sparked unrest in the radical Islamist sector. Barrero argues that it is necessary to consider all comic images in their iconographical context to understand their meaning.

In relation to the aforementioned event, there is an interesting collection of essays presented in 2006 by the International Society for Humour Studies in Copenhagen, and directed by P. Lewis. These essays analysed whether the caricatures of Prophet Mohammed were actually comical and whether they marked a new research line on graphic humour. Seven authors presented their research and condensed their critical comments at the “Transnational Ridicule and Response” colloquium. These essays were published in the journal “Humour: International Journal of Humour Research”, which since its launch in 1988 has published more than 400 articles on humour. From these articles about graphic humour, we would like to highlight the ones written by Diners (1995), Forceville (2005) and El-Arousy (2007).

Making a leap to North America, there is a very relevant article by Francisco Sáez de Adana (2014) on the comic strips of the North American press of late 19th century and early 20th century, as a reflection of society. During this period, and starting with the famous “Yellow Kid”, Sáez used content analysis to identify the stereotypes, social classes and social types reflected in the funnies, comic strips and cartoons published in the American press.

To close this section, it is worth mentioning JI Lorente, a Professor from the University of the Basque Country, who delivered a paper on the graphic humour of *Egin* (2013) at a conference on humour and irony as weapons at the *Université de Pau et des Pays de l’Adour* (France). Lorente’s paper examines the graphic humour of Olariaga and Eguillor during the first period of *Egin* and the picture of the Basque society depicted by both authors.

2. Materials and methodological strategies

2.1. Preliminary definitions

The term graphic humour has been already defined with the contributions of Armañanzas and Díaz Noci, but some important terms still need to be defined to avoid confusion.

Comic strip, as mentioned, is a lineal sequence of drawings; it is the most common form of graphic humour in publications, but not the only one. In our case, all of the units of graphic humour detected in *Egin* have this form. A cartoon panel is each one of the parts that make up the comic strips, i.e. the panel that contains a period of time in the story (Entrialgo, 2011: 277). Sometimes, a comic strip can be composed of a single panel/drawing, as it is often common in the case of Zabaleta. Thus, there are many different ways of structuring graphic humour narratives, as in the case of Eguillor, who instead of using a horizontal strip of panels, used a squared structure divided in four panels. In any case, it is necessary to distinguish all the terms used here since they tend to be used together.

2.2. Methods

2.2.1. Sample

The analysis included all “Solasjaipausa” pages published from 29 September to 24 December, 1977. The comic strips published during the rest of the year were discarded because on the Christmas Eve the characters of the comic strips only wish merry Christmas to readers, which breaks with the narrative sequence used throughout the year.

The only comic strip that does not change the days before Christmas is the one drawn by Eguillor. To understand Eguillor’s comic strips it is advisable to read previous issues, but this is not required in the comic strips of Zabaleta and Olariaga. However, we consider it was a good criterion to limit the sample to 24 December to be able to collect a sample of comic strips with sequential and narrative coherence.

From the humour pages we examined the comic strips created by the three aforementioned authors, and the text of Juana Bixenta Olabe, which despite of not being a form of graphic humour does provide an opinion that complements, as we shall see, the comic strips. From now on, we will refer to the totality of units analysed as “comic strips” or other short-hand synonyms, without forgetting that this sample also includes the texts of Juana Bixenta Olabe.

A total of 73 editions of the “Solasjaipausa” page and 292 comic strips were examined.

2.2.2. Qualitative methods

This method consists of the thematic classification of each piece of graphic humour, which sometimes are very abstract (mostly the ones by Zabaleta) and require particular attention: is not enough to read it; it is necessary to examine the interaction between characters, their environment, what they say, what they do not say, and of course, the topicality of the moment.

The newspaper itself proposes some specific glasses, which are the general perspective of the nationalist left. While not all cartoonists necessarily adopt this perspective, it greatly facilitates the point of departure of the themes that are addressed. Similarly, the aforementioned front-page message gives us clues about the reader of these comic strips, who as mentioned even started to read the paper backwards. Historiography is also used to locate the social situations portrayed in the images and symbols of the comic strips.

The objective is not to make a list of all the narrative elements of each strip, but to identify, based on the reality depicted by the newspaper, the diversity of themes that structure the strips and in many cases are recurring themes for some authors.

It is important to keep in mind that each comic strip can contain more than one topic, given they deal with diverse aspects of a plural society and often a theme can lead to another. The need for synthesis has led us to identify a single subject for each piece: the most outstanding. The list of detected themes is summarised in the following table to facilitate readability and avoid ambiguity.

2.2.3. Quantitative methods

The quantitative objective is to know what are the most recurring topics for each cartoonist. The quantitative section presents the number of comic strips in which a theme appears as well as the number of times in which a theme is used by each cartoonist. The following table summarises the findings:

Table 1. Analysis table

“Solasjaipausa” page and date				
Series >	«Barraskiloa eta Elefantea»	«Beltza-Superbeltza»	«Juana Bixenta Olabe»	«Zakilixut»
Themes	(BeE)	(BSB)	(JBO)	(Z)
Theme 1	1	0	0	0
Theme 2	0	1	1	0
Theme 3	0	0	0	1
...

Source: Author’s own creation

In the table, 0 or 1 is added to each box depending on whether a subject/theme is explored or not in the comic strip in question. Once the entire table is complete, the values for each theme are summed up, and the frequencies across comic strips and authors are calculated.

3. Results

We identified a total of 49 issues, some very similar to each other. Since the resulting list was too long, it was synthesised in 14 blocks, which are a little less specific than particular issues, but highlight the wider themes explored by authors:

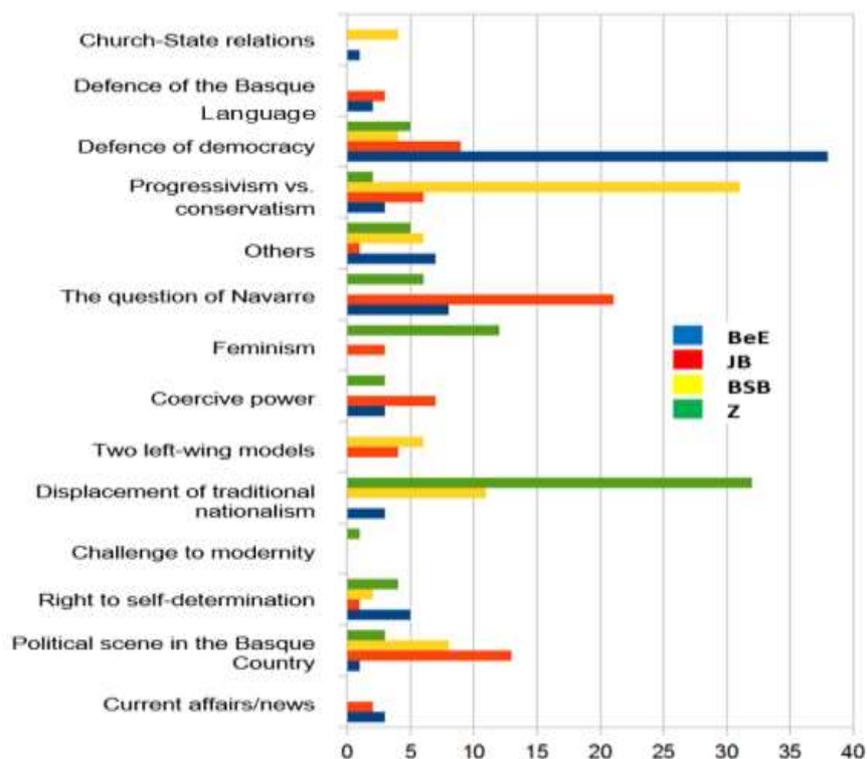
- a) Block 1 (B.01) - Defence of democracy: includes all those comic strips which speak of the need for a democratic solution and the participation of peoples in it:
 - 56 units (U).
- b) B.02 - Displacement of traditional nationalism: While nationalism in its classical and provincial form had been Catholic and supported the full reintegration of the provincial regime (“Lagi zañak”), the new Abertzale trends were leftist, Marxist and anti-clericalist, leaving aside the theses of primitive nationalism.
 - 47 U
- c) B.03 - Liberalism vs. conservatism: antithesis between new social trends towards democracy and the conservative positions, especially in the religious field.
 - 42 U
- d) B.04 - The question of Navarre: discussion of the state of the autonomies at the political level, which in the Basque case is intertwined with the working-class struggle and the right to self-

determination. This axis integrates positions that consider that the Basque Country includes Navarre, and those who believe such province must constitute an independent entity within the Spanish nation, through its *foral* tradition (regional-law) [5]. This last position is strongly identified in *Egin* as the position of the extreme right and conservatism.

- 35 U
- e) B.05 - Political environment of the Basque Country: the political instability of the Basque Country is reflected in the comic strips as the inability to reach agreements among equals
- 25 U
- f) B.06 - Other: Topics that cannot be classified in the previous categories, including, the experimentation of some cartoonists with forms, as it is common in the case of Zabaleta.
- 19 U
- g) B.07 - Feminism: issues related to the public presence of women and their social liberation.
- 14 U
- h) B.08 - Coercive power: the representation of the authoritarian central power, still latent and unsurpassed.
- 13 U
- i) B.09 - Right to self-determination: Defence of the right of the Basque Country to become independent.
- 12 U
- j) B.10 - Two left-wing models: contradiction between the national left and nationalist, which agree in everything but in the national reference.
- 10 U
- k) B.11 – Defence of the Basque language: support for the first 'ikastolas' (Basque schools) and the free and official teaching of the Basque language.
- 5 U
- l) B.12 – Current affairs: issues related to strictly current and momentary events.
- 5 U
- m) B.13 - Relations between the Church and the State: discussion about the place of religion in the fledgling State, which was a topic of discussion in the Spanish Parliament and is harshly criticised by the secular left
- 5 U
- n) B.14 - Challenge to modernity: refers to the perception of modernity as the road to capitalism and the destruction of Basque traditions, which is explored despite of not being the ideological core of the Abertzale left.
- 1 U

With regards to the comic strips drawn by the comic artists, the following table presents the frequency of the most commonly used themes:

Figure 1. Total number of comic strip series distributed by theme.



Source: Author's own creation

As we can see, Zabaleta (BeE), is the artist who dealt the most with issues related to the defence of democracy, which are also the issues most frequently dealt with in general terms.

The displacement of traditional nationalism was addressed the most by Olariaga's Zakilixut (Z), while the progressivism-conservatism binary opposition was more recurring in Eguillor's "black city" (BSB).

The question of Navarre and the heated political scene in the Basque Country were often explored by Juana Bixenta Olabe (JBO), who was very hard towards the Union of the Democratic Centre of Navarre, contrary to the integration of the province in the Basque project.

4. Discussion and conclusions

It is interesting to find out that the issues covered the most by *Egin* since its inception are not the issues cartoonists explored the most, as they gave priority to the issue of democracy, which not only concerns the Basque people, but Spain as a whole.

The defence of Basque as a national language was perhaps “reduced” to the language with which at least Olariaga and Zabaleta expressed their ideas, while the defence of the language as such was only present in 5 comic strips and only represented 1'70% of the topics explored.

Also interesting is the model of nationalism that cartoonists seem to want to promote: almost 20% of the issues are related to the struggle between classic nationalist theses and the new trends of the Abertzale left, more associated to the working-class struggle and Marxism. The classic doctrine of regional law (*fueros*), associated to the conservative right, was crushed by nearly 15% of the units studied. The territorial question seems to focus on Navarre, which seems to remarkably concern the very observant Juana Bixenta Olabe. On the other hand, the most current events are explored in just 2% of the units of analysis.

It can be concluded that the theme of the studied comic strips is in full harmony with the philosophy of the first Board of Directors of the *Egin* newspaper, which aims to reach a broad sector of the Basque left, whether nationalist or not. However, the paper highlights the territorial issue, in which undoubtedly “the hard-working Basque people” also exist in the Navarre community, which the right-wing groups want to keep “*sui generis*”. The new “nationalists” are moved away from the trends of that time, and integrated into a new national project of which *Egin* is part.

5. Notes

[1] At that time, under the tutelage of *Prensa del Movimiento* (“Movement Press”), there existed the following newspapers: *El Correo Español – El Pueblo Vasco*, *La Gaceta del Norte*, *La Voz de España*, *El Diario Vasco*, *Unidad*, *Hierro* and *Norte Exprés*. The first two had their headquarters in Bilbao, but the second also had local editions in Alava, Eibar-Mondragon, La Rioja and Miranda de Ebro. For its part, *La Gaceta* had offices in Vizcaya, Álava, Navarre, La Rioja and Cantabria. None of these papers focused on the Basque region. The remaining newspapers can be considered to be provincial: *La Voz*, *Diario Vasco* and *Unidad* circulated in Guipúzcoa, and *Norte Exprés* in Álava, with headquarters in Vitoria. *Hierro* was a local newspaper from Bilbao.

Readers complemented their information diet with the so-called *hojas de los lunes* (“Monday sheets”), which were local publications distributed on the first day of the week, which was the day of rest of the official press. These papers were used by journalists to bypass the Movement Press and publishing news more freely. These types of publications existed in Bilbao and San Sebastian, with an average circulation of 93,000 and 72,000 copies, respectively (Coca & Fernández, 1993: 15).

[2] Historically, the term “Euskalerría” has been used to refer to Basque-speaking territories, such as the current autonomous communities of the Basque Country and Navarre, in Spain, and the counties of *Labourd* (“Lapurdi”, in Basque), *Basse-Navarre* (“Nafarroa Beherea”) and *Soule* (“Zuberoa”) in the French Department Pyrénées-Atlantiques. Currently, the term “Euskal Herria” (“Basque people” or “Country of the Basque language”) is commonly used.

[3] During this time the statute of autonomy was discussed: while provincial deputies of the Basque Nationalist Party (PNV), the Abertzale left spectrum and the left in general accepted a general statutory regime for the Basque Country and Navarre, this was rejected by the spectrum of the right, mostly represented by the Union of the Democratic Centre and Popular Alliance, which advocated

for separate statute for Navarre in relation to its current regional-law regime. ETA did not hesitate to perpetrate various attacks as a response to this. One of these attacks took the life of Lieutenant-Colonel Ímaz, linked to Navarre's Armed Police. The attack took place on 28 December 1977, and the next day the controversial text which got Ferrer fired was published (*Egin*, 29/12/1977, p. 5).

[4] The adjective “ipurbeltz” can be translated as “black ass”, and evokes an old Basque proverb (“atxotitza”) that says “xoxuak beleari ipurbeltz” (the blackbird calling the crow “black ass”), which is very close to the English expression “the pot calling the kettle black”. Certainly, this is a name that evokes the critical nature of these cartoonists, who made more use of mockery and satire than of clean humour that had been published in the Spanish press during the Franco regime. A good example of this is “Don Celes” from *El Correo*, and the first stage of *La Codorniz* under the direction of Mihura.

[5] Literature on regional law is extensive, and delicate in the political arena. While classic nationalism, embodied by the Basque Nationalist Party, considered historical and provincial rights a symbol of an old independence destroyed by liberalism, traditionalism and Carlism have taken them as rights of the Spanish provinces and villas, granted and ratified by the King, which collect the uses and customs of the territories and integrate them into the nation. Until this day, both theses have been irreconcilable in the Basque Country, with one being promoted by Basque Nationalist Party, and the other by the various branches of the Spanish right, with intermediate shades. Both are, with differences, more or less autonomist.

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