

The unbearable weight of perverse cultural logic: Psychological and educational analysis of *Retribution* by Dani de la Torre and *To Steal from a Thief* by Daniel Calparsoro¹

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ABSTRACT

Corruption is a social phenomenon that has recently become one of the main worries of the Spanish population and a subject of interesting artistic works. The perverse norms of a society make up a certain cultural logic that can be seen in corrupt behaviors and in the breakdown of social bonds. This work studies in a comparative way how this process is reflected in *Retribution* by Dani de la Torre and *To Steal from a Thief* by Daniel Calparsoro. Corruption is present in every society. Although this chapter focuses on the specific situation of Spain, the conflict can be extended to other nations and these films have connections with previous and later productions from other Spanish-speaking countries and America. The 2008 economic crisis has made more evident the differences between the groups that have economic and political power and the rest of the population. The protagonists of these films are exposed to a society that boosts inequality, vulnerability and corruption and they go from taking part in it to denouncing the situation and creating some bonds that may be the beginning of other cultural logic. This article proposes a psychological and educational approach to the process of corruption shown in the mentioned movies.

Some considerations about corruption

The definition of corruption

Democratic systems subject citizens to their laws, which, considering all their regulatory power, can protect or harm them (Allbritton 2014, 101). Society can be organized for the common good or for some citizens to exercise power over others. Corruption is one of the phenomena that arises from social organization and poses a threat to citizen coexistence. Human beings need to live in society to cover both material and psychological needs, but this group organization can cause differences that lead to a particular use of the means that should be allocated to satisfy the population's needs (Pardo 2016, 1). Since the word corruption derives from the Latin *corrumpere*: 'break together' (Grande 2014, 62),

means can be used to build something for the community or, as in the case of corruption, to break it, that is, to disintegrate the common good.

'Corruption can be understood as the deviation of some institutional duty, involving the existence of immorality, illegality or fraud of law with respect to an existing regulatory framework and providing those who practice it with a greater benefit than what would be obtained as a fair return of the legitimate exercise of said duty' (Sasia 2014, 20). Cases of corruption are crimes because they are voluntary actions that harm people or society. Furthermore, corruption promotes violent crime in the strict sense, as Kugler et al. have studied (2005).

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Fernández Dols and Oceja point out that it is due to perverse rules, which are those that are not usually followed and that, however, in certain cases can be punished (1994, 4). In this work, we are interested in observing how the international sociopolitical environment and certain particularities of Spanish society lead to the prevalence of corruption and its portrayal in the cinema. The behaviour lacking social conscience of Carlos (Luis Tosar) in *Retribution (El desconocido)* and the unscrupulous decisions of the politicians that appear in *To Steal from a Thief (Cien años de perdón)* cause a contagion of corruption in other characters (Sasia 2014, 20).

In Spain, corruption cases constantly come to light and, in recent years, this problem has become one of the population's greatest concerns (Laguna 2013, 79 and 82). According to the barometer of the Centro de Investigaciones Sociológicas (CIS), corruption and fraud is the second problem that most concerns Spaniards. 49.1% of respondents consider it a problem according to data from June 2017. In this work we approach corruption as a 'cultural category' (Huber 2011, 24), which leads the protagonists of the films under our study to denounce the unacceptable abuses caused by the political and economic elite.

Next, we will contextualise the economic and political situation of Spanish democracy. Elvira Calatayud (2013, 62) establishes four stages and the last one arises with the 2008 economic crisis. As Mari Paz Balibrea has studied, the Spanish democratic system as a whole is built within a presentist framework, which responds to a loss of historical memory and the economic predominance of an emerging elite rather than the will or needs of the group of citizens (Sevilla-Vallejo 2017, 72-73). Joan E. Garcés states that: 'The system established in Spain since 1977 has adopted policies typical of financial capitalism' (2015, 10), by which the resources of the State and the means to defend labour and citizen rights have been reduced in favour of the freedom of movement of capital and the concentration of the means of production, finance and information in

private companies. Likewise, a neoliberal mentality has been imposed, rewarding the use of rational behaviour for self-interest over establishing a coherent value system (Grande 2014, 62). Both the described sociopolitical organisation and the accompanying mentality promote the perverse cultural logic typical of corruption that is intolerable. For this reason, bank executives and one of their victims portrayed in *Retribution* and politicians and robbers in *To Steal from a Thief* do not hesitate to use the means at their disposal to enrich themselves.

As Antonio Laguna analyses, the hypertrophy of the market generates a paradox because it encourages the theoretical equality of economic agents at the same time as it deregulates the exchange process, so 'the payment of what is benevolently called commissions, and are actually bribes, constitutes an intervention in the market that alters its conditions' (Piqueras et al. 2011, 37). The rationally selfish and individualistic behaviour of people who are capable of manipulating 'incentive structures' for their own benefit (Bukovansky 2006, 183) becomes a norm of social behaviour. Both in *Retribution* and in *To Steal from a Thief* the characters manipulate these structures quite naturally.

On the one hand, the ability Carlos has to sell fraudulent products rewards him with labour reputation and a life of material comfort; on the other hand, not only do the robbers organise the bank robbery, but the bank manager (Patricia Vico), after being fired, proposes to Gallego (Luis Tosar), one of the leaders of the robbers, to tell him the number of a box with political secrets that could be sold for a lot of money if they make a deal. He asks her what she wants, and she replies that they both have the same motivation: 'the same as you. To get out of here with something worthwhile.' (00:18:00)

According to Pedro M. Sasia, corruption is spurred by the great benefit that it can rationally

generate, compared to the lower cost of possible punishment (2014, 22). So a corrupt social organisation allows ‘powerful groups not subject to democratic control, with institutions that have abandoned their responsibility to promote new values for citizens, or with jurisdictional processes suspected of protecting those who have the most’ (Sasia 2014, 24). This abuse of power leads to a social rupture that, as José Antonio Marina exposes, causes ‘social ties, trust and reciprocity’ to break (2013). In other words, the lack of regularisation facilitates social differences and the advantageous (or fraudulent) relationship between institutions and causes a lack of collaboration between people (Aguilera 2014, 3).

The importance of *Retribution* and *To Steal from a Thief* in the cinema about corruption

Welsh et al. (2011) analysed different American productions related to corruption. They sustain that the genre tends to emphasize the violent cause and effects of corruption. There is tendency close to the cliché that makes the victim to be hurt or dead and then the avenger looks for “vengeance and punishment for wrongdoings” (460). This is a very simplistic representation of the pain and conflict derived from corruption. However, *Retribution* and *To Steal from a Thief* get away from this category because they part from more common forms of corruption, they deep into the psychology of the characters and, with out renouncing to action, they show a more complex moral dilemma. Carlos and the robbers live in a society that invites them to look only after their interest. At first, the characters in the Dani de la Torre and Daniel Calparsoro films do not rebel against the injustice in which they live but rather join their corrupt operation. Carlos uses the system to maintain his standard of living at the expense of his clients, while the robbers manage to enter the bank thanks to a politician who wants them to steal a box for his party.

The films chosen for this analysis are interesting because they don’t idealize their characters. They have their own conflicts and moral doubts, but they become heroes step by step due to the perverse logic that awakens their conscience

(Sevilla-Vallejo 2020). These two productions with Spanish, Argentinian, and French participation are part of a minority trend that presents corruption as a truly social problem. This work focuses on these films, but refers to a phenomenon present at an international level in cinema, as observed in the article by Welsh et al. (2011). In this sense, we may mention the polemic between one film directed by the Venezuelan Alejandro Saderman (1998) and the other directed by the Argentine Daniel Calparsoro (2016). This polemic between Venezuelan and Argentinian social networks and the subsequent demonstration that they are two different films in their scripts shows that corruption in the cinema interests not only Spain and Argentina, but other Spanish-speaking countries (El País 2016). Later, we will comment a scene where this film connects economic crisis and corruption in Spain and Argentina. Moreover, *Retribution* international success led to the American production of the eponymous film directed by Nimród Antal and starring Liam Neeson. This shows that the story he tells is of transnational interest. Scholars have sustained that cinema can be a psychological and teaching tool (Champoux 1999), especially when representative films are chosen. *Retribution* and *To Steal from a Thief* are two good examples to analyse social ambiguity and paradoxes of Spanish society (Mallinger & Rossy 2003).

The economic crisis and its repercussions in Spain

The 2008 economic crisis changed not only the world economic situation, but also the social and psychological situation of citizens. As for Spain, the economic blow was big and its effects on incomes and purchasing power caused economic difficulties for Spanish households to make ends meet (Calzón 2015, 40-41). Likewise, Spain is one of the countries where the crisis has given rise to the most socioeconomic inequalities (Calzón 2015, 41). The economic difficulties and the social differences of the economic crisis have varied the way of feeling and thinking about corruption in Spain (Manzano-Arrondo 2010) because now the reaction it generates in the population is full of outrage (Laguna 2013, 81).

Spanish corruption during and after the economic crisis has awakened a feeling of injustice before a system that causes vulnerability of the individual (Allbritton 2014, 102-103). Corruption in Spain is a phenomenon with a long history (Laguna 2013, 87); however, the economic crisis makes the perverse cultural logic manifest.

As Dean Allbritton points out, living in a certain society puts citizens in the firing line of the problems generated by the political system in which they live. This is especially evident in the case of Spain, where austerity measures have produced a socioeconomic precariousness that intensifies the danger of citizens not being able to cover their needs (101). Thus the stranger (Javier Gutiérrez) accuses Carlos because the products that he offered as safe led his wife to ruin and despair and *To Steal from a Thief* shows various cases of people who are in danger of losing their homes. Likewise, concern over corruption and fraud has increased throughout the crisis until it established itself as one of the main concerns of Spaniards. According to data from the CIS, in January 2010 2.9% of the respondents considered it one of the main problems in the country, it increased steadily until in February 2013 it shot up to 40%, reaching its maximum in November 2014 at 63.8% and it has since then oscillated between 36.1 and 60%.

We can see that the economic crisis has generated a social climate in which corruption cases are perceived by the population with real outrage. And that climate of outrage is reflected in the stranger, a man who feels humiliated by the magnitude of the abuse he has suffered, who gets up every morning only to take revenge (01:26:00), and in the robbers, who act out of conviction that the true robberies or abuses are committed at the bank (00:05:00). The circumstances very present in social discourse end up being taken as a theme, that is, they become the centre of artistic and academic production (Naupert 1998, 174-175). Corruption is an issue present in different times and countries that has been taken as a theme and has even given rise to artistic genres such as film noir and cinema of social denunciation (García 2014, 66). Awareness of this 2008 crisis has given rise

to what has been called crisis cinema, which refers to films that denounce the economic precariousness of Spanish citizens and the corruption of the ties that unite society (Badillo 2013; Kourelou, Liz and Vidal 2017, 18 ss.; Allbritton 2014, 102).

The representation of corruption in *Retribution* by Dani de la Torre and in *To Steal from a Thief* by Daniel Calparsoro

Introduction to the films and their relation to corruption

Vaca Films produced these two films that reflect the effects of corruption and the crisis. Both films had notable critical success. *Retribution* (2015) by Dani de la Torre was a candidate for eight Goya Awards, of which it obtained the best montage and best sound. It was also presented for seven awards from the Círculo de Escritores Cinematográficos, where it was awarded with best editing and best revelation direction. *Steal from a Thief* (2016) was nominated for the Goya Awards for Best New Actor and Best Original Screenplay. Also, both aroused the interest of the public. *Retribution* was the seventh Spanish film in the ranking of the box office in 2015. According to the Taquilla de cine website (Fernández 2016), it grossed 2,966,370 euros and was watched by 476,068 viewers. *Steal from a Thief* was the third in 2016 (Fernández 2017), with a collection of 6,676,116 euros and 1,073,974 viewers.

Corruption can occur to control the media and to receive a profit from whoever controls the media (The Hungarian Gallup Institute 1999, 2-3). *Retribution* refers to the second case. Carlos, a branch manager, receives a call from a stranger, who informs him that he has a bomb under his seat and that he has a few hours to collect a large amount of money; if he fails, his car will be blown up. The stranger accuses him of having deceitfully sold a financial product, which led his wife to suicide (01:10:00), in order to be awarded by his superiors. On the other hand, in

To Steal from a Thief corruption is mainly the first case because it is not the robbers who are the real corrupt in the film, but the politicians, who commission the robbery and who also control the media to hide it when their own image is in danger, and the heads of the bank, who are suggested to be using the money for their own purposes and neglect their employees and clients. The robbers intend to rob a bank and escape through a hole, but on the designated day it rains so much that they cannot go out and it is discovered that one of them is in charge of getting a hard drive that contains recordings of corruption that worry the political leaders of the different parties.

The perverse rules create a system in which there is an alleged legality that is repeatedly violated by certain agents. This system is called the corruption complex and in the case of Spain (Bilbao 2014, 26-27) has the following characteristics that we can see reflected in the films under study: irregular economic negotiations take place, such as the ease with which Carlos's bank offers savings products without real financial support in *Retribution* and the illegal businesses that politicians carry out in *To Steal from a Thief*; it highlights the 'ambition of the ruling elite and its connections with the business world', both in the way in which the bank's managers enrich themselves at the cost of deceiving customers and in the way that politicians do the same with the population, respectively; and, finally, there is no adequate 'regulation of the financing of municipalities and parties', as shown by the deals that politicians make with builders in Calparsoro's film.

Carlos' prison of psychological identity in *Retribution*

Retribution begins with an aerial shot of the luxurious villa with a pool in which Carlos lives with his family. While his children eat breakfast, he is immersed in the study of prices and receives the call from Alejandro, his superior, who asks him to make his clients exchange fraudulent investment funds for others that do not offer guarantees before the financial scandal breaks

out. And he adds the following: 'If they complain, you tell them that we do it for them [...] we do it because of the personal relationship we have with the client' (00:02:00). Carlos is willing to represent an apparent relationship of trust with clients to sell them products whose risk he does not inform and, in return, his bosses treat him with a similar apparent closeness. Since he does not perceive what is going on at home or how his wife and children feel, he begins the day arguing with his wife, who tells him that it is impossible to speak to him (00:04:00), but he does not give much importance to this anger because his attention is focused on recovering the toxic derivatives with which the bank has traded. As his daughter (Paula del Río) says, 'the bank always comes first' (00:09:00). So the main character neglects ties to his family for corrupt acts that offer him reputation and money that he could not get if he worked according to law.

Both this film and *To Steal from a Thief* show how corruption is built around the abuse of trust. These two films are interesting because they don't separate violent street crime from property crimes (Welsh et al. 2011, 461). Trust leads to empathy, understanding between people, and also respect for the law (Uslaner 2004, 10). The moment some people take advantage of the trust that others have in them, corruption begins to settle in society. Corruption creates a climate in which selfishness, the absence of communication, and the violation of laws become common. *Retribution* and *To Steal from a Thief* show how property abuses provoke street violence. For this reason, in *Retribution*, the stranger has dedicated the last two years to his revenge: he has spied on Carlos's life in detail, he has installed a bomb in the car used by Carlos and his children and threatens to make it explode unless he transfers the money he is asking for. Then, he is forced to call the "trustworthy" clients to offer them a new false fund to obtain the money that the stranger demands. To do this, he instructs his secretary on the amount of money they should get: "We have to place 420000 this morning." The secretary asks the following: 'Do we proceed to the charge before the clients sign the papers' (00:26:00) and Carlos answers that it

is not the first time that they do so. In addition, the stranger also demands all the money that his family has, so Carlos tries to contact his wife, but she does not pick up the phone. The communication between them is completely broken and only when their daughter intercedes do they manage to speak (00:27:00).

The police watch Carlos, unsure whether he is the one who has set the bomb or if someone is actually threatening him, and at that moment a situation takes place that shows Carlos that he is living the same vulnerability as the stranger, as studied by Dean Allbritton. He convinces his boss that he has reached an agreement to recover the toxic derivatives, but he has had to promise a stock fund. In this scene a double deception takes place, he pretends to have persuaded customers to change the product, as he has done other times, and in fact he tricks Alejandro into giving him the necessary permission to get the money the stranger asks for. As Alejandro believes Carlos's lie, he congratulates him and invites him to a trip on his private boat (00:25:00) as if they were friends. In spite of everything, at the moment that the news is given that Carlos drives a car with a bomb, Alejandro informs him that, although he has been working for the bank for fifteen years and that the board really trusted him (00:55:00), they will not help him in the situation he is in. Carlos then realises that he has been deceived as he deceived the stranger's wife. Although at first he denies that he knew that the fund he sold to the stranger's wife was toxic (01:11:00), he eventually admits that he took advantage of her (81'). And he also has to admit that his bosses have taken advantage of him.

The perverse rules by which the system tolerates deception are applied as long as this does not affect the institutions that comprise it. That is to say, the bank incites Carlos to an illegal activity, but punishes him for it as soon as it can harm the organisation and the protagonist realises the manipulation: he has used his clients as a means and his bosses have used him as a means within the neoliberal cultural logic. He has been carried away by this mentality to achieve an economic

position, leaving the effects of his actions on his clients in the background. As Judith Butler studies, society has power mechanisms to make the individual behave in a certain way through the establishment of an ideal. This operation does not require controlling the individual's movements directly, but rather a shared identity is built that leads the subjects to behave in the expected way. In his case, Carlos has internalised as part of his identity that he must use his power of conviction to achieve social status without taking into account his clients' well-being. He does not hesitate to carry out the commercial operations requested by his superiors, even if they are clearly dangerous.

In Judith Butler's terms, he is in a prison of psychological identity that controls him internally (Butler 2001, 96 ss.). Carlos realises the prison he has lived in when the bank leaves him alone. He becomes aware of the evil that he and the bank have committed and cleans his hands from the blood that symbolises the evil that corruption spreads (00:56:00). His ambition has made him jeopardise everything in order to maintain his identity of successful man. Until now he has not taken care of his family, so his wife has suffered a lot and her daughter feels abandoned and is aware that she is deceiving clients to get commissions (00:23:00). As Dani De la Torre says, 'we are all slaves to our decisions and we are all living the consequences of the acts we have done' (00:04:00).

For his part, the stranger was manipulated by the bank to sign something that ended up causing his ruin and his wife's suicide, and this injustice received no punishment and no moral reparation. So much so that Carlos does not remember the stranger among the many deceits he has committed (01:06:00 ss.). The title of the film indicates the totally dehumanised treatment that the banking system gives to its clients. Carlos appears to have a personal concern and warmth that generates a sense of trust and so, even when he sells the false funds to pay the stranger, he addresses them as very trustworthy customers. His conduct responds to rational ends and clients

are means that, once they stop fulfilling their end, are forgotten. The stranger knows that is the case and his feeling of injustice stems from the fact that the bank operates within a deregulated framework that allows it to break the law. The impotence of having everything taken away (01:25:00) leads to ‘hopelessness’ (Moya et al. 2015, 13) and radical outrage. Although he asks Carlos for money, what he really wants is for him to suffer the same as he has gone through. He wants him to experience the same painful vulnerability and that’s why nothing can stop him from his desire for revenge. He identifies with the group of victims of corruption, who do not receive any compensation for the abuses they receive. ‘[...] I do it for my wife, I do it for Pedro (his son), for you, for many people. Because it is not fair what they have done to us’ (01:25:00).

Retribution is about ‘the decisions we make, about how little we think about others, about putting ourselves in the shoes of others [...] we are all victims and executioners’ (De la Torre 4’) because both Carlos and the stranger live in a context that promotes a situation of vulnerability that causes them a deep feeling of injustice. The stranger loses family, money and job due to a deceptive financial product and Carlos loses the support of his company when he cannot sell the harmful products as he is commissioned to do. At the end of the film, Carlos tells the stranger that he is sorry for what they have done to him and he replies that he is only sorry when he is in the same vulnerable situation: ‘How does it feel? Now you know how I feel, right?’ (01:25:00). Carlos has lost practically all the trust from his wife and children, his money, his job, and the police treat him as if he was dangerous, but the blackmail of the stranger allows him to start fighting for his family. When the police surround him with weapons raised, his daughter protects him and thus the bond of mutual protection (01:03:00 and 01:20:00) is reborn, which allows Carlos to refuse to continue helping the bank’s purposes and to start truly caring for other people.

The box of the secrets in *To Steal from a Thief*

To Steal from a Thief begins with dialogues in which the bank branch employees inform three different clients that the bank cannot grant them a loan, that they are in the red and that they are about to seize the apartment, respectively. Immediately afterwards, the branch manager learns that, although her superior had told her a few days before that they were “a big family”, they are firing her. From the beginning there is a general lack of trust. The bank operates as a cold and rational machinery that cannot help its clients and the bank’s management violates the apparent trust. The board has capitalised on its position and ruined the lives of employees and clients. The director recaps what affects her from the situation in the following words: “Those motherfuckers who have ruined the bank are throwing me out” (00:17:00). And when the robbers enter, they get involved in a plot of political corruption of great dimensions.

To Steal from a Thief shows a society in which, once the trust is broken, each person looks after their own interests. Corruption works as a model for all characters because, seeing how politicians and bank managers act fraudulently and without social conscience, they reproduce and extend this form of behaviour (Tavits 2005, 7). Because the bank doesn’t care about her, the branch manager violates the confidentiality of one of her clients to get some of the loot from the robbery. She tells Gallego that a box belongs to the politician Gonzalo Soriano and contains a memory with the recordings of corrupt acts that Soriano commissioned from a detective. In the same way, the robbers break the trust between them, because Gallego does not tell the others what he has discovered and Uruguayo (Rodrigo de la Serna), the other leader of the robbers, knew it too and did not tell his teammates (00:40:00). This last character shows that institutions do not care about the people they are in charge of. For this reason, he refers to the bank’s operations as “robberies” as we mentioned before and tells an employee not to expect an award from the bosses for trying to prevent theft (00:07:00).

This film highlights the perverse norms that underlie social functioning. The shown authorities violate systematically the laws and only if their practices are made public can they be punished for them. The perverse character resides in the fact that it is not the facts but their transmission that sets the penalty in motion. The government ministers and the CNI try to hide at all costs the materials they suppose the memory contains. In *To Steal from a Thief*, a cultural logic appears whereby people come together to reach a specific goal, but not out of true mutual concern and never in a lasting way. The characters unite in a timely manner and without making commitments to anyone so, as Richard Sennett would say, corruption is born from the lack of solid ties (1998, 23). Corruption shows a contradiction that is inherent to any society. The basis of a society is that human beings need others to develop in human and material matters. Society produces the common good, which awakens individual greed though: 'it resembles the relationship between trust and success: the stronger the bonds of trust between us, the greater our collective and individual success. But success breeds greed, and greed is a solvent of trust' (Varoufakis 2011, 223).

The politicians who appear in the film do not look out for the common good, but use the state media as if they were their own (00:22:00) and, since they fear that public opinion knows it (00:36:00), they are willing to let the robbers go in exchange for Gonzalo Soriano's memory. In the past he took part in the corruption that has spread to all political parties and various business groups and, to fend off attacks, he had the irregular deals recorded. However, an accident makes the film's corruption plot develop even more interest. Loco (Joaquín Furriel), the gang's less experienced robber, wants to find out what the memory contains, but when he opens it, he activates a protection system that erases the disk. The robbers hide this fact in order to exchange the alleged memory for their way out of the bank without being arrested. So politicians are very concerned about files whose exact nature is unknown. They do not know who appears on the recordings or what kind of acts are recorded, but

their bad conscience makes them fear images that would destroy their careers.

To Steal from a Thief is a sharp criticism of the widespread practice of corruption in Spain. The politicians featured in the film live in a constant struggle to hide corrupt acts that the media is willing to show. Likewise, reference is made to the real situation of corruption in Spain, as is the case of Bankia's preferred stocks. In a conversation between Gallego and Uruguayo, the latter tells the former that, after the last robbery, he wanted to retire to live as a normal person. So he entered a bank and the employee told him that he had a very special product for him, because an important person like him deserved preferential treatment (00:59:00). This situation is especially interesting when Uruguayo laughs at himself because he experienced a similar situation previously during the Argentinian 'Corralito' crisis, but he was cheated again by the fraud of Bankia in Spain. This is an example that the film has a transnational message that goes beyond Spanish reality.

In the film, a contrast is made between the political and intelligence elite, who are willing to do anything to hide the truth, and the robbers who, despite everything, seek the good of others. Gallego protects the branch manager from Uruguayo's aggressiveness for having part of their loot; once Uruguayo and Gallego confess their failures, they apologise for having hidden that they knew the existence of the box with the memory; and Loco gives part of his loot to a client because he has heard that they are about to seize her (01:00:00). Daniel Calparsoro's film has the saying in its title and development: Who steals from a thief has a hundred years of forgiveness, because, within complex corruption portrayed robbers retain traits of humanity that the powerful do not have.

The robbers are about to turn themselves in because they don't really have recordings to negotiate their departure, when they realize that they have the power to play with the fear of the

corrupt of the truth being known. Corruption has reached such a level that “There could be anything in that box” (01:05:00). When Uruguayo and Gallego meet with the head of the government cabinet (Raúl Arévalo), he tells them: “This is not the first time that we have been involved in something like this.” And, when Uruguayo threatens to show the hostages the audio recordings, he responds: ‘What could happen? That the hostages say they heard that someone received this in exchange for the other?’ (01:05:00).

Normally, society would react to the scandal with the social immunodeficiency that prevents the action (Marina 2013). In other words, corruption is assumed to be inevitable and, in the face of new cases, the reaction is usually brief and without consequences, as the head of the cabinet says: ‘And what could happen? That the hostages say they heard a recording of someone receiving this in exchange for the other? How long is that?’ (01:07:00). However, the robbers keep a real ace up their sleeves: they tell him that they have video recordings and that they will give them to the hostages so they can spread them on the networks. And they add that many politicians appear on the recordings, including the Prime Minister. The head of the cabinet is truly scared because the images would be irrefutable evidence of corruption. From then on, the head of the cabinet demands time and time again to watch the videos (01:06:00 and 01:09:00), but the robbers reply that they will only give him the recordings once they are out of the bank.

The corruption that the government and the CNI try to hide breaks the unity of the authorities. While the head of cabinet and the CNI director try to end the case, José Luis Domingo (Luis Callejo), a national police officer, takes note of what is happening and passes the data on to the media. Luckily for the robbers, it stops raining, they can escape through the tunnel and the corruption around the Soriano box is made public. When the involvement of the government and its agencies in the robbery is known, the scandal breaks out. ‘When corruption and its

consequences cannot be controlled and contained, the credibility of government suffers, the security of property rights erodes, and the level of uncertainty and risk in the economy increases’ (Elliott 1998, 193). Once it appears in the media, politicians cannot avoid discredit. Deep down, all the characters live in the prison of psychic identity that lays down their selfishness. Various shots of the film show the characters between the bars that protect the safety boxes. The robbers are first seen opening the boxes (00:09:00), then the plan is repeated when Uruguayo and Gallego (00:58:00) are honest and, finally, the head of cabinet enters that cage to check that the robbers have left with the money and with the supposed political secrets. The robbers and the politicians are both metaphorically locked in by their desire to profit at the expense of society. As mentioned, the robbers manage to escape from that prison because they still have some moments of concern for other people.

Psychological and educational effects of the lack of social justice

In general terms, the films analysed have happy endings that are not so common in real cases of corruption. Both films end with a scandal that forces that corrupts receive a punishment, although corruption doesn’t disappear. In *To Steal from a Thief*, the recorded image works as proof to set the truth of the facts it establishes evidence (Woods Peiró 2015, 62). Politicians have the power to avoid reporting corruption, unless images of it are made public (01:08:00). The recordings that the robbers allegedly have establish the authenticity of the facts over any other evidence to destroy the reputation of those who hold corrupt power. In the case of *Retribution*, although there are no audiovisual recordings of the corrupt actions, the board of directors of the bank for which Carlos works also tries to recover the toxic assets before their nature is made public. In the end of both films, the media scandal breaks out, which may or may not be a victory over corruption, depending on how we consider it.

Carlos writes an email to all his clients telling them the truth of the products that they have been selling them for years. This causes the entity to be discredited because it shows that the trust that its employees transmitted to customers was false. On the other hand, the robbers can go free and the corrupt receive pressure from the media against which they can do nothing. However, this discredit affects specific people and does not change the social organisation. That is, the social denunciation in the media with which *Retribution* and *To Steal from a Thief* end punishes the corrupt that appear in these films, but does not eliminate the perverse norms or the corruption complex of the portrayed society. It is possible that the hope of that society is that, as a result of sharing experiences of vulnerability (Allbritton 2014, 104), the protagonists are capable of building ties of solidarity and affection between them. Carlos understands that he must fight for the real well-being of his family and not for the material comforts that the bank offers him, and the robbers support each other and even help some of their hostages.

Conclusion

In conclusion, corruption is caused by perverse norms that give rise to a cultural logic of social fracture in which selfishness prevails. This has some visible effects such as capital accumulation and the deregulation of economic activity. Spain has adopted this financial capitalism and the neoliberal ideal of getting rich quick. Both aspects are a breeding ground for the breakdown of social ties and corrupt acts, as reflected in *Retribution* and *To Steal from a Thief*. These films show both the breakdown of trust between people, the division of society and the search for individual interest, as well as some signs of hope. At first, Carlos and the stranger in the film by Dani de la Torre and the robbers, the bank manager and the politicians in the film by Daniel Calparsoro respond to the origin of the word corruption: they interact with others to break the links that exist with them. As action progresses, the climate of conflict is shown in which ordinary citizens face vulnerability and are manipulated by political and economic power, before which, however, they acquire a new attitude that does

not end corruption but it opens a hope. After the bank scandal in *Retribution*, Carlos receives a call offering him to take over the entity again. And despite the moral victory of the win over corrupt politicians in *To Steal from a Thief*, there is no sign of change. In both cases, corrupt institutions are discredited, but the cultural logic that supports them remains intact. However, in this very unfavourable context, Carlos and the robbers learn to take care of other people and build links with them, and this is possibly the beginning of a more humane cultural logic. This work has focused on two films that take place in Spain, but, as mentioned, the theme and the way of telling them has aroused the interest of the public and producers from other countries.

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