

# M is for Movida

(a sample chapter from *The A to Z of Spanish Culture – beyond toros and flamenco*, written by Pilar Orti, with contributions from Paul Read.)

I was born in the early 70s and can just about remember the day Franco died. I was playing in the sitting room, on the floor, looking up to the small (or extremely small by today's standards) black and white T.V. where they were showing his funeral.

After almost 40 years under a dictatorship, the Spanish finally recovered their freedom of speech in 1975. The 60s had been tame in Spain (maybe Lerner and Lowe should have used this phrase in 'My Fair Lady') as the young people were unable to dip their toes in free love under a very Catholic, right-winged regime. So you can imagine the jubilation when the lid finally came off.

## Madrid

Madrid became the hub of entertainment in the 80s as millions of bars opened in different districts of Madrid. Malasaña became one of the most frequented neighbourhoods – and continues to be one of the most popular areas to go out at night in the capital, with bars such as '*La via láctea*' (The Milky Way) still standing.

The artists took to the streets (in a manner of speaking). It was okay to produce popular art, through which you could say anything you wanted. Pop became less polite and less tamed. Punk bands emerged; rockabilies; a whole range of new bands and artists who just wanted to celebrate their freedom by making music – even though many of them couldn't even sing. As almost anything went, bands became very creative with their names, such as Kaka de Luxe (*caca* meaning poo) and La Polla Records (*polla* meaning penis). It was also during the 80s that Pedro Almodóvar joined artistic forces with McNamara to form a glam-punk duo. And it wasn't long before he became a recognised film director and revolutionary of worldwide fame.

Bars remaining open until 6am. Discos opened until later. Alcohol being openly consumed. Joints and needles passing from hand to hand. Drugs available everywhere.

This was "*la movida*".

Although it feels like "*la movida*" happened a long time ago, the word has remained part of the Spanish language. "*Qué movida*" is used when something goes terribly wrong or when an uncomfortable situation arises, similar to "*qué marrón*" (see **J is for Joder**). "*Qué movida*" gives the impression that trouble is brewing, that, indeed, there's going to be a lot of (emotional) movement.

Whether you liked its outcomes or not, there is no doubt that creativity exploded during the *movida* in the arts. It was now legal to show naked bodies on the screen, which gave rise to "*el destape*" (the "uncovering"). Tall, blonde, topless ladies (and usually Swedish or some other foreign nationality) became the most popular ingredients of Spanish comedies.

## Crystal Balls

The early 80s also gave rise to the incredibly popular TV show '*La bola de cristal*'

(The Crystal Ball). This programme was aimed at children, teenagers and young adults, targeting each age group by segments. Assuming that the older the person, the later they would be getting up in the morning, 'La bola de cristal' structured its content to appeal to an older age group as the programme progressed. (To watch some video clips, visit the official site <http://www.rtve.es/television/la-bola-de-cristal/>)

The *electroduendes* (electric elves), were irreverent creatures who artistically portrayed their creators' political views. For example, the *Bruja Avería* (The Fault Witch) had a range of slogans including "¡Viva el mal, viva el capital!" ("Hoorah for Evil; Hoorah for Capital"). Although the form seemed to be aimed at young children, the high quality of the *electroduendes* (whose puppeteers had trained with Muppets creator Jim Henson, creator of The Muppets) together with their underlying themes were definitely of interest to older viewers.

'La bola de cristal' ended with a segment hosting the most popular pop bands of the time. In fact, the second half of the programme was hosted by Alaska, who with Kaka de Luxe and Alaska y los Pegamoides (*pegamoides* has no translation, sorry!) became one of the most famous punk stars in the 80s. (She is still going by the way, still featuring in Spanish culture). Nostalgia for what was an exciting era in Spain can now be satiated through the purchase of DVDs of the series or many You Tube viewings.

With the end of censorship on T.V., came *los rombos*, the rhombuses. To indicate whether programmes contained violence or sex (or both), the two only channels labeled the programmes with either one or two rhombuses, depending on the "severity" of the content.

As Spain opened its frontiers to Europe once again, Europe's customs and American products entered the country, including many more T.V. series and uncensored films.

### **What Now?**

So, what might be the equivalent of *la movida* in the first half of the 21<sup>st</sup> Century?

In May 2011, the Spanish youth took to the streets in order to express their discontent with the political system and the official 40% rate of unemployed youth. "*Los indignados*", "The Indignants", began by camping in Madrid's Puerta del Sol. The movement soon spread through the rest of Spain's cities. Uninspired, unmotivated and unemployed, the *indignados* wanted to tell their politicians that enough was enough and things had to change. They camped in Madrid during the summer season and made their presence known through (mostly) pacifist behaviour. The freedom of speech enjoyed by the country meant that there were very few incidents involving the police, but it also meant that the core message got diluted by the range of ideologies, values and beliefs that were being represented.

The demonstrations and spontaneous campsites lasted for around 4 months and the 15-M movement returned in May 2012, just in time to condemn the actions of bankers and politicians, responsible for the collapse of Bankia, a financial institution which had been recently formed by fusing a number of building societies.

Bankia was rescued by a 24 billion Eurozone bailout fund in exchange for applying extreme austerity measures on the country. Former chief of the International Monetary Fund, Economy minister and Deputy Prime Minister of the Partido Popular Rodrigo Rato and other bank executives were part of a huge credit-card fraud that enabled them to use the cards without declaring their use. 12 million was spent over a 9 year period whilst the bank lost money and investors lost savings. He was found

guilty of embezzlement and was sentenced in 2017 to four and a half years.

Many ordinary citizens who had shares or other investments in Bankia, felt like they had been manipulated into topping up those investments, while Bankia officers knew the bank was about to collapse. During the next few years, some of these citizens managed to recover some of their savings after successful court hearings against the financial institution.

In March 2014, just before the European elections, the political party *Podemos* emerged from the 15-M movement. “*Podemos*” means “we can”. It turned out that more than 1 million people thought Podemos could indeed make a difference and in 2014, they received 8% of the votes in the European elections, obtaining 5 seats in the European Parliament.

The tradition of just voting for the traditional political parties was broken and the *indignados* went from being young people demonstrating in the streets to playing a key part in the future of Spain. (We’ll come back to the new political landscape in the next chapter.)

I watched all of the above from afar, grabbing bits and pieces of information from online newspapers and trying to deduce what was really going on amongst all the varied opinions I found on the subject. So let’s give Paul Read now the space to tell you more about the other *movidas* that took place in the years following the 15-M.

### **Más Movidas**

Between 2011 and 2014 social protest in Spain took new and creative directions applying new tools from social media to wrong-foot the security forces and the Government. Firstly, the 2011 Occupation Movement managed to disrupt not only the normal commercial and policing activities in the centre of Madrid, but also the smooth running of Parliament itself. Secondly, the government became increasingly embarrassed by organised groups that resisted home evictions and the ensuing bad publicity that followed such events (in 2014 there was an average eviction rate of 95 families a day). Finally, new forms of social media were enabling rapid and spontaneous forms of protests. Elected officials were spotted in bars, restaurants or on the street and quickly small crowds gathered to publicly confront them on controversial laws and political decisions. A new word emerged that described this form of protest: *escrache*.

The Government adapted new legislation that had been drafted two years earlier and a new controversial law came into effect in July 2015. The *Ley de seguridad ciudadana* (Citizen Security Law) was also known as “*Ley mordaza*” or “gag law” because its aim was to silence or prohibit different forms of protest.

Some of these proposals included new offences such as disrespecting a police officer or participating in *escraches*, occupying public squares close to parliament of regional Government buildings and causing “disturbances in public safety”, taking unauthorised images of police and disseminating them on social media. Regarding this last point, Amnesty International quickly condemned the law, saying that photographing police was vital in cases when excessive force had been used.

### **Modern Crimes**

In order to keep up with the times, a range of new crimes were created, from tweeting the location of a demonstration to joking about the royal family. For example, a

woman in a town in Alicante was ordered to pay €800 under the gagging law for posting a photo on her Facebook page of a police vehicle parked in a disabled parking zone. She wrote: “*Aparca donde the sale de los cojones y encima no the multan*” (“You park where you bloody well please and you don’t even get fined”). The police tracked her down within 48 hours and fined her.

Over on Twitter, a Basque magazine photographer faced a fine of €600 after uploading a picture of a woman being arrested to his social media account.

As another example away from social media, Rapper Josep Miquel Arenas (known as Valtonyc) was sentenced to three and half years for incitement to terrorism, insulting the crown and making threats to King Juan Carlos in one of his songs.

Despite warnings by United Nations Human Rights Experts in February 2015 that these laws would threaten individuals’ fundamental freedoms and rights, the government passed the new law in the summer of that year. In the first 6 months of the law coming into effect, 40.000 sanctions were issued that included on average of 30 a day for “lack of respect shown to members of the society forces”.

### **Virtual Protests**

On 10th April 2015, in protest against the imminent passing of the *Ley de mordaza*, I (Paul) participated in the first holographic demonstration in the world. The demonstration was organised by *No somos delito*, an umbrella organisation made up of representatives from a range of NGOs, civil rights associations and social movements.

Each of the protestors uploaded an image of our faces to a website, gathered them together and placed them on holographic bodies. The organisers then projected our marching virtual bodies and faces carrying placards demonstrating against the new laws onto the streets of the capital and in front of the Parliament building in Madrid.

Although it was an imaginative and creative response to the repressive new laws, it was a sad reflection that the right for collective protest ran the risk of only being attainable online, rather than on the street.

(You can watch a short news piece on the demonstration through this YouTube link: <https://youtu.be/AyXsVHJSk44> )