Burying the Hatchet: New Narrative Modes in Contemporary Basque Fiction

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With love and gratitude to my mother, for believing in me.

¿Te preguntas, viajero, por qué hemos muertos jóvenes,

y por qué hemos matado tan estúpidamente?

Nuestros padres mintieron: eso es todo.

—Jon Juaristi, “Spoon River, Euskadi”

con los mapas del tesoro baja el brazo

dejé mi casa y caminé

en busca del canto de las sirenas

a través de los escondrijos del miedo

no hallé en mi viaje sino

pequeños pedernales grisáceos

y nidos de mirlo que se deshacen

en oscuros rincones de las selvas oscuras

cuando consumido el camino por el tiempo

volví a casa

nueva era la madera de la puerta

nueva también la cerradura

—Joseba Sarrionandia, “Etxera Itzuli/ Volver a Casa”

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INTRODUCTION

0.1 Preface

Spain, like all nation states, is an arbitrary collection of diverse ethnic and linguistic groups that have historically considered themselves fundamentally different. Today, the independence movement in the northeastern region of Catalonia is the center of global attention, but just twenty-five years ago, it was the Basques along the northwestern Bay of Biscay who were voted most likely to secede. Basque nationalists of various stripes have long sought independence from Spain in order to form an independent, socialist republic called Euskal Herria. Beginning in the mid-twentieth century, however, the increasing radicalization of Basque nationalist separatists resulted in overwhelming violence, ultimately leaving more than eight-hundred victims dead between 1968 to 2011.

When Francisco Franco came to power in 1936, his fascist dictatorship—modeled on those of Hitler and Mussolini—sanctioned the persecution of Spain's ethnic and cultural minority communities, singling out the Basques as traitors to the nation. In response, members of the Basque community engaged in acts of civil and cultural resistance, seeking to defy the brutal injustices inherent in the Francoist institutionalization of Castilian nationalism. After decades of struggle to (re)validate Basque identity proved futile, however, the young members of ETA, an identity-based Basque cultural organization that would soon become a domestic terrorist group, decided a more radical change was in order. From 1959 until 2011, ETA sought independence from Spain; in 1968, it began using armed force, including murder, kidnapping, extortion, and blackmail, to achieve its goals. In hand with ETA's arrival came its development and dissemination of a violent separatist narrative which appropriated the Basque community's "imposed otherness, a central policy of Spanish nationalism since the previous century" to

"effectively invent and mythologize a picture of traditional Basque culture" worthy of independence, thus legitimizing what would soon become a decades-long struggle against the Spanish state (Watson 173).

During this period, Euskadi Ta Askatasuna or ETA [Basque Liberty and Homeland] murdered approximately 850 victims, although the exact number is disputed (García Rey). The organization's explicit objective was to liberate the Basque Country from Francoist Spain by armed force and establish the utopic Euskal Herria, which would reunite the seven traditional Basque provinces—Biscay, Gipuzkoa, Alava, Navarre, Labourd, Lower Navarre, and Soule—under one mythological banner. Its failed journey to independence, one that continued long after Spain's democratic Transition, was fraught with pervasive violence as ETA and the state struggled for control; this violence would become both "a symbolic construct and a …strategy of the Basque nationalist movement" (Watson 15). Eventually, in a visual testament to its goals, ETA would take the *bietan jarrai* as its symbol (fig. 1), depicted as a serpent intertwined around a hatchet. The former represented political struggle and the latter referred to the armed actions ETA would take to achieve independence; the symbol's name, meaning "keep up the two," likewise spoke to the organization's dual political and military activities (Sutton 49).

Fig. 1. In this undated still, the *bietan jarrai* is clearly visible on the wall, as well as upon the ETA militants' breasts. Source: Masters, James, and Claudia Rebaza. "Basque Separatist Group ETA Announces Full Dissolution." *CNN*, 2 May 2018, www.cnn.com/2018/05/02/europe /eta-spain-dissolution-intl/index.html.

In this dissertation, I examine how contemporary Peninsular narrative since 1990—the novel and fiction film—represents complex questions of Basque identity and competing strains of radical, reactionary Basque and conservative Castilian nationalism in Spain in the wake of this violent, protracted conflict. My research combines recent work in cultural studies, political science, narratology and visual culture with close readings of multilingual and cross-cultural sources. Within this structure, I examine contemporary productions in film and literature by members of the Basque community of Spain. Historical representations of the Basque nationalist separatist conflict have fundamentally biased modern perspectives towards Basque identity along a flawed sociopolitical binary that places Spanish and Basque citizens in opposition. Works by filmmakers and authors after 1990 seek to repudiate the dichotomization of these two interrelated communities and thus remedy the persistent exclusion of the Basque minority in Spain. Ultimately, I argue that recent productions by Bernardo Atxaga, Fernando Aramburu, and Borja Cobeaga, among others, offer an object lesson on how modern Europe's ethnic minorities have

renegotiated their relations with the larger state to achieve representation on a national stage through the repudiation of the violent separatism that demands their isolation.

Providing an in-depth analysis of Basque political and cultural history, and creative production, in the twentieth and twenty-first centuries is an extensive task currently outside of the scope of this dissertation. Although these topics are sufficiently addressed within each chapter, an in-depth examination of each rightly deserves to be the subject of its own work, and thankfully have been the object of devoted critical analysis by myriad literary, film, and cultural scholars, alongside anthropologists and historians alike. See foundational works produced beginning in the late twentieth century by Robert Clark, Joseba Gabilondo, Jon Juaristi, Jon Kortazar, Paddy Woodworth, and Joseba Zulaika, for example. More recently, since the second millennium, publications by Begoña Aretxaga, Larraitz Ariznabarreta, Gabriel Gatti, Xabier Irujo, Mikel López-Arza, Jaume Martí Olivella, Annabel Martín, Mari Jose Olaziregi, Santiago de Pablo, Edurne Portela, Rob Stone, María Pilar Rodríguez, Mariann Vaczi, Cameron J. Watson, and Iban Zaldua, among many others, continue to offer interpenetrating and often conflicting critical discourses that engage the tripartite social, cultural, and political phenomena that engender modern Basque nationalism.[1]

As evinced by their publications, the concerted scholarly efforts of these critics, academics, and authors—many of whom identify as members of the Basque community—have and continue to attract significant international attention to Basque creative production, which has enjoyed a renaissance since Franco's death in 1975. In this introduction, I first offer a brief history of Basque nationalism from its beginnings in the late nineteenth century until the second millennium. Although this dissertation focuses on creative production beginning in 1990, the

[1] This list is not meant to be exhaustive, but rather to offer a brief overview of recent criticism on contemporary Basque production published since 1990.

novels and films studied here do not exist in a vacuum. In a *longue durée* sense, they are the inexorable result of, more immediately, the intertwined cultural currents of Francoist repression of Basque identity and culture, and the eventual radicalization of Basque nationalism in response to this threat, throughout the twentieth and twenty-first centuries. More distantly, these works speak to the enduring isolation of this community from the greater Castilian national culture, the Iberian Peninsula, and the traditional perception of Basque identitarian difference, the underlying factor in the more recent mythologization and politicization of a narrative that affirms Basque separatism. This introduction seeks to offer a concise but detailed contextualization of the social, political, and creative forces that later appear within and underlie the diverse creative works of Atxaga, Aramburu, and Cobeaga.

0.2 A Note about Language

As a non-*euskaldun* [Euskera-speaking] scholar, I chose to approach the works examined in this dissertation in Spanish as it is the linguistic medium most easily accessible to me in a Covid-19 reality. It is natural that questions of authenticity, transparency, and translation may arise from this decision, pragmatic as it were. With that in mind, I turn to Iban Zaldua's excellent 2012 essay, *Ese idioma raro y poderoso. Once decisiones cruciales que un escritor vasco está obligado a tomar*, as a proven resource for this debate, in which the Basque author critically examines the opportunities and dilemmas of creative production in a minority language. Zaldua's exhortation to personally engage with Basque literature beyond the boundaries of language, ideology, or geography underpins my examination of a contemporary corpus that falls across a broad linguistic spectrum. Indeed, the frequent imbrication of Euskera and Spanish in contemporary Basque narratives indicates how its producers are present in varying unique

cultural and linguistic spheres that are not mutually exclusive. My approach is to look beyond the oppositional concept of linguistic identity begun in 1895, when Sabino Arana infamously declared that "¡Ya lo sabéis, *euskaldunes*, para amar el euskera, tenéis que odiar a España" (cited in Chacón Delgado); rather, in this dissertation, I recognize how the extensive overlap of these two languages present in contemporary creative production charts new visions of Basque identity in the twentieth and twenty-first centuries.

Given that this dissertation is written in English and focuses on Spanish and Basque authors, filmmakers, and illustrators, a certain bilingualism is necessary for comprehension. With that said, this dissertation primarily engages with Basque cultural production created in the Spanish language. Chapter One, which examines two novels by Bernardo Atxaga translated by the author himself into Spanish from his own Euskera, is the only exception; all other works featured here were originally produced in Spanish. When possible, terms with pre-existing translations in English are used for consistency's sake (i.e. the Pacto de Estella becomes the Estella Pact). Translations into English are always provided in brackets for the Euskera. Likewise, the Basque decision not to accentuate some names (see: Mari Jose Olaziregi above) is respected. As previously mentioned, the two Euskera language works analyzed have been consumed in their author's own translation in the Spanish; however, the original Basque titles are respected and thus included. No language hierarchy is implied or intended nor should be inferred from this work.

0.3 Basque Nationalism and ETA: A Brief History

Sabino Arana and the Origins of Basque Nationalism in Turn of the Century Spain

By Basque nationalist conflict, I refer specifically to the advent of radical Basque nationalism under the mantle of ETA, or Euskadi Ta Askatasuna [Basque Country and Freedom], a radical domestic terrorist organization founded in 1959 that sought independence from Spain through a sustained campaign of violence against civilians and state actors between 1968 and 2011. Basque nationalism, however, long preceded ETA's recent reign of terror. Originating in *fin de siècle* Spain under the direction of Sabino de Arana y Goiri (1865-1903), Basque nationalism began in part as a response to a broader peninsular migration of poor, rural workers seeking employment in the Basque Country's industrial centers, particularly Bilbao, that took place in Restoration Spain throughout the late nineteenth century.

That this massive wave of intranational migration should coincide with emigration en masse from the Basque Country, as rural Basques fled to the Americas and were replaced with rural Castilians (among many others), catalyzed Arana's interest in constructing a particular vision of Basque identity as difference. At its xenophobic core, this ideology sought to isolate the community from the nefarious influence of ethnic *maketos* [foreigners] and non-Basques in order to preserve a mythologized, millenary Basque culture founded on the idealized rural society of the ancient *baserri* [traditional Basque farmhouse]. In Arana's view, the Basque national subject was inherently rural, pious, Euskera-speaking, and above all different (read: superior) to the other races inhabiting the Iberian Peninsula, and thus represented a viable alternative for a movement away from the rapid modernization so evident in urban centers across Spain.

Arana's nationalism simultaneously reacted to Carlism's final defeat at the hands of the Isabeline liberals in the Third Carlist War (1872-1876). As a child, Arana and his family had

been exiled to France for his father's support of Carlism; as an adult, Carlism's insistence on preserving the very institutions named in its motto, "Dios, Patria y Rey," offered Arana a viable and familiar base upon which to build an conservative political platform centered on the rights of the Catholic Church, traditional monarchy, and the *fueros*, or provincial medieval charters of rights, practices, and customs, which privileged local and regional authority over that of a king or centralized government. Abolished in the early eighteenth century under the Nueva Planta decrees of the first Bourbon king, Philip V, the Basque *fueros* were coopted by Carlists and later by Basque nationalists as proof that "the region's association with the emerging Spanish nation-state… [was] voluntary, and conditional on the Spanish king conceding sweeping autonomous powers" (Woodworth 28) to the Basque community. In the face on the ongoing imposition of the Castilian nationalism taking place across the Iberian Peninsula throughout the end of the nineteenth century, the reinstatement of this traditional model of Basque self-government proffered by Arana was highly desirable, as Spain suffered the progressive institutionalization of Castilian monoculturalism "at the expense of the plural and diverse nature of the country itself" (Watson 70). Arana's desire to foreground conservative Carlist values in the face of what he perceived to be the abandonment of millenary, rural Basque culture, practices, and legal privileges, was undeniably a response to the threat of the twin national projects of liberalization and secularization faced within the Basque Country at the end of the century.

With this particular vision of the Basque national subject and his concomitant identity as a traditional Euskera-speaking *baserritarra* [farmer], Arana had constructed a solid foundation on which to develop an independence-based nationalist ideology throughout the end of the nineteenth century. He also established major nationalist symbols and institutions—among them, the *ikurriña* [Basque national flag] and the EAJ-PNV [Euzko Alderdi Jeltzalea-Partido

Nacionalista Vasco, Basque Nationalist] political party itself—along these lines. The simultaneous national embrace of *fin de siècle* degeneracy made all the more evident by the liberal government's inability to rectify Spain's colonial losses during and after the Disaster of 1898 rendered Arana's idea of an independent Basque nation based on a return to ancient Christian tradition all the more appealing for defeated Carlists and neo-Carlists alike, along with regionalists angered by the loss of the *fueros* and Catholics incensed by increasing national interest in secularization.

In the context of this brief overview, Arana's legacy is best viewed through the institutions he created, which endure to this day and function as ideological loci around which a variety of diverse political, religious, and cultural belief systems coalesce within a particular nationalist framework. Upon his death in 1903, followers of Arana's Basque nationalism and particularly the EAJ-PNV found themselves swept up in the swiftly changing currents of early twentieth century Spain, challenged by the waves of socialism, anarchism, mass protest, civil unrest, political violence, and terrorism that would eventually culminate in two separate dictatorships and the Spanish Civil War (1936-1939). Although an autonomous Basque state governed by EAJ-PNV politician José Antonio Aguirre (1904-1960) was declared in October 1936, it proved to be fleeting, collapsing only months after its inception when Francoist troops took the region the following year. Aguirre and his supporters fled the war, maintaining a weakened EAJ-PNV in exile in France, South America, and the United States until his death in 1960.

ETA in Aftermath of Francoism: The Postwar Period

Staggering Basque losses during the Civil War, including the infamous 1937 bombing of Guernica that killed over 1,600 civilians, were followed by a severe Francoist repression of the region's culture, traditional practices, and language that singled out the Basque community as traitors to the nation. The ultimate Francoist triumph, which saw the EAJ-PNV illegalized and its leaders sent into exile, marked a turning point for a new breed of Basque nationalism both catalyzed and challenged by the repressive realities of Francoist Spain throughout the 1940s and 50s. Eventually, in 1959, the adherents of this new nationalism would form ETA. ETA first began as Ekin, an informal group formed by students at the University of Deusto in Bilbao during the 1951-2 academic year who met in secret to discuss Basque language and culture (Watson 187). Unlike the EAJ-PNV, the group, whose name referred to Arana's concept of *ekintza* [call to action] on behalf of the Basque nationalist cause, held that Euskera was fundamental to the nationalist cause and sought the creation of an independent Basque state completely separate from Spain.

This differed from the EAJ-PNV's official stance at the time, which was to "work within a future system with the former parties of the Second Republic toward a degree of self-determination" (190). A rapidly radicalizing Ekin was incorporated into the EAJ-PNV's youth wing, EGI [Eusko Gaztedi-Juventud Vasca del Interior], in 1956; however, its young members, suffocated by nearly two decades of Francoist repression, felt the need to take immediate action to further the Basque nationalist cause. ETA was founded on July 31, 1959: Saint Loyola's day and the anniversary of the EAJ-PNV's founding. By the end of the year, it had between 200 and 250 members organized into various geographical cells. Among its original members was Benito del Valle (1927-2011), a founder of Ekin and later a member of EGI, whose 1958 expulsion from

the latter had catalyzed the need among young nationalist activists for a more radical organization.

Throughout the 1960s, ETA waged a small-scale campaign against the Francoist state, with an elevator bombing and a train derailment standing out among a greater campaign of public graffiti featuring its motto, “Gora Euskadi” [Onwards Basque Country]. During this period, the organization devoted itself to reforming the discourses of isolationist xenophobia inherent to Sabino Arana’s original conception of Basque nationalism in order to recruit the proletariat masses from the region’s industrial labor force. Here, ETA was stymied by a familiar problem: that a great number of these workers were not ethnically Basque. Members such as Ekin and ETA founder José Luis Álvarez Emparanza (1929-2012), alias Txillardegi, offered an effective alternative to ethnic nationalism, defining Basque identity solely on fluency in Euskera.

Yearly clandestine assemblies held by the organization solidified this new vision of Basque nationalism at the same time that the contemporary revolutionary ideals of Mao, Marx, Lenin, and Castro gained support alongside those of Sabino Arana. The organization increasingly shifted towards the international currents of radical political thought that put it in contact with the greater revolutionary struggles taking place outside of the stifling atmosphere of Francoist Spain. During ETA’s Fifth Assembly, held in 1967, its original founders, including Txillardegi and Benito del Valle, resigned in protest as a young revolutionary firebrand, Txabi Etxebarrieta (1944-1968), took control, marking the first of many splits within the organization. The now rebranded ETA-Zarra [Old ETA] instituted a policy of violent political action, employing bombings, armed robbery, extortion and sabotage as it sought to revive Basque identity lost under Franco (Kurlansky 240; Ayerbe Sudupe 17).

ETA's First Attack: The Killing of José Pardines and its Legacy, 1968-1969

On June 7, 1968, Etxebarrieta committed the first-ever killing in the name of ETA when he ambushed and shot dead the Spanish Civil Guardsman José Pardines (1943-1968) during a traffic stop in Tolosa. Such traffic stops had become routine in the region after a marked rise in ETA's actions against the Spanish state following the Fifth Assembly. The consequences of Etxebarrieta's actions were immediate and brutal: the Civil Guard killed him in an extrajudicial shootout later that day; his co-conspirator and fellow ETA member, Iñaki Sarasketa (1948-2017), was ferociously beaten and sentenced to death (later commuted to life in prison); and a state of exception was declared by the federal government, first in Gipuzkoa and then later across the entire country. This led to the illegal detention, interrogation, beatings, and torture of any suspected supporters of Basque nationalism.

For its part, ETA sought revenge for Etxebarrieta's death by assassinating a high-ranking Francoist ally, Melitón Manzanas (1906-1968), captain of the Brigada Político-Social in San Sebastian, who was known for brutally torturing prisoners and for collaborating with the Gestapo. Manzanas' assassination on August 2, 1968, began a savage pattern of action-reaction through indiscriminate bloodshed between ETA and Spanish state security forces that endured until the former's dissolution in 2011; Mikel Ayerbe Sudupe cites these bloody incidents as a "turning point in ETA's evolution" (17). The events of the summer of 1968 culminated in the Burgos Trials of December 1970, in which sixteen members of ETA were tried for these deaths, as well as for theft, robbery, terrorism, and rebellion against the State.

During the trials, despite mass protests across Spain, a labor strike of 100,000 Basque workers, ETA's kidnapping of West German consul Eugen Beihl, and international outcry, the Francoist tribunal was seemingly unmoved and on December 28, 1970, summarily sentenced six

of the defendants to death, with the rest receiving extensive, decades-long prison sentences. Yet an unprecedented wave of public resistance to this decision, both nationally from Spanish and Basque citizens and internationally from the governments of Western Europe and the Vatican, meant that before the month's end, Franco had commuted the death penalty to a sentence of thirty years' imprisonment. The massive sociocultural impact of the Burgos Trials quickly became manifest across the Iberian Peninsula: with international figures like Pope Paul VI defending the accused's right to life, popular support for ETA hit new heights as the organization saw itself transformed into a symbol of resistance against a brutal, decades-long dictatorship. Between 1960 and 1969, ETA murdered three victims.

ETA's Transformation: The Transition Years, 1970-1979

Throughout the tumultuous decade of the 1970s, ETA continued to target Francoist allies—mainly in the form of public officials—for extorsion, kidnapping, and murder. The most notable of these was Admiral Luis Carrero Blanco (1904-1973), a trusted Francoist military ally whose close collaborative relationship with the dictator resulted in his assignment to multiple high-ranking federal positions over the course the twentieth century.[2] On June 9, 1973, only months before his death, the Admiral was named Prime Minister under Franco, confirming his role as the official successor to the aging dictator. Operation Ogre, as it was referred to by those involved, took place on December 20, 1973, when a Madrid-based ETA cell detonated a powerful bomb underneath Carrero Blanco's car. The Admiral, his bodyguard, and his driver, who had been on the way to hear Mass that morning, were instantly killed.

[2] Carrero Blanco was Undersecretary of the Presidency from 1941 to 1973; *Procurador* in the Francoist Cortes from 1943 to 1973; Deputy Prime Minister from 1967 until June 9, 1973; and finally Prime Minister between June 9 and December 20, 1973.

Carrero Blanco's death had an electrifying effect on the Spanish nation; as Mark Kurlansky explains, "[w]hatever the judgement of history, at the time the assassination was widely seen as the end of Francoism. The stagnating nation felt exhilarated" (254) as an ailing Franco and his enfeebled state progressively lost control over a deeply restive populace. The assassination had serious repercussions for ETA as well. Within a year, a significant split had occurred, and ETA found itself divided into two opposing factions. The political-military (ETA-pm) sect believed that the democratic process had now begun and thus sought to bring exiled and jailed members back into civilian life and into accepted social and political circles. For its part, according to Paddy Woodworth, the opposing military faction (ETA-m), "insisted that ETA was involved in a justified war of independence against Spanish occupation. Its response to a hard-won amnesty which finally emptied every Spanish jail of Basque prisoners in December 1977 was the killing of a municipal councillor" (5). As it expanded its campaign of violence, ETA-m, which over time would come to be known simply as ETA, rapidly became known as the face of radical political extremism across the Basque Country and Spain.

Franco's 1975 death ushered in the Transition period which saw, among other boons for the Basque community, the legalization of the EAJ-PNV and other regional and nationalist parties; the establishment of the Basque Regional Parliament; the creation and revitalization of diverse Basque cultural institutions, such as television and radio programs in Euskera; and the release of political prisoners (ETA militants and nonmilitants alike) under the 1977 Spanish Amnesty Law. Yet despite the evident progress the Basque community had made during the Spanish Transition to democracy, ETA continued to kill, insisting on the total withdrawal of the "occupiers," a referendum for Basque independence, and on the legitimacy and political viability of this claim (Woodworth 5). Between 1970 and 1979, ETA murdered 223 victims.

The Lead Years

An unstoppable surge of potent separatist violence marred the 1980s and the 1990s; this period would later be christened as the Lead Years, in direct reference to the thousands of bullets fired as ETA continued to employ guerrilla terrorist warfare in its ideological battle for Basque independence. The 1980s began under the leadership of Felipe González's (1942-) democratically-elected liberal Socialist government, which served four terms from 1982 until 1996. During its tenure, the PSOE, or Partido Socialista Obrero Español, struggled to minimize the staggering rate of mass crimes and casualties as ETA, alongside its traditional foils of state and military apparatuses, began to target wealthy and middle-class Basques for extortion, as well as Basque and Spanish civilians in mass bombing campaigns that extended to the farthest reaches of the Iberian Peninsula.

These included the kidnapping and subsequent murder of military captain Alberto Martín Barrios (1944-1983), whose death provoked the first wave of mass protests against ETA across Spain, with more than 500,000 citizens taking to the streets of Madrid on October 20, 1983, to decry his death. After the June 19, 1987, bombing of the Hipercor supermarket in Barcelona left twenty-one civilians dead and forty-five wounded—a majority of whom were women and children—furious demonstrators once against took to the streets, with more than 700,000 people participating in protests against ETA's terrorism across Barcelona ("Manifestaciones"). Attacks like Hipercor and the December 11, 1987, strike on the Civil Guard Barracks in Zaragoza demonstrated ETA's frightening new practice of targeting civilians, women, and children alongside its more traditional public-sector enemies in indiscriminate bombing campaigns designed to maim as many victims as possible at once. Despite a growing protest movement

across the country that vehemently disavowed ETA's means to achieving independence, the organization continued to kill, regardless of public outcry.

In the Basque Country itself, the native nationalist EAJ-PNV party, which had ruled the regional Basque parliament since its inception in 1980, soon had to contend with the surging popularity of both the liberal PSOE (known in the region as the PSE-EE) and the far-left extremism of the Herri Batasuna or HB [Popular Unity] party. HB, often described as the political arm of ETA, was a radical offshoot of the EAJ-PNV begun in 1978 that openly supported ETA's use of violent militancy in order to build a socialist Basque republic independent from Spain. Although it had maintained dominance in regional politics since the inception of the Basque Regional Parliament in 1980, between 1987 and 1990 the EAJ-PNV lost control of the parliament to the PSE-EE, an upset that coincided with Felipe González and the PSOE's third term in office between 1986 and 1989.

While the EAJ-PNV was able to regain control in 1990 elections, the traditionalist party struggled to respond to the reactionary militarism of HB that had become increasingly apparent in its support of ETA's violent separatism as HB, throughout the previous decade, had progressively won support in parliament. Between 1984 and 1990, HB's share increased from eleven to thirteen seats, an increase from approximately 15% to 17% of the vote. While its popularity paled in comparison to that of the EAJ-PNV, which in the 1984 regional elections won nearly three times more the number of seats than HB, the radical nationalism of the latter gained significant ground in the 1980s with its consistent popularity in parliament.

This set the stage for intense, intraregional political infighting throughout the 1980s as the three primary competitors for Basque regional governance—the EAJ-PNV, HB, and the PSE-EE—attempted to articulate an effective and unified vision of Basque identity in the fragile

environment of the post-Transition period. Each political party, aided and abetted by the more minor parties present in the parliament, offered a vision of the future founded either on regional independence (conservatively, in the case of EAJ-PNV, and more radically in the case of HB) or on greater national belonging to Spain (in the case of the PSE-EE). At the same time, the EAJ-PNV and the PSE-EE also emphatically denounced the terrorism of ETA and radical Basque nationalism, while HB remained silent on the issue. As these three parties jockeyed for independence, Basque nationalists and non-nationalists alike were confronted by a new threat to this recently established autonomous community: the GAL, or Grupos Antiterroristas de Liberación, a paramilitary force clandestinely supported by Spanish military loyalists and government officials, whose extrajudicial killings of ETA members and suspected supporters alike rendered it akin an extreme right-wing death squad (Kurlansky 289). During its brief existence between 1983 and 1987, GAL murdered twenty-seven victims as it sought to avenge the death of its many comrades killed by ETA since 1968. For its part, between 1980 and 1989, ETA murdered 401 victims, marking the deadliest decade in the organization's existence.

Pacts and Politics for a New Century

As ETA's violence escalated throughout the first decade of the Lead Years, regional and national political parties sought to hinder the bloody consequences of separatist militancy through a show of collective diplomacy. Beginning with the Madrid Pact on November 5, 1987, a wide range of major political parties, including the PSOE, the EAJ-PNV, and the PP or Partido Popular, among many others, signed a series of widely publicized declarations that openly denounced ETA's actions on behalf of the Basque community it claimed to liberate through its terrorism, while calling on the organization to abandon violence in favor of democratic

processes. The 1987 Madrid Pact was rapidly succeeded in 1988 by the Ajuria Enea Pact, the Ardanza Plan, and the Navarre Pact, and later in 1998 by the Estella Pact. HB's refusal to sign on to earlier public condemnations of radical Basque political violence, such as the Ajuria Enea Pact and the Navarre Pact, was finally remedied when its members signed on to the 1998 Estella Pact.

This particular agreement, like others before it, sought to achieve an end to ETA's terrorism through dialogue and diplomatic negotiations. Unlike the previous conventions, which were fundamentally intranational in nature and were supported by both federal and regional political agents, the Estella Pact was an effort by a coalition solely comprised of Basque nationalists and labor syndicates, including the EAJ-PNV and, for the first time, members representing HB. Four days after it was signed, on September 16, 1998, ETA declared an indefinite and unconditional ceasefire, promising to halt all violent attacks. The truce did not last, however; by August 1999, ETA sought to rewrite its terms, demanding the formation of a new regional parliament (whose members were to include citizens from French Basque territories) tasked with creating the constitution of a new independent Basque state. Its demands unmet, and suffering the virulent censure of the EAJ-PNV, who attacked the organization for its distortion of the Basque nationalist project, ETA returned to violence soon afterwards with the January 21, 2000, murder of the Spanish Airforce colonel Pedro Antonio Blanco García (1952-2000). Two days later, more than a million Spaniards took to the streets of Madrid, where the murder took place, in a powerful public protest of ETA's terrorism ("Manifestaciones").

Neither the Pact itself nor the subsequent breakdown of the truce were much loved by the federal government, which by 1998 was in the hands of the conservative PP led by José María Aznar (1953-). In 1996, Aznar's PP had defeated the PSOE, weakened by corruption scandals, effectively ending the Socialist rule in Spain after nearly fourteen years. With the PP's ascension

came an opening for the party to differentiate itself from the PSOE, which "[i]n spite of muzzling the press, imprisoning thousands, and engaging in torture, kidnapping, and murder…was still vulnerable to the accusation of being 'soft on Basques'"; a searing irony given that conservative estimates posit that between 1977 and 1997, at least 8,000 Basques were imprisoned for political reasons, the majority without trial (Kurlansky 294, 292).

Regardless, the mid-1990s marked a period of intense antinationalist actions by the conservative government. As Giles Tremlett explains, under the PP,

> [t]he crack-down on ETA also began to throw up concerns about civil liberties. There was no repeat of the GAL outrages committed under the Socialists. The results, however, still sound shocking: the Basque Country's fourth-largest political party has been banned; two daily newspapers and a magazine have been closed by the courts, with the editor of one claiming he was tortured by the police; a court administrator was appointed to run a series of Basque adult education schools; and various groups supposedly devoted to promoting youth, culture or other pastimes have also been closed or had their organisers charged with collaborating with ETA. (316)

This fourth-largest political party was HB. With its fervent support of ETA's armed struggle for Basque independence, by the late 1990s, HB represented a powerful political bloc of thousands of radical nationalist votes in the Basque Country. Regardless, the Spanish Supreme Court accused HB of aiding and abetting radical nationalist terrorism, in part based on the party's decision to show a video made by ETA during an election campaign. In 1997, the court sentenced twenty-three of HB's leaders to seven years in prison each (Tremlett 317). Among them was none other than Joseba Álvarez (1959-), the son of José Luis Álvarez Enparantza, alias Txillardegi, a founder of ETA. In response to the Supreme Court's proceedings—which were

eventually overturned, although not before Eugenio Aramburu, one of the accused, committed suicide in protest of his imprisonment—a now-illegalized HB ran as Euskal Herritarrok or EH [Basque Citizens] during the 1998 regional elections and won fourteen seats, or nearly 19% of the vote, its highest number to date. The HB/EH would continue to reform itself, and be illegalized, under a variety of diverse guises into the twenty-first century, most recently appearing as Euskal Herria Bildu [Rejoin the Basque Country] beginning in 2012.

The PP's hardline stance towards ETA and its supporters persisted into the new millennium. While Aznar's government was ultimately successful in reducing ETA to a shadow of its former self, it did so at a high cost to its own members. Beginning in the mid-1990s, PP politicians suffered from pernicious, violent kidnappings and brutal assassinations that risked not only their lives, but the lives of their loved ones; victims included the future Prime Minister José María Aznar, who was the target of an unsuccessful car bombing attack in 1995. The 1997 kidnapping and subsequent murder of a popular young PP city councilman, Miguel Ángel Blanco (1968-1997), from the Basque town of Ermua, outraged Basques and Spaniards alike. More than 2,500,000 citizens mobilized and marched in Bilbao and Madrid in protest of Blanco's killing on July 14, 1997, and another 800,000 marched the following day in Seville and Zaragoza ("Manifestaciones"). The subsequent assassination of PP councilman Alberto Jiménez-Becerril Barrio and his wife, Ascensión García Ortiz, at a Seville restaurant in January of the following year likewise garnered mass protests, with more than 45,000 people, including Prime Minister Aznar, visiting as the couple lay in state at the Town Hall (Belausteguigoitia). During the period between 1990 and 1999, ETA murdered 163 victims.

On November 21, 2000, ETA murdered Ernest Lluch (1937-2000), a retired Catalan member of the PSC-PSOE (the Catalan branch of the PSOE) who had served as Minster of

Health and Consumers under Felipe González between 1982 and 1986. A respected economist and academic, Lluch was known in post-Transition Spain as a creator of the Spanish national healthcare system. Like Barrio and Ortiz two years prior, public reaction to his death was intense and immediate; 900,000 gathered in Barcelona to protest. This consistent and deadly victimization of the ruling party likely garnered a sympathy otherwise unlikely as the PP cracked down on radical Basque nationalism through the aforementioned series of sweeping regional and federal government reforms. These included reforming the Spanish Penal Code's treatment of terrorists so harshly that in 2012, the European Court of Human Rights found this doctrine guilty of violating the European Convention on Human Rights.

The 11-M Terrorist Attacks and the 2004 Election Crisis

The March 11, 2004, terrorist attacks on Madrid's bustling commuter rail system, which left 193 victims dead and another 2,000 wounded, proved pivotal in renegotiating ETA's relationship with the greater Spanish state in the new millennium. 11-M, as the event is known, took place on a Thursday, three days before the 2004 national elections on Sunday, and marked the deadliest terrorist attack on European soil since the 1988 Pan Am Flight 103 bombings. Reactions were swift. Opposition candidate José Luis Rodríguez Zapatero (1961-) of the PSOE was the first to publicly declare ETA's guilt; he was echoed by many other powerful regional and national politicians, including Juan José Ibarretxe (1957-) of the EAJ-PNV, the then-*lehendakari* [premier] of the regional Basque government. These unsubstantiated claims spread like wildfire, and were quickly taken up and amplified by Ángel Acebes (1958-), the Interior Minister under Aznar, who claimed that "[t]he government does not have any doubt at all that ETA is responsible. ETA was looking to commit a massacre in Spain and it has managed it"

(cited in Tremlett 257). In response, Arnaldo Otegi (1958-), the radical nationalist leader of Batasuna and a de facto representative of ETA, fiercely denied the organization's participation in the attacks, insisting that the bombings were instead the work of an Arab resistance movement. An increasingly agitated Aznar then publicly accused Otegi of blaming radical Islamists in order to avoid responsibility for the bombings. The back-and-forth continued as "the more ETA protested it was not them, the louder the government insisted it was" (258).

Throughout Thursday and Friday, the PP continued to insist on ETA's guilt, going as far as to broadcast a documentary about ETA's recent assassination of Basque *vicelehendakari* [vice-premier] Fernando Buesa (1946-2000) on the state television network TVE. Aznar and his party sought to draw attention to the ongoing threat presented by ETA and thus justify their political supremacy over rival Rodríguez Zapatero and the PSOE, who pledged to bring Spanish troops home from the Iraq war (269), a campaign promise that placed the candidate at sharp odds with Aznar, a fervent Bush ally. Meanwhile, a reported eleven million Spanish citizens marched across the country in a furious condemnation of the attacks and those they believed who were to blame for it: Basque nationalists, ETA, Arnaldo Otegi, Aznar, the PSOE, and the PP. During the first forty-eight hours immediately after the attack, the real culprit, al-Qaeda, had yet to be named by anyone other than Arnaldo Otegi. al-Qaeda had carried out the attacks with the assistance of a loosely-linked Madrid-based jihadist cell in response to Spanish collaboration with Bush's Iraq invasion.

However, a videotape released by the Islamist organization soon confirmed its responsibility for the attacks, as did considerable physical evidence collected from the crime scenes. On Sunday, March 13, 2004, Spaniards headed to the polls *en masse* to deliver their

verdict, with the Socialist leader Rodríguez Zapatero soundly defeating Aznar's conservative PP after two terms in office. As Giles Tremlett describes, the reason for the PP's defeat was its

> [o]bstinacy in insisting on the one version of events that would help them politically—that ETA was to blame…In the end, it was not al-Qaida that brought Aznar's People's Party down. It was ETA. Or, rather, it was Aznar's personal obsession with the separatist group…ETA had shown its full vileness, further justifying Aznar's firm stance and shaming those he saw as appeasers. (271)

The appeasers were, of course, none other than Rodríguez Zapatero and the Socialists; the former had been previously nicknamed "Bambi" for his innocent expression. But Bambi eventually triumphed, inasmuch as Rodríguez Zapatero, the first to blame ETA for the attacks, successfully won the election, saved by Aznar and the PP's continued insistence on ETA's culpability despite the release of information that strongly pointed to jihadist authorship. A Saturday announcement by PSOE spokesman Alfredo Pérez Rubalcaba (1951-2019) coinciding with the arrest of three Moroccan nationals sowed considerable doubt the day before national elections, with Rubalcaba strategically declaring that "[l]os ciudadanos españoles merecen un Gobierno que no les mienta, que les diga siempre la verdad" (cited in Cabrera 54). Thanks to ETA's (non)intervention, PP's fate was sealed, and it would remain out of power for eight years.

The Beginning of the End: 11-M to ETA's Dissolution

ETA's exculpation from the 11-M attacks did little to alleviate anxieties about terrorism (radical Basque nationalist or otherwise) across Spain and Western Europe. Following the attacks in Madrid, the European Council published a "Declaration of the Fight Against Terror" that sought to usher in a new stage of concerted antiterrorist efforts across the European Union. It

led the arrests of ETA leaders Mikel Albizu Irirate (1961-), alias Mikel Antza, and María Soledad Iparragurrie (1961-), along with eighteen others, from their hideout in France. Throughout 2004, the increasing success of the Spanish police and the Civil Guard in foiling plots by ETA drove the organization to the negotiating table, and in 2005, the PSOE approved a congressional resolution—popular with all but the PP, who voted against it—that authorized dialogue between the federal government and the group in order to put an end to radical separatist violence. On June 19, 2005, ETA officially halted attacks against politicians, and on March 22, 2006, the organization announced a permanent ceasefire. Throughout 2006, the PSOE and ETA would continue to negotiate; the fruit of these negotiations were the Loyola Agreements of September and November, 2006, which recognized Basque identity and authorized new governmental support for the community and its cultural institutions in the Basque Country and Navarre.

Despite the success of the Loyola Agreements, ETA returned to bloodshed not long after when on December 30, 2006, four members of the Elurra [Snow] Command carried out a car bombing attack in the T4 terminal of Madrid's Barajas International Airport, leaving two Ecuadorian citizens, Carlos Alonso Palate and Diego Armando Estacio, dead, and twenty others wounded. Only in June of 2007 did the organization belatedly announce its return to violence, much to the fury of Rodríguez Zapatero and the PSOE, who had repeatedly proven themselves willing to negotiate with ETA since the 2004 elections. Throughout the following years, the organization reneged on nearly all of its previous agreements, assassinating politicians like the Socialist councilman to Mondragon, Isaías Carrasco Miguel (1966-2008), alongside its more traditional targets, members of the Civil Guard and the police. All the while, a massive wave of arrests and detentions by Spanish and French forces saw more and more of ETA's remaining

leadership jailed throughout the end of the decade; among them were the infamous Francisco Javier López Peña (1958-2013), alias Thierry, and Mikel Garikoitz Aspiazu (1973-), alias Txeroki, both accused of taking part in the T4 Airport attack, among many others. Between 2000 and 2009, ETA murdered fifty-seven victims.

2010 marked a climactic year for ETA. On March 16, 2010, forty-two years after Txabi Etxebarrieta shot Civil Guardsman José Pardines dead during that fatal traffic stop in Tolosa, the organization would murder its last victim, the French policeman Jean Serve Nerine (1958-2010), in a shootout in the town of Dammarie-les-Lys southwest of Paris. Despite ETA's extensive practice of murdering civil agents, Nerine's death marked the only time a French officer was killed by the organization. Days later, in late March of 2010, a host of renowned international dignitaries, including four Nobel Peace Prize Winners, unexpectedly joined by a more compliant, if illegalized Batasuna (which remained legal in nearby France), petitioned for the organization to cease armed activity and for the Spanish government to reinstate peace talks ("Mediadores"). Six months later, on September 5, 2010, ETA released a televised announcement on BBC in which it declared a permanent ceasefire, reconfirming its permanence on January 10, 2011. On October 20, 2011, ETA officially announced the end of its armed activities.

The PSOE, which as recently as September 3, 2010, had expressed serious reservations as to the viability of a truce, found itself suddenly triumphant. An hour after ETA's pronouncement was made public, an elated Rodríguez Zapatero addressed the nation, highlighting the impact of French collaboration and expressing feelings of "legítima satisfacción por la victoria de la democracia, de la ley, de la razón" at the organization's dissolution (cited in "Zapatero"). Family members of ETA victims tempered this outpouring of governmental enthusiasm, labelling the announcement a fraud; Ángeles Pedraza, then-president of the Victims of Terrorism Association,

decried the news as simply “más de lo mismo” (cited in “Víctimas”). In 2017, ETA followed up these earlier pronouncements by announcing a definitive disarmament; in 2018, the organization released a letter manifesting its interest to completely dissolve all remaining structures and thus end its political initiatives. Between 2010 and 2020, ETA murdered one victim.

During its five decades in existence, ETA murdered approximately 850 victims, ranging from civilians and children to high-ranking Francoist foes. At no point did the organization come close to achieving its explicit goal of establishing an independent socialist state that reunited the seven original Basque provinces. Rather, throughout the organization’s existence, “an endless, vicious circle” dominated, in which

> [f]aced with a social majority opposed to armed violence and other violent action, ETA declared one ceasefire after another in order to try to find a political solution to the Basque conflict and to make negotiations inevitable. Sometimes the governments of the day took part in negotiations, but when negotiations broke down ETA broke the ceasefires and carried out ever more spectacular attacks. (Ayerbe-Sudupe 23)

This strategy, which intensified during the last two decades of the organization’s armed action (1990-2011), was simply a continuation of a cycle of political violence first begun back in 1968, with the retaliatory murders of Civil Guardsman José Pardines, ETA leader Txabi Etxebarrieta, and police captain Melitón Manzanas took place. In this context, the death of French *gendarme* Jean Serve Nerine in 2010 should be understood as the final consequence of Txabi Etxebarrieta’s decision to pull the trigger at that fateful traffic stop. Only after decades of forceful and intensely violent governmental and state interventions, which at its most evil resulted in the clandestine paramilitary murders of the GAL, was this decades-long cycle of potent political violence ever

stopped. How long it will take for the consequences of this conflict to stop echoing across Spanish and Basque society is another question entirely.

0.4 Conclusion

In his conclusion to the critical collection *Construyendo memorias: relatos históricos para Euskadi después del terrorismo,* Juan Pablo Fusi Aizpurua describes ETA as both a historical problem and a current moral issue, highlighting the actual divergence and reach of radical Basque nationalism throughout the twentieth and twenty-first centuries. The legacy of decades of assassinations, kidnappings, and bombings endures for victims and nonvictims alike. For her part, Edurne Portela cites the need for collective effort on behalf of all affected to move beyond the stifling practice of silence towards the suffering inflicted by ETA. She notes that

> Todavía queda mucho trabajo por hacer…todavía estamos muy lejos de que se produzca un cambio imaginativo real a nivel colectivo que nos permita no tanto 'superar' el conflicto, sino conocerlo en sus dimensiones más intricadas, que son las que tienen que ver con los afectos que nos unen. Y los que nos desunen. (211)

Portela's calls for reflection come in the face of the persistent growth of the radical nationalist left in regional Basque politics, continuing the activism and ideological foundations of the former across numerous local, city, and regional governments (Fusi 283). Indeed, the renewed power of radical nationalist politics in the Basque Country is best seen in Euskal Herria Bildu, which as of 2021 holds nearly a third of seats in Basque Parliament. Fusi rightly concludes that the radical nationalist left's recent electoral successes "hicieron de lo que en realidad había sido una derrota estratégica de ETA….una victoria política" (283). Thus, while the political violence of ETA no longer exists, the sentiments behind the violence—above all, a fierce desire for

Basque independence and separation from historical Spanish dominance and Castilian and global cultural imposition on Basque identity—will likely continue to fan the flames of local, regional, and national politics in the Basque Country and Spain throughout the future. The only way to dampen them, as Portela explains, is "a través de las conversaciones que se pueden crear a raíz de una lectura, de una película, de una exposición que nos sacuda, nos saque de la indiferencia colectiva, y nos haga reflexionar honestamente sobre nuestra participación en este conflicto" (211). That is exactly what this dissertation seeks to do.

In Chapter One, titled "Five Nights at Hotel Heterotopia: The Locus of Crisis in El hombre solo and Esos cielos by Bernardo Atxaga," I expand upon Mari Jose Olaziregi's foundational investigation of heterotopias in *El hombre solo* (1994) in order to elaborate further on the function of the hotel site in both this and Atxaga's succeeding 1995 novel, *Esos cielos*. I define Foucault's heterotopia as simultaneously an unreal construction existing within the bounds of literature *and* a real counter-site, an inversion outside of all places where disparate elements collide. Through a comparative analysis of these novels, I argue that the hotel functions as a heterotopia of crisis, and that the protagonists' presence there catalyzes the fundamental dilemma of contemporary Basque identity lying at the heart of both novels. The protagonists of *El hombre solo* and *Esos cielos* are forced to come to terms with the fragmentation and dissolution of their identities resulting from their displacement from their Basque homeland into the hotel site. In *El hombre solo* and *Esos cielos* the hotel becomes the interstitial, disjunctive space from which new subjects, beings in crisis, emerge.

In Chapter Two, "The Patria Problem: Contemporary Basque Fiction and the Politics of Victimization," I invoke Gabriel Gatti's recent study on victimhood and politics in contemporary Spain, in which the author sustains that the family members of those killed by the Basque

nationalist terrorist organization ETA have long monopolized the figure of the victim in the twentieth and twenty-first century Spanish imagination. During the Basque conflict on into the present day, ETA's victims found themselves within a sacralized space that locates them at the center of national narratives on victimhood, violence, and culpability. Until the late twentieth century, Basque cultural production avoided questioning the clearly established line between victim and victimizer, maintaining instead an exacting binarization between good (sufferers/ETA's victims and their families) and evil (aggressors/ETA militants). In response to this monopoly, Fernando Aramburu's recent novel *Patria* (2016) deploys a lengthy multivocal discourse as a method of interrogating the highly contested cultural construction of victimhood in the Basque Country. The novel disrupts the prearranged hegemonic narratives of the conflict and its sufferers dating from the nineteen-eighties until present through a democratization of the victim figure, thus contesting established national tropes about victimization.

In Chapter Three, "The *Ocho apellidos vascos* Effect: Disavowing Difference in *Fe de etarras*," I investigate two recent films that address the problem of regional identities, Emilio Martínez-Lázaro's 2014 romantic comedy *Ocho apellidos vascos* and Borja Cobeaga's 2017 dark comedy *Fe de etarras*. The latter film employs techniques of stereotype and cliché first established by *Ocho apellidos vascos* in order to repudiate discourses of Basque nationalism. Specifically, *Fe de etarras* exploits exaggerated symbols of regional (Basque) and national (Spanish) identity in order to mock the practice of cultural difference that supports problematic narratives of exclusive regional identity, which in turn justifies the Basque nationalist cause. By placing *Ocho apellidos vascos* in dialogue with *Fe de etarras*, I examine how the latter employs a diverse range of symbols of varying allegorical weight and comedic impact to both satirize and criticize the problematic narratives of difference engaged by members of the Basque nationalist

community (as well as those in the Spanish nationalist camp, to a lesser extent) in their pursuit of independence. Through their analysis, I investigate how both *Ocho apellidos vascos* and *Fe de etarras* censure the broader discourse of radical Basque nationalism that looks to these symbols to shore up its sense of self, thus demonstrating the larger discursive impact achieved by recent Peninsular blockbuster comedy films as they employ humor to inform a separatist critique.

Lastly, in Chapter Four, "Performing Radical Basque Nationalism: The *Bertsolaritza* Structure in Borja Cobeaga's *Negociador*," I explore how the underlying structure of Borja Cobeaga's dark comedy *Negociador* corresponds to the *bertsolaritza* model of Basque oral tradition. This 2014 film, which fictionalizes the collapse of peace talks between a representative of the ruling PSOE government and the radical nationalist terrorist organization ETA renders its titular negotiators as *bertsolaris* whose failure to mediate an end to the Basque conflict is largely contingent on the breakdown of this structure over the course of the film. The film's deployment of this cultural model functions as an ironization of a traditional Basque oral practice, whose misappropriation engenders a mordant criticism of the myopic limitations of the radical political ideologies of ETA. The *bertsolaritza* model employed by the characters of Manu, Jokin, and Patxi in the film makes visible the historic struggle for dominance between the Spanish national government and ETA through a model that translates daily practices of identity creation through cultural performance on screen. Rendering the *bertsolaritza* structure tangible in this way, Cobeaga thus emphasizes the myopia of radical Basque nationalism as negotiations between the competing *bertsolaris* collapse, ironically revealing ETA's disinterest in participating in a practice from which it would only benefit.

CHAPTER ONE

Five Nights at Hotel Heterotopia: The Locus of Crisis in *El hombre solo* and *Esos cielos* by Bernardo Atxaga

1.1

In her 2005 monograph *Waking the Hedgehog: The Literary Universe of Bernardo Atxaga*, Mari Jose Olaziregi applies the Foucauldian concept of the heterotopia to Bernardo Atxaga's (1951-) novel, *El hombre solo,* to argue that its protagonist, Carlos, occupies a heterotopic counter-space due to his self-imposed exile from his native Basque Country. In this chapter, I expand upon Olaziregi's foundational investigation of heterotopias in *El hombre solo* (1994) in order to elaborate further on the function of the hotel site in both this and Atxaga's succeeding 1995 novel, *Esos cielos*.[3] In this analysis, I define Foucault's heterotopia as simultaneously an unreal construction existing within the bounds of literature *and* a real counter-site, an inversion "outside of all places" where disparate elements collide. Through a comparative analysis of these novels—both foundational texts in the development of Basque realist narrative in the nineties—I argue that the hotel functions as a heterotopia of crisis, and that the protagonists' presence there catalyzes the fundamental dilemma of contemporary Basque identity lying at the heart of both novels.

The protagonists of *El hombre solo* and *Esos cielos*—Carlos and Irene, respectively—are forced to come to terms with the fragmentation and dissolution of their identities and ideologies that result from their displacement from their Basque homeland into the hotel site. In this sense, the hotel in Atxaga's novels can be understood as a means to address what Homi Bhabha identifies as "[t]he problem of signifying the interstitial passages and processes of cultural

[3] For simplicity's sake, I refer to these novels by their Spanish titles throughout the analysis, unless otherwise noted.

difference that are inscribed in the in-between" (217); here, the ontological doubts faced by ex-militants in post-Transition Spain as they attempt to return to civil society in a new and unstable democracy. In *El hombre solo* and *Esos cielos*, the hotel becomes the interstitial, disjunctive space from which new subjects, beings in crisis, emerge.

The heterotopia is an alternate space, the binary of the utopia, in which several spaces coexist and that contains a systematized entrance and exit, with other related components shifting based on time, culture, and space. Its flexibility is emphasized by Foucault's statement that the heterotopia consists of "a sort of simultaneously mythic and real contestation of the space in which we live" (4). In short, an interstitial site of diverse, varied applications to spaces both real and imagined. The heterotopia's utility resides in its inherent duality as a simultaneous concrete and symbolic site. This engenders a reading of the hotel space in *El hombre solo* and *Esos cielos* through a heterotopic lens, where this site is understood as a palimpsest in which it is both the other space, a non-space, *and* a real counter-site, the binary of a utopia.

Specifically, the trajectories of both novels have their protagonists moving from a heterotopia of deviation—the prison, a space "in which individuals whose behavior is deviant in relation to the required mean or norm are placed"—into the hotel, a site soon marked as a heterotopia of crisis for Carlos and Irene (Foucault 5). Foucault defines the heterotopia of crisis as a "privileged or sacred or forbidden place, reserved for individuals who are, in relation to society and to the human environment in which they live, in a state of crisis: adolescents, menstruating women, pregnant women, the elderly" (4). Carlos and Irene move laterally between heterotopias: once freed from an environment predicated on the enclosure of perceived aberrance to their new hotel environment, they are thrust into internal crisis begun in the prison space, whose physical isolation from their homeland has irrevocably distanced the protagonists from

their past selves. In the hotel space, both face up-close the disintegration of their core values and its effect on their identities as both (ex)militants and civilians. The heterotopic site of the hotel has an undeniable effect on Carlos' and Irene's consciousnesses, demonstrating its key role in both narrations as an impetus for the censure of radical nationalist terrorism.

1.2

Atxaga's 1993 novel *Gizona bere bakardadean* [*El hombre solo/The Lone Man*] narrates the internal struggle of protagonist Carlos, the titular lone(ly) man. Beginning on June 28, 1982, the novel spans the five tense days that become Carlos' last on Earth. Middle-aged, anxious, and plagued by conflicting inner voices, Carlos is fundamentally unable to connect with the small band of former nationalist militants with whom he shares both a business—a thriving hotel outside of Barcelona—and a complex history that involves the group's past crimes on behalf of obliquely referred-to organization, the radical Basque nationalist terrorist organization, ETA.

Carlos and his companions were released from prison under the auspices of the polemic 1977 Amnesty Law, which freed Franco's political prisoners. Five years later, Carlos' individual decision to allow two active members of ETA to take refuge from Spanish police beneath the hotel's bakery provokes an inexorable chain of dramatic events that play out alongside the 1982 FIFA World Cup. An atmosphere of cutthroat competition and increasing tension between rival factions permeates the novel—not just because the Polish national team is lodged at the hotel. As the police's suspicion that the activists are hidden at the hotel grows, Carlos chooses to act alone to save them and, in doing so, inadvertently causes the death of an innocent victim, as well as his own. In Annabel Martín's estimation, *El hombre solo*'s significance lies in that it is "una de las primeras novelas escritas en euskera sobre el mundo sociológico y psicológico de ETA" and thus

that it "genera preguntas políticas que aún siguen vigentes por las insuficiencias de la democracia española" (109).

Atxaga's 1995 novel *Zeru horiek* [*Esos cielos/Those Skies*] likewise poses serious doubts about the realities of the post-Transition Spanish state. In a well-reported account from the author, Atxaga was inspired to write the novel after watching two young men write graffiti calling someone a traitor; he later decided to write the story of that traitor's return to home (Kortazar 53-54). In a 2018 interview, Atxaga cited the fact that "[d]entro del País Vasco, de ese mundo que yo cuento, el tema de la traición es tabú" as a catalyst for his interest in the topic ("Tensión" 26). *Esos cielos* is the story of thirty-seven year-old Irene's return to Bilbao after four years of imprisonment at an unnamed women's prison in Barcelona.[4] Irene, a Yoyes-like figure, is a former ETA militant released after her participation in the Social Reinsertion Plan, begun in 1981 under the government of Leopoldo Calvo Sotelo and still active in 2020 (Aizpeolea et al.; Quílez).[5] The Plan invited imprisoned militants like Irene to abandon violence and all ties with ETA; those who participated were rewarded with better conditions, imprisonment closer to home, and pardons. The narrative opens on her first night of freedom, which she spends in a cheap hotel in Barcelona, and continues during the course of her journey west from Catalonia to the Basque Country the following afternoon.

The novel features even stricter temporal limitations than *El hombre solo,* exchanging a period of several days for a compact twenty-four hours, with the bulk of the narration centered on Irene's bus journey. Her encounter with a number of strangers on the bus, among them

[4] Likely the Centre Penitenciari de dones de Barcelona. Inaugurated in 1983, this prison is located in the neighborhood of La Vila Olímpica del Poblenou at the eastern limit of the city. From there, Irene would have been easily able to travel on foot to the bars, hotel, and station she visits in the novel. In fact, the Estació del Nord is only a twenty-minute walk from the Centre Penitenciari.

[5] Yoyes, the nickname of high-ranking ex-militant María Dolores Katarain, was murdered in broad daylight after her return to the Basque Country from exile in Mexico on September 10th, 1986. The murder was meant to punish Katarain for being a "traitor," that is, for abandoning the organization.

several nuns, an ill older woman, and most significantly, two undercover police officers in the Antiterrorist Brigade marks her journey home as a person haunted by a growing sense of fear as she nears her destination. In this sense, *Esos cielos* is a novel that, above all, is recognized by its decision to "no intenta[r] resolver las tensiones sociopolíticas que retrata," instead leaving them, like the text itself, "siempre…en movimiento" (Perret 127). Indeed, this movement underlies the essential instability that permeates the heterotopic hotel space in the novel.

1.3

Contextualizing these works within both contemporary history and Atxaga's expansive literary production is critical, given the wide breadth of work by an author that began to publish upon the eve of Spain's Transition. Although written and published in the early nineties, both *El hombre solo* and *Esos cielos* attempt to realistically portray the political instability of the Transition period, in which the newly elected democratic government and the 1978 Constitution were inarguably at their most fragile. As Giles Tremlett explains,

> Democracy did not appear in Spain overnight – though the period in which it emerged is often viewed through rose-tinted glasses… The *Transición* was a period of high political drama… In the five years after Franco's death, more than a hundred demonstrators, left-wing activists, students and separatists were killed by the police or the '*ultras*,' the far-right. Many more were killed by ETA and other left-wing or separatist terrorist groups.[6] (72)

Compounding the violence that plagued the country during this period were several key factors that weakened public faith in the nascent Spanish democracy and its ability to maintain order.

[6] Italics original to author.

Among these factors were rampant inflation and unemployment resulting from an economy in shambles; growing political regionalisms in the Basque Country, Catalonia, and Galicia legitimized by the autonomy statutes created in Part VIII of the 1978 Spanish Constitution; and most ominously, a failed coup d'état spearheaded by the forces of Neo-Francoist Antonio Tejero on February 23, 1981.

Despite the ultimate preservation of constitutional order after 1981 and Calvo Sotelo's subsequent inauguration as Prime Minister (though his term would be but brief), anxiety about the new democracy continued, and the feeling "Franco's legacy had not fully disappeared" persisted among citizens (Tremlett 95). In the case of the Basque Country, this period of dramatic political transformation was only intensified by the exponential growth of "the appeal of 'neo-regionalisms" (Núñez 75). These regionalist ideologies were hardly unfamiliar in the region—the modern founding father of Basque nationalism, Sabino Arana, began to openly preach a doctrine of Basque independence as early as 1893—but new interest saw their consolidation as party organizations during the 1980s and first half of the 1990s, bringing regional identity-based political parties and related nationalist movements to the forefront of public awareness (74-5).

Set in 1977 and the mid- to late 1980s, respectively, *Esos cielos* and *El hombre solo* reify these anxieties through their realist narratives. *El hombre solo* is the first major work in what is now considered Atxaga's realist period, which Jon Kortazar situates between 1988 and 1995. Both *El hombre solo* and *Esos cielos* were published during this time, a period that mirrors a greater movement towards realism in Basque literature overall. As novels at the forefront of a new literary zeitgeist, both were received with great critical acclaim (Olaziregi; Perret). Prior Basque literary production had been dominated by a number of competing movements whose

main goal was to break with Costumbrismo, which had long dominated Basque letters. The works of Atxaga's contemporary, Ramon Saizarbitoria (1944-), who began to publish experimental, avant-garde novels in 1969 with *Egunero hasten delako* [*Porque empieza cada día/Because It Begins Every Day*], in large part inaugurated the realist mode in Basque letters. Saizarbitoria's publications in the second half of the twentieth century is credited with the modernization of the contemporary Basque novel, as it employed a more (although not always) realistic approach to form and content (Kortazar 14-15, 13).

The significance of Saizarbitoria's work—and not long after, Atxaga's—went beyond his embrace of the new realist zeitgeist, addressing the very real issues facing the Basque Country after the Transition period. Writing in 1998, Joseba Gabilondo cites Saizarbitoria, alongside Atxaga, as the new face of Basque literary production due to their unflinching ability to embrace contemporary political violence in their realist narratives. Although there was no shortage of politically inspired violence across the Iberian Peninsula post-Transition, Atxaga's and Saizarbitoria's novels focus specifically on quandary of the radical separatism of ETA and the state-sanctioned counterterrorist response (of the Civil Guard, the Francoist Secret Police, and the GAL) in and around the Basque Country during this period. Referring to *El hombre solo* and Saizarbitoria's 1995 novel *Los pasos incontables*, Gabilondo writes that

> [t]he latest literary texts by key Basque writers Bernardo Atxaga (1951-) and Ramon Saizarbitoria (1944-) exemplify Basque literature's own turn to history. This turn represents a radical departure from previous production, for this time around Basque literature addresses the issue of terrorism, the problem at the core of Basque society, head on in its historical complexity…They constitute the first attempt to write historically about ETA without either endorsing or marginalizing it. (114)

As seen in these works, the foundational role of terrorism in the Basque realist narrative of the nineties cannot be overstated. In the eighties, radical Basque nationalist terrorism had hit new highs across the Iberian Peninsula. In 1980, ETA's deadliest year, ninety-three people—political enemies and civilians alike—were killed in its terrorist attacks. It is notable that the previous two years were likewise *each* the deadliest on record, with eighty-six and sixty-five mortal victims in 1979 and 1978, respectively. The highest death tolls caused by the organization took place over the course of the 1980s with a total of 412 victims. The grim symbol of this bloody decade became the car bombing attack at the Hipercor shopping center in Barcelona on June 19, 1987. The Hipercor blast stood out as ETA's deadliest assault on Spanish soil at the time, with twenty-one civilian victims killed by a powerful car bomb. This attack and others like it infused the realist aesthetics of Basque authors with a tone of cynicism and despair.

These writers could hardly avoid the brutal violence on their doorstep, as the car bombs and shootouts continued, seemingly unabating, into the nineties and second millennium (fig. 2). The first novel of the Basque nationalist conflict, *Ehun metro* [*Cien metros*/*One Hundred Meters*] published by Saizarbitoria in 1976, is heralded as the inaugural modern literary testimony to the Basque Country's profound political discord. However, it wasn't until the nineties that the mass publication of realistic literature reflecting this crisis truly began. Olaziregi tracks this tendency in part to a boom in memory studies beginning in the last three decades of the twentieth century as well as real-life inspiration in the case of authors like Atxaga ("Literature" 254, 258). For his part, Gabilondo notes that by this time, "Basque literature has abandoned its spatial, allegorical thrust of the 70s and 80s and has moved into the 90s to explore the historical foundations of its community," a shift that created new relationships between authors, narratives, and the violence suffered by Basque communities (122). This statement

holds true for Atxaga, whose publications in the eighties did not address the violent political conflict plaguing his homeland. In fact, it wasn't until the nineties that the author would turn the recent events of the last decade into the basis of his writing.

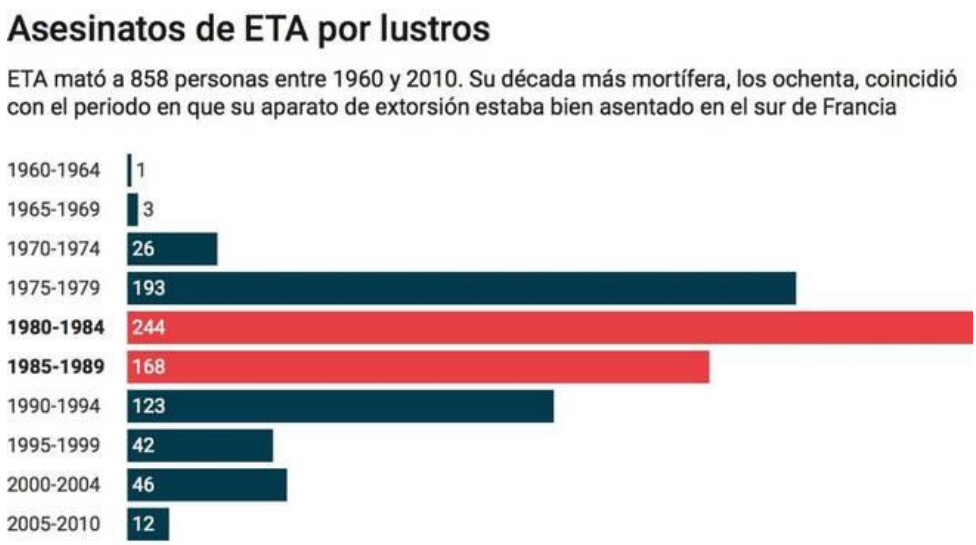

Fig. 2. Deaths attributed to ETA between 1960 and 2010. Source: García Rey, Marcos. "El legado mortal de ETA: todos los datos sobre sus 858 asesinatos." *El Confidencial*, 3 jun. 2018, www.elconfidencial.com/espana/2018-06-03/eta-numeros-victimas-mortales-terrorismo_1565850/.

Prior to the nineties, Atxaga's writing had followed general literary trends across the Iberian Peninsula while simultaneously carving out a space for the author in the field of Basque letters. Within its curious melding of the fantastic, the mysterious, and often the experimental, in 1988 Atxaga published what many consider to be his most important novel to date, *Obabakoak* [*Los de Obaba/Those from Obaba*], which would launch him to fame in the realm of Basque letters. The novel features a vast mythologized narrative that mixes genres, space, and time to create a hybrid text in which "two symbolic worlds coexist, the world of childhood and the world of modernity" (Kortazar 48). Neither are particularly realistic. The novel's diverse influences hint at traditional Basque themes and intertexts alongside Latin American magical realism and

dark ruralism. *Obabakoak* is thus an appropriate emblem of the state of pre-realist literary production in the Basque Country that looked abroad to Latin America, rather than to the political conflict at its doorstep, for inspiration.

Yet despite brilliant praise from critics like Manuel López de Abiada and the novel's sustained success over the years—in 1989 it received the Critic's Prize, the Euskadi Prize, and the Spanish National Prize for Narrative—all was not well in the field of Basque letters after *Obabakoak*'s publication. Certainly, not all members of the Basque literati were in support of the aesthetics of fantasy over that of reality, as evinced by Lasagabaster's infamous 1990 complaint: "[i]n the end, one has the impression that our narrative writers have not yet told us what we were, what we are, or what we would like to be. The Stendhal-like mirror of the Basque novel has barely begun to reflect the path of our dreams and our experiences" (23). Interestingly, Lasagabaster's lament of the lack of realist narrative production in the Basque Country seems to have foretold its later explosion just a few years later.

In the case of twentieth century Basque literary production, the nineties were a moment of particular significance. Kortazar notes that by 1993, the year in which *El hombre solo* was published, a meaningful aesthetic "shift had been completed and [Basque] authors consciously strove to connect with reality" (50). Among those participating in the incipient realism of the nineties were, alongside Atxaga, the authors Itxaro Borda, Aingeru Epaltxa, Edorta Jimenez, Joan Mari Irigoien, and Luis Mari Muxika, and all of whom published realist narratives that same year. For these and others experimenting with this inchoate (in Basque literature, at least) aesthetic, realism implied a more straightforward, linear narrative experience often tinted with pessimism, given its close relationship to violent political turmoil of the late eighties and early nineties (50).

The result of this general movement in Basque literature in the nineties was an entirely heterogenous set of novels published where realist inclinations manifested differently in each author. That this realism would be heterogenic and unstable is no surprise, given, as Lasagabaster explains, the uneven development of the Basque novel in the twentieth century.[7] In any case, Atxaga's *El hombre solo*—and, to a lesser extent, his 1992 children's book *Memorias de una vaca* (published originally as *Behi euskaldun baten memoriak* [*Memories of a Basque Cow*] in 1991)—represent a new embrace of realism in the author's production that breaks with the fantastical Obaba. As realist texts, both *El hombre solo* and *Esos cielos* can be understood as intense psychological portrayals of their protagonists' inner states, with interior monologues in the second and third person dominating throughout, accompanied by vivid descriptions of the characters' inner monologues.

In the following pages, I examine what Olaziregi has termed the "heterotopic spaces of crisis or digression (the hotel or the prison)," because of the hotel's fundamental role as a catalyst of the characters' crises of identity in exile ("Literature" 258). With the hotel, Atxaga creates a space in both novels whose inherent conflict marks it as significant for the way in which its liminality rejects both the permanent spatial displacement of the prison, an experience shared by both characters, and the idealized homeland out of their reach within their narrations. The psychic consequences of this fragmentary and jumbled space continue to erupt, like aftershocks, throughout each novel for Carlos and Irene, as their identities merge and ultimately collapse within its bounds. The loss of the protagonists' identity within the hotel speaks to the

[7] Writing in 1990, Lasagabaster notes, "The Basque novel has not gone through the experience of fictionalized realism, since it has necessarily had to go from prerealism (or strongly regionalist literature which some of today's scholars define as essentially "anti-novel") to the most modern and avant-garde forms. In thirty short years the Basque narrative has had to traverse a path that was so complicated that it could not avoid being affected by the process. Perhaps it is like a child who grows prematurely and, having grown tall before his time, still cannot hide certain…inadequacies. The Basque narrative is experiencing a growth crisis, which is the basis for explaining its many virtues and undeniable limitations" (19).

impossibility of these ex-militants' adaptation to civilian life given the potent political instability of post-Transition Spain. Neither character escapes from the consequences of the crisis of identity begun in the hotel space: Carlos dies while Irene is forced to seek out yet another heterotopia of crisis in a convent.

1.4

The hotel's presence as the principal frame of *El hombre solo* is offset by a more limited presence in *Esos cielos*, whose locus is primarily the bus that conveys Irene back to the Basque Country. However, the "very limited…time/space coordinates" spanning only few days in each novel mark Irene's twelve-hour stay in a cheap Barcelona hotel as a significant portion of the overall narrative arc (Olaziregi, *Hedgehog* 218).[8] Both are equally constrained by their narratives and in fact, it is the reduced "spatial-temporal elements" of *El hombre solo* and *Esos cielos* that reinforce the hotel site in both as fundamental, given its inclusion in two novels where "the places in which the action takes place are few" (258, 219). Both hotels in *El hombre solo* and *Esos cielos* correspond to key indicators of the heterotopic space as highlighted by Foucault. Hotels have a privileged system of ingress and egress that are privileged and controlled: in *El hombre solo* by the police checkpoint and in *Esos cielos* by Irene's would-be paramour, alongside the guest reception in both, presumably managed by a receptionist (Atxaga 378, 27). The hotel is also the site of an asynchronous experience of time. In *El hombre solo*—specifically, during days one through four of Carlos's narration—time is mainly experienced by the protagonist as endless, atemporal, as he is dominated by lengthy excursions into his past memories, something he only becomes aware of upon leaving the hotel: "[c]uando consiguió

[8] To this point, Olaziregi writes that in *Esos cielos*, "the events take place in the two days following her [Irene's] release from jail. In this sense, Atxaga's use of the spaces in the novel is extremely important" (*Hedgehog* 234).

atravesar la maleza y salir del edificio, caminó hasta la farola donde volaba el pequeño murciélago y se detuvo a respirar. Se sentía como un nadador que ha permanecido demasiado tiempo bajo el agua" (71). On the fifth day of his narration—the last of his life—the memories are replaced with a feeling of inexorability as time suddenly rushes forward; as his mental countdown winds down, Carlos experiences its end like a blow upon his back (439). Irene's experience at the cheap hotel in Barcelona is likewise ephemeral. She only spends the night before continuing west to Bilbao (37). The fleetingness of the brief night in the hotel is contrasted by its persistence in her thoughts, as Irene revisits the encounter in her letter to her friend Andoni (25-7) and again as the basis of her persistent fear of being arrested by the Antiterrorist Brigade for the events that have taken place there.

Both hotels are defined by their interstitiality. In *El hombre solo,* Atxaga's description of the establishment that Carlos runs with his ex-militant companions, located a few hundred meters from the highway towards Barcelona, offers relevant details to the spaces that intervene within the greater site:

> El hotel era un edificio blanco y de corte racionalista formado por un pabellón rectangular de 60 habitaciones al que se unía, en uno de sus extremos, la torre cuadrada donde se hallan los apartamentos de los socios del mismo hotel, así como el restaurante y otros servicios….[Carlos] se dirigió a la parte reservada a restaurante y cocina. Ésta quedaba a la derecha de la escalera, al otro lado de la zona de recepción del hotel, y al otro lado, también, del salón donde en aquel mismo instante comenzaba a celebrarse la fiesta. (27)

This description highlights the confluence of many spaces in one: the guest rooms, the staff living quarters, the restaurant, the kitchen, the reception area, and the salon, alongside various

other related sites mentioned later (the hotel pool, the garage, the bakery). These diverse spaces affirm a variety of different uses, ranging from public to private, to the satisfaction of basic physiological needs (the kitchen, the restaurant, the guest rooms) to more complex psychological needs for the characters (such as in the bakery, where Carlos finds relief from mental torment of his voices). Given this potent incongruence, a site such as the hotel—in which the elite athletes of the Polish national soccer team derided by their translator as materialist are brought together with a handful of failed ex-militants—can be nothing other than a heterotopia. The hotel is a counter-space, one that negates easy separation by juxtaposing inherently dissimilar elements within its walls.

The description of the hotel offered in *Esos cielos* is more circumscribed, given the novel's protagonist spent the previous night in "cuatro o cinco bares" drinking beer in bad company (Atxaga 13). Her inebriation limits her description of the space to the few fleeting details she recalls: she repeatedly remembers that it was "un hotel barato" (12, 37), describing it in her letter to Andoni as "el más barato de Barcelona, hasta las sábanas estaban sucias" (27). Regardless of these constraints, the reader may safely assume that like in any other hotel, that multiple spaces conflict and collide within. When Irene slashes her unnamed would-be paramour with her handmade "punzón" after he threatens her, he flees deeper into the hotel in search of aid: "[e]nloquecido por el dolor, aterrorizado por la sangre que surgía de las heridas y comenzaba a manchar las sábanas, huyó corriendo de la habitación. No hacia la calle, puesto que estaba desnudo, sino hacia algún punto del hotel" (38). An important heterotopic implication lies behind this tragicomic scene. In his flight from the danger of the hotel room, Irene's erstwhile lover seeks to escape from a semi-public space to a private one while remaining under the same roof,

as to not endanger his pride with full-on public nudity nor risk more physical violence from Irene.

Where could he have gone? One imagines to tend to his wounds in an available bathroom, or to hide in another guest room; this unnamed man, like Carlos and Irene, has a multiplicity of intermingled spaces to choose from, each affirming multiple different functions. Perhaps the man even sought out the hotel's coat check to resolve his nudity before calling for aid. Like the curious juxtaposition of Polish soccer players and retired nationalist ideologues in *El hombre solo*, where else could such an ex-militant as Irene be thrown together with such an ill-suited buffoon? As spaces in which many different elements are placed in proximity despite incongruity, the heterotopic hotels in *El hombre solo* and *Esos cielos* open their physical and metaphorical doors to the cohabitation of discordance and contradiction within the same site.

While I have just demonstrated that hotel is always a heterotopia, it is not always a heterotopia of crisis. What distinguishes a heterotopia of crisis from the general term is its nature as a privileged space reserved for those in crisis with their greater environment. In brief, it is Carlos and Irene's fraught relationship to their identity, political and personal, further fragmented through their exile (which, in the case of the former, is self-imposed), that transforms them into beings in crisis. In turn, this internal turmoil transmutes the hotel into a heterotopia of crisis. The hotel is not far off from the example of a heterotopia of crisis originally offered by Foucault, that of the boarding school. Just as adolescents, isolated at boarding schools, must struggle with manifestations of their maturing selves that occur at this "elsewhere," likewise do Carlos and Irene find themselves struggling with ontological doubts that surface at the hotel.

For the protagonist of *El hombre solo*, ontological doubts manifest through his involvement with Jon and Jone, the alias of the radical nationalist militants that he has hidden

underneath the hotel's bakery. Jon and Jone are on the run after a planned backpack bombing killed an innocent child rather than its intended target, the police (Atxaga 120). Carlos' crisis of identity comes to the forefront of the novel upon his initial encounter with Jone. During their conversation, he repeatedly identifies himself, both externally to Jone and internally through the Rata's interior monologue, as an ex-militant: "[h]acía años que no pertenecía a la organización. No era más que un colaborador ocasional, un militante retirado que se había prestado a hacer un favor" (38). Jone presses Carlos on this seeming case of cognitive dissonance—how can he claim both his retirement from, and yet at present be collaborating with, the organization?—yet the autogenic equivocations he offers do not satisfy her:

> "¿Qué opinas de la línea que lleva la organización esta última temporada?" dijo ella…
>
> "Yo creo que vuestra lucha actual es absurda," le contestó Carlos secamente….
>
> "Entonces, ¿porque nos escondiste? ¿Viste mi foto en el periódico y quisiste contactar conmigo? ¿Fue por eso?"
>
> Carlos tuvo la impresión de que, realmente, le hablaba desde el fondo de un túnel.
>
> "No nos enfademos," dijo… "Ahora os escondo, de acuerdo, porque cuando me lo pidieron me pareció que debía hacerlo. Pero no es una decisión que valga para siempre. Quizá la próxima vez no acepte la propuesta. Tenéis que convenceros de eso. Yo no pertenezco a la organización. Lo siento, pero es así." (51-2)

With the threat of future perfidy, this conversation reveals that Carlos' most portentous political and criminal action since his release from prison—at least, since the bank robberies and money laundering he had committed with the other ex-militants to open the hotel—has not been encouraged by any real ideological zeal for ETA. As the reader discovers through his narrative, it was shame of his petty bourgeoise lifestyle that encouraged his decision to shelter the militants.

In a conversation with another ex-militant/hotel employee, Mikel, Carlos voices his fear of having become irresolutely middle-class, realizing that "[q]uizás se debía a aquel sentimiento que Mikel había acertado a expresar, 'yo siento vergüenza, Carlos, me parece que aburguesado mientras los dos nos siguen en la lucha y eso me acompleja.' Era verdad también él pudiera percibir aquel sentimiento en su interior" (386). Ironically for Carlos, his fear of others' perception of him as bourgeoise, has already come to pass long before this conversation with Mikel, given that Carlos has participated in civilian life via the hotel business since 1977. It is fear of scorn which motivates him to hide the active militants more than any burning desire to promote an independent Basque state.

Carlos' further reflections continue to call attention to the distance that between himself in 1982 and his militant past self: "[l]e preocupaba mucho lo que de él pudieran pensar Jone y los demás de la organización, no quería que le tomara por un flojo. Y quizá ahí residía la clave, en la servidumbre que aquella preocupación ponía de manifiesto, ya que haber sido indiferente aquellas opiniones jamás habría entrado en el juego" (386). These two factors—the shame of self-gentrification and of perceived weakness—have convinced Carlos to hide the fugitives. In the bakery, listening to the young militant as if from the end of a long tunnel, Carlos and Jone are separated by the vast metaphorical distance of belief and identity, and his rupture with his past militant self becomes clear. But if Carlos is not the militant ideologue he used to be, who is he?

The protagonist has not the faintest clue, catalyzing his crisis of identity. The struggle of the protagonist of "Atxaga's novel is that of the lone man consumed by his indecision, which vacillates between disillusion and nostalgia, between guilt for the horror of his past and for his present inactivity" (Ballesteros 304). The disintegration of the political principles that Carlos once held dear, rendered crystal clear in the previous discussion with Jone, becomes a leading

theme throughout the rest of the novel as Carlos' lack of separatist and nationalist convictions intensify his indeterminate identity. By his own admission, almost half of Carlos' forty years have been spent as a militant in ETA or in jail for crimes committed under its direction (Atxaga 48). Yet he feels he has little to show for his toil on behalf of an independent Basque state:[9]

> Cuando repasaba su trayectoria vital...le parecía que lo único que podía salvarse eran los cinco años que llevaba en el hotel trabajando por puro capricho y sin otra finalidad que la de hacer un pan de calidad… "Maravilloso," le decía entonces la Rata. "Casi cuarenta años luchando en este mundo y luego resulta que el fruto de tanto esfuerzo es el pan que un pequeño burgués usa para rebañar la salsa de tomate que le queda en el plato." (49)

Carlos is in a state of crisis. His past militancy has achieved little (other than the murder of a supposed ideological enemy), and his present role as the hotel baker has only solidified the unwanted identity as bourgeoise. Carlos does not belong in armed nor civil circles, and he only has a symbolic loaf of bread to show for decades of inner toil and political turmoil. Isolated, the lone man's narrative is one that reflects the broader trajectory of this figure in the eighties, when

> [t]he *etarra* has stopped being the effective vehicle of opposition to the national State and, with the exception of the Basque radical nationalism which demands independence for the Basque Country and has ETA as its armed wing, has lost the sympathy and identification of citizens and political parties that it enjoyed during Francoism and the first years of the political transition….The *etarra*'s marginality must thus be understood as a reflection of the loss of acceptance in the Basque and Spanish societies.[10]
>
> (Ballesteros 301)

[9] This is, of course, an understatement. Carlos has killed at least one person on ETA's orders, a businessman deemed enemy of the organization for unspecified reasons. Yet despite memories of this event haunting his thoughts, he does not list it as one of particular importance when reviewing his life so far in 1982.

[10] Italics original to author.

Vocalizing this communal distaste cited by Ballesteros, Carlos openly and repeatedly decries the actions of ETA from where it has left him: on the margins in exile. Yet he does this while simultaneously protecting and providing for the outlaws, despite the increasing police presence at the hotel and the growing suspicion and hostility of his fellow ex-militant and hotel owner, Ugarte. Carlos knows he is not the militant he once was, yet his complex relationship with his past self prevents him from embracing his present identity.

Thus Carlos is trapped by his own "ambivalence and ideological (in)definition," which intensify within the hotel's walls, creating within them a heterotopia of perpetual crisis (Ballesteros 291). The hotel is an "elsewhere," rather than a singular, identifiable space. It is the site upon which converge the intense ideological and ontological doubts of the protagonist and the site from which he broadcasts his hopes for the future outwards towards Barcelona. Carlos recognizes that leaving this heterotopia of crisis is the only way to form a cohesive identity:

> [a]lquilaría un apartamento en el centro de Barcelona…Y una vez en Barcelona, por qué no, recuperaría su verdadero nombre, y al fin abandonaría el seudónimo de Carlos... además debía emprender el nuevo modo de vida cuanto antes, cuánto se resolviera el problema del Jon y Jone. (Atxaga 113)

Yet Carlos dies without fully escaping from the bonds of the heterotopia of crisis as his identity collapses under the weight of self-negation (397). Carlos is no militant, but neither is he a baker or businessman.

Upon his violent death in an ambush by the Antiterrorist Brigade on the fifth and last day narrated in the novel, Carlos' crisis crystallizes. The protagonist is "[c]ondemned to living in a place that is a nonplace… a man exiled from his country and his people, a man whose identity has been denied…and who is in a perpetual state of melancholy" (Olaziregi, *Hedgehog* 224).

That his death is deeply ironic (the Polish football team's Spanish translator, Danuta, whom he had befriended, gave Carlos up to the police for the large financial reward, despite having persistently fashioned herself as an anti-materialist socialist revolutionary) is no surprise, given that Carlos had been unable to create an identity that neither admitted or contradicted such political ideologies.[11] Within the heterotopic hotel of crisis, then, Carlos dies when the weight of the many incongruous identities and ideologies inside him—baker, businessman, militant, socialist, separatist, pacifist—collapse upon him. Unable to escape the heterotopia of crisis, it becomes like a black hole, subsuming both the protagonist and his inherently unreconcilable identities into a nothingness in which all converge.

1.5

Like *El hombre solo*, *Esos cielos* opens with a protagonist in the throes of an identity crisis, evinced by her meandering bacchanal through the city upon her release from prison. Her willing participation in the Social Reinsertion Plan has freed Irene, but in doing so has robbed her of the only home she has known for four years, leaving her "deambulando" endlessly through the city (Atxaga 7). The only immobile refuge she visits—albeit briefly—is an unnamed, cheap hotel, a characteristic heterotopia of crisis. Like Carlos, this space only sends Irene further down a path of ambiguity and confusions as she seeks to fashion her identity post-imprisonment. The character's deracination is intensified by the reality that "the only spaces available to her are heterotopical," like the hotel (Olaziregi, *Hedgehog* 235). As I discuss below, the hotel's function

[11] The only consistent belief that Carlos expressed throughout the novel was, in the end, the one that killed him. As Carlos informs Danuta, "[e]l socialismo, o cualquier otro movimiento revolucionario, no hace nada si sólo responde a lo verdaderamente importante. Tiene que dar respuesta también a las cosas que no son importantes, a los caprichos y demás. Si no, está perdido, no puede sobrevivir" (284). Danuta's *caprichos*, her whimsical desire for real emerald earrings, leads her to give Carlos up to the police, and thus to his ambiguous death that, depending on its reading, is either suicide or murder.

as a heterotopia of crisis transforms the site into the catalyst of the Irene's deepest ontological doubts.

Olaziregi has previously argued that the hotel site in *Esos cielos* is a heterotopia of crisis, given that it is in this space that Irene recovers the sexual identity long denied to her in prison (*Hedgehog* 235-8). However, I do not limit Irene's crisis in the hotel to just the failed recovery of her sexuality. Her stay in the hotel, coupled with the violent encounter that there occurs, is the impetus for a much larger systemic collapse of the protagonist's identities. The disintegration of the self continues to torment Irene through the rest of the novel, as she seeks to remedy her displacement by taking stock of her troubled reality and eventually deciding to return home to Bilbao. The letter Irene writes to her friend Andoni immediately after her hotel experience makes clear the depth of her internal confusion, one explicitly triggered by her night in this heterotopia of crisis: "era evidente que la carta materializaba un estado de ánimo muy concreto, el de aquella mañana, el que había seguido a la desagradable experiencia sexual con el hombre que la había abordado en un bar" (27). Irene's letter can be understood as an epistolary testament to her experiences of exile, both in the heterotopia of deviation (the prison) immediately afterwards in the heterotopia of crisis (the hotel).

In Irene's case, given that "[t]he experience of being in exile affected both the content and style of exiled writers," particularly in the case of the "complexities and ambiguities of identity," the letter demonstrates the protagonist's struggle to mediate critical issues of identity raised through writing (Throndset 52). The letter contains a scathing attack on Andoni for disowning her after her disavowal of ETA and her subsequent pardon. Significantly, it is in denying Andoni's integrity as militant that provides Irene with insight on her relationship the "organización," another oblique reference to ETA. As she sarcastically implies, how could

someone like herself—suffering from years of imprisonment on its behalf—have been a less serious militant than Andoni, of whom she accuses of never having "militado en ninguna parte, ni siquiera en una sociedad gastronómica" (26)? Irene's caustic reflection on Andoni's limited commitment both to their friendship and to the organization to which he professes to love (but, Irene implies, for which he has never suffered any real consequences) provokes an explicit disavowal of the former and thus a metonymic rejection of the latter.

Indeed, Irene's epistle deftly transforms Andoni into a culpable, physical metonym of ETA, guilty on both a personal and global level for treating her as a traitor of her own kind:

> Tú tenías que haberme dicho, sí, sal de la cárcel, no importa si los demás te acusan de traición...pero no fue eso lo que hiciste. Hiciste lo contrario. Yo te responderé que sí, necesitas un saco para echar en él todas tus penas y tus malas noticias, pero a partir de ahora no voy a ser yo ese saco. Ya puedes ir buscándote otro. (Atxaga 26)

Reading Andoni as a metonymic symbol of ETA provides insight into the depth of Irene's ontological conflict with the group. Her past role as a militant has both landed her in prison and branded her a traitor when she sought release from prison. Thus her core identity is no longer valid; it cannot provide her any refuge from the enemies that actively antagonize her person and her mind on her journey west. Ironically, Irene's adversaries are not limited to ETA's traditional foil (the police), but include ETA itself, whose policy of brutally murdering those who left the organization became infamous after the public assassination of ex-militant leader María Dolores González Katarain, alias Yoyes, in 1986.

Given that immediately after *Esos cielos*' publication, Atxaga repeatedly spoke out against what he considered "the excessive romanticization of politics, which, in his opinion, tainted the attitudes of nationalist politicians in the Basque Country," it is not difficult to connect

Irene's furious treatment of Andoni to a greater criticism of ETA's tendency to glorify its violent ideologies in spite of their cost to victims and their families (Olaziregi, *Hedgehog* 233). Once again, the novel attests to the grim outcome of those who fall prey to the romantic call of the radical Basque nationalist cause. As Carlos laments in *El hombre solo*, "la organización…no ofrecía más que la cárcel, el cementerio o el desprecio de gran parte de la sociedad" (47). In the case of *Esos cielos*, a fourth option exists as well: the eternal displacement of one who, branded as a traitor by her own people, is "lost her illusions and who returns, alone and as a failure, to reclaim her place in the story that remains to be completed" (Kortazar 55).

That the hotel sparks an intense self-examination by Irene is evident through her letter to Andoni. In this manner, the heterotopia of crisis has exacerbated the incoherence of the protagonist's identity. Throughout her letter to Andoni, she self-fashions, in Stephen Greenblatt's term, by way of negation. Her satire of Andoni as a "militante serio," and the ideological deception it reveals, disallows any continued association with ETA. Buying a pack of cigarettes in the station before her journey, she reflects on her adolescent self:

> Llevaba varios años sin poder fumar regularmente aquella marca, Lark, la que durante su adolescencia había elegido casi como un emblema de su forma de ser. Ella había sido "la chica que fumaba Lark," y ahora, después de pasar cuatro años en una celda de la cárcel de Barcelona, tenía la posibilidad de volver a hacerlo. (Atxaga 14)

Yet the optimism trigged by this brand nostalgia is limited when, only a few moments later, Irene puts out her cigarette and suffers from a painful realization. Despite securing an early release, no friend or family member has come to fetch her from prison. Irene bitterly concludes that "muchos de ellos la despreciarían por desentenderse de la organización y actuar como una arrepentida, pero le resultaba duro aceptar que aquella actitud fuera la de todos, la de todos sus

amigos de antes sin excepción" (29). Irene is no longer a militant, as her criticism of Andoni has made clear, but her family and friends' absence from her supposed moment of triumphant release makes clear that her decision to pursue freedom over loyalty to ETA has irrevocably altered her intimate relationships and the secure sense of self she gains from them.

Irene cannot recuperate the past identity of the young woman who smoked Lark, despite obtaining the longed-for cigarettes. Nor can she recover the self who loved and lost in past romantic relationships with an ex-husband and another young militant through her frightening one-night stand with the unknown man.[12] She concludes her epistle to Andoni sardonically referencing the unsuccessful encounter: "[m]e he acostado con un hombre que no conocía de nada. Y, la verdad, ha sido humillante. Me ha tratado como a una puta, y encima le he resultado más barata que cualquier puta, porque yo he pagado casi todas las cervezas" (27). That this aborted attempt at establishing a sexual connection with a stranger has resulted in disaster is no surprise; it is just one facet in a crisis of identity of profound proportions. As Perret explains, "[e]n definitiva, toda su identidad se reduce a lo que no es: ya no es terrorista, ya no es prisionera, ya no está dispuesta a ayudar a la policía ni a 'la organización'" (135). Catalyzed by her night in a heterotopia of crisis, Irene cannot recover any remaining vestiges of herself to present a unified identity to others and thus continues to fragment during her journey to Bilbao. Like Carlos, she is entirely devoured by a vacuum set into motion by her stay at the hotel heterotopia of crisis.

[12] It is worth noting that two important secondary characters in *El hombre solo* and *Esos cielos* bear the names of famous scions of Basque literature and language: Sabino, in the former, after Sabino Arana, the nineteenth-century father of Basque nationalism; Larrea, in the latter, after Juan Larrea, the twentieth-century poet born in Bilbao. Although these could be coincidences, given Atxaga's demonstrated tendency towards intertext, especially in *Esos cielos*, I conclude these are most likely references to these noted personages.

1.5

What is a hotel if not a heterotopia, a confluence of many dissimilar sites within four walls? Coupled with characters like Carlos and Irene, whose defining narrative feature are their ontological crises, the hotel site in *El hombre solo* and *Esos cielos* is transformed into a space that mediates the incongruous reality of a Basque identity in transition. Atxaga uses the hotel site in these novels to criticize now-dated visions of Basque identity via the situation of the radical nationalist militant in the eighties. Their past political ideology has fragmented under the weight of a reality in which political terrorism is no longer a viable tool for protesting the rapidly democratizing and globalizing society of Transition-era Spain. As a narrative space, the hotel catalyzes the inner turmoil of those present. Engaging it thus through a heterotopic lens demonstrates its persistent role in Atxaga's novels as an impetus for characters' fundamental existential doubts.

Specifically, in *El hombre solo*, the hotel is the locus for the negotiation and eventual collapse of Carlos' competing selves. Within its apartments, its bakery, its hallways, the protagonist attempts to delineate his past identity as a militant from that of the paradoxical present, in which he openly derides ETA while simultaneously providing refuge to two militants whose most recent act of violence appalls him. Yet in his attempt to save Jon and Jone, he sacrifices himself and, in an accident laced with dark irony, the life of a child—Pascal, the five-year-old son of his hotel companions. Its repercussions unknown (the novel ends with Carlos' death), the protagonist's final act should be understood alongside his ambiguous death as the coda of crisis of a character whose true identity is so lost to him that the novel never even reveals his real name.

Esos cielos likewise pits its protagonist against the unforgiving displacement of a country and society in transition, one in which she fundamentally no longer belongs. Her sojourn in the cheap Barcelona hotel marks Irene's first attempt to recuperate past iterations of the self. Yet like Carlos, the destabilizing effects of exile from the Basque Country, combined with the aftereffects of many years spent in a heterotopia of deviation, mean that the protagonist enters the hotel as one would a crucible, to be remade under extreme conditions within. Irene runs the risk, however, of completely melting away, of being incinerated to nothing under the sheer force of her competing identities from which she cannot fashion a cohesive self. Although Atxaga later provides a conclusion to Irene's journey in the posterior short story "Declaración de Dorotea," the author notes that her story, like Carlos', was meant to end in crisis:

> Cuando terminé de escribir *Esos cielos* tenía la certeza de que no podía haber otro punto final. La novela debía acabar con la llegada ya del autobús, porque su territorio era la autopista, una tierra de nadie situada entre la cárcel y la sociedad. Se trataba de la historia de una mujer que, literalmente, no tenía a dónde ir. (151)

Esos cielos is in this manner understood as the portrait of a character in turmoil who, given her ontological equivocality, cannot claim repatriation to any homeland other than the utopias she imagines in her dreams.

With the fragmentation and collapse of Carlos and Irene, Atxaga censures the mythologization of radical Basque nationalist militancy. His characters' failure to escape the existential pressure of conflicting past and present identities and ideologies reflects the gaping chasm between ETA and the public it professed to liberate through its violent acts of political terrorism. Both *El hombre solo* and *Esos cielos* should be understood as critical testimonies on the crisis of Basque identity in the region's post-Transition turmoil. As realist texts, these novels

directly link the devasting effects of radical separatist ideology to the individuals it harms, demonstrating its profound effects on the Basque self. Atxaga explicitly describes how this danger creates “el que solo tiene ideología y va por la vida con las puertas y ventanas cerradas” (Atxaga, “Tensión” 38). This threat is writ large in the characters of Carlos and Irene, who find themselves trapped in heterotopias of crisis from which there is no escape other than displacement and death.

CHAPTER TWO

The *Patria* Problem: Contemporary Basque Fiction and the Politics of Victimization

2.1

In his study on victimhood and politics in contemporary Spain, Gabriel Gatti sustains that the family members of those killed by the Basque nationalist terrorist organization ETA have long monopolized the figure of the victim in the twentieth and twenty-first century Spanish imagination. During the Basque conflict (1968-2011) on into the present day, ETA's victims, the sufferers of a visible political struggle, have come to occupy a sacralized space that locates them at the center of national narratives on victimhood, violence, and culpability. There, their status as "víctima modelo, víctima prototípica, víctima horizonte, víctima ejemplar, nada menos que eje en torno al que pivotan todas las demás—es lo que define su identidad" (Gatti 97) and perpetuates a simplistic vision of ETA's victims as the permanent causalities of a seminal political conflict, and little else. In this chapter, I argue that in response to this monopoly, Fernando Aramburu's recent novel *Patria* (2016) deploys a lengthy multivocal discourse as a method of interrogating the highly contested cultural construction of victimhood in the Basque community. The novel disrupts the prearranged hegemonic narratives of the conflict and its victims dating from the nineteen-eighties until present through a democratization of the victim figure, thus contesting established national tropes about victimization.

2.2

Until the late twentieth century, any attempt in Basque cultural production to subvert the clearly demarcated separations between victim and victimizer was a non-starter, as dominant

narratives insisted on an absolute polarization between good (sufferers/ETA's victims and their families) and evil (aggressors/ETA militants). A general cultural consensus among victims of ETA and their families maintained that it was impossible, as well as morally wrong, to suggest that members of ETA were, like those they terrorized, the sufferers of significant victimization. For their part, novels by Ramón Saizarbitoria and Bernardo Atxaga, including *Cien metros* (1976), *El hombre solo* (1993), and *Esos cielos* (1995), made initial strides in rejecting these taboos and, in turn, rehumanizing the figure of the terrorist in Basque literature as both as actor and aggressor, as simultaneously innocent and human.[13]

As Aramburu explained in a 2016 interview with *20 Minutos*, his goal for *Patria* complemented the efforts of these earlier novels: "mi tentativa es trazar un dibujo general que no dejase fuera a nadie. He unido a víctimas, victimarios y resto de vecinos. El dibujo final abarca la sociedad de manera suficiente para que el lector sepa lo que hemos vivido en el País Vasco durante tres décadas" (cited in Arenas). The author's recognition of the plurality that emanates from the broad cross-cultural impact of the Basque conflict is evident in his novel's construction, in which nine unique voices from across the political spectrum narrate 125 chapters across nearly seven-hundred pages. From these diverse narratives, and the myriad conflicts that arrive from their opposition, springs the novel's fundamental moral dilemma: in what ways are those who exists outside of the traditional figure of the victim equally deserving of the reader's compassion?

The final of the three texts in the author's unofficial trilogy on this struggle, *Patria* (2016) testifies to the lethal force of this period. The novel traces how the virulent nationalism of

[13] For a more in-depth look at these novels, see Chapter One.

ETA splinters two close-knit native Basque families and their isolated rural community.[14] Since its publication in 2016, *Patria* has provoked an overwhelming response by readers and critics alike. Winning an incredible fourteen national and international literary prizes, among them the famed National Prize for Narrative in 2017, it outsold international literary staples authored by Dan Brown and Isabelle Allende to become Spain's bestselling fictional work that year (Martín Rodrigo). By October 2020, it had outsold all other novels in Spain to become the bestselling fiction novel of all time since its release (Massot). In November 2020, Tusquets reported that the novel had sold more than one million copies in thirty-seven editions (Louzán Fariña). In May 2017, Mariano Rajoy, then Prime Minister of Spain, praised the novel as a must-read "para recordar y para saber qué ocurrió, para conocer la verdad" (cited in Casqueiro). The Prime Minister's accolades echoed the overwhelmingly favorable opinions of regional, national, and international presses, among them Javier Alfonso, Carlos Boyero, César Coca, Borja Hermoso, and Jesús Mendaza Prieto. In a 2016 review in *El País*, José Carlos Mainer ranked the novel alongside international classics like Galdós' *Episodios nacionales* and Tolstoy's *War and Peace* (1). Capitalizing on the novel's apparently unceasing popularity, in September 2017, HBO had announced that it would adapt *Patria* into an eight-episode miniseries to be directed by Basque filmmaker Aitor Gabilondo. The series inaugurated HBO Europe's first ever production for audiences in Spain and, like the novel, was received to critical acclaim by viewers both at home and abroad (El País; Aizpeolea; Lang et al.).

Despite its seemingly unabating commercial and critical success, *Patria*'s consolidation as the "gran novela sobre la sociedad vasca" since 2016 has not gone uncontested. Unlike its

[14] *Los peces de la amargura*, 2006; *Años lentos*, 2016; *Patria*, 2016. In a series of interviews with the Spanish press, Aramburu has repeatedly affirmed the creative debt that *Patria* owes to its predecessors in the trilogy, configuring *Los peces de la amargura* and *Años lentos* as the thematic, if not stylistic, building blocks upon which *Patria* was constructed. See Seisdedos, Alemany.

predecessors *Los peces de la amargura* and *Años lentos*—both favorably reviewed, but fleeting in popularity—*Patria*'s depiction of the Basque conflict throughout late twentieth and twenty-first centuries continues to provoke virulent censure to this day. Within the field of Basque letters, accolades have been tempered by a persistent vein of unfavorable reviews by authors like Edurne Portela, Iban Zaldua, and Ramón Zallo. Their criticism reflects the inextricable relationship between politics, culture and literature in this minority community, in which Aramburu is denounced for publishing a novel whose ending simply "resuelve el conflicto (personal y colectivo) a través de un abrazo conciliador que pone el punto final a la historia" (Portela 5). That those who most contest Aramburu's fictional (re)vision of the conflict are none other than members of the Basque community like Portela, Zaldua, and Zallo signals how the novel's ultimate resolution of the past aggravates the consensus that the enormity of such a conflict evades straightforward resolution, literary or otherwise. In sustaining that *Patria* simplifies the figure of victim and victimizer in this conflict, critics like Portela argue that the novel clearly defies the complex moral tergiversation that dominated the period.

These critical accounts maintain that *Patria* is an ideological monolith, an argument for reconciliation between perpetrators and victims, and thus overlooks the brutal injustices of the government-sanctioned counterterrorist responses to ETA like GAL in favor of a biased narrative that distinguishes the victims of ETA and their families as the only legitimate causalities of the Basque conflict. In Portela's view, *Patria* is "una visión simplificada de realidad en aras de la defensa de una tesis. Sus personajes actúan guiados por esa tesis, dentro de una narración melodramática que potencia una versión maniquea y sin matices de la historia" (5). Within this critique, the model victims' identities are melodramatized and sanctified by their suffering, forcing them into the rigid confines of a culturally-proscribed sacralized space. In this view, this

space of and for the victim is strictly constructed to exclude the "víctimas de *otras violencias*," in particular, the "*izquierda abertzale, viejo combatiente* antifranquista" (Gatti 99–100) and other Basque victims of Francoist and paramilitary forces that existed well on into the late twentieth century.[15]

Discussions of *Patria*'s purported exclusion of valid victims were not only of interest to members of Basque letters. In early October 2020, the Basque nationalist politicians Pernando Barrena and Joseba Permach took to social media to transform the critiques of the Basque literati into a war cry on behalf of narratives they felt were unfairly left out of *Patria* in both literary and cinematographic forms. [16] Echoing past grievances about the author's country of residence (thus implying that Aramburu's long-term residence in Germany with his German spouse negates his prior lived experiences as a Basque-speaker born in San Sebastian), on October 6, 2020, Barrena tweeted that "'Patria' no es el relato, es el relato de una de las partes: la del constitucionalismo español, gran patronal, los parapoliciales, los tribunales d[e] excepción, los torturadores... Y contada [por] alguien que vivía en Alemania. Tienen derecho a contar su verdad, pero no es la verdad" (cited in Artola).[17] For Barrena, *Patria*'s focus on the victims of ETA and consequent condemnation of their victimizers was yet another expression of the intense Spanish nationalism that had justified the creation of a radical Basque response in the first place. At the core of

[15] Italics original to author. The Basque term *abertzale*, also frequently referred to as the *izquierda abertzale*, literally the "patriotic left," refers to the radical leftist political factions within the Basque Country in which nationalist and socialist ideologies converge with the explicit goal of liberating Basque territories from the control of Spain and France.

[16] At present, Barrena is a Representative of Euskal Herria Bildu (EHB) in the European Parliament. Permach is an ex-member of Basque Parliament, as well as a member and spokesperson on behalf of various defunct *izquierda abertzale* political parties, including Batasuna, Herri Batasuna (HB), and Euskal Herritarrok (EH).

[17] Aramburu has repeatedly defended his residence in Germany. In an interview in *El País* on September 2, 2016, Aramburu was asked, "De haber vivido en San Sebastián estos años…, ¿habría podido publicar la parte de su literatura en torno al terrorismo?" In response, Aramburu explained that writing against ETA in the San Sebastián of his youth likely would have killed him: "Podría haberlo hecho y después podría haber recibido un paquete bomba. El que se interponía en el camino de esa gente se convertía en un enemigo que había que eliminar" (cited in Seisdedos).

Barrena's argument is the recognition of how the radical Basque nationalism of ETA did not suddenly spring to life in 1959, and the subsequent belief that the factors that led to its creation throughout three centuries justified its existence.

Indeed, the essential ontological doubt underlying ETA's creation—that without direct action, the imposition of a dominant Castilian cultural majority would force the marginalized Basque community out of existence—was the direct result of decades of state-sanctioned violence against Basques with the express goal of repudiating or eradicating native Basque identity, language, and culture. Coupled with the energetic promotion of an authoritative vision of Spanish nationalism, encouraged within early Spanish democracies and intensely radicalized during the Francoist dictatorship, this goal of cultural elimination through marginalization endured from the 1890s until Franco's death (Watson 220-1). Alongside it mushroomed a growing fear that the Basques would lose their Basqueness. This fear, in turn, catalyzed the separatist ideologies underpinning Ekin, an early clandestine political organization dedicated to Basque nationalism and, after 1959, its successor, ETA (195).

In this sense, that *Patria* should supposedly glorify the narratives of "constitucionalismo español… los torturadores" through its sympathetic portrayal of the victims of ETA and their families was unconscionable in the eyes of Permach, Barrena, and others of the *izquierda abertzale*. In their view, *Patria* reified the nation at large's explicit bias and refusal to acknowledge the justified outcome of endless anti-Basque persecution, whose overlooked victims clamored for recognition in the Spanish imagination alongside the well-known victims of ETA. *Patria* thus represented above all a threat to the militant's right to inclusion within the space of the political victim, within which he was configured as a righteous martyr resisting the profound injustices vested on the Basque community throughout Francoism and beyond.

The fracas of October 6 and 7, 2020 was not unique. Just a month before, on September 1, 2020, an intense debate had erupted when HBO Spain published the first theatrical release poster promoting *Patria* on its official Twitter account, accompanied by the following message: "Todos somos parte de esta historia" (@HBO_ES). The poster placed two still images from vastly different, but equally dramatic, scenes side-by-side, implying to numerous critics (Aramburu among them) that the suffering depicted on either side was analogous (fig. 3). The left still image depicts the *Patria*'s chief protagonist, Bittori, wailing in despair in the heavy rain in the middle of a suburban street. In her arms, she holds her husband, Txato's, bloodied body; he has just been assassinated by ETA. Upon exactly the same plane as Bittori and Txato, the right still image shows Joxe Mari, a *gudari* [soldier] and Txato's suspected murderer, naked, handcuffed, and curled in a fetal position on the bare floor. Three members of the Civil Guard stand behind him, smoking and chatting; Joxe Mari is being tortured, and his torturers, indifferent, are on a cigarette break.

Fig. 3. HBO's promotional poster. Source: @HBO_ES. "Todos somos parte de esta historia." *Twitter*, 1 sep. 2020, 9:38 a.m., www.twitter.com/HBO_ES/status/1300790047994785799.

As *El Diario Vasco* reported the following day, critics expressed disbelief in the poster's seeming equivalence of two incomparable situations: that of the victim and that of the victimizer (Colpisa). Responding on his personal blog, *Déjate de rosas*, the same day, Aramburu criticized the poster as a "desacierto" while defending the overall series: "Atribuyo el cartel a una estrategia de márquetin que no comparto. Incumple una norma que yo me impuse cuando escribí mi libro: no perder de vista el dolor de las víctimas del terrorismo, tratarlas con la empatía y el cariño que merecen. La serie, en mi opinión, sí lo hace". While the series itself maintained "una clara línea divisoria entre quien sufre y quien hace sufrir," the poster, in Aramburu's view, committed the cardinal sin of manufacturing a problematic "equidistancia entre víctimas y verdugos," as *El Diario Vasco* described it in a byline (Colpisa).

While the events of October 6 and 7 angered members of the *izquierda abertzale*, this poster conversely inflamed their traditional antagonists along the right side of the Spanish political spectrum. Iñaki Oyarzabal, president of the Basque delegation of the PP, described the ad as an "insulto," echoing the complaints of fellow member Andrea Levy and Macarena Olona of Vox. For these critics, the mere positioning of a victim of ETA alongside their victimizer represented a fundamental upheaval of the former's sacralized space, within which "las víctimas de ETA disfrutan de un alto grado de institucionalización y de reconocimiento, pero se resienten de la quiebra del espacio que antes monopolizaban y la entrada por esas fisuras de nuevos agentes" (Gatti 110). This was undeniably the case with *Patria*'s promotional poster. The moral equivalence it implied, uniting both victim and aggressor in their mutual suffering on the same visual plane, generated critics' utter disbelief and denial of the idea that the aggressor could be construed as a victim in this (or any other) Basque cultural production.

This persistent view of the victims of ETA as the occupants of an exclusive space came about from Spain's desire to generate a unanimous moral narrative about victims and victimization during the post-Transition period in the nineteen eighties (Gatti 11). From this stratification, legitimized by a plethora of victims' associations that have erupted since the tail end of the twentieth century, the ETA's sufferers were increasingly confined into "el lugar protegido de los sacrificados para el bien de otros—la ciudadanía" and, I would add, the country's nascent democracy (11). Yet this sanctification of victims as such delegitimizes their role as citizens with agency, thus requiring their active protection by others—here, by Oyarzabal, Olana, Levy, and even Aramburu himself. This protection, however unwarranted, serves to consolidate these victims at the top of an arbitrary, culturally-controlled hierarchy of adversity that maintains the exclusivity of, and resentment towards, others who would occupy this space. Conversely, since the Transition, the legal criteria for victimization has become increasingly porous, extending far beyond its original, singular object, the victims of ETA and their families.

Patria's nine narrative voices are easily divisible into two distinct categories, ostensibly with no overlap, that follow the traditional binary narrative of victimization in the context of the Basque conflict. Here, the non-nationalist victim is pitted against the *izquierda abertzale* victimizer of the ETA militant; in *Patria*, the Lertxundi family (el Txato, Bittori, Xabier, and Nerea) occupies this figure of the victim, and the Garmendia family (Joxian, Miren, Joxe Mari, Arantxa, and Gorka) occupies the latter.[18] The novel's use of this prototypical binary harkens back to the long history of Basque and Spanish conflict predating the particular late twentieth century iteration featured in the novel; indeed, broader Spanish cultural tropes have

[18] These last names are not original to the 2016 novel, but have been applied a posteriori after the 2020 release of the HBO series, which included them. Here, I apply them for clarity's sake.

dichotomized Basques and Spaniards as ideological opposites since as early as the Second Carlist War (1872-76) (Lorenzo-Arza 101). According to Mikel Lorenzo-Arza, *Patria*

> corrobora la dicotomía *vasco-española* que utiliza el nacionalismo vasco desde que Sabino Arana populariza esta oposición…La novela reproduce estas estructuras maniqueas propias de la 'narrativa del conflicto', aunque no tanto para señalar la sujeción española, sino más bien para denunciar el matonismo nacionalista contra amplias capas de la población. (98)

Such a narrative construction begets questions of legitimate victimization in competing ideological camps who both consider their members sufferers, either from the historic "sujeción española" or more recent "matonismo nacionalista". As a result, the concept of panvictimization is at the forefront of the novel's discourse on the victim figure. Regardless of the characters' professed ideological associations, each and every one of *Patria*'s nine voices incorporate the events of el Txato's unjust killing—and its psychic consequences—into their intersecting narrations over the course of the novel.

It is undeniable that the trope of panvictimization is deeply entrenched in the characters' psyches by the date of the novel's opening, October 20, 2011. This in turn reflects the development of this concept in Basque cultural narrative since the Transition under the legal broadening of the definition of the victims to include those who have suffered the loss of their human rights. In her study of the novel, María Alonso-Rey configures *Patria* a literary rebuttal to panvictimization, "una ficción que combate el relato panvictimista con el que se pretende olvidar a las víctimas y justificar el terror" (19). However, this conclusion is proscribed by the belief that the victims of ETA should remain the sole occupants of the isolated and stratified space they have occupied since their arrival in the Spanish imagination of the post-Transition period. This

judgement, drawn from a close examination of the devastating effects of el Txato's murder on his wife and children, fails to recognize that the circumstances leading up to the character's demise—that is, the radicalization of Joxe Mari, a close family friend—has undeniably devastated the family of this would-be executioner.

If, as Alonso-Rey claims, *Patria* rejects the nefarious *panvictimista* narrative that minimizes the true victims of ETA in favor of a forced narrative of that generalizes Basque suffering for contemporary political gain, why are more than half of 125 chapters narrated through a third-person omniscient focalization by members of the Garmendia family? Why feature the extensive narrative protagonism of the presumed antagonist and his family in a novel that supposedly seeks to restore victims of ETA to their rightful dominance on top of an imaginary hierarchy? While the traumatic experiences of the Lertxundi family clearly function as a powerful and explicit denunciation of radical Basque nationalism during the conflict, the combined narratives of Bittori, el Txato, Nerea, and Xabier Lertxundi make up less than half of the novel. To say then that the ultimate merit of *Patria* is its repudiation of panvictimization through the perspectives of the Lertxundi family is to discount the majority narrative focus on their victimizers, the Garmendia family.

As Aramburu has made clear, his desire to depict a broad picture of two Basque families during the conflict meant creating a fundamentally comprehensive narrative that featured opposing accounts from diverse perspectives, including those from family members of ETA militants. By allotting the members of the Garmendia family extensive space to develop their own version of events over the course of the novel, *Patria* reappropriates, rather than repudiates, the culturally-imposed narrative of panvictimization to democratize the victim figure. In short, the inclusion of the Garmendia family's narrative alongside that of the Lertxundi family asks

readers to consider, not for the first time in Basque literature, an oft-overlooked victim of Basque nationalism: the family members of its militants. In the second half of this chapter, I analyze how the previously unexplored narratives of father Joxian Garmendia and his youngest son, Gorka, encourage the reader to view them as victims—if not of ETA, then of Basque nationalism more broadly—in their own right.

2.3

Of the five members of the Garmendia family, wife Miren, son Joxe Mari, and daughter Arantxa have received critical attention from Alonso-Rey, Arrizabalaga, and Lorenzo-Arza, as well as from this author. But Joxian, husband of Miren and father of Joxe Mari, Arantxa, and Gorka, remains uninvestigated, despite his pivotal role in the novel's reappropriation of the panvictimization narrative. In other words, Joxian's narration is fundamental in Aramburu's employment of multivocal discourse as a tool by which to question cultural conceptualizations of victimhood, as the character's strident apoliticism inverts expectations about those historically victimized by radical Basque nationalism. Joxian lacks the nationalist fervor that takes over his wife when "su hijo mayor se hace *gudari*, [y ella] se pliega fanáticamente en favor de la causa nacionalista y la lucha armada" (Arrizabalaga 5); in fact, his initial response to his son's unexpected move to France in August 1983 is confusion (57).[19] Soon afterwards, Joxian connects Joxe Mari's sudden departure to his enlistment in ETA; it was well known that Iparralde was home to a number of the organization's clandestine strongholds, as well as its leaders and members, who took advantage of the porous Franco-Spanish border to evade capture

[19] As Gorka reports to his father in Chapter Eleven, Joxe Mari's sudden flight to France occurs approximately two weeks before a series of powerful floods across the Basque Country, which destroy his father's beloved garden. These floods are likely those of August 26, 1983, which devastated the region and left over thirty dead. Joxe Mari would have thus left for France sometime in early to mid-August 1983.

(Bew et al. 197). Joxian's bewilderment at his son's decision gives way to outright denial (Aramburu 62), followed by intense anxiety about Joxe Mari's well-being, a sentiment shared by his wife (227).[20] Ultimately, Joxian cannot accept his son's entry into ETA, and his initial indifference to politics gives way to repudiation of the radical Basque nationalism that has ensnared his son. As he explains to his wife soon after Joxe Mari's abrupt departure, "[n]adie entra en ETA para cuidar jardines…[Si ha entrado, es] para matar…Yo no he educado a mi hijo para que mate" (309). His condemnation of ETA marks an ideological point of no return that results in Joxian's increasingly irremediable isolation from his wife as she refashions herself as *abertzale* in order to justify Joxe Mari's nationalist militancy (39, 334, 344, 437).[21] The moral opposition separating Joxian from Miren soon becomes the major operant contention underlying an increasingly-troubled marriage.

At the same time, without knowing where Joxe Mari is, or how to contact him, Joxian is helpless to save his son from an awful fate in which, as another father who has lost his son to ETA confirms, "no hay más premio que la cárcel o la tumba" (Aramburu 339). The realization of his impotence to save Joxe Mari in the face of his almost certain death or imprisonment (309, 340), alongside his wife's explicit support for an ideology Joxian has come to describe as "el mal camino" (472), triggers the first bout of intense depression from which the character suffers throughout the rest of the novel (340). After el Txato's murder in 1988—someone Joxian considered his best friend (332)—his mental illness rapidly worsens and he turns to alcohol abuse to "nublar la realidad" (471). After Joxe Mari's capture and imprisonment in late 1992,

[20] As Bew et. al. explain, "[i]t was here that ETA held its assemblies, argued, and split; and here too that it had its logistic base and published its statements. Militants from Spain would cross the border to meet with the group's leaders before being sent back to carry out operations. Commandos on the run would flee into France to rest and recuperate. Entrepreneurs who had received ETA's letter demanding payment of the 'revolutionary tax' were ordered to make contact with the groups' collectors in *Iparralde*" (197). Italics original to the author.

[21] I discuss Miren's transformation from apolitical to openly *abertzale* at length in my 2019 article, "Rhetorical Self-Fashioning in Aramburu: A Contemporary Take on Cervantine Techniques."

Joxian cannot stomach frequent visits with his son in jail, as he cannot control his tears (38-9, 612), and these visits become "cada vez más esporádica" (39). Over time, Joxian has been utterly diminished, appearing "cansado, apático…sin rastro de vigor en la voz" in a visit with his daughter and her husband around 1999 (570).

The omniscient narrative voice connects Joxian's rapidly diminishing sense of masculinity to a simultaneously occurring phenomena that progressively endangers the character's agency in the face of his son's radical nationalism. Joxian's repudiation renders him ideologically impotent and thus unable to actively participate in the traditionally masculinist project of nation building undertaken by Joxe Mari and ETA. As Joane Nagel identifies, an operant microculture of masculinity demands men's participation in nationalist activities, resisting means "they risk the disdain or worse of their communities and families" (243). This is certainly the case for Joxian, who consistently suffers from his wife's bullying exhortations to support ETA's cause. Morally unable to commit to the extremism expected of him by his family unit, Joxian begins to use alcohol as a "un conato de rebeldía" (Aramburu 471) against the vast ideological distances between himself, his son, and their community, which demands, at a minimum, explicit support of the belief system of the radical *izquierda abertzale*.

His wife, on the other hand, steps into this apparent void of political belief and reappropriates the failed patriarchy of Joxian under the guise of a traditional matriarchy. After Joxe Mari's flight to France to join up with ETA, Miren's position as matriarch overtakes any lingering claims her husband might have made to a patriarchal family order within the household dynamic. Following generations of Basque women before her, her sudden political extremism is "carried out under the guise of the mother figure" (Llona 236), as she refashions herself as not the mother of a terrorist, but of a patriot loyal to the radical Basque nationalist cause. Joxian's

stubborn refusal to adopt Miren's nationalism, couched in the character's alcoholism, both reflects and juxtaposes the political schism between husband and wife as Miren increasingly embraces the extremist separatist ideologies that have driven her husband to despair.

Joxian likewise suffers from what Portela labels as "el miedo a perder un estatus dentro de una comunidad" (25), of becoming the target of intense social ostracism in his rural Basque village. He fears "el matonismo nacionalista contra amplias capas de la población" (Lorenzo-Arza 98) suffered by non-nationalist Basques and Spaniards alike throughout the conflict. The dual societal and political pressures at play throughout the course of the conflict demonized any resistance against ETA as anti-Basque, with dissidents facing a sustained campaign of exclusion that reduced them to non-beings, non-Basques. As Joxian cautions his friend, Josetxo, himself the father of a dead ETA militant, the organization and its supporters "[t]e amargarán la vida…Mira el Txato. Ya nadie le habla…Me harían lo mismo que a él" (Aramburu 340) despite el Txato being a native-born Basque speaker.

The character quickly becomes complicit in the community's ostracism of el Txato and his Lertxundi family, excluding his friend from games of cards at the local tavern. As Joxian explains to el Txato not long before the latter's murder, "no te puedo saludar porque me traería problemas" (335). When, in response, el Txato calls Joxian a coward, the latter knowingly responds that "me lo digo yo todo el tiempo" (336). His admission of cowardice is the final nail in the coffin as alcoholism increasingly becomes the character's coping mechanism of choice to address his feelings of failure and impotence. The omniscient narrator describes Joxian as drinking to suppress the pain of losing his son and wife to an ideology he personally finds revolting: "[e]ste hombre se bebería hoy un mar de vino…Y a fin de atajar un sollozo que le subía a la garganta, se metió a toda prisa otro trago de vino" (472).

According to traditional cultural conceptions of the victim figure, because of his family's intimate relationship with ETA, Joxian is ineligible for consideration as a victim *de jure*. Within the post-Transition Spanish imagination, the stratified space of the victim was occupied by a select few meeting one of the following specific criteria: (1) those who lost family members to ETA; and/or (2) those who were themselves physically harmed by the organization, such as losing a limb. Despite his close fraternal bond with el Txato, Joxian's immense distress at his friend's ostracism and eventual murder in 1988 does not qualify him as a victim, given that within his culture, the bonds of blood are stronger than those of friendship. He is not related by blood to el Txato, so despite all his intense psychic pain—the catalyst for his alcoholism—his suffering accounts for little. Scolding him for his tears over his friend's death, Miren reminds her husband that "no se te olvide que tienes un hijo en la lucha," a loss she considers worthy of mourning (Aramburu 232). Furthermore, although his son is certainly irrevocably "lost" to him as a member of ETA, Joxe Mari is not dead, a point clearly delineated in the novel (340). Eventually, Joxe Mari is jailed, and Joxian is able to visit him in prison. To consider Joxian a victim, then, in either context seems improbable.

But as a close reading of Aramburu's representation of Joxian reveals, the dual losses of his best friend and son to the same violent ideology that would kill one and imprison the other take an immense toll on the character's conceptualization of his self. Above all, in regard to his gender and familial identity, any pretext of Joxian as the protector and leader of his family has vanished over the course of the conflict. The traditional Basque cultural imaginary towards men and women was proscriptive:

> While support and defence of the family and the home were demanded of women "from inside" and "toward inside,"…the sphere of men's work was projected towards the

> exterior, where it acquired a clear social and political dimension, often incarnated in the figure of the *gudari* (soldier) called to defend the father's house (*aitaren etxea*).[22] (Hernández García et. al. 292)

That the character has failed to defend his metaphorical home from an invasion, albeit an ideological one, triggers a bout of intense self-recrimination in which Joxian identifies himself as an impotent father. As he explains to his younger son, Gorka, not long after Joxe Mari's capture by the Spanish forces in late 1992, he was unable to remedy the violent nationalist ideology that took Joxe Mari hostage: "[t]u hermano es un asesino. Eso es todo lo que se sabe. ¿Te parece poco?... La *ama* tiene razón. He sido un padre blando. Esto, con unas hostias a tiempo, pues igual se habría arreglado" (Aramburu 471).[23][24] In an ironic reduplication, while the Basque cultural conceptualization of gender delegitimizes Joxian as a *gudari* for failing to protect his son from an ideology that would lead him to murder, it simultaneously authorizes Joxe Mari as an exemplar Basque male within the nationalist narrative as he fights, through violence, on behalf of his home.

What purpose do the character's consistent despair, impotence, and alcoholism serve within the narrative? Joxian's emergent pathos throughout *Patria* marks him as a victim of ETA, unable to save his son from the intense current of the ideology responsible for his radicalization, peddled by ETA and legitimized by members of the subversive Basque clergy. As Joxe Mari's own reflections from prison in late 2011 confirm, "su *aita* se ha convertido en un guiñapo podrido de tristeza. ¿Por su culpa? Pues a lo mejor" (Aramburu 525). Over the course of the

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[22] Italics original to author.
[23] Joxe Mari is captured approximately six or seven months after the French police captured the vast majority of ETA's leaders in the infamous Bidart raid that took place on March 29, 1992.
[24] Throughout *Patria*, Aramburu uses italics to differentiate Euskera from the Castilian Spanish in which the novel is written.

novel, Joxian has become a character ultimately defined by his victimization, first and foremost by his son, but more metonymically through ETA. Like Josetxo, whose son's death in ETA led to his rapid death from cancer, Joxian has lost control over his narrative and suffers severe physical and psychic consequences as a result in the form of worsening alcohol abuse and enduring depression. The impact of Joxian's narrative in *Patria* is evident within Aramburu's greater desire to encapsulate, in the broad strokes, the aforementioned lived experience of the Basque reality during the conflict; with this work, the author posits that within the recent history of Basque nationalism exist a multiplicity of victims whose lived experiences, fictional or otherwise, actively push back on well-known cultural limitations of this figure. Joxian's dissolution throughout the course of the novel effectively demonstrates the power of ETA, and the radical nationalist ideologies it embodies, to pilfer and otherwise appropriate intimate bonds for violent political gain within the most sacred of cultural contexts: the paterfamilial unit.

The insidious nature of the separatist discourse is emphasized as Joxian's son (and his wife, to a lesser extent) is transformed into the victimizer of his own loved ones. Aramburu's inversion of the nationalist threat, which the author locates it within the family unit itself, foregrounds its nature as a greater societal issue that cannot be contained or eradicated by one man. In this way, the novel calls for the undertaking of a broader, and thus more complex, reflection on nationalism in Basque society, and rejects a common tendency to place blame on the individual. Indeed, with the novel's representation of Joxian, and the clear link Aramburu establishes between the character's inability to prevent his son's extremism and his lasting alcoholism and depression, there lies an important current of sympathy for Joxian as the victim of his own son. Through this character, Aramburu proposes a radical revision of the victim of ETA inclusive of militants' family members that configures them as the victims of their own

loved ones. In doing so, he rejects a tendency to ascribe to these figures a certain guilt by association, contesting the oversimplified binarization that insisted on an absolute delineation between good (ETA's victims and their families) and evil (ETA militants and their families).

2.4

Like his father Joxian, Gorka, another member of the Garmendia family, also disrupts the established narratives of the conflict and its victims that would exclude him from participation in greater national visions about victimization. Joxian and Miren's youngest child is a bookish, awkward youth frequently bullied by his elder brother, Joxe Mari, who eventually matures into a polished media professional working exclusively in Euskera.[25] As an adolescent coming to terms with his homosexuality and his increasing distaste for the radical Basque nationalism that has gripped his brother and eventually, his mother, Gorka's slow victimization comes at the hands of the ideologies of the *abertzale* that dominate his insular rural community, "un pueblo pequeño [en que] no puedes escurrir el bulto" (Aramburu 251). Like it does with his father, *Patria* configures Gorka within a contemporary context in which the victim is a

> *sujeto ordinario*. El *viejo espacio de las víctimas* se ordenaba en torno a un imaginario de esta figura que hacía de ella una singularidad, un lugar especial; esto es, un sujeto marcado por un hecho extraordinario, y un sujeto por todo eso excepcional…Violencias con mayúsculas. Pero cuando el espacio de las víctimas se abre, entran en él exigiendo ser reconocidos sujetos dañados con marcas de otros orígenes, otras violencias, estas con minúsculas: ya no necesariamente son héroes o mártires. Aunque violentados, son *sujetos comunes*.[26] (Gatti 12)

[25] The character's bookishness is, according to Aramburu, partially based on his own (cited in Arrizabalaga 7).
[26] Italics original to the author.

Indeed, Gorka is not a victim of ETA in the same way that Bitorri, Nerea, or Xabier Lertxundi are, as direct relatives of the deceased; rather, like his father, Gorka's admission into the space of the ordinary victim is marked by the violent separatist discourse of ETA, via young militants like his brother, that violates his home and community. Throughout his adolescence and early adulthood, Gorka's quiet but persistent resistance to the nationalism of his brother, mother, and community results in his victimization by these very actors, who despite their concerted efforts at political indoctrination only further distance Gorka from their cause.

Gorka's suffering begins at age fourteen, when his demonstrable literary inclinations—his preference for Galdós and Machado over protests organized by Alternative KAS, a radical youth group—clash with his elder brother's burgeoning political advocacy on behalf of Basque independence. Breaking from his usual style of infantile bullying, one that throughout the brothers' childhood primarily consisted of name-calling and insults (Aramburu 176), robbing Gorka of his dessert (179), and vandalizing his personal property (185), Joxe Mari begins a sustained campaign of torment in an attempt to threaten Gorka into supporting his cause. In the first of many verbal attacks, Joxe Mari abuses Gorka's masculinity and sexual orientation in order to force his attendance at a pro-independence political protest:

> Más te valdría dejarte de novelas y sumarte a la lucha por la liberación de Euskal Herria. Mañana hay manifa a las siete. Espero que no faltes. Algunos amigos míos ya me han preguntado dónde te metes. Mientras los de tu cuadrilla dan la cara, a ti ni se te ve. ¿Qué les digo? No, es que se ha vuelto delicado y se pasa el día leyendo. Mañana a las siete te quiero ver en la plaza. (183)

Until he reaches his early twenties and leaves his family's home, Gorka continues to attend marches and political protests out of fear, rather than any inclination towards Basque

independence (183, 187). Reminiscent of Joxian's outright rejection of his wife's radicalism, Gorka's consistent (non)reaction to the mushrooming political fervor of Joxe Mari is an attempt, however small, at resistance via borderline catatonia: at one protest he is forced to attend, Gorka "coreó consignas con moderado entusiasmo" (183), while at another, he takes photos at his brother's behest "sin entusiasmo," leading his sister to inquire "para qué vas si se nota que no te apetece" (187). The answer is simple: Gorka is afraid of his brother (185).

This unenthusiastic compliance, wholly rooted in fear and anxiety, sustains Joxe Mari as he continues his campaign to indoctrinate his brother throughout the course of their adolescence. Eventually, Gorka's marked superiority in Euskera, a skill for which Joxe Mari has long tormented him, earns him respect when Joxe Mari finally comprehends its value for his cause.[27] However, while Gorka is no longer the chief target of his brother's torment, Joxe Mari's deepening involvement in ETA sparks a series of dangerous incidents in which his militancy forces Gorka to risk his life. Most notably, at age sixteen, Gorka is compelled into aiding in Joxe Mari and Jokin, a fellow young nationalist, in their escape after the Civil Guard raids their safe house (Aramburu 244). Challenging Joxe Mari's call for aid, despite its terrific risks—given that the Civil Guard "le hicieron la bañera y lo hostiaron a base de bien hasta dejarlo inconsciente" (247) to Koldo, another young militant associated with Joxe Mari and Jokin—would be to openly repudiate the prevailing belief system that justifies the community's vision of these young militants as freedom fighters. Again, in fear, Gorka complies. As he later recalls as an

[27] Switching tactics, Joxe Mari attempts to manipulate Gorka through flattery: "dale duro al euskera, que también es parte de la lucha…[Joxe Mari] argumentaba simple, brusco, elemental: él sería el hacha y Gorka la serpiente. Buena pareja" (186). While Joxe Mari "dejó de burlarse de su hermano, de su afición a los libros y a salir poco a la calle y todo eso" (186), Gorka—although treated with a modicum of respect by his brother for the first time—still resists. This renders Joxe Mari's vision of himself as the hatchet to Gorka's serpent entirely fantastic, in that it relies on the latter's acquiescence to use his considerable faculties in Euskera to advocate for a nationalist cause.

adult in conversation with his sister, who demands to know why she wasn't told of his collaboration earlier, Gorka explains his terror:

> Tenía dieciséis años. Me asusté mucho. Fíjate que cuando unos días después registraron la casa de los *aitas*, yo estaba convencido de que venían a por mí, no a por Joxe Mari, que a fin de cuentas ya se había dado el piro. ¡La de noches que habré estado sin dormir por eso! (250)

Arantxa is quick to condemn the situation, exclaiming to Gorka "se [le] había convertido en cómplice de unos aprendices de terrorista" and that, despite "[el] muy adolescente que fuera, si lo pillan los guardias civiles, te habrían zurrado de lo lindo a lo galindo" (250). Unlike Koldo, Gorka is lucky to have escaped severe physical harm at the hands of the Civil Guard; however, as his conversation with Arantxa makes clear, this episode, like those before it, left an indelible psychic scar on the character – one that forced him to maintain this secret for years.

The source of Gorka's fear has shifted from his brother to his community, a fearsome collective that brooks no argument against its subjects, who "se sumergen en un colectivo donde se nacionalizan de una forma exclusivitas, con una intensa vocación movilizadora…que frecuentemente se experimenta desde la infancia, en múltiples expresiones de la vida cotidiana" (López Romo and Van der Leeuw 16). During the nineteen-seventies and eighties, a pronationalist community like this severely punished any deviation from the culturally-proscribed support of the *izquierda abertzale*, its unifying element: "en Euskadi la población se divide fundamentalmente por motivos políticos... En todas las sociedades hay diferencias, pero solo en algunas surge un elemento identitario…tan conflictivo que polariza radicalmente a los habitantes de un mismo territorio hasta incluso segregarlos en la vida cotidiana" (30). Quick to fill the void Joxe Mari has left behind, Gorka's community, including his mother, steps up to

vigorously enforce the character's compliance with (and implicitly, belief in) the ideologies of the *abertzale*. Where Joxe Mari once tormented Gorka, incessantly "propugn[ando] la lucha armada y la independencia" (Aramburu 185), now too does their community. From age sixteen on into his early twenties,

> Gorka reconoce que mientras vivió en el pueblo le resultaba muy difícil mantenerse al margen del ambiente *abertzale*. En un pueblo pequeño, afirma, no puedes escurrir el bulto. Cuando había manifestación, homenajes, altercados, y alguna historia de esas había cada dos por tres, no es que pasaran lista; pero siempre había ojos dedicados a controlar quién estaba y quién no. (251)

Indeed, on one notable occasion after his brother's escape, Gorka recalls that his mother

> entra en mi cuarto a echarme en cara que yo estuviera en casa entretenido con libros mientras mi hermano se sacrificaba por Euskal Herria y la gente del pueblo había salida a la calle a protestar… Y me soltó que si Joxe Mari se enteraba, se llevaría un disgusto muy grande…¿Qué iba a hacer? Cogí el paraguas y me fui a la manifestación a pegar cuatro gritos. (252)

While his brother's prestige as an active member of ETA shields Gorka from some harm—"les podía parecer un tipo raro, introvertido, poco sociable, pero nadie recelaba de mis ideas políticas" (251)—communal expectations, including those of his mother, still dictate his every move, as is clearly case when the character seeks higher education. Despite his father's support, Gorka's long-held dream of attending university, already difficult due to his family's lack of funds, is ended when his mother forbids him from asking the wealthy Txato for a loan: "¿Estás loco? ¡Pero si no nos hablamos!" (253). Any fraternization, however benign, with el Txato, despite the fact that "para mi padre, un hermano y, para mí, casi como un tío" according to

Arantxa (353). But "ahora no nos hablamos con él ni con su familia aunque no nos han hecho nada," as a result of the community's energetic policy of social ostracization of any non-radical members.

In an ironic redoubling of Francoist prohibitions, this "país de locos" that Arantxa describes zealously forbids any relationship, whether contractual, educational, or personal, at odds with its *abertzale* message. When Gorka wins a youth literary prize, Patxi, the barkeep at the local tavern, confiscates his winnings as punishment for Gorka's grave error of speaking with a reporter from *El Diario Vasco* about his success. Patxi threatens Gorka that "[t]e estás equivocando y eso no me gusta…Que sea la última vez que hablas para un periódico fascista y que aceptas dinero de una entidad bancaria explotadora de los trabajadores. Lo primero ya no tiene solución…Lo segundo se puede arreglar" (Aramburu 350). Motioning to the collection box for the ETA prisoners, Patxi leaves no doubt as to what Gorka must do to regain his status in the community: "Aquí caben exactamente diez mil pesetas". From then on, Gorka must publish in *Egin* in order to keep even suspicious community members like Patxi at bay; the *abertzale* daily newspaper "le servía de salvoconducto en el pueblo" (358), relentless in its quest to enforce compliance within a concrete political paradigm.[28]

As this episode makes evident, the prestige of being related to a member of ETA cannot protect Gorka forever; in fact, the character increasingly suffers from the communal expectation that he follow in his elder brother's footsteps and join ETA. The pressure builds until one day Gorka suddenly bolts, leaving his hometown behind in order to seek refuge in his sister's home in Rentería. There he confesses to Arantxa and her husband that

[28] In another small show of resistance, Gorka's contributions to Egin are always literary, never political.

> O me voy del pueblo o sigo los pasos de Joxe Mari. No hay más alternativa. Me presionan. Les parezco blando. Dicen que los libros me están comiendo el coco y se ríen de mí. Les ha dado por llamarme *Kartujo*. Y lo peor es que están logrando dominarme y me obligan a hacer cosas con las que estoy en desacuerdo. Ahora mismo no tengo ningún amigo al que pueda hablarle como a vosotros. Casi no hablo por miedo a meter la pata. (Aramburu 352)

The event that catalyzed this frenzied flight was increasingly unavoidable as members of Gorka's social group, Peio and Juancar, became progressively radicalized. While at the local tavern, the inebriated Peio and Juancar decide to make a show of *abertzale* force and, at Patxi's suggestion, attack el Txato's trucking business with Molotov cocktails. When Gorka resists, Peio and Juancar begin a verbal assault on his character reminiscent of those of his original tormenter, Joxe Mari: "Aquí, *Kartujo*, que dice que no viene." "Es un radajo." "Parece mentira que sea hermano de Joxe Mari" (354). Patxi, the barkeep, bluntly finishes off the assault with yet another (not-so-implied) threat; if Gorka abandons Peio and Juancar, it marks him as a traitor. The threat produces the desired effect on Gorka—he joins his friends in their attack on el Txato's business—but also has the unexpected consequence of concretizing, with unavoidable finality, the character's self-loathing. Gorka internalizes his brother, mother, and community's disparagement:

> A Gorka lo habían relacionado con la palabra "traicionar". De ahí a chivato, un dedo de distancia. Eso desbarató su resistencia. Y estaba de pronto tan corroído de vergüenza que sintió como si anduviera desnudo por la calle…Se le puso una bola de asco en el gaznate. Y era un asco de sí mismo. Se sintió cobardica, muñeco despreciable, bicho raro, pez fuera del agua, pájaro desplumado… Los otros, ¿qué hacen? Repetir por la calle, en tono

de recriminación, el argumento de Patxi, hasta que Gorka les dijo: bien, ya vale, vamos. (354)

This episode has a profound effect on Gorka's autonomy; why attempt to fit in with his friends and community if this is how they treat him?

With his escape to Rentería, and eventually to Bilbao, where he meets his partner Ramuntxo and begin his profession in Basque-language media, Gorka has at last repudiated the dominant *abertzale* narrative that has plagued him since age fourteen. In doing so, he has in fact saved his own life from a deadly myth popularized within this narrative that views the act of giving one's life for the nationalist militant cause as Christlike; indeed, to Gorka's surprise, he and his friend's attack on el Txato's business was interrupted when the latter furiously opened fire. Only through flight from the only home he has even known can Gorka completely absent himself from the pressure of the "ETA activist [to] display his truth by 'giving up his own life'…first by the decision to take up arms, then by concrete acts of war, finally by actual martyrdom" (Zulaika 334). The dark irony of this decision—to avoid same narrative that eventually secures a life sentence in prison for Joxe Mari—becomes all the more mordant as Gorka continues to frame his decision to leave his hometown as one made in resistance of "termina[ndo] igual que Joxe Mari" (355).

The effect of this episode on his psyche are even deeper, reflecting the extensive, insidious reach of these cultural pressures and disparagements within Gorka's own self. Over the course of his teenage years, Gorka has learned to effectively repress his identity, ranging from his anti-nationalist political beliefs to his sexual orientation. Gorka maintains his dichotomous political beliefs so close to his chest that even his older sister Arantxa, with whom he is close, doubts their existence: "¿Cómo? ¿Tú has tenido ideas políticas?" (Aramburu 251). While key

factors in Gorka's selective mutism include the valid fear of reprisal, made evident in the community's concerted ostracism of the Lertxundi family, Patxi's antagonism, and his brother's bullying, perhaps the greatest is that the character runs the risk of being doubly outed—both as a nonnationalist and as a gay man.

After suffering years of ridicule throughout his adolescence for both his bookishness and his resistance to the community's *abertzale* despotism, the young adult Gorka only returns home under duress (Aramburu 466), given that the reaction to his presence is the same: "*Kaixo, Kartujo*". Outside of his hometown, Gorka has more liberty for self-expression; at least, when el Txato is murdered in 1988, Gorka can vent to Ramuntxo, with whom he by this point shares his career, home, and life:

> Soy tan cobarde como…tantos otros que a estas horas, en mi pueblo, estarán diciendo bajito para que no los oigan: esto es una salvajada, un derramamiento inútil de sangre, así no se construye la patria. Pero nadie moverá un dedo…¿Con qué derecho puedo yo reprochar nada a nadie? Soy igual a los demás. ¿Te imaginas que tú y yo condenáramos mañana en la radio el asesinato de hoy? Antes del mediodía ya nos habrían cortado la subvención o nos pondrían de patitas en la calle. Con los libros pasa lo mismo. Como te saldas de la línea te conviertes en un apestado, un incluso en un enemigo. (462)

With this furious monologue, Aramburu reiterates the essential absurdity of Gorka's situation, that shared by so many other Basques who remained resistant to the *izquierda abertzale*: that despite his physical absence from his community's control in search of freedom of (self) expression, the ingrained fear of *abertzale* populism and its unchecked power forces Gorka's compliance with the laws of "el país de los callados" that he has so desperately sought to escape.

After Joxe Mari's capture by the Civil Guard in late 1992, the community throws its support behind its prodigal son, organizing protests and decorating the town square with massive placards of his photo with messages calling for his freedom. On a rare visit home, Gorka reacts in pure disgust to the community's efforts, but says nothing: "Si la gente del lugar supiera la repugnancia que me causa todo eso" (469). As becomes clear, although his career in Bilbao has galvanized Gorka's separation from the intense political pressures of his community, any attempt by the character to fully embrace an identity separate from that of the *izquierda abertzale* has its limits, especially during the height of the Basque conflict in late eighties and early nineteen-nineties.

While the character keeps his non-nationalism as a secret from anyone other than his sister and partner, Gorka's singular attempt at revealing his sexual orientation to his family results in a curious imbrication of his political and sexual identities. His efforts at coming out to his father are unexpectedly interrupted by the very narratives of *abertzale* martyrdom that he had sought to avoid in Bilbao, yet which dominate the community all the more after Joxe Mari's capture. Despite Gorka's getting as far as to announce that he has moved in with Ramuntxo,[29] Joxian is uninterested, trapped in an alcoholic miasma of shame and impotence. The announcement does not even register, and "Gorka decidió interrumpir su apenas iniciada confesión. ¿Cómo no se había dado cuenta de que aquel no era el momento apropiado ni su padre estaba en las mejores condiciones de prestar atención y entender?" (Aramburu 473). Although he has dreamed of this moment, Gorka's sexual orientation goes the way of his political views: that is, it remains unspoken, unknown to his family. Only when Arantxa accidentally reveals her

[29] Emphasis on the diminutive, as in the novel.

brother's living situation to the rest of the family (585) does the family realize that Gorka is gay. Yet the character still refuses to come out—regarding his orientation or politics—in any way.

Just as he lives in fear of his community's political reprisal, Gorka likewise dreads their reaction to his sexual orientation. After Spain legalized gay marriage in 2005, Ramuntxo proposes the idea of marriage to Gorka, who stubbornly rejects him, given that

> Para Gorka, los planes de matrimonio chocaban con un obstáculo insalvable: sus padres. No porque ellos pudieran desaprobar su decisión, cosa sobre la cual albergaba pocas dudas, sino por la vergüenza que iban a pasar (o que él se imaginaba que iban a pasar) no bien la noticia de su boda hubiese empezado a correr por el pueblo. (593)

Decades after his escape into Bilbao, Gorka still experiences the lasting psychic consequences of the community in which he spent his youth, where, despite Spain's affirmation of civil rights for same-sex couples, the heteronormativity of the *izquierda abertzale* still reigns supreme. That Gorka's intense fear of discovery would persist after all these years is no surprise, given that members of this community—most notably his brother—continue to energetically denounce any perceived aberration in their midst as traitorous. As Gorka's only conversation with Joxe Mari after the latter's imprisonment demonstrates, the twin issues of nationalism and homosexuality remain at the forefront of the community's insistence on heteronormative morality.

During a brief face-to-face interview with his brother, Gorka finally questions the *izquierda abertzale* status quo, at last protected from Joxe Mari by his incarceration as well as a sheet of glass dividing the two as they speak. Gorka asks, "¿Prefieres que te mienta, que te felicite por el dolor que has causado vete tú a saber a cuántas familias? ¿Y para qué?" (582). He rejects the rationalization that his brother and his community have imbibed like some delicious poison, in which Joxe Mari's militancy in ETA, and the murders he committed its behalf, were

"para salvar a mi pueblo…de la gente opresora que nos machaca a diario y no nos deja ser libres". When Gorka continues to insist on his brother's culpability in "dearramando la sangre de otros," including that of innocent children (582), Joxe Mari, furious at this outright dismissal of violent Basque nationalism, turns the table on his brother in order to condemn him.

In this exchange, Gorka, in refusing to acknowledge to the righteousness of the *izquierda abertzale*'s nationalist discourse, occupies a position of moral superiority over Joxe Mari that the latter finds unacceptable. Thus, the militant returns to attacking what he considers to be his brother's other great moral failing in order to regain his footing:

> Me han contado que vives con un hombre. Justo tú que condenas lo que yo he hecho. Siempre fuiste un poco raro, chaval, pero no me imaginaba que hasta estos extremos. La *ama* cree qué te avergüenzas de nosotros. Yo sí que me avergüenzo de tener un hermano maricón al que le importa tres cojones arrastrar nuestro apellido por el suelo. Por eso no vas nunca al pueblo, ¿no? (582)

It is clear that for Joxe Mari, and the community whose beliefs he loyally continues to espouse, that Gorka's sexual orientation precludes any claims of moral superiority and in fact marks him as irrevocably inferior. As Imanol Uribe's films *La muerte de Mikel* (1983) and *Días contados* (1994) demonstrate, the Basque separatism of respective protagonists Mikel and Antonio, like that of Joxe Mari, is one predicated on a fundamentally heterosexual model of male attraction and relationships. Any deviation from this norm is considered a threat to the militants' commitment to the separatist cause (Davies 122). Hence Joxe Mari's outright homophobia in this episode should be understood as a key factor in the overall *abertzale* discourse that he and his community espouse.

The severity of this discourse, and its impact on Gorka's psyche, are in turn the reason for which the character eventually "pretendió contraer matrimonio a escondidas de su familia" (Aramburu 593). During decades of limited contact with his family and even fewer in-person visits, this imbrication of homophobia and political intolerance has become so ingrained that when Gorka, at Ramuntxo's insistence, sends them a notice of their impending wedding, his family's lack of initial response causes him to "[dar] por hecho que sus padres lo habrían repudiado y estarían encogidos de espanto o de vergüenza, sin atreverse a poner un pie en la calle" (594). Their surprise attendance—as well as the unexpected congratulations that his mother passes along on Joxe Mari's behalf—do little to alleviate Gorka's intense anxiety, as the character feels "atolondrado, serio, cohibido" at their arrival. While *Patria*'s final chapters narrate the breakdown of the *izquierda abertzale* discourse that had, among its myriad consequences, isolated Gorka from his family and hometown for decades prior, the character's final appearance in the novel during his wedding subverts any assurance of fraternal forgiveness when Aramburu ends the chapter without recording Gorka's reaction to his brother's congratulations.

Ending Gorka's final chapter with this ambiguity reifies the character's status as a victim of the *izquierda abertzale*. Throughout his life, Gorka has suffered from the aforementioned "matonismo nacionalista contra amplias capas de la población" in which "los españoles y los 'vascos no nacionalistas' no oprimen a los 'vascos nacionalistas' sino que estos últimos hostigan a sus compatriotas para integrarlos en un proyecto totalitario" (Lorenzo-Arza 98). Like his father's, Gorka's victimization is predicated on his lack of control in the community in which he lives; in this case, his inability to assert his own identity in the face of the pro-*abertzale* discourse that vilifies both his sexual orientation and political dissent. As such, his self-conceptualization is

fundamentally truncated by these insidious narratives which have convinced him that he is above all a coward (Aramburu 593).

That Gorka consistently identifies himself as a coward throughout the novel (Aramburu 354, 462, 593) in relation to both his sexual orientation and political beliefs demonstrates the extent to which nationalist bullying has biased the character's vision of himself. Gorka is not a coward; in fact, for years he has bravely and consistently opposed the *abertzale* narrative that has ensnared his mother, brother, and community, all of whom interpret this concerted moral resistance as pusillanimity and a challenge to the righteous political order. Even more, as critics such as Lorenzo-Arza have noted, the character's profession in the creation and spread of Basque-language media offers a viable alternative to the violent nationalism of the *abertzale*, functioning as a definitive rebuke to any radical nationalist discourse declaring independence as the only course of action to propagate Basque culture and heritage. Gorka thus questions the radical Basque nationalism of ETA when he declares to his brother during their erstwhile prison encounter, "[h]ago programas de radio en euskera, escribo libros en euskera, ayudo a nuestra cultura. Es mi manera de aportar algo a nuestro pueblo, pero algo constructivo, sin dejar a me pasó un montón de huérfanos y viudas" (582).

As with Joxian, Gorka's progressive distancing from, and disavowal of, the radical nationalism embodied by Joxe Mari once again reiterates how ETA has trampled the most intimate of relationships in its desire for political and ideological supremacy within the Basque Country. Such a representation functions as an explicit criticism of radical Basque nationalism's myopia when compared to the positive efforts of Gorka to advance Basque culture through creative production, which rendered ETA's political violence all the more ineffective. The juxtaposition could not be more glaring; Gorka's tangible success, in the form of his multiple

publications and radio programming, calls attention to the utter lack of achievements (political, social, cultural, or otherwise) gained from the separatist violence of characters like Joxe Mari. But despite this reality, the vision of himself as a coward that Gorka has internalized is proof of his victimization at the hands of the *abertzale*, one that cruelly diminishes the very meaningful contributions that Gorka has made to the preservation and popularization of his culture through Basque-language media. Through this character, like that of his father, Aramburu foregrounds the militants' family members as the legitimate victims of nefarious political posturing that, in Gorka's case, has rendered his very real achievements in the realm of Basque creative production inconsequential in comparison to the deadly acts of ETA. In this way, Aramburu calls simultaneous critical attention to the absurdity and ineffectiveness of political violence through juxtaposition while that democratizing the victim space to include those who, like Gorka, were only guilty of association.

2.5

In 2011, the year in which *Patria*'s narrative begins, the Spanish federal government passed a fundamental legal challenge to the cultural conception of the victim, Law 29/2011, which built on previous regional legislation (Law 52/2007) to reconfigure this figure as one who has suffered from a violation of their human rights.[30] Significantly, it offers—for the first time in the contemporary Spain—a newly inclusive vision of the victim whose suffering does not correspond to traditional limitations: "la presencia social de la víctima se extiende y alcanza a un ciudadano ordinario que lo es porque su motivo de victimización escapa de las referencia al gran pacto político que fundan y sostienen las víctimas de ETA" (Gatti 249). It is within this broad,

[30] Law 52/2007 specifically condemns Franco's dictatorship and all those who suffered the violation of their human rights between 1939 and 1975.

recent revision of the victim figure at a national level that I situate both Gorka and Joxian Garmendia, whose victimization was not the result of a singular act of aggression by ETA, but rather a steady stream of lesser evils deemed by their community to be inconsequential in the pursuit of a greater goal: the freedom of the Basque Country. In other words, the greater purpose of these characters' representation within *Patria* is in their ordinariness, in their quotidian melodrama, and above all their daily suffering at the hands of a loved one, which incorporates them into legitimate cultural discourses of victimization in contemporary Spain. Reading Joxe Mari as a metonym for ETA serves as a powerful reminder of the limitations of previous constructions of victimhood that would render his brother and father guilty by association, rather than victims in their own right.

While, in the end, Gorka's narrative arc offers a notably more positive outcome than that of his father's—Joxian, it is worth noting, appears at the happy occasion of his son's wedding as "desangelado de sonrisa, lacrimoso de mirada" (Aramburu 595)—both characters serve to demonstrate the lasting effects of the nationalist bullying from which they have suffered for decades. Gorka's visceral disgust of both his brother, his hometown, and their beliefs, coupled with his father's impotent rage and alcoholism, recall Jon Juaristi's postulate that "[e]l nacionalismo engendra sus propios sepultureros" (106). Leaving home dissolves any remnant of a fraternal or paternal bonds between Joxe Mari, his brother, and his father, making clear the insurmountable cleavage between these members of the family: Gorka and Joxian are the figurative "sepultados" to Joxe Mari, Miren, and their community's adoption of "el propio sepulturero."

As the aforementioned fracas surrounding *Patria* so recently demonstrated, the question of legitimate victimization will continue to be contested by many, by members of the *izquierda*

abertzale and the far-right alike. Unsurprisingly, the novel and its subsequent television adaptation continue to receive criticism in regional and national media along politically partisan lines. Aramburu's revision of Gorka and Joxian Garmendia as victims of their brother/son, mother/wife, and community—and thus metonymically of the *izquierda abertzale* discourse that dominates in each—represents a significant deviation from traditional cultural conceptualizations of the victim figure both in the Basque Country and Spain. Once again, I cite Aramburu's statement that with *Patria*, "mi tentativa es trazar un dibujo general que no dejase fuera a nadie. He unido a víctimas, victimarios y resto de vecinos. El dibujo final abarca la sociedad de manera suficiente para que el lector sepa lo que hemos vivido en el País Vasco durante tres décadas" (cited in Arenas). The plurality of narrative voices present in this novel aligns succeeds in that it creates a powerful multivocal discourse inclusive nontraditional victims, here Joxian and Gorka, in order to question the validity of traditional cultural constructions that have so long dominated in both Spain and the Basque Country.

Hence despite their indisputable intimate relationship with the violent separatist discourse of the *izquierda abertzale* in their family and community, *Patria* asks the reader to interpret Gorka and Joxian as victims rather than as guilty by association with ETA. Indeed, *Patria*'s most important contribution to contemporary cultural notions of the victim figure is the novel's premise that, regardless of where they fall outside the traditional limits, all those who have known the violence and fear of the Basque conflict are victims. Rather than ranking them on a scale of oppression or creating an arbitrary hierarchy to validate or invalidate the suffering of a select group—as partisan politics are wont to do—*Patria*, through the characters of Joxian and Gorka, affirms an indelible truth: that all those affected by this struggle are deserving of our understanding, and above all, compassion.

CHAPTER THREE

The *Ocho apellidos vascos* Effect: Disavowing Difference in *Fe de etarras*

3.1

Within the last decade, no film has had a greater impact on contemporary perspectives towards regional identities in Spain than director Emilio Martínez-Lázaro's 2014 romantic comedy, *Ocho apellidos vascos* [known as *Spanish Affair* in English]. The 2017 dark comedy *Fe de etarras*, directed and written by *Ocho apellidos vascos*' scriptwriters, Borja Cobeaga and Diego San José, respectively, employs techniques of stereotype and cliché established by the former film in order to repudiate discourses of Basque nationalism in the latter. Specifically, *Fe de etarras* exploits exaggerated symbols of regional (Basque) and national (Spanish) identity in order to mock the practice of cultural difference that supports problematic narratives of exclusive regional identity, which in turn justifies the Basque nationalist cause. In this chapter, I place *Ocho apellidos vascos* in dialogue with *Fe de etarras* in order to examine how the latter film deploys a diverse range of symbols of varying allegorical weight and comedic impact to both satirize and criticize the problematic narratives of difference engaged by members of the Basque nationalist community (as well as those in the Spanish nationalist camp, to a lesser extent) in their pursuit of independence. These symbols range from the conventional, including a traditional Basque dessert, the Spanish national football team, Spanish national flag, to the absurd, including a shower tray and a sudden, unexpected death. Through their analysis, I investigate how both *Ocho apellidos vascos* and *Fe de etarras* censure the broader discourse of radical Basque nationalism that looks to these symbols to shore up its sense of self, thus

demonstrating the larger discursive impact achieved by recent Peninsular blockbuster comedy films as they employ humor to inform a separatist critique.

3.2

In an article published on April 21, 2014, Gregorio Belinchón of *El País* famously declared

> Ni siquiera el hombre araña puede con los vascos. El estreno el jueves pasado de *The Amazing Spider-man 2* hacía prever el fin del reinado de *Ocho apellidos vascos*, pero no ha sido así. La comedia de Emilio Martínez-Lázaro sigue en el primer lugar de la taquilla en su sexta semana en cartel, batiendo récords, casi triplicando en recaudación al filme de acción de la factoría Marvel, situándose siempre dentro del top 15 de los largometrajes más taquilleros durante esas semanas (y eso que solo está estrenada en España) y convirtiéndose en la película española más vista de la historia. (1)

Belinchón's surprise was understandable. Only a month had passed since its March 14th, 2014, premiere, and *Ocho apellidos vascos* had already received the distinction of the most-watched film in Spanish history; apart from its record number of spectators, the romantic comedy also became highest-grossing domestic-made film of all time, with reported earnings of over fifty-five million euros (*Largometrajes*). Its 2015 sequel, *Ocho apellidos catalanes* [*Spanish Affair 2*], likewise directed by Martínez-Lázaro, followed in the footsteps of its predecessor, likewise achieving enormous success with over five million spectators and over thirty-one million euros in earnings.

At its core, *Ocho apellidos vascos* is a conventional romantic comedy within an easily recognizable linear narrative built on regional differences, cultural misunderstandings, and

frequent miscommunications between its enamored but clumsy protagonists.[31] Rafa (Dani Rovira), the archetypal Sevillian, a diehard supporter of hair pomade, the Virgen of Macarena, and the Real Betis football club, falls in love with his equally stereotypical counterpart, Amaia (Clara Lago), with her "abertchandal" dress (as Rafa mistakenly describes it), her txalaparta ringtone, blunt fringe, and shouts of "Gora Euskadi". These emphatically regional associations conspire to frustrate the hapless protagonists' attempts to realize their particular iteration of heteronormative romance over the course of ninety-eight minutes. The film's enormous popularity upon its release was, and continues to be, a curiosity for critics and academics alike, seemingly defying descriptions of it as "the most conventional of romantic comedies" (Buse and Toribio 229), one "aimed at a general audience" that lacks "the artistic or conceptual sophistication of more auteurist approaches" (Martínez-Expósito 184). In 2014, Paul Julian Smith lamented in *Film Quarterly* that the film was so "[b]roadly acted, conventionally scripted, and so jerkily edited it might well have been cut with an ax," leading him to ask "what is the secret of *Spanish Affair*'s success?" (51). These initial musings set off a wave of critical investigation on the film's treatment of identity, terrorism, nationalism, regionalism, and gender, among other themes (Buse and Toribio [2015], Colbert Goicoa [2016], Caballero Gálvez [2017],

[31] It is also worth noting that *Ocho apellidos vascos* is a film about Basque identity directed by a Spaniard, the Madrid-born Emilio Martínez-Lázaro, but written by two Basques, Borja Cobeaga and Diego San José. Rather than enter into the convoluted debate about whether or not the film is truly "Basque" given the diversity of its creators' birthplaces, I instead look to Santiago de Pablo who, in reference to depictions of terrorism in Basque cinema, writes that "at times there is no important difference in the point of view of ETA conveyed in films produced by Basques and non-Basques, whether the latter are from Madrid, Barcelona, or Italy" (415-16). Although *Ocho apellidos vascos* avoids direct reference to ETA, it is undoubtedly a film predicated on popular (mis)conceptions of Basque nationalism as terrorism, which lies at the butt of many of its jokes. For the purpose of this analysis, then, it is more useful to treat *Ocho apellidos vascos* as the product of a specific sociohistorical context—the Basque nationalist conflict (1968-2011) and post-ETA poetics its dissolution created—and the cultural conceptions that have emerged from this context, than of Martínez-Lázaro in particular. The director is simply a vehicle to represent this particular context and its cultural by-product(s) on screen.

Gabilondo [2017], Martínez-Expósito [2017], Miguélez-Carballeira [2017], Noble [2017]); within these, one avenue of investigation stands out: *Ocho apellidos vascos*' historical moment.

As evinced by its constant reappearance and reference in scholarly work across the globe, an understanding of the film's historical moment is necessary to comprehend its ultimate success. Released in 2014, *Ocho apellidos vascos* should be understood as directly benefitting from ETA's official ceasefire declaration on October 20, 2011, three years prior. ETA's dissolution permitted the creation of a new discourse of unified national identity by way of a heterosexual romantic relationship between two representatives of distinct regional and cultural communities. Discourses like these, which are so evident in *Ocho apellidos vascos*, are part of "a series of recognizable narrative tropes [which] place state-aligned post-ETA cultural products in line with the narratives of consensus promoted since the Transition period," (Miguélez-Carballeira 167). Over the course of the film, Rafa and Amaia resolve the cultural differences that would keep a conventional Andalusian and a stereotypical Basque apart, thus achieving an interregional romantic love that appeals to an overarching post-ETA desire for greater unity within the Spanish nation-state. That this discourse is packaged in a familiar romantic comedy format whose jokes, clichés, and stereotypes would be easily recognizable (and thus popular) with a general Peninsular audience establishes the film as the pioneer in using stock regionalisms to advocate for a unified nation that overwhelms any traditional cultural differences. In and of itself, *Ocho apellidos vascos*' employment of comedy as a unifier corresponds to the larger development of the genre over the centuries in Spanish cultural production, often appearing as the form by which cultural integration, familial resolution, or financial issues may be solved.

In this sense, *Ocho apellidos vascos*' tactic of making hyper-visible the local identities of its characters through frequent reference to their associated regionalisms emerges from the recent

configuration of autonomous culture—in particular, Basque—as difference, an enduring trope that has coexisted within Peninsular film since at least the advent of cinema in the early twentieth century. In fact, the earliest Basque productions sought to differentiate the region and its populace from dominant Castilian cultural narratives through the creation an idealized nationalist identity rooted in millenary rural tradition. Mauro Azcona's full-length silent film, *El mayorazgo de Basterretxe* (1928) and Teodoro Hernandorena's propaganda documentary *Euzkadi* (1933) are both examples of early attempts to ascribe to the Basque identity a narrative of sovereign difference at odds with centuries of Castilian/Spanish repression (de Pablo 409).[32] Continued financial backing from the EAJ-PNV throughout the twentieth and twenty-first centuries meant that emphasis was placed on depicting this identity in regional cinematographic productions; see, for example, Segundo Cazalis' *Los hijos de Gernika: La lucha del pueblo vasco por su libertad* (1968), Pedro de la Sota's *Sabino Arana* (1980), José Antonio Zorilla's *A los cuatro vientos* (*Lauaxtea*) (1987), Arantxa Lazcano's *Urte ilunak/Los años oscuros* (1993), or any of the made for television documentaries produced by ETB, such as *Al alba: Lauaxeta Espinosa* (1997).[33]

Cinema has also played an outsize role in shaping narratives of regional and national identities during moments of profound social and political upheaval throughout the twentieth and twenty-first centuries (de Pablo 410). Released in the new era of post-ETA poetics, *Ocho*

[32] *Euzkadi* was one of many productions made with an explicit political purpose in mind; it was financed by the Basque Nationalist Party (EAJ-PNV) and screened at the party's *batzoki* community centers. Santiago de Pablo notes that in the early twentieth century, the EAJ-PNV was determined to use "every means at their disposal, including the cinema, to promote national identity…early nationalist documentaries focused on idealized rural settings in attempting to cinematically represent a putative Basque 'Golden Age'" (46).

[33] After languishing during the Civil War (with a few exceptional productions made in exile or under Francoism), cinematic representation of Basque identity flourished in the nineteen-eighties with the creation of EITB (*Euskal Irrati Telebista*, literally Basque Radio Television). ETB was the first public media network of its kind in the autonomous community. Launched in December 1982, EITB was from its inception a public entity, controlled by whatever political party led the regional government. Under the jurisdiction of the PNV-EAJ, which held power from 1980 through 2009, the network stuffed its televised fare with documentaries on the history of the Basque history and nationalism (de Pablo 71).

apellidos vascos follows, at first, the tried-and-true filmic conventions of Basqueness as difference; an understanding best exemplified in film through a visual counterpart (Egea 15). Thus Amaia's stock affinity with the *izquierda abertzale* becomes all the more notable when she is placed next to her ur-Andalusian lover, as does Merche/Ane's implied Falangist affinity in context with Koldo's traditionalism. In any case, as soon as the characters' identities take on a broader regional association, such as with Amaia's "Basqueness" or Rafa's "Andalusian-ness," they become "not a reality but a construct, albeit a construct with very real effects in the thinking as well as in the 'making' of a cultural specificity" (13). Through the development of Amaia and Rafa's romantic relationship, the film effectively criticizes through comedy the stereotypical constructs of regional identity that it has established in order to advocate for greater national unity. The film's final scene—in which Amaia appears in a horse-drawn carriage in historic Seville, accompanied by the famous flamenco duo Los del Río singing "Sevilla tiene un color especial"—is explicitly rendered an act of surpassing the limitations of cultural difference (and thus the constructs that fashion these differences). The carriage pulls away, the protagonists embrace and kiss passionately, and the film ends on the implication that the binary opposition between Amaia and Rafa's regional identities can be resolved through (romantic) unification with the greater Spanish state embodied by Seville.

It is worth noting that this discourse of national consensus as superior to regional cultural difference popularized by *Ocho apellidos vascos* did not appear suddenly post-2011; in fact, as many investigators have described, in large part it developed through *Vaya Semanita*, the Basque sketch comedy show which cemented the pivotal practice of satirizing regional identities on contemporary Peninsular screens. This program premiered on the public channel *Euskal Telebista* 2 in 2003; two of the program's chief scriptwriters, Borja Cobeaga and Diego San José,

would later write the script for *Ocho apellidos vascos*. San José would also collaborate with Cobeaga in the latter's 2017 film, *Fe de etarras*.[34] With its sketches ridiculing "the Basque rural ideal, as well as the church, universities, and, of course, politicians" as well as "the *abertzale* look and attitude" (Buse and Toribio 234), *Vaya Semanita* represented a direct challenge to narratives of Basque difference and sovereignty that so frequently appeared on screen thanks to the intervention of the EAJ-PNV. In fact, until *Ocho apellidos vascos'* release in 2014, *Vaya Semanita* was one of only a handful of domestic references for comedy about the Basque subject.[35]

The film's conclusion, as well as that of its sequel, *Ocho apellidos catalanes*, suggest that it is not only possible, but rather preferable, for our enduring understanding of regional culture as difference to give way, under the right amount of romantic love and heterosexual desire, to the creation of a successful (inter-)national union. Fiona Noble describes Rafa and Amaia's eventual union at the end of *Ocho apellidos vascos* as a tactic by which the film participates in the "erasure of difference by means of heteronormative romance…[which] evokes historical national spectres intent on centralization, hegemony and a united Spanish nation" (211). Ultimately, *Ocho apellidos vascos* seems to posit that consensus, not cultural difference, is essential to the formation of a united Spain post-ETA; the film proposes a clear path away from this difficult separatist conflict by rendering it, like the other stereotypical, presupposed narratives of Andalusian-ness or Basqueness it ridicules, comically obsolete.

[34] A year later, Cobeaga and San José would return to scriptwriting together as principal scriptwriters on director Javier Ruíz Caldera's 2018 comedy *Superlópez.* Previously, San José had also worked as a scriptwriter Cobeaga's 2009 comedy *Pagafantas. Superlópez* would eventually number alongside *Ocho apellidos vascos* as one of Spain's most-viewed films of all time (*Largometrajes*).

[35] Others comedies included Aiser Altuna and Telmo Esnal's 2005 *Aupa Etxebeste!,* Aitor Mazo and Patxo Tellería's *Bypass* (2012), and Borja Cobeaga's *Pagafantas* (2009) and *Negociador* (2014) (Stone and Rodríguez 203).

With this contention, *Ocho apellidos vascos* fundamentally altered following cinematographic representations of regional identities by demonstrating that achieving riotous financial success and lasting popularity was in reach—assuming creators embraced doctrines of national consensus in their productions. The lesson to be learned from *Ocho apellidos vascos* is evident: comedies predicated on cultural difference that ridiculed this divergence offered an easily replicable formula for commercial and critical success, in that their disruption of constructs of cultural identity proved popular with the post-ETA vision of national unity. In the following pages, I examine how *Fe de etarras* (2017, dir. Borja Cobeaga) [known as *Bomb Scared* in English] employs this formula to reject Basque nationalism through its satire of ETA and its related symbolic representations of cultural difference.

3.3

A month before his declarations on *Ocho apellidos vascos*' surprising popularity were published in *El País*, journalist Gregorio Belinchón made mention of a yet unmade but closely related film called *Fe de etarras*. In a March 20, 2014 article titled "Is it time to start laughing about ETA?", the journalist noted

> another script [that] remains in limbo, *Fe de etarras*, whose departure point is: what would happen if an ETA cell hiding out in a safe house found themselves in charge of their apartment building's residents association? And, what's more, during a period coinciding with Spain winning the 2010 World Cup. (Belinchón)

In March of 2014, the fate of this film, another collaboration between Borja Cobeaga and Diego San José, was yet undecided. The early success of *Ocho apellidos vascos*, released in national cinemas only six days prior at the time of Belinchón's article, certainly had drawn the attention

of critics and the public; however, the heights it would eventually reach were still unknown. Despite assurances from Álvaro Augustín, the film director of the privately-owned national channel Telecinco, that a film like *Fe de etarras* would eventually be made (although not by Telecinco, as which had recently passed on it), Belinchón rightly determined that in 2014 "[i]t is fair to say…that ETA still frightens Spanish cinema" (1).

Indeed, that same year, Borja Cobeaga and Diego San José had also released the forty-minute-long comedy about ETA, *Aupa Josu*, on the Basque public television channel ETB2, purportedly as a pilot episode for a longer series that would spoof the titular Josu's struggles as he tries to bring about the end of ETA. However, despite an overall positive response from critics and viewers alike to the pilot,

> la cadena pública vasca decidió finalmente no seguir adelante con el proyecto, debido al parecer a que algunos de sus responsables consideraban que su humor era demasiado irreverente. Este hecho es sorprendente a primera vista, puesto que ETB había emitido durante muchos años el programa de humor *Vaya Semanita*, con Cobeaga y San José, entre otros, como guionistas, que precisamente se basaba en un humor desenfadado, con muchos toques socio-políticos, que criticaba con gracias a todos los partidos y a la propia ETA. (Pablo et al. 176)

Despite its embrace of *Vaya Semanita*, it seemed that public television was just as reticent as Telecinco to tackle ETA on film. It is worth noting that while *Vaya Semanita*, through its sketch comedy format, certainly took aim at ETA (see such infamous sketches as "El diccionario ETA-Castellano" and "La escisión de ETA se separa y se vuelve escindir" among many others, for example), it was hardly the singular target of *Vaya Semanita*'s satire; in fact, the great majority of the program's sketches are devoted to a myriad of local, national and global topics that range

from Basque culture and international politics to dating, friendship, and sex. With this ostensible diversity of its criticism, the program could hardly be accused of singling out solely ETA for its satire, which was exactly what Cobeaga sought to do with *Fe de etarras*.

Cobeaga was in luck, however. Despite private and public media's hesitation, *Fe de etarras* was eventually picked up by Netflix, one of the most successful international online streaming platforms in Spain (Liberal-Ormaechea and Cabezuelo-Lorenzo 144).[36] Releasing *Fe de etarras* on Netflix on October 12, 2017—coincidentally (or not) el Día de la Hispanidad—Cobeaga neatly bypassed Spanish television's reluctance to directly address ETA while exploiting the growing national demand for online audiovisual content that had developed across the country since 2006 (Capapé 451). However, its absence from national theaters hardly exempted the film from controversy. A contentious marketing campaign produced by Netflix in September of 2017 that sought to announce *Fe de etarras'* upcoming premiere at the San Sebastian International Film Festival generated condemnation before the film had even been released to the general public.

The campaign, which took place in San Sebastian, home of the Festival, featured an incredible six-story long promotional poster or "lona". On the poster was written the phrase "[y]o soy españooool, españoool, españoooool" in massive white block font on a black background; the last three words were crossed out with startling red slashes (fig. 4). The phrase, itself a common refrain sung by Spanish football fans during matches, putatively referred to the chronological frame for the film's narrative during the summer of 2010, during which Spain would participate, and eventually triumph, in that year's FIFA World Cup. This context did little

[36] In terms of its popularity, its offerings, and the quality of those offerings. For further detail, see Liberal-Ormaechea and Cabezuelo-Lorenzo's 2018 article, "Film streaming platforms spectrum in Spain: commercial strategies and technological characteristics".

to mollify the Civil Guards Union, who denounced the poster for its purported humiliation of terrorist victims, nor the Victims of Terrorism Association, nor Covite, which likewise censured the poster's perceived insensitivity towards victims of ETA (Alonso; Ormazabal).[37] In response, *Fe de etarras* director Borja Cobeaga defended Netflix, which had organized the marketing campaign, remarking: "A lo mejor Diego y yo logramos que dejemos de ser los autores de 'Ocho apellidos vascos'. Ahora seremos los de la lona" (cited in Alonso).

Fig. 4. The polemic poster on display in downtown San Sebastian. Source: Martínez, Luis. "Etarras y Erratas." *El Mundo*, 29 sep. 2017, www.elmundo.es/opinion/2017/09/29/59cd3f5a468aebc8128b45c2.html.

While Cobeaga's tongue-in-cheek quip made light of this particular controversy, the director was perfectly serious when questioned about why he had chosen ETA as the target of his

[37] Covite is the national Victims of Terrorism Collective (Colectivo de Víctimas de Terrorismo).

comedy: “Es un contexto idóneo. Nos permite repasar todo lo que ha ocurrido en Euskadi y nos da cierta perspectiva de lo absurdo de haber vivido con esta violencia” (cited in Ormazabal). Critics agreed with the director’s appraisal, and *Fe de etarras*, once released on Netflix, garnered generally favorable reviews in the Spanish press, which praised its comedic takedown of such a polemic topic as Basque terrorism (Costa [2017]; Martínez [2017]; Montoya [2017]; Pereda [2017]; Prieto [2017]; Viguera [2017]).[38] *El País* lauded the film as evidence as to why “al humor no hay que ponerle límites, ni barreras, pero quizá no estaría mal recordar más a menudo, como hace *Fe de etarras*, la fuerza del humor para comprender lo humano, para disolver las fronteras que separan a una supuesta normalidad de una supuesta otredad” (Costa). This assessment, like many others that appeared in the press, confirmed that Cobeaga’s goal for the film was not, as detractors claimed, to belittle ETA’s violent legacy or the suffering of its more than eight-hundred victims. Rather, as the director himself explained,

> Reducir un terrorista al chiste es algo que tiene que escocer y es una victoria de la sociedad…lo que nos inspira es hacer comedias de lo cercano que hemos vivido en este país y contar nuestra historia. Nos interesa contar qué ha pasado en los últimos años en el País Vasco y levantar una sátira sobre lo que ha estado presente. (cited in Alonso)

In light of these statements, two imbricated phenomena began to emerge regarding the film: first, that Cobeaga had succeeded in lampooning the difficult topic of ETA; and second, as in *Ocho apellidos vascos*, the film rejected the practice of regional cultural difference in order to promote a greater national consensus through the comedic (mis)representation of symbols of regional (Basque) and national (Spanish) identities.

[38] Due to its release on the streaming service, the film earned only a handful of euros in box-office ticket sales, ostensibly garnered through its run at the San Sebastian International Film Festival, where it had premiered earlier that year (Índice).

Before moving forward with this analysis, it must be noted that the *Fe de etarras* released in 2017 was not quite the same as the script "in limbo" first identified by Belinchón in March of 2014. The title is a play on *Fe de erratas*, the headline that precedes Spanish newspapers' corrections of incorrect information published in past editions (de Pablo 328). In this vein, the latter version of the film recounts, in the form of a darkly satirical comedy, the bumbling attempts of the "erratas," Martín (Javier Cámara), a bitter, aging veteran of ETA, and his equally inept commando, featuring handyman Pernando (Julián López) and counterfeiters Ainara (Miren Ibarguren) and Álex (Gorka Otxoa), to bring ETA back to its former glory through a spectacular terrorist attack in a period of intense Spanish pride during the 2010 FIFA World Cup. That none of the members of this clumsy commando have ever seen militant action becomes increasingly obvious as the group transforms into a caricature of nationalist militancy, holed up in a safe house in an unnamed Spanish city. When, after weeks, a much-desired call to action from senior ETA leader Artexte (Ramón Barea) fails to arrive, the commando decides to take matters into its own hands and act, setting off an unexpected chain of events leading to Artexte's murder and thus the group's reconciliation with a vision of Spanish unity that repudiates Basque nationalism through the ironic and comedic remaking of symbols tied to cultural difference.

3.4

Of the many aspects of *Fe de etarras* that directly or indirectly satirize regional and national identities, visual symbols that manifest cultural constructs of difference are of vital importance. It is through their on-screen representation that the film articulates a discourse critical of Basque nationalist efforts. Just as *Ocho apellidos vascos* took aim at these differences through exaggeration and characterization—as evinced by Rafa's comical transformation into the

pseudo-Basque Antxon throughout the film—*Fe de etarras* invokes a steady stream of image-based cultural symbols whose depiction directly contributes to the film's rejection of the violent separatism of ETA in favor of a greater national consensus. The use of these symbols is a direct reference to an established practice within Basque nationalism, in which the

> interplay of nostalgia, ethnicity, violence, tradition and cultural symbols that included the use of Euskara, divisive archetypes and recourse to emotionally-charged rhetoric [played] a prominent role in the political and cultural history of the Basque Country throughout the twentieth century as well as the evolution of Basque cinema. This discourse resembles one of sentiment, but when radicalized becomes a rigid criteria of citizenship. (Stone and Rodriguez 33)

The film's engagement with this interplay—in particular, it combines tradition and cultural symbols within a large narrative of regional and national identities—posits *Fe de etarras* as a natural successor to this "discourse of sentiment" that can be so readily identified in past production dating as far back as to Mauro Azcona's 1928 *El mayorazgo de Basterretxe*. However, rather than use this discourse to legitimize "a return to independence through the regeneration of Basque purity and the concomitant repatriation of Spaniards and foreigners" in the style of Sabino Arana, *Fe de etarras* exaggerates, warps, or otherwise renders absurd these symbols. In this manner, the film is consistent with *Ocho apellidos vascos*' in that it likewise engages with cliché and stereotype in order to draw attention to the artificiality of cultural difference and thus the practices that inform an exclusive regional identity at the heart of ETA's brand of radical Basque nationalism. In the order in which they appear in the film, the symbols satirized in *Fe de etarras* analyzed here are the *pantxineta*, the shower tray, the Spanish World Cup team, the Spanish national flag, and the murder of Artexte.

The Pantxineta

Fig. 5: Still of the much-debated *pantxineta* (00:01:01). Source: Cobeaga, Borja. *Fe de etarras*. Mediapro/Netflix, 2017.

The first and foremost of these symbols is the *pantxineta* (fig. 5), a typical Basque pastry consisting of layers of custard and almonds topped with powdered sugar. The film opens with a close-up of the dish that fills the screen, while a lively debate about traditional Basque cuisine can be heard taking place off-camera. The camera slowly tilts upwards to reveal Martín, the film's protagonist, finishing a hearty meal along with several other militants in a Bayonne safe house in 1998. The dim lighting, shabby décor (peeling wallpaper, bare floors, a flimsy cot piled high with mismatched blankets), and the limited color scheme of drab, cool tones of the safe house starkly contrast with the rich, warm yellow of the dessert, which seems to glow amongst the rest of the table scraps. Alongside Martín are Artexte, the commando's leader, and two others, Benito and another unnamed female militant. The topic of conversation quickly turns to the dessert itself: Martín's mistaken assertion that *pantxineta* is made with cream, rather than its traditional custard, serves to catalyze the commando's discussion of exclusive regional identity,

with the dish becoming a satirical measuring stick used by Artexte and the other militants to sustain beliefs gleaned from the practice of cultural difference.

In this case, Artexte and the other militants configure *pantxineta* as a symbol of authentic Basqueness through which they demonstrate their participation in a narrative of regional identity predicated on collective belief and experience; to wit, that *pantxineta* served with anything other than cream is inauthentic and hence unworthy of consumption. Unfortunately for Martín, his lack of experience with the particular *pantxineta* that the others have deemed legitimate excludes him from participating in their restricted vision of regional identity. Even when Martín attempts to fix his mistake, contending that he had once eaten *pantxineta* with custard in the southern Basque town of Llodio, Artexte and the other militants are unmoved:

> Martín: Es que meterme ahora nata…
>
> Artexte: ¿Nata? ¿La *pantxineta*? Cómo se nota que eres de La Rioja, la hostia.
>
> Female militant: Crema pastelera.
>
> Martín: Pues yo una vez en Llodio la tomé con nata.
>
> Benito: Pues *pantxineta* no sería.
>
> Female militant: Milhojas sería.
>
> Artexte: La *pantxineta pantxineta*, la de Donosti, con crema de toda la puta vida. A ver qué hostias haces tú en Llodio comiendo *pantxineta.* (00:01:05-00:01:25)

As this dialogue indicates, the dish has taken on colossal symbolic proportions as Artexte and the other militants use it to reinforce a practice of cultural difference exclusive of Martín, whose explicit refusal to eat a slice of the dessert stresses the displeasure he experiences at this circumscription. That the deciding referent is none other than pastry filling is a clear example of how the film satirizes exclusionary regional identity by rendering its associated symbols

laughably artificial. At the same time, the *pantxineta* reveals a fundamental paradox underlying the militants' larger ideology of radical Basque nationalism in that it highlights the arbitrariness of cultural difference. As evinced by his place at the safe house table, Martín has risked life and limb to join ETA—a commitment to militancy that, over the course of the organization's existence, that few would make—and yet the character remains on the periphery, unable to partake in a (wholly factitious) narrative of exclusionary regional identity that is symbolized by the *pantxineta*.[39] The French gendarmerie's unexpected raid of the safe house immediately after this conversation only stresses this absurdity: with only Martín able to escape arrest by climbing through the window, the future of the commando has been left to the inauthentic militant from La Rioja.

After the film fast-forwards to the diegetic present of the summer of 2010, Martín invokes alimentary references as symbols in continuation of a narrative of exclusive regional identity as he attempts recreate the fierce ETA commando of his past. Given the character's notable circumscription from the practice of cultural difference that informs said narrative, the film's frequent comedic appeals to these symbols are doubly ironic. Thus when a friendly neighbor, Lourdes, offers to cook up a plate of authentic cod *al pil pil* "como lo hacen en el norte" (00:35:10) for Martín and his roommates in the safe house (all of whom, she had been led to believe, are construction workers), the character's unrelated and bizarre reaction to her proposal—he inexplicably denies any connection to the north—demonstrates his continuation of this narrative, again symbolized by another traditional Basque dish. Lourdes' visible confusion at Martín's unexpected reaction accentuates, like the *pantxineta* before it, the absurdity of the

[39] During the course of the organization's existence (1959-2011), ETA and its various subdivisions numbered approximately 3,800 total members (Rivas). For comparison, the Provisional Irish Republican Army or IRA, which operated between 1969 and 2005, was estimated to have over 10,000 total members.

practice of cultural difference through associated symbols. Simultaneously, the character's attempts to convince his utterly nonplussed neighbor of his (dis)identification with the north make laughable the massive figurative power he ascribes to a simple dish of cod *al pil pil*. For Lourdes, the cod merely represents a tasty meal, and nothing more; this counterpoint thus serves the film's greater comedic espousal of cliché and stereotype to highlight the transparency of the practice of cultural difference that underpins a highly discriminatory vision of regional identity.

The Spanish National Team

The next symbol to stress the absurdity of cultural difference, the Spanish selection for the 2010 FIFA World Cup, both serves as the temporal frame for the film at the same time that its frequent reference permits its transformation into a satirical emblem of this practice. This international football match, which took place in South Africa between June and July of that year, saw Spain triumph as the all-around world champions in a moment of much-needed success after the country's total economic collapse and resulting social crisis two years prior. Across the Iberian Peninsula, football [soccer] has long been used metonymically to represent collective regional and national identities, anxieties, beliefs and experiences; take Prime Minister José Luis Rodríguez Zapatero's 2007 announcement, for example, that the roaring Spanish economy belonged in an international "Champions League" (Britland 26).[40]

Since the sport's arrival in Basque territories during the Industrial Revolution, football has been employed specifically by Basque separtists as a symbol of collective nationalist identity, inasmuch as the sport "ha propiciado igualmente un marco de resistencia en el terreno

[40] Zapatero made this untimely statement in a September 11, 2007, speech before Congress, exactly a year and one month before the head of the International Monetary Fund (IMF), Dominique Strauss-Kahn, warned of devasting collapse across the global financial system on October 11, 2008 (Murphy).

de juego y en los graderíos hasta nuestros días, dada la capacidad añadida del evento para albergar los conflictos contemporáneos" (Rojo-Labaien 339). In this way, that the commando should perceive the Spanish national team in such jaded and negative terms, as evinced by their constant complaints, insults, and general denigration of the squad, demonstrates how *Fe de etarras* takes up and amplifies this football team as a symbol of Spanish national identity and self-imposed Basque nationalist exclusion from this identity. The commando's disbelief in the abilities of the Spanish national team once again calls critical attention to the heavy allegorical weight that the militants, supported by their practice of cultural difference, have ascribed to this symbol. Simultaneously, their acrimony towards this representation of Spanish pride underscores how the anxiety of Basque sovereign (il)legitimacy, concretized by its demonstrable lack of a national team, has led to an irrational enmity that is continuously and comically magnified as the commando lambasts a team that, in reality, contains several Basques.[41]

Much as Amaia, when placed next to Rafa in *Ocho apellidos vascos*, was rendered all the more stereotypically Basque, the constant presence of a visual counterpart dominating *Fe de etarras*' mise-en-scène both catalyzes and satirizes the commando's clichéd response to tangible tokens of Spanish national identity. Bright, colorful red-and-gold symbols of the Spanish national team (in the form of patriotic bric-a-brac, flags and banners hung from balconies, and all manner of red and gold clothing and accessories) suffuse both on and offscreen spaces, stressing how patriotism has actively animated an otherwise sedate urban environment. The vivid, splashy decorations of the city and its residents contrast with the interior gloom of the safe house, whose scowling, dour residents hotly complain as they watch the Cup's televised matches. In order to rectify to the obvious irony of their actions—inasmuch as they willingly choose to watch the

[41] Xabi Alonso, Javi Martínez, and Fernando Llorente, all of whom played on the 2010 World Cup national team, hail from Tolosa, Estella, and Pamplona, respectively.

Spanish team compete, despite detesting everything it represents—Martín and the other militants engage with a ludicrous and eminently laughable practice of cultural difference that justifies their choice while further concretizing (and thus, satirizing) the artificiality of this process.

In order to validate his decision to watch Spain's match against Switzerland, for example, Martín announces that he has not tuned in to support the national team; rather, he is watching the Swiss selection, as "hoy Euskal Herria es Suiza. En el partido siguiente seremos los que vayan contra España" (00:19:48-00:19:59). He also asserts that the tournament cannot be called the World Cup, as there is no Basque national team participating in it. When the commando breaks out into a (muted) cacophony of cheers at a Swiss goal, it is clear that they are celebrating not the Swiss but rather the defeat of a perceived ideological enemy, whose very existence as a national symbol delegitimizes their claims to an exclusive identity fundamentally separate from that of the Spanish. For his part, Pernando comically misunderstands Martín's appeals to Switzerland as a symbolic threat to Spanish hegemony on behalf of Basque nationalism, and attempts to establish cultural parallels between Switzerland and the Basque Country by claiming that they are both green and contain many cows and mountains.[42]

As this scene makes evident, the commando's assertions of cultural difference, in that they support the non-native Swiss over a team whose symbolic charge is anathema to their beliefs, is in effect irrational, thus rendering the greater narrative it supports all the more artificial. When a skeptical Ainara asks how the commando will respond if the Basque midfielder Xabi Alonso scores, Pernando simply avoids the question: "Que no va a meter, no tiene llegada" (00:20:14). This response confirms how the interplay of cultural difference and a

[42] This farcical Swiss-Basque connection reappears in another film, the 2019 romantic comedy *La pequeña Suiza,* directed by the Basque Kepa Sojo. *La pequeña Suiza* recounts a fictional Castilian village's attempts to gain recognition as a Swiss canton after its efforts to incorporate itself into the Basque Country fail.

symbol of the Spanish nation present in the scene articulate a narrative of exclusive regional identity that is fundamentally absurd. Pernando cannot respond to Ainara's valid query without acknowledging the illogicality of his and the other militants' employment of said narrative, and chooses to discard the possibility entirely in order to preserve a flawed process of difference that actively isolates Basque nationalists from participating in greater visions of the Spanish nation. That this irony is lost on the militants only emphasizes the humorous obstinacy of their misguided beliefs.

The Shower Tray

Unlike the Spanish national team, the next symbol of considerable impact in the film is one with no outsize allegorical weight: a shower tray. Trapped by his cover story, in which he improbably claimed to be a construction foreman, Martín agrees to change out an outdated bathtub in Lourdes' neighboring apartment for a more modern shower stall, a scheme with which the character attempts to simultaneously substantiate the lie he has told Lourdes (that the commando is actually a construction company); instill among his commando a sense of identitarian pride (ennui is setting in, as the militants' wait for Artexte's call grows endless); and above all as earn the much-needed funds for a spectacular future terrorist attack (which the clumsy commando inevitably botches). When Martín, who knows nothing of home renovation, elects Pernando to carry out the work, the latter balks; despite being the only militant with any actual construction experience, Pernando rightly insists that he did not join ETA to install shower trays. Yet, in a moment of sheer comedic absurdity, Martín skillfully transforms the shower tray into a symbolic referent, this time for the exclusive regional identity with which Pernando seeks to align himself through his association with ETA.

That Pernando, like Martín, is not Basque has already been well established in the film. Pernando's first appearance on screen emphasizes the artificiality of the practice of cultural difference as the character effectively has "Basque-ified" himself in order to assert a regional identity that is patently false. He arrives wearing an over-the-top *abertzale* costume out of place in the summer heat; claims to have improbably changed his name from Fernando García to Pernando Gartzia; and sustains that his choice to join up with ETA places him at the top of a so-called "pirámide de ser vasco" (00:14:56). The character, whose clichéd characterization of ETA is so over-the-top that it makes the other militants cringe, seeks to compensate for the misfortune of his birthplace in Chinchilla through an enthusiastic embrace of cultural stereotypes, an obvious case of "recourse to stereotype" being used to "shore up a threadbare sense of self" (Stone and Rodríguez 204). The inauthenticity of his articulation of exclusive regional identity is made all the more laughable when these stereotypes are revealed to be informed, oddly enough, by the American action film stars Sylvester Stallone and Steven Segal.[43]

The character's idolization of these actors—so laughably out of place in the context of the late-stage Basque nationalist militancy of the film's 2010 setting—is the catalyst by which Martín can convince him that the shower tray installation is not simply a construction job, but a symbol of a free Euskal Herria. In one of the most memorable dialogues in the film, Martín attempts to convince Pernando to see the forest for the trees, or in this case, the independence of Euskal Herria for the shower stall:

Martín: Esto lo harías por Euskal Herria.

Pernando: ¿Poner un plato de ducha por Euskal Herria?

[43] Pernando also refers to the famous American basketball player Michael Jordan as an inspiration for his militancy in ETA.

Martín: Es que no es cambiar una bañera por un plato de ducha, es sacar dinero para hacer algo importante. O sea, es poner un plato de ducha, pero sería en nombre de ETA…Esto no es ser albañil. Es como si le dices a alguien que mande un paquete bomba y te dice que no, que no quiere ser cartero. Esto no es ser cartero. O por lo menos no cartero cartero, que tú digas 'Mira, un cartero'.

Pernando: Ya, pero es que ahí manda un artefacto explosivo. Ahí yo veo tensión, yo veo peligro, yo veo cosas. Lo estás contando y me pongo cachondo, hostia. Pero tú me estás pidiendo que coja la espátula. Yo no me he metido en ETA para eso.

Martín: O si le dices a alguien que pida el impuesto revolucionario…sería mandar una carta, un papel. Con su amenaza, lo que quieras, pero un papel. ¿Es ser un cartero? No, es ser un *etarra* con todas las de la ley. Bueno, fuera de la ley. Pero un *etarra*.

Pernando: Stallone.

Martín: ¿Cómo?

Pernando: Llámame Stallone…El nombre completo…¡El mío, cómo sonaría el mío completo en los informativos, en las noticias!

Martín: Pernando Gartzia, alias 'Stallone'. Te prometí que ibas a hacer cosas importantes por Euskal Herria. (00:45:02-00:47:32)

With this exchange, the shower tray takes on an absurd symbolism. Ironically, it now represents the excessive weight of Pernando's unrealistic expectations for nationalist militancy wrapped up in a greater narrative of exclusive regional identity that affirms him as Pernando Gartzia, rather than Fernando García, a media-heavy construct of Basque regional identity warped by Hollywood action films. Devoid of any outside cultural association, Martín adroitly ascribes to this simple piece of plumbing the liberation of an entire nation, thus appealing to Pernando's

mythologization of the nationalist cause *a la* Sylvester Stallone as a way by which the character can assert his Basqueness.

This employment of Stallone as a tool to glamorize a less-than-attractive job once again highlights how the practice of cultural difference, in its inherent artificiality, is easily manipulated; indeed, in linking the shower tray to Basque liberation, Martín has hilariously created a narrative of exclusionary regional identity that is not in any way based on traditional shared symbols, beliefs, or experiences but on foreign film stars. As follows, the shower tray is rendered a shockingly powerful, multifaceted symbol: first, as an attack on discourses of radical Basque nationalism that renders them absurd (as seen in the militant from Chinchilla, Pernando Gartzia alias Sylvester Stallone, who inhabits the top of the pyramid of Basqueness due to his renovation-style militancy); and second, as a tangible indication of the fallibility of the nationalist discourse (the commando earnings' from the installation fund a botched attack with fireworks *and* force them to do more unwanted construction work). The shower tray therefore functions as a ludicrous symbolic repudiation of all of the constructs of cultural difference with which the characters have endowed it, just like the *pantxineta* or cod *al pil pil*.

The Spanish National Flag

Like the shower tray, the next considerable symbolic referent is irrevocably warped by a narrative of exclusive identity: a Spanish flag. The flag is so excessively large that it stretches from wall to wall of the safe house without being completely unfurled, leading Ainara to accuse the other militants of having bought an awning. Just as the commando has carried out considerable construction work to maintain their cover, so must they—however unwillingly—buy a Spanish flag, in order to fit in with the film's diegetic setting at the height of Spanish

national pride during the 2010 World Cup. In line with the film's previous distortion of cultural symbols, the flag is absurdly large; once hung from the safe house balcony, it hilariously evinces a very different nationalist discourse than that supported by the commando (fig. 6).

Since at least the nineteenth century, flags have functioned as a nation building tool, a simple piece of fabric to which can ascribed a greater national consciousness and identity. In his discussion of the *ikurriña*, Cameron Watson remarks that "national flags represented the visual articulation of differentiation, identification, hegemony, and power. They were cultural devices intended to cement a community's identity and to exclude unwanted outsiders. As such, the flag remains one of the most powerful symbols in modern human imagination" (74).[44] Thus the commando's collective dismay is evident when they realize that not only is their flag enormous, but that it also displays, in lieu of the traditional royal coat of arms, a massive black Osbourne bull. As an internationally recognized Spanish cultural symbol, this (in)famous black bull has historically been a target for reappropriation or destruction by peripheral nationalisms; take the repeated attempts by Catalan separatists in 1998, 2007, and 2009 to demolish the only Osborne bull in the Autonomous Community (in Bruch) as an example. With the bull's unexpected and unwanted appearance on their flag, the militants appear to be thumbing their nose at regional separatist efforts while simultaneously exhibiting an ostentatious symbol of Spanish nationalism, resulting in a true one-two punch to the practice of cultural difference that the militants hold dear. Consequently, the commando has, at least superficially, embraced the very nationalist discourse whose repudiation underpins the organizing principles of ETA: that of Spanish

[44] The Basque nationalist flag of red, white, and green, which was first inaugurated by Sabino Arana in 1894. It is presently the flag of the Basque autonomous community.

sovereignty over the narrative exclusive regional identity employed by the organization in its attempts to establish an independent state.

Fig. 6: A still of the massive Spanish flag the commando hangs from their balcony (00:59:05). Source: Cobeaga, Borja. *Fe de etarras*. Mediapro/Netflix, 2017.

Beyond this immediate double irony, however, the flag exercises little power over the militants; indeed, the commando's espousal of Spanish nationalist symbols offers the militants the cultural clout necessary to maintain cover as they carry out a long-desired terrorist attack on unsuspecting locals. What, then, is the purpose of the flag within *Fe de etarras*' greater mockery of extreme regional and national identities? One glance at the flag displayed at the safe house demonstrates that its irrevocable symbolic warping; its absurd size, coupled with the presence of the Osborne bull, make concrete its role as a hyperbolic visual articulation of Spanish national identity. However, in parallel with the *pantxineta* and shower tray before it, the flag's exaggeration is a tool by which the film may repudiate all discourses of extreme nationalism.

Thus immediately after the militants hang the flag, the film records the reaction of their downstairs neighbor, Armando, whose characterization as openly racist and xenophobic parodies

stereotypical perspectives historically linked to Spain's far-right ultranationalists. In agreement with this clichéd characterization, Armando insists he has no issue with outsiders, but readily admits to harassing the Moroccan couple living in the building.[45] Armando's utter delight at his neighbors' extreme choice in decoration thus serves as an analogous disavowal of the radical, exclusive identitarianism of Spanish nationalism. Displayed by none other than Basque separatist militants, this flag solidly links two seemingly incompatible narratives of identity based on practices of cultural difference in order to problematize, through exaggeration, both their artificiality and the constructs that inform them.

Artexte's Murder

With this final symbol, the film makes concrete an overt repudiation of the discourse of Basque nationalism. After Martín has ignored his attempts to establish contact with the commando, a furious Artexte makes a surprise visit to the safe house, where he is appalled to discover that the militants, living comfortably off the proceeds of their burgeoning home renovation work, appear to have abandoned ETA's cause. Martín and Pernando's belated return—they had been strong-armed into watching Spain play Holland in the World Cup finals with the racist xenophobe, Armando, downstairs—upon the national team's triumph hardly improves the situation, as the two arrive covered head-to-toe patriotic gear as the brilliant multicolored flashes of fireworks, raucous cheers, and honking horns overwhelm the safe house

[45] Armando also tells the militants to remember his name by way of its association with Maradona, the Argentine professional football player. While playing for FC Barcelona in the 1984 Copa del Rey Final, Maradona physically attacked several members of Athletic Bilbao when members of the team provoked him. This association is clearly ironic, as Armando has no inkling of the militants' true nature but, like Maradona before him, it is implied that he would attack them if he knew.

from the outside. Indeed, the volume of the offscreen celebrations is so extreme that Martín and Artexte must raise their voices to be heard.

Artexte's aggressively negative reaction to the militants' physical appearance as seen Pernando and Martín's fulfilling the visual stereotype of pro-Spanish football fans stresses his role as the stern enforcer of the problematic narratives of regional identity that the film's symbols have so effectively satirized. In an absurd scene whose festive atmosphere starkly contrasts with the venom of the character's incandescent rage, Artexte openly mocks Martín in front of the commando, referencing the latter's failings as the result of his inability to correctly perform Basqueness:

> Te has vuelto a cagar, como siempre. Pero te digo una cosa: no vamos a perder esta guerra por gente como tú, que son muchos años de lucha para que mandes todo esto a tomar por el culo. Pero ¿qué sabrás tú de lucha, eh? Tú nunca has tenido fe. Ese es el problema, ¿eh? Eres peor que un cobarde, porque a los cobardes se les espabila a hostias, pero, cuando no hay fe, no hay nada, ni cobardía hay. Y ahora, mira, haznos el favor, y vete llorando por esa ventana. (1:20:27- 1:21:02)

Martín is deeply discomfited, once again, by his rejection from the narrative, which has seemingly remained intact despite the former's best attempts to incorporate himself into this exclusionary vision of regional identity through engagement with exaggerated symbols. His rejection of Artexte's phone calls notwithstanding, Martín's active embrace of an anti-Spanish identity while maintaining the necessary cover to hide his activity as a militant (seen in his insistence on Spain losing the World Cup, among many other examples) has been fundamentally misinterpreted by Artexte as a disavowal of ETA's founding principles of exclusion of the Spanish other. Yet Martín, for his part, believes, in what the audience recognizes as sheer irony,

that his commando is an effective iteration of Basqueness. In his fury at being denied, yet again, the identity which he has longed for, Martín shoots and kills Artexte, as the continuous popping of celebratory fireworks hides the sound of the gunshots.

If this killing was not enough to establish the film's disavowal of Basque nationalist discourse, the commando's quick decision to bury Artexte's body inside of a partially-constructed wall on one of their constructions sites makes explicit what this murder has achieved. Unlike the shower tray, void of allegorical meaning until rendered as a symbol of a free Euskal Herria by Martín, the wall clearly has a well-established, culturally-inscribed meaning of division. That the commando should choose to bury Artexte's body within a visual representation of division thus transforms the wall into a visual marker of collective repudiation of exclusive regional identity underlying radical Basque nationalism. While less comical, undoubtedly, than the shower tray or the massive Spanish flag, Artexte's murder represents *Fe de etarras*' final shot fired at the practice of cultural difference that informs artificial narratives of regional identity.

It is the final symbolic sally in the film's critical discourse towards Basque nationalism, in which the absurd constructs of a select nationalist few (embodied by Artexte) threaten to entice ignorant apostles (embodied by Pernando) into reductive practices of difference and identity that will never achieve ETA's desired independent socialist republic. In burying Artexte in this wall, the militants construct a physical barrier that separates them from the discourses they had previously sought to embody. *Fe de etarras*' conclusion drives this separation home; after burying Artexte's body, the militants have seemingly abandoned the radical Basque nationalism that first brought them together. Instead, a sequence of scenes depicts the commando opening a successful home renovation business; watching foreign action films on their new couch; and

generally enjoying each other's company during meals.[46] This sequence in accompanied by Martín's monologue, in which the character concludes that

> Nosotros seguimos luchando a nuestra manera, pero seguimos siendo parte de algo mucho más importante que hacer baños en la oficina de la calle Fernando el Católico…Eso es lo que los demás pensarán que somos, una próspera empresa de reformas. Bueno, pues que piensen lo que quieran, porque nosotros, por dentro, sabemos lo que somos, *gudaris*. Nunca me había sentido tan cerca de Euskal Herria como con vosotros. Ni estando allí en persona, nunca. Nosotros también somos Euskal Herria porque la llevamos dentro. (1:23:57-1:24:36)

That this monologue begins as Martín stands looking out at a sea of Spanish national flags displayed in neighboring balconies, and ends with the character eating cod *al pil pil* surrounded by the cheerful conversation of the other militants, demonstrates the ideological distance covered in the course of the film. Thus Martín's affirmation of the militants' identity as radical Basque nationalism is fundamentally without teeth as he asserts that such a discourse is built upon community and collaboration, rather than violence.

Its leader's about-face demonstrates how the commando has repudiated the problematic ideology of ETA that first brought them together, an enduring process catalyzed by the warping and exaggeration of visual symbols that rendered the practices of cultural difference underpinning the organization's narrative of exclusive regional identity comically absurd. In short, the militants have chosen to embrace an internal Basqueness, a cultural identification that goes beyond regional or national representations to form an imagined community, Andersonian-style. The employment of this schema thus permits the militants to abandon violent separatist

[46] In a tongue-in-cheek reference to Pernando's love for foreign action films, the renovation business is named "Reformas Van Damme," after Jean-Claude Van Damme, the famous Belgian martial artist and actor.

efforts in favor of sustained cultural appreciation that permits their incorporation, if they should so choose, in the greater Spanish nation. The commando is no longer held hostage by its beliefs.

3.5

Like *Ocho apellidos vascos*, *Fe de etarras* is a comedy predicated on the satire of cultural difference. In a clear continuation of the former film's use of stereotype in order to ridicule seemingly immobile cultural misconceptions, Cobeaga and San José effectively employ, warp, and otherwise render absurd visual symbols of regional (Basque) and national (Spanish) identity in order to criticize a greater discourse of radical Basque nationalism that looks to these symbols to shore up its sense of self. The film locates practices of cultural difference at the heart of narratives of exclusionary identity to draw attention to both concepts' inherent artificiality and ideological contortion. At the same time, *Fe de etarras* emphasizes that any discourses built upon these habits (see the problem presented by Xabi Alonso, for example) are impossibly fragile and supported by misrepresentations, exaggerations, and other absurdities rather than logic, history, or tradition. Among the film's symbols are those associated with Basque regional identity (the *pantxineta*, the shower tray, Artexte's death) and Spanish national identity (the Spanish national football team, the Spanish national flag); the interplay of these diverse visual representations, each with its own allegorical weight, results in a memorable comedy that articulates a discourse highly critical to the organization it depicts. Above all, through humor *Fe de etarras* repudiates a discourse of extreme Basque nationalism that, up until very recently, was generally unaddressed in contemporary Peninsular film. The film's success, as both as continuation of the satirical project begun in *Ocho apellidos vascos*, as well as a discrete parody of contemporary regional divisions, stereotypes, and hyperboles, demonstrates the value of

comedy as an effective tool to disavow the symbolic power of cultural difference across the Iberian Peninsula.

CHAPTER FOUR

Performing Radical Basque Nationalism: The *Bertsolaritza* Structure in Borja Cobeaga's *Negociador*

4.1

In his 1988 work, *Basque Violence: Metaphor and Sacrament,* Joseba Zulaika examines Basque political violence through the regional cultural institution of *bertsolaritza*, the competitive performance of an improvised verse in Euskera known as the *bertso,* which is traded between multiple *bertsolaris*, the male verse singers.[47] The term "bertsolari" is a combination of "bertso," or verse, and the suffix "-lari," communicating maker; a *bertsolari* is thus a maker of verses, which are sung according to particular metric and rhymical structures (Mouillot 3). This chapter explores how the underlying structure of negotiations in Borja Cobeaga's dark comedy, *Negociador,* corresponds to the *bertsolaritza* model of Basque oral tradition. The 2014 film, which fictionalizes the collapse of peace talks between a representative of the ruling PSOE government and the nationalist terrorist organization ETA, renders its titular negotiators as *bertsolaris* whose failure to mediate an end to the Basque conflict is largely contingent on the breakdown of this structure over the course of the film. The film's deployment of this cultural model functions as an ironization of a traditional Basque oral practice, whose misappropriation by those who would most benefit from it as a marker of Basque nationalist identity engenders a mordant criticism of the myopic limitations of the radical political ideologies of ETA.

[47] Officially, Euskera has multiple accepted spellings, most frequently "Euskera" and "Euskara". In this chapter, I employ the former; however, citations may employ the latter.

4.2

Borja Cobeaga's 2014 *Negociador* is, at its core, a narrative of communicative collapse. The seventy-nine-minute film chronicles the unsuccessful efforts of incompetent but well-intentioned Manu (Ramón Barrea) to negotiate an armistice on behalf of the Socialist government of José Luis Rodríguez Zapatero with ETA leaders Jokin (Josean Bengoetxea) and later Patxi (Carlos Areces Maqueda). Unlike the director's smash-hit *Ocho apellidos vascos*, with its record-breaking ticket sales and reputation as a box office triumph, *Negociador*, which likewise premiered in 2014, received a comparatively muted response from the Spanish public, perhaps for its admittedly sober take on the issue of radical Basque nationalism. During its 2015 run in national theaters, the film drew just 33,000 viewers for a profit of nearly 200,000 euros (Índice). Upon its 2014 release, critics were impressed by *Negociador*'s unequivocal, clear-cut repudiation of ETA's inconstancy in negotiations (Batlle Caminal [2015]; Bermejo [2015]; Martínez [2015]; Ocaña [2015]; Valle [2015]). In 2014, the film won the Irizar Prize for Best Basque Film at the San Sebastian International Film Festival. The following year, *Negociador*'s lead actor, Ramón Barea, won Best Actor for his performance at the 2015 Turia Awards, and in 2016, the film was awarded Best Comedy at the Feroz Awards and also received a nomination for a Goya Prize for Best Original Script.

Writing in *El Mundo,* Luis Martínez compared *Negociador*'s representation of these negotiations to the deformed *esperpentos* of Ramón del Valle-Inclán a generation earlier, describing the film as "una comedia que apunta maneras de tragedia; un drama que, a su pesar, no le queda más remedio que romper en esperpento. No hay gags, sólo fragmentos de vidas diminutas. La realidad, de repente, se antoja tan blanda como ridícula, tan graciosa como sangrienta" (1). Critics were quick to point out Cobeaga's role in *Ocho apellidos vascos* and

sought to establish a connection between the two productions, but beyond basic thematic elements—inasmuch as both films evoked stock Basque regionalisms and their associated cultural practices—the two films had little in common.[48] *Negociador* is best compared with Cobeaga's later *Fe de etarras* (2017), as both black comedies make abundantly clear the brutal consequences and enduring legacies of radical Basque nationalist terrorism in twenty-first century Spain.

In the case of *Negociador*, the film fictionalizes the real-life peace talks that took place in 2005 and 2006 between the Basque PSE-EE (PSOE) president, Jesús Eguiguren, and two powerful leaders of ETA: José Antonio Urrutikoetxea Bengoetxea, alias Josu Ternera, depicted as Jokin in the film, and Francisco Javier López Peña, alias Thierry, who appears as Patxi. Eguiguren's tell-all account of the process, *ETA, las claves de la paz, confesiones del negociador*, published in 2011 and coauthored by well-known Basque journalist Luis Rodríguez Aizpeolea, served as the source material for the production. The talks between the two parties, which take place at an unnamed French resort, are mediated by international arbiters from the fictional Frédéric Passy Center: the stiff Northern European James (Jöns Pappila) and his multilingual interpreter, Sophie (Melina Matthews).[49] The conversations and miscommunications between the multilingual representatives present, whom among them speak Spanish, French, Euskera, and English to varying degrees of fluency and intelligibility, function as the frequent

[48] It would be far more accurate to compare *Negociador* to Cobeaga's 2017 black comedy *Fe de etarras*, as many of the techniques employed in *Negociador* satirize ETA, such as the comedic warping of regional and national symbols, would later be refined in *Fe de etarras* in order to reject discourses of exclusive identity that justify the radical nationalist ideology of this organization. While *Ocho apellidos vascos*, like its 2015 sequel, *Ocho apellidos catalanes*, have been identified by critics as a pair of light-hearted romantic comedies that overcome stereotypical regional differences through the tool of heteronormative romance, both *Negociador* and *Fe de etarras* feature broadly ambiguous conclusions that evade the straightforward sentimental resolution to political crises via marriage found in the former films.

[49] The titular Passy (1822-1912) was the French founder of several peace organizations, including the Inter-Parliamentary Union, which still remains in force today.

targets of satire as mutual incomprehensibility impedes negotiations between the representatives and their arbiters.

The film is set during the critical final chapter of the decades-long Basque conflict, which endured from 1968 until 2011. In 2005, the newly-elected Socialist government led by Zapatero was seeking to differentiate itself from its predecessor, the conservative PP, in negotiating with ETA. It was well known that the PP had no love for ETA, given that between 1996 and 2004, José María Aznar had made eradicating ETA a top priority. The PP's commitment to anti-terrorism stemmed in no small part from the intense pressure it suffered to be seen as tough on terrorism, given that the "continuing ETA offensive against its local councilors...[represented] the most sustained series of attacks on politicians of one party in the history of ETA" (Woodworth 380). Indeed, in a 1995 attack reminiscent of its infamous assassination of Admiral Luis Carrero Blanco two decades prior, ETA attempted to murder Aznar by placing a bomb underneath his limousine. The attack wounded nineteen victims, eventually killing one. [50] While the then-opposition candidate was unhurt and seemingly unflustered by experience, Aznar's wrath was soon felt across the Basque Country as the Prime Minister began a crackdown on the Basque nationalist left so severe that it caused concern for civil liberties (Tremlett 316).

This strategy was strengthened by a cooperative military initiative between France and Spain that saw the former, for the first time in decades, publicly assume responsibility for the dozens of active ETA cells scattered across its southern border.[51] Furthermore, the PP's bipartite legal and military offensive against radical Basque nationalist terrorism only intensified after the

[50] The attack, which took place on April 18, 1995—twenty-two years after the assassination of Carrero Blanco—left elderly passerby Margarita González Mansilla, seventy-three, in critical condition. She would later succumb to her injuries.

[51] As the *ABC* reported, after decades of turning a blind eye to the radical Basque nationalism that had taken root along its border with Spain, "cuatro meses después de ganar el PP en las urnas, Francia, por primera vez en la historia, asumía que ETA también era un problema suyo" (Martínez).

jihadist terrorist attacks of September 11, 2001, on close Aznar ally George W. Bush. The events of 9/11, along with Spain's severe loss of civilian life during the attacks of March 11, 2004, renewed Aznar and his allies' dedication to destroying any terrorist threat to their respective countries. Although days after the 11-M attacks, Aznar and the PP would lose the 2004 election to Zapatero and the PSOE—in no small part due to their dogged insistence that ETA, rather than radical Islamists, had authored the deadly attack on Madrid's train network—the former's tough on terrorism legacy remained firmly in place throughout the PSOE's takeover.

This brief history reveals the political machinations underlying the failure of negotiations at the center of the film. Despite Zapatero's public willingness to negotiate with terrorists, the successes achieved through the so-called "Peace Process" talks between the PSOE and the organization were nothing if not fleeting, and ETA was nothing if not fickle in its dealings with Zapatero's government. ETA's 2006 ceasefire, announced on March 22, was quickly broken that same year when the organization bombed Madrid's Barajas Airport on December 31, killing two Ecuadorian citizens. As *Negociador* makes evident, ETA's internal instability, heightened by a myopic emphasis on improvisation, inevitably resulted in the same breakdown of communications between negotiating parties. This in turn led to the PSOE suffering a renewal of the very same political violence that had that previously plagued Aznar's government.

In interviews, Cobeaga has stressed that *Negociador* "[n]o es una historia sobre las negociaciones, sino sobre los detalles colaterales y domésticos que la rodearon y que terminan influyendo mucho. En ningún momento, quise centrarme en el diálogo político" (cited in García). Thus, while the actual details of the talks between the parties involved are almost never depicted on screen, the characters are instead frequently faced with resolving basic minutiae of the process through energetic verbal sparring that parallels the *bertsolaritza* model. Each

bertsolari serves as a metonym for, as much as the actual representative of, the political ideology which has brought him to the negotiation table. Employing his characters in this way, Cobeaga signals his interest in "poner en pantalla cosas que ves en la calle... Aquí se juzga y se distingue a una persona dependiendo de qué periódico lleva bajo el brazo, si te saluda con un 'Buenos días' o un 'Egunon' o si utiliza la palabra 'Euskadi' o 'Euskalherria'" (cited in García). Here, the director emphasizes his aim to depict the everyday binarization of Basque reality as a result of the conflict; within this reality, I locate the substantial presence of a traditional oral practice, well-known to the involved parties, all of whom identify as Basque. The *bertsolaritza* model engaged by the characters of Manu, Jokin, and Patxi during their talks makes visible the historic struggle for dominance between the Spanish national government and ETA through a model that translates daily practices of identity creation through cultural performance on screen. Through making the *bertsolaritza* structure visible in this way, Cobeaga thus emphasizes the shortsightedness of radical Basque nationalism as negotiations between the competing *bertsolaris* fall apart, ironically revealing ETA's unwillingness to participate in a practice from which it would truly benefit.

4.3

Bertsolaritza is the competitive performance of improvised verse creation in Euskera known as the *bertso*, performed by multiple *bertsolaris* in front of an audience (and frequently judges). Despite its prominent position in contemporary Basque society, where "over the last decade…*bertsolaritza* has become one of the most significant cultural manifestations in the Basque Country" (Lasarte Leonet et al. 25), its history remains remarkably murky. As a result, relations of the practice have frequently been the subject of concerted manipulation by those who

would seek to deploy it to justify or legitimize a particular vision of the Basque community. For example, Manuel Lekuona (1894-1987), an early Basque scholar, asserted that *bertsolaritza* had existed since time immemorial, referencing on several occasions its "Neolithic" and "prehistoric" nature, in order to vindicate a mythological vision of the Basque community as ancient (cited in Garzia 77, 81). For contemporary scholars like Joxe Azurmendi, Lekuona's attempts to locate *bertsolaritza* in prehistory are offset by a "counter-myth," which sustains that it is an entirely modern phenomenon beginning approximately in the early nineteenth century. This theory is supported by scholars such as Alison Wellford, who dates the practice to the late eighteenth century, all the while recognizing that "many believe it to be an ancient oral tradition as old as the language itself" (31).

Searching between these extremes, it is possible to ascertain that the practice dates at least from the fifteenth century when, in 1452, the Ancient Charter for Bizkaia, an early Basque governmental charter, made two references to its prohibition. The Charter offered "irrefutable proof that, as early as the mid-fifteenth century, improvised verse singing, or some manifestation thereof, was sufficiently common and deep-rooted to merit its express banning" (Garzia 78). Essentially a rural practice, early *bertsolaritza* was generally performed at village dances, funerals, or weddings, as a means by which its practitioners, the *bertsolaris*, could "provide entertainment in addition to commenting on social conditions" in the community to which they belonged (Mouillot 4). This mutual association between the *bertsolaris* and the audience for whom they performed became progressively stronger throughout the following centuries, permitting this figure to increasingly embrace a role as the public voice of the Basque community.

The first written records of *bertsolaritza* date towards the end of the eighteenth century and early nineteenth century. However, these records, made by classical *bertsolaris* such as the French Basque Pierre Topet, alias Etxahun (1786-1862), and Guillermo Ureña, alias Bilintx (1831-1876), were written or dictated, rather than improvised, raising questions of authenticity as many of these bards were illiterate (Garzia 78). It wasn't until the mid-twentieth century that recordings and transcriptions of improvised *bertsos* became popular, as a part of a larger creative debate about the practice that saw "written *bertsolaritza*, the most important format at the beginning of the century, ced[ing] primacy to the improvised form. By the end of the twentieth century, it was the people improvising their *bertsos* before the public who were seen as the true *bertsolaris*" (79). The twentieth century also witnessed the boom of the female *bertsolari* in a traditionally male sphere of cultural practice, at least in public; previously, women had only performed *bertsos* in the confines of their home or in female-designated spaces, such as sewing workshops (Wellford 31).

Although improvised *bertsolaritza* undeniably suffered after the fall of the Second Republic, during the Civil War, and throughout the subsequent Francoist regime—in her chronology of the cultural practice, Garzia labels the period between 1936 and 1945 the "Time of Silence" (89)—the art form saw a revival in the early nineties, coinciding with a heightened interest in Basque culture in the post-Francoist period. Community *bertsolaritza* competitions kept the practice alive during the dictatorship; towards the end of the twentieth century, these tournaments began to be shown across the Basque Country via the newly-formed regional network, ETB.[52] The televised championships proved wildly popular with Basque audiences and continue to this day; presently, hundreds of *bertsolaritza* events are held every year across the

[52] See the previous chapter for more information about the autonomous Basque television networks created during and after the Transition period.

Basque Country, with the National Bertsolaritza Championship, which takes place every four years at the Bilbao Exhibition Center, drawing crowds of up to 15,000 people (Lasarte Leonet et al. 25). The popularity that the practice presently enjoys is in large part a result of these broadcasts, as well as a growth in festivals and performances of the art since 1990, which have effectively brought the formerly "ancient" practice into modern times.

For as long as it has existed, *bertsolaritza* has contributed to the construction of Basque identity. The broad structure of competitive *bertsolaritza* gives it its "privileged role in defining sociocultural situations" that emerges from "the formal mastery of a linguistic game" (Zulaika 215), thus permitting the practice to concretize specific visions of Basque identity and nationhood in both the past and present. Historically, as Natalie Morel-Borotra asserts, the Basque community has traditionally esteemed spoken word and song, considering them a part of their cultural heritage; *bertsolaritza* is seen as an ongoing continuation of the community's veneration for oral culture (cited in Bergadaà and Lorey 5). More recently, as François Mouillot argues, in the face of the rapid globalization of Western Europe beginning in the late twentieth century, *bertsolaritza* has served to consolidate

> the ideals of a Basque national identity based primarily on the Basque language (Euskara)…[T]o the outside world, Basque oral improvised poetry represents Basque singularity by positing an ambiguous, yet undeniable, discourse of resistance to other transnational forms of political, economic, and cultural hegemonies. (1)

In the scenario described by Mouillot, *bertsolaritza* cements two interrelated narratives that underlie contemporary understandings of Basque national identity. At the same time that the practice produces for public consumption a model of Basqueness based fundamentally on Euskera—harkening back to Sabino Arana's vision of a monolingual, racially pure Basque

state—it emphasizes the nature of this discourse of identity as difference and resistance to the forced acculturation of the Basque community to a dominant Castilian model under Franco.[53] In the aftermath of Francoism, which actively sought the eradication of minority languages through far-reaching, heavy-handed, and often absurd policies, concerted efforts have been made to "re-Basquify" the autonomous community through pro-Euskera legislation.[54] As of 2020, there were approximately 750,000 speakers of the language which, while representing a marked increase in speakers from the dictatorship period, could not save Euskera from being rated as in danger of extinction by UNESCO (Wellford 31).

A basic knowledge of Euskera is a requirement, then, to at least comprehend *bertsolaritza*; however, the relatively low number of its speakers (comparatively, some 580,000,000 people speak Spanish across the globe) renders the practice exclusive to the select few whose language ability permits their understanding ("VI Encuesta Sociolingüística"; "Spanish in the World").[55] In other words, the practice is fundamentally dependent on its linguistic community of origin, reinforcing a unified vision of cultural identity based on language (Mouillot 5; Retortillo and Aierdi 30). If *bertsolaris* seek to reach larger audiences outside of their traditional *euskaldun*, or Basque-speaking, sphere, they must rely on translators, again raising questions of authenticity in a practice defined by its speakers' skillful employment of "'euskeraren indarra,' the force of Euskera" (Wellford 31; Zulaika 214). These linguistic factors

[53] See the introduction for more information about Sabino Arana's vision of the Basque nation.
[54] A 1938 law prohibited the use of Euskera in Catholic mass; in 1939, its use on hotel signage; in 1940, in films; in 1944, in public spaces and on tombs…For more examples of Francoist legislation against Euskera, please see my article, "La realidad en la ficción: el realismo en la literatura vasca".
[55] This limited number of Euskera speakers is ultimately tempered by their heavy concentration in the Basque Country, which "generates enough critical mass to preserve Euskaldun culture within an increasingly globalized framework. To put it another way, the social reality of Euskara is far denser than the number of speakers indicate. It doesn't come down to purely geographical considerations, but rather, in a more fundamental way, to a social and cultural community that constitutes the sociological humus that has made it possible for bertsolaritza to grow and develop as a mass phenomenon" (Retortillo and Aierdi 17).

result in *bertsolaritza*'s use as a valid cultural currency used to identify of a privileged in-group of Basque speakers.

With these close ties to Euskera, *bertsolaritza* is thus a practice intimately linked to identity formation. To attend a performance is to participate in a public display of Basqueness. White contends that

> Bertsolaritza is a public sport. Without an audience, a bertsolari cannot perform. Singing improvised verses with no audience is merely practice, not the art itself. A bertsolari must have the wit and language to improve rhyming lyrics of consistently high quality and content to entertain a group of informed, discriminating listeners. They, in turn, provide the artist with instantaneous feedback…(13)

The public nature of *bertsolaritza*, however, does not mean that it is appreciated by just any crowd. To function as "informed, discriminating listeners," a *bertsolari*'s audience, at the very least, must enjoy enough fluency in Basque to participate in the performer's creation process; I return to *bertsolaritza*'s use as a valid cultural currency used to identify of a privileged in-group of Basque speakers.[56] With a bare minimum of fluency in Euskera a requirement, *bertsolaritza* functions to "create a cultural conversation in and around Euskara from which a community emerges, if only temporarily, to negotiate and re-invent the meaning of being Basque in that particular moment" (Mouillot 5). In agreement with Mouillot, Zulaika emphasizes the role of the *bertsolari* in public performances to "make statements about the nature of the community ties that hold together a village or a group" (213).

[56] Ideally, too, they would comprehend cultural references (particularly those specific to the Basque community), and recognize the various formal elements that contribute to the practice (meter, rhyme, syntax, metaphor, ellipsis, and tone) as well as non-formal elements (wit, humor, puns, plays on words). For non-Basques such as this author, the tripartite linguistic, cultural, and artistic knowledge required for full comprehension may prove elusive; that said, a *bertsolaritza* performance can and should still be enjoyed by a lay member of the audience.

Improvisation is a second key element of the practice. Linda White explains that "[b]ertsolaritza is an art of immediacy… The immediacy and ephemerality of the bertsolari's artistic production resists critical discussion, an activity that requires 'close' and repeated 'readings' of a text" (14-15). This argument, at its core, holds that given the immediacy of *bertsolaritza*, the message of the *bertsolari* is fundamentally less important than the experience of the message, with the performance taking precedence through a "complete immersion in the present" (Zulaika 234) that renders later analysis of any written transcriptions less than authentic.[57] Typically, a public *bertsolaritza* performance features two (or more) performers who must create their verse according to the whims of the *gai jartzaile*, the master of ceremonies and moderator, who decides the theme and the rhythm of the competitors' verses; the *bertsolaris* generate their sung, rhyming verses in response, with a panel of judges (and often input from the public) deciding on the winner.[58] The performance's filming for television, radio, or other modes of transmission, permits the direct transmission of the *bertsolaris*' spontaneous message—proposed in response to the *gai jartzaile*—across the world, although in practice, *bertsolaritza* is mainly consumed by Basque-speaking audiences in the Basque Country.

Hence the linguistic exclusivity, immediacy, and communicative limitations of the practice render it one in which few can partake. In turn, the singularity of *bertsolaritza* makes it ripe for appropriation as a symbol of Basque nationalist identity by the moderate, conservative Basque nationalism of the PNV (Partido Nacionalista Vasco), as well as the radical Basque

[57] According to Linda White, "[a] transcribed verse is several stages removed from the intended form. It is not even an echo of the original, because no sound is produced on the page. Rhythm is lost, tonality (music) is lost, spatial reference (location of the performance) is lost, audience is lost; indeed, everything necessary to the creation of a bertso is lost. All that appears on the page is a semantic shell composed of symbols (letters) that represent the individual words uttered during performance. This semantic shell cannot accurately transmit the bertsolari's meaning" (13).

[58] Criteria for judgement include meter, rhyme (the former is variable; the latter is always consonantal), metaphor, tone, melody, and wit.

nationalism of ETA and its political arm, Herri Batasuna. By the mid-twentieth century, interest in, and acceptance of, a new model of Basque identity based on fluency in Euskera, rather than racial purity, had grown across Basque nationalist factions. Linguistic, rather than ethnic, nationalism reconfigured the problematic racial standards of Sabino Arana into a more flexible and appealing model of Euskera as cultural heritage, allowing ethnic Basques to comingle with the children of immigrant *maketos* in the independent Basque state that these nationalists sought to build. For the first time since the conception of Aranist Basque nationalism in the late nineteen century, "[y]oung people with no Basque blood or with one Basque grandparent or parent could now be equally Basque if they spoke the language" (White 19). Since its inception in 1979, the regional Basque government, more often than not headed by the PNV, has upheld this vision of Basqueness as essentially linguistically derived (Mouillot 5).[59]

It comes as no surprise, then, that beginning in the sixties and seventies, nationalists of all stripes turned to this oral tradition to express, validate, and celebrate Basque difference through the performance of heavily politicized pieces (Zulaika 214). Long used as a tool of cultural resistance to Francoism, the art form's continued engagement with local and national politics throughout the second half of the twentieth century

> equated the bertsolari figure with Basque patriotism, and the names of certain individuals, such as "Bilintx," who died as a result of wounds received during the Second Carlist War, can evoke abertzale ("patriotic") sentiment in the Basque breast regardless of which side one's ancestors fought for. (White 20)

[59] The only exception to PNV rule of the regional government was Patxi López and the PSE-EE's leadership between 2009 and 2012, a period that coincided with the second of Zapatero and the PSOE's terms in office. Unsurprisingly, 2012 elections saw the PNV return to control with the election of Iñigo Urkullu, who remains in office at present.

This gradual process of politicization eventually resulted in *bertsolaritza*'s transformation into a battering-ram of Basque nationalism in its "quest to maintain and develop the whole of the culture carried on through the medium of Euskara" (Retortillo and Aierdi 30). Within this context, the chief allure of *bertsolaritza* for nationalists both conservative and radical was, and remains, its function as the competitive public performance of linguistic nationalism that appeals to Basque difference while simultaneously resisting the sovereignty of Spain (and the globe). At the same time, *bertsolaritza*'s historic appeal to Basque (Carlist) patriotism, its murky and malleable history, and its value as a popular cultural currency in recent years, render the improvised oral tradition an integral component of Basque identity in both the past and present. Its demonstrated capacity for consolidating Basque subjects under a singular, identitarian banner makes *bertsolaritza* as an effective cultural model by which Cobeaga attacks ETA's duplicities.

4.4

The interpersonal debates that make up the core of *Negociador*'s narrative—particularly, the encounters between Manu, Jokin, and Patxi at the negotiating table—establish the *bertsolaritza* frame within the film, as Cobeaga employs this cornerstone of Basque oral culture to ironization ETA's misappropriation a traditional Basque oral practice, which in turn provokes a communicative collapse between the negotiators/*bertsolaris*. In line with the director's expressed desire to avoid centering his film on political dialogue, the negotiations that take place between these characters (and on occasion, arbiter James and interpreter Sophie) do not concern the fate of the Basque Country as much as they offer the interested parties a concrete opportunity to engage in an improvised verbal battle. Therefore while the actual minutiae of these discussions are never revealed in Cobeaga's film, "los detalles colaterales y domésticos que la

rodearon y que terminan influyendo mucho" (cited in García) are emphasized. The metonymic *bertsolaris* compete to outfox each other with the future of their homeland, riding on their success in convincing an audience of the validity of their argument through their skills as improvisers. In the scenes I analyze below, the *bertsolaritza* model becomes apparent as the director employs it in order to evoke specific visions of Basque identity and nationhood, subsequently criticizing ETA's vision of an independent Basque state as fundamentally duplicitous.

The first of the three scenes corresponds with Manu and Joxian's first encounter at the negotiation table in a drab, windowless conference room at the unnamed French resort. The scene opens with a sequence of close-ups featuring the utterly mundane contents of the conference room (pens and notepads; leather chairs; a glass pitcher of water; assorted treats), as James' voice, immediately followed by Sophie's interpretation, can be heard off-camera. The film then jumps between medium close-up shots of those present, rapidly moving between Manu and Joxian, who sit on opposite ends of a long rectangular table, and James and Sophie, who sit together on one side, bridging the symbolic and literal gap between the two parties. As James, via Sophie's interpretation, attempts to establish the ground rules for negotiation, the camera leaps back and forth between Manu, Joxian, and Sophie and James, with the occasional medium long shot providing a brief respite to the dizzying movement of the camera between speakers. The velocity with which the camera shifts subjects mirrors the rapid-fire exchange taking place:

> Sophie [interpreting on behalf of James]: El objetivo de la primera fase es la redacción de un documento que sienta las bases para el diálogo.
>
> Joxian: Negociación.
>
> Sophie: ¿Perdón?

Joxian: Que las bases son para la negociación, no para el diálogo.

Manu: Yo con diálogo estaría más cómodo.

Sophie: Mejor avancemos. Esto lo podemos ver luego, porque el propósito del texto es el fin del conflicto.

Manu: La violencia. El fin de la violencia. Lo de conflicto, mejor olvidarlo.

Joxian: ¿Por qué?

Manu: Porque es ambiguo.

Joxian: Violencia sí que es ambiguo. ¿Violencia de quién?

Manu: Eso mejor lo hablamos más adelante. No vamos a entrar ahora en un debate de terminología. (18:17:00-19:13:00)

Although brief, this initial encounter between the parties, the arbiter, and the interpreter establishes the *bertsolaritza* framework employed throughout the rest of *Negociador*. In this context, Manu and Joxian represent the dueling *bertsolaris*; James (through Sophie), the *gai jartzaile*; and the film audience, the public and the judge(s).

I have previously discussed why Manu and Joxian are *bertsolaris*. While not actually singing *bertsos*, in their negotiations on behalf of their respective political ideologies and the identities they represent, both characters function as "genuine generator[s] of expressive culture"—here, the clashing moral views of the PSOE and ETA towards political violence—who are "rendering into speech collective sentiments of solidarity" for their respective communities through oral improvisation (Zulaika 231). The immediacy and velocity of Manu's rebuttal to Joxian, and vice versa, witnessed in the debate about terminology, clearly articulate these characters' association with the *bertsolaritza* structure. In this sense, as Manu and Joxian make evident, each character is simply responding, via spontaneous improvisation, to the problem with

which he is presented; "it is a response to the public and to the bertso challenge of another bertsolaria [sic]" (225).[60]

Begun in this scene, Manu and Joxian's verbal duel dominates the ongoing peace talks, beginning the first of many rapid-fire interchanges of terminology, vocabulary, and ideology that closely resemble the *bertsolaris*' energetic exchange of verses. While not employing the formal aspects of the *bertso* per se, each character utilizes the structure of *bertsolaritza* in order to improvise a defense for the political ideologies and associated identities they have come to represent at the negotiation table and thus invalidate for their audience the "collective sentiments of solidarity" (Zulaika 231) evoked by the other (fig. 7). Given that the "validation of the bertsolari's performance rests on his individual skills," in order to advocate for their positions' superiority, both Manu and Joxian must prove themselves the more skillful improviser, fending off their competitor in oral combat. With Manu and Joxian (and later, Patxi) in the role of *bertsolaris*, the *bertsolaritza* structure thus necessitates that Sophie and James must fill in a key remaining position required in the typical performance: that of the *gai jartzaile*. As the above dialogue demonstrates, mediator James' attempts to lead the peace talks, via Sophie, render him the *gai jartzaile*, as he proposes the (social, political, and cultural) themes around which the

[60] Like the word Euskera, the Basque phrase *bertsolari* has multiple acceptable spellings. I use the most widely accepted form, *bertsolari*, throughout this analysis; Zulaika, a native Basque speaker, uses the less common *bertsolaria*.

Fig. 7: The negotiating table. From left to right, Manu, James, Sophie, and Joxian (19:29:00.) Source: Cobeaga, Borja. *Negociador*. Sayaka Producciones Audiovisuales/Canal+ España, 2014.

bertsolaris (the peace talk participants) construct their responses; ironically, here, these themes are none other than dialogue and conflict, the very two actions provoked by the *bertsolaritza* structure employed within the film. The meta aspect of James' suggested topics aside, each subject catalyzes the *bertsolaris*' performance, provoking an immediate, improvised antiphon by Manu and Joxian. This first episode of *bertso*-making by the respective *bertsolaris*—albeit brief—provokes the other's response in turn, setting off a chain of creative improvisation as each *bertsolari* repudiates, rejects, or otherwise returns fire to his competitor.

At the same time that his attempts to elicit negotiation between the two parties mark James, via Sophie, as the *gai jartzaile*, the essential neutrality of their role as mediators from the Frédéric Passy Center invalidates their ability to function as the public or the judge(s) of the *bertsolaris*. Hence the remaining roles necessitated by the *bertsolaritza* structure are shifted onto the film's audience itself; the diegetic narrative of *Negociador* opens a window into conference room proceedings, reifying the public's role as both the viewer of the performance and, absent

the customary panel of judges, its critics. Unlike true *bertsolaritza*, the improvised oral encounters that dominate *Negociador*'s narrative take place in Spanish. However, despite this sensible linguistic (and undoubtedly, economic) appeal to a wider audience, the format present in the film is still a fundamentally exclusionary practice, where the *bertsos* exchanged by the dueling *bertsolaris* serve to unify and consolidate specific visions of Basque identity and nationhood associated with each particular competitors' political ideology.

At its most basic, to understand the following exchange between Joxian and Manu, the viewer must have certain familiarity, at the very least, with the Basque conflict. More specifically, the viewer should recognize the broad political interests of the PSOE and ETA, and the social, cultural, and linguistic implications of each bloc's vision for the future of the Basque Country and its people that are so clearly at a crossroads in this scene. The camera once again leaps between speakers, creating a sensation of rapid movement as Joxian and Manu debate:

Joxian: Derecho de decidir.

Manu: Respeto a las decisiones.

Joxian: Procedimientos democráticos.

Manu: Legalidad vigente.

Joxian: Euskal Herria.

Manu: El pueblo vasco.

Sophie: ¿Perdón? Es que no entiendo una cosa. Es por la traducción. Sé que es diferente, pero…

Joxian: Claro que es diferente.

Manu: Una cosa es Euskal Herria, y otra pueblo vasco.

> Sophie: Sí, ya lo sé, pero no sé como traducírselo, en inglés se dice igual.[61] (19:31:00-20:00:00)

Sophie's difficulty differentiating between "Euskal Herria" and "pueblo vasco" in her interpretation reiterates the powerful, continued role of *bertsolaritza* as an exclusionary practice directly involved in Basque identity formation tied to a particular political ideology: the radical Basque nationalist of Joxian and later Patxi versus the comparatively more centrist and democratic beliefs of Manu.[62] When the *bertsolaris* respond to a political topic through the performance of *bertsos*, as Manu and Joxian do here, they consolidate a specific, restrictive view of Basque identity based on political affiliation. This view is restrictive in a double sense: firstly, in that any viewer unfamiliar with the peculiarities of the Basque conflict may be excluded from comprehending the film's central narrative; and secondly, in that each *bertsolari*'s vision of Basqueness disallows the existence of the other's, further winnowing down an already exclusive practice of identity formation to a particular political perspective.

In this sense, in their deployment of a practice so closely associated with Basque political identity, both Manu and Joxian construct their corresponding vision of Basqueness upon representative ideologies and affiliations exclusive to their bloc. The weighty political connotations contained within "Euskal Herria" and "pueblo vasco," then, are exploited by the *bertsolaris* to delegitimize their competitor's singular vision of Basque identity; each of Manu and Joxian's rapid-fire rebuttals serves to negate the existence of other's goals for the future of

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[61] Sophie is correct that both phrases translate the same in English. Although "Euskal Herria" is usually translated as the Basque Country, the Basque word *herri* contains a multitude of simultaneous, overlapping meanings, including "people," meaning that "Euskal Herria," like "el pueblo vasco," can mean the Basque people, as it does in this context, causing the interpreter's confusion.

[62] From its beginnings, ETA sought to create an independent socialist Basque state; despite this, the organization's understanding of socialism as political ideology, its goals, and its employment clearly differed from that of the PSOE. This schism becomes particularly visible when one considers that ETA assassinated twelve members of the PSOE over the course of its existence, including Isaías Carrasco, the PSOE councilman for the Basque town of Mondragón, who was killed as recently as 2008.

the Basque citizenry. Through the exchange of political *bertso*, each *bertsolari* seeks to install and maintain supreme his exclusionary vision of Basqueness. In the above exchange, Manu and Joxian utterly fail to convince Sophie of the superiority of their version of Basque identity, leaving her to revert, both humorously and ironically, to a catch-all term that satisfies neither: the Basque Country.

Manu and Joxian continue to face off in increasingly dynamic oral battles that witness each *bertsolari* attempting, by merit of their performance, to sway the peace talks in their favor. However, Joxian's sudden disappearance from the table puts a stop to these performances before any particular agreement—or winner—can be announced. In his place arrives the rough and tumble Patxi, a character whose irascible nationalist radicality, far beyond that embodied by Joxian, catalyzes the communicative breakdown between the negotiators/*bertsolaris*, thereby effecting the collapse of the greater *bertsolaritza* structure at play within the film. Through this disruption and consequent disintegration, the director's ironization becomes clear, since Cobeaga skewers radical Basque nationalists' shortsightedness in misappropriating a traditional communicative practice for (failed) political gain.

Upon his first appearance within the conference room/symbolic stage, Patxi's refusal to participate in the preestablished *bertsolaritza* structure catalyzes the collapse of communication between the two factions, alongside their representative politics, identities, and associations. Manu's singular attempt to engage Patxi as a fellow *bertsolari* within this oral communicative practice is precluded by the former's overt lack of cooperation. Patxi spends much of the negotiation glowering in sullen silence, only speaking to repudiate the previous efforts of *bertsolaris* Jokin and Manu, and the *gai jartzaile*, Sophie and James:

Sophie [interpreting on behalf of James]: El borrador a limpio, pero con todas las notas. Creo que será un bueno momento para firmarlo.

Manu: Sí.

Patxi: Un momento. Aquí habrá que incluir un anexo.

Manu: Es que si hay un anexo, no tengo autorización para firmar esto.

Patxi: Pues si tú no tienes poder para firmar esto, ahora hay que hacer una llamadita.

Manu: No creo que sea la manera.

Patxi: Excusas, bah. Saca el móvil, ¿eh? Ahora lo digo en serio. No me vengas con chorradas.

Sophie: Hemos estado trabajando en este documento durante casi un mes.

Patxi: Pues lo que iba a decir, si me dejáis, es que yo pensaba que mi interlocutor aquí tendría plenos poderes para negociar.

Manu: Para dialogar.

Patxi: ¿Qué?

Manu: Para dialogar.

Sophie: Lo siento mucho, pero es fundamental que James esté al tanto de todo de lo que se dice en esta mesa. Es fundamental.

Patxi: ¿Lo ves que te decía yo que era mejor que lo arregláramos tú y yo? Esto así es un engordo. [to Manu] ¿Vienes o qué?

Sophie [to James]: I don't know what *engordo* means.[63] (53:00:00-54:16:00)

Patxi then marches Manu off to his car for a pointless drive in which he proffers a one-sided political rant laced with death threats; throughout this diatribe, Manu remains

[63] In Sophie's defense, the slang term employed by Patxi is not listed in the RAE. Colloquially, "engordo" means hassle.

uncharacteristically soft-spoken, as he becomes increasingly aware of Patxi's volatility—and the fact that he carries a gun in the waistband of his jeans. This episode, which abruptly ends with Patxi threatening Manu's life, as well as those of his political allies, in no way resembles the previous exchange between Manu and Joxian. Patxi's deliberate interruption of the previous format evinces several immediate and deliberate ironies, as the character disavows the communicative practice that had allowed Jokin and Manu to negotiate, through the *bertsolaritza* structure, a peace treaty previously acceptable to both ETA and the PSOE. With his eruption on the stage entailing threats, complaints, and a stubborn unwillingness to cooperate, Patxi has effectively destabilized the established back-and-forth of political *bertsos* previously employed by Jokin and Manu that allowed them to consolidate a mutually agreed-upon vision for the future of the Basque Country.

For his part, Joxian's willingness to participate in previous negotiations validates the role of the *bertsolari* as the aforementioned "genuine generator of expressive culture…[who] is rendering into speech collective sentiments of solidarity and proposing solutions" (Zulaika 231) to conflict. At the same time, it affirmed the character's—and Manu's, by proxy—role as *bertsolaris* in the film, as their performance expressed their individual "community's political voice". On the other hand, his collaborator Patxi's refusal to participate in the *bertsolaritza* structure, as seen via his insistence removing Manu from the conference room/stage, forces both characters outside of the sphere of this practice. In this sense, Patxi has discarded the role of *bertsolari*, with all of its associated communicative benefits; above all, the culturally-dictated right to represent, in public, a particular ideological and political community associated with Basque identity. As the character's deliberate bewilderment at Manu's insistence on dialogue in the above exchange demonstrates, he is unwilling to return fire with a political *bertso* of his own.

Thus Patxi has provoked the communicative collapse between the two parties; that this collapse has been effected through the character's refusal to participate in an oral practice that would legitimize his vision for the future of the Basque Country and its citizens marks it as darkly ironic.

Further compounding this irony is the aforementioned cultural esteem and prestige maintained by Basque nationalists of all stripes, ranging from the conservative, anti-violence PNV to the radical HB and ETA, for *bertsolaritza*. Recall the long-existing association between *bertsolaris* and Basque identity. At present, "[b]ertsolaris, as masters and promoters of the Basque language, often either self-identify or are perceived by their audiences as patriots, nationalists, or even separatists" (Mouillot 8). Hence Patxi's refusal to participate in the practice is rendered not only a repudiation of a significant representative role of Basqueness, one that would permit the validation of a particular viewpoint of Basque identity through a traditional cultural framework of oral performance. Rather, it is also the disclamation of a practice long used to solidify the very vision of Basqueness as separatists that ETA sought to establish through its policies of political violence.

That Patxi would be seemingly unaware of the consequences of his disavowal of the *bertsolaritza* structure only emphasizes the paradox of ETA. Upon this occasion, the organization refused to engage with this practice, ostensibly to its own detriment; this decision is rendered all the more ironic given the parallels between ETA's employment of indiscriminate, random bloodshed for political gain and a cultural practice in which "unpredictability and improvisation in the course of action is essential" (Zulaika 230). Both acts, whether political or poetic, subscribe to what Zulaika describes as "the exigencies of the urgent present" (234), justifying both the ephemeral creative spirit of the *bertsolari*'s verses before his public as much

as the immediate need for an act of political violence by ETA. Yet despite these preexisting corollaries, Patxi rejects the *bertsolaritza* structure with which he could engage his political rival, thus giving up his right to address the entire community he represents and make statements about said community (214).

The ultimate irony related to this structure within *Negociador* comes at the film's close, after the communicative collapse between ETA and the PSOE has led to Patxi carrying out his threat; ETA murders a member of the PSOE. The film cuts from a shot of the grim, depressed Manu dressing for his colleague's funeral to a dynamic action shot tracking the French police force as they arrest Patxi and several other unnamed militants in a surprise sweep of ETA's safehouse.[64] As the police drag a handcuffed, belligerent Patxi towards a waiting police car, the press swarms him, thrusting their microphones towards his face (fig. 8). While Patxi's response is obscured by the beat of the extradiegetic Basque hard-rock song that accompanies the scene, a handful of phrases make it through the background noise: his shouts of "Gora Euskadi askatua!" and "Garaituko dugu!" [Long live a free Basque Country] [We shall overcome] (01:08:40-01:08:52).

[64] A fictionalization of the real-life raid that took place at an ETA safe house in Bordeaux, France, on May 20, 2008. French forces captured Francisco Javier López Peña (alias Patxi in the film), along with several other high-ranking ETA militants: Jon Salaberria, Igor Suberbiola and Ainhoa Ozaeta.

Fig. 8. Patxi attempts to speak to the press during his arrest (01:08:35). Source: Cobeaga, Borja. *Negociador*. Sayaka Producciones Audiovisuales/Canal+ España, 2014.

The searing irony of the scene could not be more obvious. It was only upon his arrest that Patxi sought to communicate his beliefs to the public, yet they are obscured to the viewers by the extradiegetic music, limiting him to just two tired slogans. If only the character had taken advantage of the *bertsolaritza* structure, perhaps he could have convinced the audience of the validity of his political perspective and desires for an independent Basque state as Joxian had. But his refusal to engage with this practice in the conference room, which would have offered a legitimate cultural framework through which he could perform and thus validate his beliefs, has effectively forestalled the success of the character's final, desperate attempts at communication. Like the previous ironies that were elicited through Patxi's disavowal of the *bertsolaritza* structure, this ultimate failed attempt at public (un)communication drives home its director's criticism, via ironization, of the myopia of ETA's radical Basque nationalism. As the increasing imbrication of these ironies over the course of the film's narrative makes clear, ETA's own desire for unrelenting control and radical separatism via political violence have prohibited it from taking advantage of a traditional cultural practice that would have permitted the ultimate

legitimization of the organization's vision for the future of the Basque Country and its citizens. ETA's myopia has blinded the organization from seeing its own path to success via negotiations that employ a structure closely associated with Basque identity. By this logic, the film seems to ask, is ETA truly even Basque?

4.5

In reference to a series of *bertsos* performed by the *bertsolari* Lopategi after the death of a young ETA member and community member of the Basque village of Itziar, Zulaika writes that

> The bertsolaria [sic] has provided the words by which the community redefines itself in relation to a local son killed in the armed struggle for Euskadi's freedom. Only one other forum in Itziar allows for statements about the community as such—the church. However, the priest's discourse is in prose, conversational, within a dogmatic religious rhetoric, and in a shrine sacralized by the presence of religious icons…for the bertsolaria the language is the only sacred house. (214)

Through his comparison between *bertsolaritza* and the Catholic Church, Zulaika emphasizes the relevance of this model as a representative of collective Basque identity formation. Like a Catholic priest, the *bertsolari* holds a unique right to address the entire community he represents and make statements about its members. Lopategi's *bertsos* affirmed the patriotism—and radical Basque nationalism—of the young militant and his community, reappropriating his death from its tragic circumstances and recasting it into a narrative of separatist martyrdom on behalf of a free Basque Country. In the same way that Lopategi, in improving *bertsos* on the occasion of the

young militant's death, made visible the violent struggle for control between the Spanish federal government and ETA through this cultural model, so does Cobeaga's *Negociador*.

The film deploys the *bertsolaritza* structure to frame the narration of the breakdown between the two competing parties, the PSOE and ETA, represented by the *bertsolaris* Manu, Jokin, and Patxi, respectively. In their role as *bertsolaris*, these characters seek to validate and legitimize through oral performance to an audience—in this case, that of the film itself—a particular set of identities and ideologies related to a specific vision of the future of the Basque Country that defies that of their competitor. Each *bertsolari*'s *bertsos* take on a broader political symbolism as markers of Basque nationalist or Socialist democratic identity creation through cultural performance witnessed on screen. When the *bertsolaritza* structure established in negotiations between Jokin and Manu is interrupted by Patxi, the oral exchanges between competitors immediately disintegrate, indicating the director's ironization of radical Basque nationalism. Thus emphasizing the visibility of *bertsolaritza* structure, Cobeaga reiterates the limitations of radical Basque nationalism as negotiations between the competing *bertsolaris* are precluded by ETA's misappropriation of a traditional communicative practice for (failed) political dominance. A natural paradox emerges from the film: ETA's collapse, as evinced through Patxi's ultimate arrest, stems from the organization declining to participate in a practice of which it would be a key beneficiary, one closely associated with the Basque identity it seeks to establish as the foundation of its independent state. In this sense, it was ETA's inability to detect its own myopia, more so than police or governmental intervention, that effected the organization's collapse, affirming the global inviability of radical Basque nationalism.

CONCLUSION

Writing in his 2007 compendium, *The Basque Country: A Cultural History*, Paddy Woodworth asks

> What has made ordinary young Basques take up arms, generation after generation, when their counterparts all over Spain were content to resolve deep and painful political differences through democratic channels? Why should one of the most prosperous and vibrant regions in the peninsula, materially and culturally, be home to such a bloody conflict? (174)

The author notes that his queries are extremely complex, and that answers—even in 2007, forty-eight years after ETA murdered its first victim—remain elusive. Instead of seeking a definitive response to the unthinkable *why*s of the Basque conflict, and thus implying the existence of a straightforward, linear relationship between cause and effect, repression and bloodshed, democracy and dictatorship, Woodworth instead engages in a broad critical exploration of the interstitial, disparate, and above all interpenetrating factors present in the conflict, circumstances at once historical, cultural, and political.

This is the approach that I have sought to employ within this dissertation. Within the greater argument present here—that recent creative productions by Bernardo Atxaga, Fernando Aramburu, and Borja Cobeaga have sought to achieve national representation of the Basque minority community through the repudiation of the violent separatism that would separate them from Spain—I have endeavored to offer as complete an investigation as possible into these tripartite consequences of history, culture, and politics on contemporary Basque narrative. This broader, factorial background supports the subsequent contextualization and location of these creative works within the social and artistic milieu in which they were created, in order to

recognize the ongoing relationship that these novels and films maintain with the particular community that engendered them.

As much as Paddy Woodworth frames his discussion by asking *what* and *why* of the impossibly complex Basque conflict, so did I frame this dissertation through a set of questions particular to the issue at hand. Above all, I sought to examine how contemporary Basque creative production confronted two key issues stemming from the emergence of radical Basque nationalism and political violence in the second half of the twentieth century. Firstly, how did this production address the reality that historical representations of the Basque nationalist separatist conflict had fundamentally biased modern perspectives towards Basque identity along a flawed sociopolitical binary? Secondly, how did it deal with the inevitable consequences of this dichotomization, which resulted in the persistent exclusion of the Basque minority from the Spanish nation state?

While, as Woodworth argues, questions like these are unable to ever be fully or satisfactorily answered, it is my hope that this dissertation can offer insight. My conclusion, simply put, is thus: since 1990, the protracted violence of the Basque conflict has catalyzed a wave of fundamentally anti-nationalist creative production by members of the Basque community, whose fictional narratives respond to the persistent threat of radical separatism that lingers in Basque society, even a full decade after ETA's collapse. Deploying the novel and fiction film as discursive tools, Basque creators repudiate the centuries-old narrative of Basque difference, so intensified by the violence of this struggle, that has long maintained the community as fundamentally separate and isolated—whether for good or for bad—from the Spanish state. As a consequence of the historic concentration of this narrative within the region, the Basque community continues to suffer from a profound fracturing upon ideological and

political lines, with the conflicting currents of incorporation and separation from Spain prevailing in contemporary discourses of Basqueness. The enduring legacy of the conflict in 2021 leads me to a question of my own: is there a space for middle ground between the radical Basque nationalism of ETA, which demanded separation through violence, and the cultural genocide of the Basques seen under Franco?

In response, the works of Atxaga, Aramburu, and Cobeaga offer a unique perspective towards identity, representation, and political binarization that is at once conciliatory and consolidatory, whereby Basqueness is ascribed the unique power to renegotiate its relationship and that of its community with the larger nation-state, rendering Spain inextricable from the unique social, political, and cultural environs of the individual regions composing it. The recent implementation, since 1990, of contemporary Basque narrative as a discursive tool to reinscribe this minority community within the greater Spanish nation is the definitive result of the extreme human cost of ETA's failure to achieve, via political violence, the independent socialist republic of Euskal Herria so mythologized by the organization's propaganda. Towards the end of the twentieth century, the continuous failure of the radical Basque nationalist terrorists to achieve anything beyond the mass murder of their enemies—perceived or otherwise—had dissuaded all but the most radicalized separatists, aided and abetted by political parties such as HB, from supporting an independent Basque state. This shift proved seismic, hastening the organization's decline at the hands of a resentful, victimized populace, one that by the end of the millennium was no longer willing to entertain ETA's flights of nationalist fancy as it once had during Francoism.

Beginning around 1990, Basque authors and filmmakers began to turn to creative production as a tool to address the social, cultural, and political consequences of ETA's faltering

nationalist project. These producers reoriented their work towards democratic principles of nation-building, emphasizing the inviability of the radical Basque nationalist agenda and consolidating the Basque Country within the greater Spanish nation; these works repeatedly affirmed, via fictional narrative, how ETA's policy of achieving independence through indiscriminate violence had accomplished nothing more than indiscriminate bloodshed and had largely left its supporters isolated, jailed, or dead. At the same time, authors and filmmakers also sought to address in their production the lingering consequences of the Basque conflict, which have continued to endure far beyond the organization's 2011 dissolution. Residual bitterness towards ETA has created an ongoing polarization within both regional and national political environments in which the Basques, their community, and their creative production find themselves pigeonholed into binaries of right/wrong, nationalist/democratic, and martyr/terrorist.

Perhaps the best example of this is Fernando Aramburu's 2016 bestselling novel of this struggle, *Patria*, which I discuss in Chapter Two. The author believes his novel is impartial, as his interviews in the Spanish press make clear; an interview he gave titled "No he escrito 'Patria" para juzgar a nadie" (Barcelona) was followed by "No he escrito 'Patria' para servir ningún partido" (Lucas). Yet, depending on the source, this novel and the subsequent HBO series that followed were classed by critics as either anti-Basque or anti-Spain, categorizing them along the lines of the tired dichotomy that has long dominated the region's literature (Artola; Lardiés; Zaldua; Zallo). Regardless, Aramburu sustains that his novel is nonpartisan. Indeed, a focus on impartiality offers the most productive method to approach not just Aramburu but contemporary Basque narrative in general, which buries the hatchet and attempts to move beyond the established polarization of the Basque conflict in contemporary cultural production.

Despite this—and the author's concerted insistence otherwise—two of *Patria*'s most vocal critics, the Basque nationalist politicians Joseba Permach and Pernando Barrena, illustrate why neutrality is vital for the future of Basque fictional production. Permach and Barrena's complaints that *Patria* is anti-Basque reveal the persistent binarization present in the Basque cultural corpus where, despite evidence to the contrary, narratives such as Aramburu's continue to provoke anxiety for those who still cling to traditional dichotomies of Basque/Spanish, nationalist/democratic, patriot/terrorist, and good/evil. In the case of *Patria*, Aramburu's repeated refusal to take sides on a novel he maintains as impartial invalidates the broader discourse of critics like these, who depict modern, democratic Spain as the cruel Goliath of lingering, Francoist fascism, and the Basque Country as the heroically nationalist David, tenacious and unyielding in its struggle for liberation from those would who seek to usurp its traditional sovereignty. Indeed, the ultimate value of the contemporary Basque narrative, as seen in Aramburu's novel, as well as in the works of Atxaga, Cobeaga, and others, is its insistence on depicting the Basque Country beyond binaries, as part of a broader whole whose literature responds to both the local and the global.

The first to actively move beyond dichotomization in his creative production was pioneering Basque author Bernardo Atxaga, whose novels published in the nineteen-nineties "constitute the first attempt to write historically about ETA without either endorsing or marginalizing it" and in doing so "overcome allegorically its historical subalternity" (Gabilondo, *Postnational* 114; *Before Babel* 237). In this vein, in Chapter One, I discuss how the hotel in Atxaga's novels serves as a means to address what Homi Bhabha identifies as the problem of interstitiality and the in-between; here, the ontological struggles of ex-*etarras* in post-Transition Spain whose attempts to rejoin civil society are stymied by social, political and cultural factors

beyond their control. My investigation into contemporary Basque creative production has drawn critical attention to the continuing, problematic legacy of ETA and the resulting conflict between the organization and the Spanish state present in these works. As such, in Chapter Two, I address dominant narratives on victimization during and after the Basque Conflict, which traditionally maintained an immobile dichotomization between ETA's victims and their families and its militants along a clearly-defined axis of good and evil. Employing an extensive multivocal discourse that questions contemporary attitudes towards victimhood in the Basque Country, Fernando Aramburu's *Patria* (2016) rejects these preestablished tropes through a democratization of the victim figure.

Likewise, in Chapter Three, I investigate how Emilio Martínez-Lázaro's 2014 hit film *Ocho apellidos vascos* and Borja Cobeaga's 2017 black comedy *Fe de etarras* decry radical Basque nationalism through the appropriation and exaggeration of regional (Basque) and national (Spanish) symbols linked to identity. The latter film looks to the former in order to censure the practices of cultural difference that render regional identity the exclusive possession of a select ethnic in-group; in doing so, *Fe de etarras* demonstrates the continuing cultural significance of the popular Peninsular film that utilizes comedy to deconstruct the radical separatist discourses that have historically flourished in the Basque Country. Finally, in Chapter Four, I examine how Borja Cobeaga's dark comedy *Negociador* engages with the traditional Basque oral practice of *bertsolaritza* to construct a narrative fundamentally based on communicative collapse. The eventual failure of the representative *bertsolaris* to reify their vastly contrasting notions for the future of the Basque Country through the use of a competitive, public exchange that would ideally declare them both winners emphasizes the underlying

inviability of ETA, as the organization falters in the face of its own misguided attempts to maintain political dominance through violent improvisation.

Works by the authors and filmmakers studied here, among many others, locate the Basque conflict in a liminal space where contrasting discourses—official/civilian, authoritarian/democratic, fascist/socialist—come into contact. In this sense, their narratives must mediate between seemingly irreconcilable ideologies, charting new waters in Basque creative production by rejecting stereotypical characterizations of the Basque community as either the valiant patriots of the legendary Euskal Herria or the terrorist traitors of Francoist propaganda. Above all, the contemporary Basque narratives examined here in this dissertation prove that the Spanish nation is fundamentally a diverse collection of culturally distinct, but equally significant, parts making up a greater heterogenous and democratic whole. The fictional production, first of Atxaga, and later of Aramburu and Cobeaga, evade polarization in order to emphasize human fallibility and moral ambiguity, mediating this historic struggle from a place of objectivity, rather than political partiality, with the region and its minority community fundamentally linked to the greater Spanish nation-state. Framing my discussion of these narratives through the works of Foucault, Gatti, and Zulaika, among others, I have argued for the recognition and contextualization of the competing ideologies interwoven throughout contemporary Basque creative production without their replication, in order to prevent the persistence of hegemonic binaries that only serve to isolate and divide. In this way, I demonstrate how these narratives synthesize the national and the regional in the Basque Country, locating the minority community upon a shifting continuum of global and local identities.

Through this approach, I emphasize how since 1990, authors and filmmakers have actively rejected the reactionary dichotomization dogging this corpus, itself the offspring of the

resurgence of militant nationalisms across the world founded in racism and xenophobia. As their production indicates, even a struggle as complex and violent as the Basque conflict is capable of moving into a postnational phase, inspiring hope that an end to many virulent nationalist discourses is near. The corpus examined within this dissertation encourages readers and audiences, Basques and non-Basques, and nationalists and anti-nationalists alike to inscribe themselves within the porous boundaries of a heterogenous nation-state whose identity is not fixed, but fluid, and constantly in (re)creation. Contemporary Basque narrative provides us with a model of literature and film as a discursive tool for reconciliation between nationalism and democracy that mediates essential differences in cultures and communities across the globe.

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