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***Ocho apellidos vascos* and the poetics of post-ETA Spain¹**

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Abstract

The article takes as a starting point the idea that the ceasefire announced by ETA (Euskadi Ta Askatasuna) in October 2011 has allowed for the appearance of newly inflected cultural engagements with the legacies of the Basque-Spanish violent conflict. Among these, the blockbuster *Ocho apellidos vascos* (OAV) is without a doubt the most significant exponent of a post-ETA poetics that engages with the present memory wars on the Basque Spanish conflict from a state-aligned perspective on consensus. This perspective is characterized by the use of soft metaphors related to (heteronormative) romantic or familial love as a way of condensing the complexities of Spain's internal national conflicts; the privileging of individual forms of memorialization over collective ones; the fetishization of affects such as forgiveness; and the erasure of politics and history. After an analysis of how these strategies play out in OAV and its sequel *Ocho apellidos catalanes* (OAC) (Martínez Lázaro, 2015), the article places these films in relation to a larger corpus of state-aligned post-ETA cultural products comprising, for example, the repenting ex-ETA member Iñaki Rearte's autobiography, published in 2015. By way of contrast, the article proposes that other post-ETA cultural products such as Ion Arretxe's memoirs *Intxaurrondo: la sombra de un nogal* (2015a), the art exhibition *Todo lo demás* (Katakarak, Iruña-Pamplona, 2016) and recent Basque-language literature disrupt the narratives and metaphors of state-aligned consensus on the legacies of the Basque Spanish conflict.

Keywords

post-ETA Spain

Basque Spanish conflict

memory politics

consensus

heteronormativity

romantic love

The study of the dynamic link between terrorism, the media and spectacle has been a productive line of work in the field of critical terrorism studies, a strand of traditional terrorism studies focusing on self-reflective, discourse-oriented approaches to the study of terrorism and gathering significance since September 11 2001. As the authors of the introduction to the inaugural issue of the journal *Critical Studies on Terrorism* synthesized, ‘Terrorism has become a major cultural phenomenon that is the subject of tens of thousands of novels, movies, television programmes, news items, comics, plays, academic studies, websites, blogs, and the like’ (Breen Smyth et al. 2008: 1). Specific analyses of the relation between terrorism, terrorism discourse and entertainment have gone as far as proposing that the relation between terrorism, the media and spectacle is constitutive and symbiotic, whilst also susceptible to shifting socio-political frameworks and historical events (Baudrillard 2002: 414; Vanhala 2011: 39). Thus, Hollywood blockbuster terrorist films, although they display a set of recognizable features, ‘also respond to prevailing political conditions, as well as to changes in public opinion [...] audience interests [and] antiterrorism policies’ (Vanhala 2011: 5, 7). In Spain, a country that is explicitly mentioned in critical terrorism studies as one whose political dynamics are deeply affected by the ‘diffused effects’ of terrorism discourse (Breen Smyth et al. 2008: 1), scholars working in media and cultural studies have investigated the changing patterns in the journalistic and cultural representations of ETA’s violent activity, from the first images published in 1968, after the killing of Francoist political police officer and notorious torturer Melitón Manzanas, to 2010 when the last ETA killing took place in France. Nekane Parejo and Ramón Esparza, for example, have tracked the increasingly sensationalist approach to information and images perceivable in the journalistic coverage of ETA violence, which went from the distant framings and empty spaces that were typical under Francoist censorship to the macabre images of assassinated bodies populating

post-1978 Spanish and Basque media, where the journalistic principle of transparency ‘bordered on the obscene’ (Esparza and Parejo 2012: 141).

Fictional representations of the Basque violent conflict in text and screen have also been governed by the possibilities and limitations dictated by historical circumstance, although a set of features, some critics have argued, seem to have fossilized into solid tropes. Here, one of terrorism’s intrinsic qualities according to critics, i.e. its fictive-narrative dimension (Zulaika and Douglas 1996: 4, 65), meets the exoticizing tendencies that have informed external representations of the Basques over the centuries (Leoné and MacClancy 2008), giving rise to a dense and durable representational composite, namely, that of Basque identity as intrinsically and ahistorically linked to terrorism (Gabilondo 2008: 164) and of the Basque Country as a dangerous territory, whose people have grown accustomed to living in a menacing and violent environment (Arzuaga 2010: 32). For this reason, the different filmic possibilities of imagining ETA in Basque and Spanish cinema, surveyed in Jaume Martí-Olivella’s pioneering study in 2003 and more recently by Rob Stone and María Pilar Rodríguez (Martí-Olivella 2003; Stone and Rodríguez 2015), need to be considered with respect to how they negotiate an encroaching representational context steeped in taboo and stereotype. These include the dissemination of images of the Basque north as hostile, unwelcome and fearsome (Lewis 2005), although such images need to be understood, as work in critical terrorism studies shows us, in relation to the shifting discursive demands and limit zones dictated by political agendas and circumstances. ETA’s definitive abandonment of its armed struggle campaign after the permanent ceasefire announced on 20 October 2011 marked the beginning of a new political cycle in the Basque Country and Spain, a cycle that has been characterized, to a huge extent, by a preoccupation with memory and narratives about the past. In this article, I will argue that there is a discernible ‘post-ETA poetics’ traceable in the cultural production of this post-2011 period. In particular, following Basque

film producer Ángel Amigo's prediction that '[c]uando no exista ETA se harán más películas sobre este tema' ('when ETA disappears, more films will be made about it') (Amigo in Carmona 2004: 120), I will argue that, in effect, there has been a noticeable burgeoning of cultural products about ETA since the ceasefire and that these have a memorialistic function at their core. From Gabriela Ybarra's novel *El comensal* ('The dinner guest') (2015) and Fernando Aramburu's high-selling novel *Patria* ('Fatherland') (2016), to TV series such as *El padre de Caín* ('Cain's father') (2016) and museum exhibitions such as *1989 Tras las Conversaciones de Argel. Delirio y tregua* (*After the Argel Conversations. Delirium and Truce*) (showing in Artium, Vitoria-Gasteiz and Fundació Antoni Tàpies, Barcelona from November 2016 to January 2017), ongoing debates about how to represent the Basque Spanish conflict after ETA's ceasefire are being held in the cultural field. A central intervention in this respect has been, without a doubt, the blockbuster film *OAV* (*A Spanish Affair*) (Martín Lázaro, 2014) and the rash of related printed, film and media products appearing in its wake, including its sequel *OAC* (*Eight Catalan Surnames*) (Martín Lázaro, 2015), ex-ETA prisoner Iñaki Rekarte's autobiography *Lo difícil es perdonarse a uno mismo* (*The Difficult Thing is to Forgive Oneself*) (2015), the TV series *Allí abajo* (*Down There*) (2015) and the film *Cuerpo de Élite* (*Heroes Wanted*) (Mazón, 2016). Through an analysis of some of the above products and their interaction with post-ETA memory discourses in the Basque Country and Spain, in this article I will argue that a series of recognizable narrative tropes place state-aligned post-ETA cultural products in line with the narratives of consensus promoted since the Transition period, which privileged sentimental and ahistorical treatments of ETA and the 'problem of nationalisms' (Tomé 2012: 57). However, the end of ETA's armed activity has facilitated the appearance of certain variations in such tropes, variations that have been most visible in the way in which the romantic metaphor has been utilized to promote a certain understanding of the Basque Spanish conflict, with the *Ocho Apellidos*

franchise at the forefront. In the article's final section I will identify a series of examples that disrupt state-aligned post-ETA narratives of familial, romantic consensus, particularly from irony, non-normative, feminist and queering perspectives. The present study is meant as a further contribution to post-2011 cultural commentary on the Basque Spanish conflict and its legacies (Zaldua 2012; Rodríguez 2015; Portela 2016), but recognizes that the often binary exposition of the case studies informing much of this emerging critical corpus is problematic. For this reason, the term 'post-ETA poetics' is introduced here as a way of designating the complex – and inevitably interactive – cultural engagements that characterize the memory wars on the Basque Spanish violent conflict, in the understanding that ETA-related discourses and representations remain the site of a very particular cultural and political struggle in Spain, where the consolidation or the rejection of an 'undemocratic socio-political power' is at stake (Crumbaugh 2007: 367, 368).

Memory, *relato* and the controversy around OAV

Nowhere is the interactive dimension of post-ETA poetics seen more clearly than in the current tug-of-war between Basque nationalisms and the Spanish political establishment around the so-called *relato* (narrative) of the recent violent conflict. With the announcement of the end of armed struggle on ETA's part, the historical codification of the violence that marked the Basque Spanish political conflict throughout the twentieth century and into the twenty-first has been centre stage in contemporary Spanish and Basque memory discourses, with a host of initiatives, publications, broadcasts, research projects, exhibitions and policies being implemented that tackle events as varied as the bombing of the town of Gernika in April 1937, the violent repression of clandestine Basque nationalist activity under Franco, ETA killings and violent activities from 1968 to 2010 and Spanish-state counter-terrorist measures, including torture or recourse to paramilitary groups such as the Batallón Vasco Español or the Grupos Antiterroristas de Liberación (GAL). There is ample evidence that

primary actors in this area are well aware that a discursive battle is being waged. In the interview of Arnaldo Otegi aired on 17 April 2016 as part as La Sexta's weekly documentary programme *Salvados*, the leader of the Basque pro-independence left referred explicitly to the fact that those who say that ETA's ceasefire resulted from its decimation and defeat by Spanish state forces are just attempting to impose their inaccurate *relato* of events (Otegi in *Salvados*, Évole 2016). The Euskal Memoria Foundation, a civic organization established in 2009 with the aim of intervening actively on the documentation and preservation of Basque twentieth- and twenty-first-century memory, states clearly in its mission that

la ofensiva ideológica de los Estados español y francés hace mella en nuestra perspectiva. Los medios de comunicación, el currículum educativo, el discurso institucional y la doctrina antiterrorista llevan décadas imponiendo una versión adulterada de lo que somos y hacemos (ideological attacks coming from the Spanish and the French states keep on undermining our perspective. The media and state schools' curriculum, together with institutional discourses and anti-terrorist laws, have been imposing their twisted version of what we are and do for decades). (Euskal Memoria Fundazioa)

They further argue that against the ahistorical and compartmentalized version of the Basque Spanish national conflict promoted by the Spanish establishment, only the promotion of a joined-up exposition of historical events, linking together as 'eslabones de una misma cadena' ('cogs in one and the same wheel') the Civil War, the Francoist period, the Transition into democracy and what they call the Constitutionalist period, will build a holistic understanding of the conflict and bring about its final resolution.

Some interventions have already appeared that explicitly denounce a memory politics thus designed by the Basque pro-independence left. The book *Construyendo memorias: Relatos históricos para Euskadi después del terrorismo* (*Building Memories: Historical Narratives for Euskadi after Terrorism*) (Ortiz de Orruño and Pérez 2013), for example, includes work by historians associated with the Instituto de Historia Social ‘Valentín de Foronda’, a research centre based at the University of the Basque Country, which promotes historical research on political violence and repression and favours academic rigour over ‘urgencias políticas’ (political urgencies), according to its director and editor of the volume (Ortiz de Orruño and Pérez 2013: 9). Against the ‘concepción de la memoria puramente instrumental’ (purely instrumental understanding of memory), which Ortiz de Orruño says is championed by projects such as that of Euskal Memoria Fundazioa (Ortiz de Orruño and Pérez 2013: 8), the contributions to this volume aim to set the discursive foundations of ‘a relato democrático para Euskadi después de ETA’ (a democratic narrative for Euskadi after ETA) (Ortiz de Orruño and Pérez 2013: 10) that will not legitimize terrorism by promoting an ‘injusto empate moral’ (unjust moral equalizing) (Alonso 2013: 180) or a ‘neutralidad blanda’ (soft neutrality) (Castells Arteché 2013: 221) in the ‘batalla hermenéutica’ (hermeneutic battle) that is currently being waged (Castells Arteché 2013: 211).

It is not surprising that commentary on certain cultural products emerging in this context has been pervaded by the ubiquitous debate on post-ETA memory politics. For example, the Spanish Ministry of Culture formally complained about the programme for Donostia/San Sebastian 2016 European Capital of Culture, which included an exhibition on the history of the Spanish government’s negotiations with ETA that described ETA as a ‘fenómeno político, militar y cultural’ (‘political, military and cultural phenomenon’) (Alonso 2016). It was presumably the reference to ETA as a *cultural* phenomenon that set in motion the State’s mechanisms for regulating memory discourses of the Basque Spanish conflict,

mechanisms that rely strongly, as they did again on this occasion, on the invocation of ETA victims and the need to preserve their dignity. However, among the myriad cultural events populating post-ETA debates on memory politics, the film *OAV (A Spanish Affair)* (Martínez Lázaro, 2014) is without a doubt the one that has so far attracted most immediate attention – and, in some cases, indignation. The film is not strictly about ETA and is set – although not without some ambiguity – in a post-ETA context. For example, when male protagonist Rafael tells his Sevillian friends of his intentions to travel to the Basque Country to track down Amaia, he assures them that ‘las cosas allí están más tranquilas ahora’ (‘things there are a lot quieter now’), only to be mocked by one of them for seemingly having fallen for another ‘tregua-trampa’ (con-truce) (*Ocho apellidos vascos* [OAV] 2014). Further, the film does not show or allude to any specific historical episode of political violence in the Basque Country, and ETA remains, as Peter Buse and Nuria Triana-Toribio have said, ‘a distant memory at the very periphery of the film, a structuring absence, but not a menacing one’ (2014: 233). In view of this, it is eloquent that some voices – mainly coming from the right – have hastened to comment on the unwelcome intervention that *OAV* has signified in the debate about how to codify ETA and its legacies in terms of memory politics.² For example, Basque Spanish intellectual Jon Juaristi wrote an article for *ABC* on 30 March 2014 where he argued that the banal treatment of ETA terrorism in the film should have no place in a society where ‘la tragedia de ETA sigue formando parte del paisaje cotidiano del País Vasco’ (‘the tragedy of ETA continues to be part of the daily landscape in the Basque Country’) (2014). Echoing Juaristi’s critique of *OAV* as extemporaneous, Juan Antonio Zarzalejos, director of the Spanish newspaper *ABC* from 1999 to 2008, devoted a whole chapter of his book *Mañana será tarde: un diagnóstico valiente para un país imputado* (*Tomorrow Will Be Late: A Brave Diagnosis for a Country Under Indictment*) (2015) to the film. Again, the overriding reason for his critique seems to be the argument that a film such as *OAV* is simply immoral at a time

when ETA has not yet disbanded and continues to maintain its hold over a depressed and fatigued Basque society. Zarzalejos' reference to the heightened stakes involved in the current Basque Spanish memory wars, which he sees as a necessary ethical reaction to the 'relato que está construyendo el nacionalismo vasco homicida y asesino' ('version of events that a murderous and homicidal Basque nationalism is concocting') (2015: 199), frames his critique of *OAV* as dangerously banal and reckless. In his own words:

Cuando en Euskadi aún siguen impunes tres centenares de asesinatos, se desconoce todavía el colaboracionismo financiero con la banda terrorista, la izquierda *abertzale* sigue intimidando a sus adversarios y homenajeando *gudaris* etarras que salen de las cárceles, cuando técnicos de obediencia radical se afanan por borrar el rastro etarra en Internet con una comprensión por parte de Google que causa perplejidad; cuando ETA no se ha disuelto y sigue disponiendo de grandes arsenales de armas y su cúpula permanece agazapada y presta a tomar decisiones quizá trágicas, ¿acaso no es perfectamente legítimo plantear un debate a fondo sobre los mensajes confusos que transmite una película aparentemente inocua como *Ocho apellidos vascos*? Muchos pensamos que sí. (When in Euskadi three hundred murders remain unpunished; the level of financial collaborationism with ETA is still unknown; the *abertzale* left continues to intimidate its adversaries, paying public tribute to the *gudaris* that leave prison; when technicians of radical leanings work tirelessly to erase traces of ETA on the Internet, with Google's perplexing connivance; when ETA has not disbanded and continues to have large arsenals of weaponry and its leaders are still in hiding and ready to make decisions of perhaps tragic consequences, is it not perfectly legitimate to want to discuss the profoundly ambivalent message that an apparently harmless film like *Ocho apellidos vascos* conveys? Many of us think that it is). (Zarzalejos 2015: 241)

The noticeable accumulation of references to ETA that characterizes Zarzalejos' quote above, and indeed the rest of his chapter on *OAV*, is indicative of one of the features of state-aligned post-ETA memory discourses, namely, the repeated evocation of – and deliberate equivocation about – ETA's alleged persistence, a strategy that allows for the continual presence of ETA's name in public discourses, even at a somewhat spectral level. Thus, whilst acknowledging with Buse and Triana-Toribio that *OAV* 'articulates a key message about regionalist and nationalist identifications in a post-ETA landscape' (2014: 230), the film can also be approached as a prominent example of a recent trend in commercially promoted cultural products whose relations to ETA (even if tangential) facilitate the continuous reinstatement of a particular discursive framework for the memorialization of the violent Basque Spanish conflict, a framework that renders invisible conflict-oriented, historicist representations, whilst commercially promoting hyper-subjective, affect-laden and binary ones. The following section will analyse how the above dynamics operate in a corpus of interrelated products: *OAV*, its sequel *OAC* and ex-ETA member and political prisoner Iñaki Rekarte's autobiography *Lo difícil es perdonarse a uno mismo: matar en nombre de ETA y arrepentirse por amor* (*The Difficult thing is to Forgive Oneself: To Kill in ETA's Name and to Regret it for Love*), published in 2015.

From taboo to trend: Introducing post-ETA poetics

Existing critical commentaries on what would be the main debates of a post-ETA moment illustrate that clear chronological delineations of such a period remain elusive. Joseba Zulaika's essay *Polvo de ETA (ETA Dust)* (2007), published after ETA's ceasefire in 2006, yet truncated in its final pages by an epilogue written after ETA's bomb attack of Madrid

airport's T4 on 30 December 2006, remains a document of the shifting conditions for conflict resolution and analysis with respect to the Basque Spanish political conflict in the first decade of the twenty-first century. Joseba Gabilondo, for his part, pronounced Basque terrorism as historically finished in a 2008 article, but still predicted a long and fertile future for 'the discourse of otherness and essentialism, which has defined the Basque Country over the last two hundred years' (2008: 171). Here I would like to take up these scholars' considerations of the so-called 'big Other' of the Spanish State (i.e. the Basque revolutionary political subject) as susceptible to both destructive and reconstructive representations, and place it vis-à-vis contemporary cultural texts emerging in a post-ETA context, thus trying partially to address Zulaika's question of '¿qué sucede ahora con el gran "Otro" del Estado español?' ('what happens now to Spain's big "Other"?') (2007: 45). Again, examining how the representation of political violence is both shunned and refashioned for mass consumption in *OAV* provides a good starting point in this respect.

The film's narrative pivots around the male Andalusian protagonist's pursuit of the love of Amaia, a young Basque woman whom he had met fortuitously in Seville, where she had been taken – reluctantly – on a hen party trip. After travelling to the Basque Country to find her, Rafa finds himself caught up in Amaia's ploy to hide from her father that her fiancé had called off their wedding, and so the Andalusian Rafa ends up having to play the part of Basque Antxon whenever in Amaia's father's presence. An essential part of Rafa/Antxon's performance of Basque identity in order to convince Amaia's father that he is a worthy son-in-law is the performance of pro-independence political militancy. This is not a demand that comes explicitly from Koldo, Amaia's father; in fact, Koldo himself confesses to Rafa/Antxon during a boozy dinner gathering with Amaia and Merche, the widow of a Spanish Civil Guard member, that as a young man he used to be involved with 'el asunto de la independencia y eso' (independence and stuff) – note the hedging around the word

independencia, which muffles its political sonority – but that ‘eran otros tiempos, cuando Franco y así, pero hoy en día, andar con lo de la *kale borroka* tan en serio [...] pues chico, no sé’ (‘the times were different then, when Franco was around and stuff, but being so involved with the *kale borroka* today, you know [...] well, I don’t know’) (*OAV*). Koldo’s words serve to register, albeit tenuously, what may be interpreted as one of the film’s few historical concessions with respect to the Basque Spanish national conflict, namely, that ETA was created as a form of anti-Francoist political and cultural resistance in the Basque Country in response to the dictatorship’s violent measures against the Basques.³ But the main message remains that Rafa’s pro-independence militancy – even if purely performative – is out of kilter with the times. In fact, pro-independence militancy is again represented as pure performance in *OAV*’s immediate sequel, *OAC (Eight Catalan Surnames)* (Martínez Lázaro, 2015), where an entire Catalan town pretends to be part of an already independent Catalonia for the delectation of a local matriarch. Thus the independence-as-performance motif could be read as the chosen narrative vehicle in these films for a dehistoricizing representation of Basque and Catalan *independentismos*, as purely circumstantial occurrences, almost a mere hobby, with which subjects engage for arbitrary or ad hoc reasons. Other moments in *OAV* may add to this reading, from Rafa/Antxon’s remark to Koldo that his preferred hobbies include ‘deporte eta independentzia’ (sport and independence), to the representation of the pro-independence militants with whom he comes into contact as brainless and erratic.

Cultural studies of contexts of political violence such as the Northern Irish, which has often been compared to the Basque, have remarked on how films portraying such violence have tended towards non-historicizing approaches, favouring instead representations of political violence as *non-political* or mainly as ‘essentially pathological – the fault of the Irish themselves [...], the result of their own innate proclivities, the workings of fate, or the effects of nature and environment’ (McLoone 2005: 210). Under such depoliticized outlines, the

existence of violent conflict and terrorism tends to be presented as the motif for narrative tension in otherwise individualized and subjective story lines, such as for example that of the ‘Romeo and Juliet’ scenario, the archetype of the love story ravaged by sectarian affiliations, which became a standard theme in television representations of the Northern-Irish conflict in the 1980s (McLoone 2005: 221–22). *OAV* and its sequel *OAC* can certainly be interpreted as variations of this theme, contributing towards a long tradition of filmic representations of the Basque Spanish conflict through the metaphor of the impossible love between a Basque and an Andalusian, extending back to Eloy de la Iglesia’s unmade film script ‘Galopa y corta el viento’ (Ride like the wind) (de la Iglesia, 1981), Ernesto del Río’s *El amor de ahora* (*Now’s Love*) (1987), Imanol Uribe’s *Días contados* (*Running Out of Time*) (1994) and Antonio Hens’ *Clandestinos* (*Clandestine*) (2007). However, unlike in these films, the post-ETA context of the *Ocho apellidos* franchise makes the fulfilment of the romantic love metaphor just about possible – although love is allowed to triumph only if it follows a series of set patterns.

This is visible, for example, in other post-ETA commercial cultural products currently engaging with the theme of the once-impossible now just conceivable love story between enemies, such as ex-ETA member and political prisoner Iñaki Rekarte’s autobiography *Lo difícil es perdonarse a uno mismo: Matar en nombre de ETA y arrepentirse por amor* (*The Difficult Thing is to Forgive Oneself: To kill in ETA’s Name and to Regret it for Love*) (2015). The book is a first-person account of the life story of an ex-ETA member who was arrested and sentenced to 203 years in prison for his involvement in the bomb attack that killed three civilians and injured two police officers in Santander on 19 February 1992, and how he falls in love with a social worker from Cádiz while in the Puerto de Santa María prison. It is written from the perspective of the repentant terrorist seeking redemption and forgiveness, within the historical context of the post-ETA process of social reinsertion of

those Basque political prisoners who publicly renounce the use of violence and apologize for their crimes, known as ‘Vía Nanclares’. Published in May 2015 by the commercial Ediciones Península (today part of the Grupo Planeta, Spain’s leading publishing house, linked to the media group Atresmedia) and carefully timed with the broadcasting of Rekarte’s interview during that same week as part of the documentary programme *Salvados* (also an Atresmedia product), Rekarte’s autobiography displays a series of features that, as I argue in this article, conform with the discursive landscape of state-aligned post-ETA poetics. First and foremost, Rekarte’s account of his coming into contact with ETA as a young man, and of the indeterminate moment when he became officially a member of the organization, is markedly stripped of any reference to political motivation. Similar to how the young pro-independence activists are portrayed in *OAV* as brash and foolhardy, Rekarte refers repeatedly to his joining ETA as a ‘locura juvenil’ (a youngster’s folly) (Rekarte 2015: 55), which he entertained mainly ‘por amor a la aventura’ (for the love of adventure) as he was not ‘un concienciado del abertzalismo’ (a believer in *abertzalismo*) and ‘carecía de esa vena política’ (lacked that political streak) (2015: 51), an emphatically apolitical explanation of events that he also held in his *Salvados* interview (‘ETA desde dentro’, *Salvados* 2015).⁴ When reminiscing about his mate Juanra and how they both found themselves almost inexplicably enmeshed with the terrorist organization in their teens, Rekarte puts this down to the appeal that guns had for them back in those days: ‘después de entrar en la organización, Juanra me confesó que realmente no sabía si se había metido en ETA por la ideología o porque le gustaban las pistolas’ (‘after joining the organisation, Juanra confessed to me that he really did not know whether he had joined ETA because of ideology or for the love for guns’) (Rekarte 2015: 52). References to reckless adventurousness turn into suggestions that members of ETA were mentally ill – ‘no están del todo bien de la cabeza’ (they are not right in the head) (Rekarte 2015: 197) – and were running a terrorist organization that was ‘simple y arbitraria’ (simple

and arbitrary) (Rekarte 2015: 72), ‘una puta cuadrilla de locos’ (a fucking nuthouse) (Rekarte 2015: 367), an account that aligns with accustomed portrayals of terrorists as ‘insane and psychopathic’, which has been recognized as characteristic of commercial cinema and mass media coverage of terrorism (Vanhala 2011: 11). Interspersed with this depoliticized account for ETA’s activities is the negation of a political explanation altogether for the description of the Basque Spanish conflict. Here, Rekarte’s narrative rests on the denial of the collective dimension of the conflict to centre on individualistic interpretations, which, he seems to imply, become more apparent once in prison. Thus the hurt one has caused as a terrorist

tratas de taparlo escondiéndolo bajo el manto de la política, de la represión en Euskadi, de la situación de los presos, de lo que sea. Lo que pasa es que cuando estás solo contigo mismo, toda esa palabrería vana no vale para nada. (you try to cover underneath the veneer of politics, of repression in Euskadi, of the situation of prisoners, whatever. But when you are alone with yourself, all of that vapid talk becomes pointless). (Rekarte 2015: 198)

The classification of the vocabularies associated with the Basque Spanish political conflict (repression, political prisoners) as ‘palabrería’ (vapid talk), together with the declaration that ‘el manto de la política [...] no vale para nada’ (‘the veneer of politics [...] is pointless’), sets the way for Rekarte’s biography as a hyper-subjective and sentimental text framed by the protagonist’s love story. The careful desemanticization of politically loaded terms (remember the verbal blurring around the word *independencia* in *OAV*) is strategically employed at those points where the violent materiality of the Basque Spanish conflict needs to be bypassed. It is no coincidence, therefore, that Rekarte’s testimony on having been tortured at the Civil

Guard headquarters in Madrid resorts more frequently to the softer term ‘maltrato’ (maltreatment) than to that of ‘tortura’, thus yielding strangely understated, and without a doubt state-aligned, declarations such as:

Aquí [at the Spanish Civil Guard headquarters in Madrid’s Guzmán el Bueno street] el protocolo del maltrato era más sofisticado. Sabían lo que hacían y hasta dónde podían llegar, conocían a la perfección ese punto de no retorno que, una vez superado, les habría obligado a hacerme desaparecer para no tener que asumir sus malos tratos. (Here [at the Civil Guard headquarters in Madrid’s Guzmán el Bueno Street] the protocol for maltreatment was more sophisticated. They knew what they were doing and the boundaries; they were perfectly familiar with that point of no return which, if trespassed, would have forced them to get rid of me so as not to have to admit that there had been maltreatment). (Rekarte 2015: 222)

Once hard politics and the ugly materialities of national-political conflict are suppressed, the ground is clear for more acceptable, even satisfying outlines such as those provided by the tropes of heteronormative romantic love. Here Rekarte’s testimony as a Basque ex-ETA member serving prison in an Andalusian jail and falling in love with a prison social worker from Cádiz seems eerily to replay a reversed version of the *OAV* romantic plot, thus capitalizing on an tried-and-tested strategy for the depoliticization and sentimentalization of national conflict in Spain. Various tropes of romantic love appear in both of these cultural products that serve to create this framework. For example, the love-at-first-sight motif colours Rafa and Amaia’s first encounter at a flamenco club in Seville in *OAV*, and is also

explicit in Rekarte's recollection of his first vision of Mónica, who is described in full Orientalizing manner as:

una chica menuda, muy simpática y extraordinariamente guapa, con un cierto aire de india americana [...]. Llevaba una melena larga y morena, y sus ojos, marcados por un remoto toque oriental, parecían lanzar destellos de vivacidad que iluminaban con su brillo aquel lugar cerrado y deprimente. (a petite young woman, very friendly and exceptionally good-looking, with a certain Indian-American look about her [...]. She had long dark hair, and her eyes –which looked remotely oriental – seemed to give off flashes of vivacity that lit up that depressing, closed-up place). (Rekarte 2015: 13)

Further, the love-between-enemies plot functions as a reinforcement of the ethnicist representation of the Basque Spanish political conflict as one fuelled by an irrational anti-Spanish hatred on the part of the Basques, rather than by entrenched historical grievances.⁵ Thus an interpretation could be advanced of *OAV* and its sequel *OAC* as a two-sequence symbolic representation of the Basque overcoming of the ethnicist-nationalist framework, represented by Amaia's double surrendering to Rafa (in *OAV* first, and again in *OAC*), despite her irrational dislike for his (Andalusian) personality quirks. Comparably, the description of Iñaki Rekarte's falling in love with Mónica, a woman who 'pertenecía a un mundo que [...] formaba parte del territorio enemigo' ('belonged to a world that [...] was part of the enemy's territory') (Rekarte 2015: 13), unfolds in parallel to his overcoming of the Spain-as-enemy narrative that presumably informed ETA terrorism, and culminates with his eventual embrace of an apolitical, atomized understanding of life, which Mónica, portrayed as '[u]na persona muy unida a sus amigos, a sus gentes gaditanas, a su familia, alegre y llena

de vida, con poco interés por la política' ('a person who was very close to her friends, to the Cádiz people, to her family; cheerful, full-of-life and uninterested in politics') (Rekarte 2015: 17–18), facilitates. Both tales of romantic love conclude with affect-laden representations of the traditional nuclear family: in *OAC*, the twice reunited Amaia and Rafa are now expecting their first child, who is born in the car when the whole family comes back from a holiday outside the Basque Country. In a final scene loaded with post-political meaning, Amaia is helped in her delivery by Merche, who in the film symbolizes a benign version of the legacy of Spanish state forces in the Basque Country, while Amaia's father Koldo resolves to move the 'Welcome to the Basque Country' road sign closer to the point where they had to stop their car so that he will be able to boast his first grandchild's Basque origins. This closing finale in *OAC* thus relativizes the historical territorial claims of Basque nationalism while celebrating the normative ordering of nuclear family politics, which can now serve as a suitable symbol of post-ETA Basque–Spanish relations after decades of ETA-related films where the romantic encounter between a Basque and an Andalusian was a harbinger of sure death. Similarly in Rekarte's autobiography, the children he has had with his now wife Mónica are chosen as the final sentimental witnesses to his repentance, described as his personal development from 'la radicalidad a la comprensión, del odio al afecto y el perdón' ('radicalness to understanding, from hatred to forgiveness') (Rekarte 2015: 381), in which he has been aided by love, family and his stable job as the owner of a local tavern back in Euskal Herria after being released from prison. Both narratives then share in a post-conflict poetics based on the tropes of lifeworld (families, cultures, jobs) and normative affects as purportedly non-political spaces where state-aligned forms of consensus can finally be achieved. In a poetics thus defined, the unpleasant vicissitudes of having been involved with ETA or having upheld its legacies can only be codified for mass commercial cultural products as a performative figuration ready to be consumed as a comic anachronism (as in the case of the

Ocho apellidos franchise) or as a distant, relinquished memory now soothed by and replaced with familial affections (in the case of Iñaki Rekarte's best-selling autobiography). Such seem to be some of the prominent frames of discourse on the Basque Spanish violent conflict commercially promoted in post-ETA Spain, a place that would aptly resemble Judith Butler's definition of 'a sensate democracy', in which the discursive frames through which societies may respond affectively to political violence are constantly regulated by state-aligned interests (2010: 52). Starting from Butler's argument that a veritable critique of violence requires the questioning of the dominant frames of interpretability available for such violence, the final section of this article will analyse a series of cultural products engaging with the enduring legacies of the violent Basque Spanish conflict in ways that challenge the frames of intelligibility promoted by a commercial, state-aligned post-ETA poetics.

Cultural interventions out of the post-ETA fantasy

On 22 September 2008, the film *Tiro en la cabeza* (*Bullet in the Head*) (Rosales, 2008) was premiered at the San Sebastian Film Festival. The film, shot without dialogue and only with zoom lens, tells the story of the days leading to the killing of two Spanish civil guards by two ETA members in Capbreton (France) in December 2007 from the perspective of the routine life of one of the latter. Catalan director Jaime Rosales has accounted for the film's choice of technique and perspective as a way to challenge binary representations of terrorists as either heroes or demons (Rosales in Estévez 2008) and he reacted to the controversial reception that the film received on its premiere by suggesting that perhaps it had been made with a future viewer in mind (Rosales in Alonso 2008). Indeed many of this film's reviews revolved around its lack of an affective dimension, remarking that it was impossible for viewers to 'relate emotionally' to it and almost implying, as Carmen Puyó did in her review, that only at

the moment of the fateful encounter between the ETA members and the Civil Guards leading to killing of the latter ‘llegan la emoción y el sentimiento’ (‘do emotion and sentiment make an appearance’) (Puyó 2008). It is interesting that affect and narrative meaning should come together in this reviewer’s appraisal of a film that was noticeably trying to push beyond the existing regimes of affective interpretation with respect to ETA’s violence in order to trigger a different politics of recognizability (Butler 2010). The fact that the film director should suggest that future viewers would be better placed to appreciate *Tiro en la cabeza* may function as a bridge between this film’s proposed treatment of the violent Basque Spanish conflict from a 2008 perspective, and a series of contemporary counter-enunciations to a state-aligned post-ETA poetics so focused, as was outlined in the previous section, on the regulation of affective processes related to forgiveness, redemption, healing and (non-)closure through dehistoricized and (hetero-)normative familial narratives. With this in mind, I will be talking in this final section of texts about the violent Basque Spanish conflict and its various legacies of pain, which bring about a series of crises in the hegemonic discourse of post-ETA memory politics, either because they act as ‘insurgent testimonies’ (Rizzuto 2015) running counter to the sanctioned frames on nation and narration that have been privileged by such discourse or because they disrupt the established ‘affective economies’ (Ahmed 2004: 44–49) established by it.

Iñaki Rekarte’s testimonial writing as an ex-ETA member and Basque political prisoner released from jail as part of the State’s programme for reinsertion of repentant terrorists could not be analysed without considering how the text negotiates self- and State-narratives about the violent Basque Spanish conflict. Also in 2015, however, a very different post-ETA testimonial was published that can be approached as a counterpoint to Rekarte’s text. I am referring to Ion Arretxe’s *Intxaurrondo: La sombra de un nogal* (*Intxaurrondo: The Walnut Tree’s Shadow*) (2015a), an autobiographical narrative about how he was

arrested by the Spanish Civil Guard on 26 November 1985, kept in their custody under the auspices of the Spanish Counter-Terrorism Law and tortured for ten days before being released with no charges. The title of Arretxe's text summons the dense connotative meaning that Intxaurreondo has in post-Transition Basque and Spanish history as the place name of the San Sebastian neighbourhood where the Civil Guard headquarters are located and systematic torture of Basque citizens was practised with impunity. Place, in fact, remains a chief motif in the text as Arretxe's familiarity with the Gipuzkoan geographies of his childhood and adolescence (the neighbourhoods of his home town Errenteria, its natural surroundings, rivers and mountains) is fractured by his experience of detainment and torture as a kind of infernal placelessness, where, as Ignacio Mendiola has theorized, the subject is dislodged from its situated enunciative and sensate position until she becomes 'un habitante sin habitat' (2014: 71). However, I would like to focus here on how Arretxe's testimony of torture by Spanish state forces during the first PSOE government (1982–86) dislodges through its ironic and anti-solemn tone two other main narratives of nation and narration pertaining to contemporary Spain and its internal violent national conflict, thereby also destabilizing state-aligned post-ETA poetics.

First, the text mounts a frontal rebuttal against the grand narrative of the Spanish Transition to Democracy by rendering visible some of its alternative – often censored – imaginaries, which in the Basque context are inseparable from the collective experiences of suffering and fear exerted by Spanish legal and paralegal counter-terrorist action from the early years of the Transition up until today. Thus, against widespread theories of pain and torture as radically ineffable experiences, Arretxe farcically describes the pain of having one's head smashed with a packet of A4 paper as very similar to that of having one's head smashed with a telephone directory (Arretxe 2015a: 105) as he relates how he was subjected to this and a battery of other horrific torture techniques while kept inside a flat of the

‘Servicio de información donde se cocía la lucha antiterrorista y la defensa de los valores de la democracia’ (‘Information Services, where the fight against terrorism and the defence of the values of democracy were being forged’) (Arretxe 2015a: 143). Thus the historical, legal and cultural discourses associated with the Spanish Transition as a largely successful, if not exemplary, and non-violent process collapse in the face of insurgent testimonies such as Arretxe’s, which irreverently tell of the experiences of pain and suffering associated with Spain’s post-1978 democratization process, experiences that in the case of torture cannot possibly be contained by institutionally recognized plots. If, as has been studied in the field of life narratives in postcolonial contexts, ‘[t]o accrue value, testimony must have the national interest on its side’ (Whitlock 2015: 149), then there is every reason to believe that Arretxe’s text will struggle to ‘accrue value’ in a context where discourses about Spain’s democratic standards continue to bypass the link between the right of the country’s sub-state nations to self-determination and Spain’s history of political violence throughout the twentieth century up until today.

But Arretxe’s demythifying testimonial may well strike a chord with other cultural enunciations of an alternative post-ETA poetics, where self-critical debates about how to memorialize political violence and victimhood are currently being explored and promoted. Among these, the critique of the masculinist model of the Basque political prisoner who endures torture without revealing any information to the torturers has cropped up in certain recent cultural representations of torture in the Basque country. Arretxe’s testimony certainly engages with this critique as it tells the reader how ‘[b]ajo las torturas no sólo contaba lo que sabía, contaba lo que me inventaba y lo que ellos querían oír’ (‘under torture I didn’t only tell them about what I knew, but also what I invented or what they wanted to hear’) (Arretxe 2015b), thus presenting a self-affirmed post-torture subject that exceeds the model of revolutionary manhood as stoic and heroic, epitomized since the decades of Basque anti-

Francoist resistance by the song ‘Itziarren Semea’ (‘Itziar’s Son’) (1969).⁶ The art exhibition on torture *Todo lo demás* (Everything else), organized in February 2016 by the solidarity campaign *Atznugal* in Pamplona-Iruña’s bookshop Katakarak to raise awareness of the torture cases brought by five Basque activists occurring in 2011, also engaged critically with such models of post-torture stoic manhood from a feminist, queering perspective. One of the exhibition’s pieces included a panel where the lyrics of ‘Itziarren Semea’ had been transcribed and scribbled all over at those points where forms of resistant heroic manhood are hailed as the main path of reconstruction for a post-torture masculine identity. For example, the line ‘bainan nik ez dut eman lagunen izenik’ (I have not given them the names of my friends) was partly crossed out, with the addition ‘egin negarrik’ (I have not cried) appearing on the margin as a critique of the model of hegemonic (unemotional) masculinity. Words such as ‘Tinko’ (straight up) and ‘gure heroia’ (our hero) are scribbled in coloured handwriting at those points where the song describes the details of the torture inflicted on the captured Basque man, thus pointing critically to the high expectations that the community places on the masculine ideal that he needs to uphold while in custody. The reward for this, when he is finally released from torment, will be the admiring yet contained love of his sweetheart Maji, who will greet him with two kisses at the prison gate. Ironic jottings here include a heart symbol pierced with an arrow underneath the phrase ‘Disney love’ and the word ‘saria’ (prize) next to the reference to Maji’s two kisses, thereby disrupting a heteronormative, sentimental easing of the post-torture moment and exposing the central role that the repressive narratives of romantic love have played in perpetuating the uneven gender distribution of national epics. The disruption of sentimentalizing memory politics of the Basque Spanish conflict based on the values of atomized, familial or normative affects seems certainly to underlie other cultural expressions emerging in the Basque post-ETA landscape. In Iban Zaldua’s short story ‘Orokarra, iraunkorra, egiaztagarria’ (General, permanent,

verifiable), included in his collection *Inon ez, inoiz ez* (*Nowhere Never*) (2014), a conversation about ETA's permanent ceasefire in 2011 is held between a young man and woman after their casual sexual encounter, while they mindlessly converse about where or not to place the used condom (Zaldua 2014: 133–38). In Ekhine Eizagirre's poetry collection *Alde erantzira nabil* (*Walk on the naked side*) (2016), the poems 'Familia imposituak' ('Imposed family') (66) and 'Familia nuklearrak' (Nuclear family) (67) reclaim from an (imprisoned) feminist stance the right to alternative forms of community that negate the nuclear family as the one and only source of solace in the aftermath of political violence.

Taken as different cultural interventions in the debate about post-conflict memory politics currently unfolding in the Basque country and Spain, the above literary texts, memoirs and art exhibitions contest the frames of interpretability that state-aligned post-ETA poetics institute by memorializing forms of state-sponsored violence practiced in the Basque country during the 'democratic' period and disrupting the narratives of heteronormative romantic and familial closure that seem to function as the cipher of post-ETA consensus in the *Ocho Apellidos* franchise and other related cultural products. But they also inaugurate a self-critical examination of the sexual politics informing traditional models for the memorialization of the Basque Spanish political conflict by offering 'queering' accounts of mourning, trauma and relational care that had been traditionally left outside the frameworks of heteronormative heroics informing Basque nationalist resistance (Sosa 2014). A final word needs to be added about the apparent binary opposition that has structured my analysis of a state-aligned post-ETA poetics on the one hand and a series of alternative proposals emerging mainly in the Basque Country on the other. This binary approach has not been intentional but is rather a reflection of the structures accompanying the current memory debates with respect to the violent legacies of the Basque Spanish conflict, where a growing multiplicity of (self-)critical, (non-)institutionalized and (de-)historicizing endeavours – some of which have been

analysed in this article – seem to be finding an outlet in the Basque post-ETA cultural and political landscape, whilst state-aligned representations seem persistently to rely – with some meaningful variations – on recurrent identity stereotypes, dehistoricized outlines, normative sexual politics and references to ETA as an enduring violent threat. Echoing the arguments in Michael Rothberg’s *Multidirectional Memory* (2009), a sophisticated plea for the abandonment of competitive memory practices in favour of an exploration of the multidirectional dimensions of memory in acts of Holocaust remembrance, I would argue that the only way out of the binarism apparently inherent in current memory debates about the legacies of suffering and violence brought about by the Basque Spanish political conflict would need to entail ‘the mutual implication of histories [...] that colonial and genocidal violence inevitably create’ (Rothberg 2009: 313). The message inscribed in state-aligned post-ETA products such as *OAV* and its sequel, with their dehistoricizing treatment of Spain’s internal national conflicts and their proposal for a political and cultural consensus that remains safely within the State-sanctioned aesthetics for ‘safe difference’ (Delgado 2003: 127), bypasses the deep memory work that the hope for new post-ETA solidarities would entail and, regrettably, pushes it one step further.

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Notes

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² Criticism of *OAV* has certainly come from fronts other than the conservative right. Mikel Insausti's review of the film for *Gara*, a Basque daily linked to the pro-independence left, criticized it for its unoriginal recourse to regionalist stereotyping of the type that abounded under Francoism (2014). Toni Rico, writing for the Catalan pro-independence online magazine *Llibertat.cat*, also criticized the film for its regionalist and ultimately centralist intention (2014). Both reviews see the film as part of a depoliticizing agenda of Spain's internal national conflicts, mounted by the Spanish unionist establishment.

³ The significance of this historical acknowledgement should not be underestimated in a context where historiographical equivocation about the origins of ETA is not unusual. In their book *España inventada: Nación e identidad desde la Transición* (2007) Sebastian Balfour and Alejandro Quiroga for example suggest an overturned account of this episode, explaining ETA's anticolonial understanding of the twentieth-century decimation of Basque identity as a nationalist-ethnicist response to the great numbers of Spanish working-class immigration into Vizcaya and Guipúzcoa, stating that 'el uso de la violencia [on the part of ETA, it is understood] provocó una creciente represión de la dictadura, lo cual intensificó a su vez las

acciones armadas etarras' (Balfour and Quiroga 2007: 88). To readers puzzled by accounts such as these, I would recommend reading the existing documentary collections of Francoist violent repression of Basque people from the immediate post-war period onwards (Egaña 2011).

⁴ On this point Rekarte's account in both his book and TV interview is contradictory and ambiguous as it includes a reference to the moment when his father was unjustly arrested as part of a raid by the Spanish Civil Guard, taken to the Intxaurreondo headquarters, where 'le hicieron de todo' (they did all sorts of things to him) (Salvados 2015), and imprisoned for several months. Rekarte refers to this episode as the formative moment that forced him to consider joining ETA, although this sequence of events is never presented as a process of *political* awakening.

⁵ A clear example of how this discursive pattern has operated in state-aligned filmic representations of ETA is without a doubt Miguel Courtois' *El Lobo (Wolf)* (2004), where an ETA member implausibly accounts for their activities as follows: '¿Qué tenemos que ver con los andaluces o los asturianos? Nunca nos hemos mezclado ni con los rumanos, ni con los árabes, ni con los godos. Somos una raza aparte, con su propia sangre y su propia lengua' ('What have we got to do with Andalusians or Asturians? We have never mixed with Rumanians, Arabs or Goths. We are a distinct race, with its own blood and language') (Courtois 2004).

⁶ The song, written by the writer and politician Telesforo Monzón and sung by the singer-songwriters' duet 'Pantxo eta Peio', is inspired in the real-life story of Andoni Arrizabalaga, captured and brutally tortured by Francoist police in 1964 and 1968. The song's denunciation of state-sponsored torture has remained an important symbol of the Basque pro-independence imaginary, with contemporary punk and ska bands such as Itziarren Semeak (Itziar's Sons) upholding this tradition.