Moving Past *Patria*: Locating Memory in Contemporary Basque Literature

Thesis submitted in accordance with the requirements of the University of Liverpool for the degree of Doctor in Philosophy by Thomas David Linton Olver

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Abstract

Whilst ETA's definitive cessation of armed activity in 2011 marked the end of over half a century of violent conflict between the Basque separatist group and the Spanish state, a highly politicised dispute over historical memory has since arisen in the public arena. Commonly known as *la batalla del relato* ("the battle of the narrative"), these fractious debates over the causes and nature of the conflict have frequently constituted a zero-sum struggle to impose an overarching historical narrative. Alongside successive Spanish governments and the mainstream national media, both of which have strenuously promoted a dehistoricised, Manichean interpretation of the conflict, an array of cultural depictions have emerged over the last decade that have simultaneously perpetuated such a narrative.

After establishing this context as the starting point for this thesis, I offer a critical examination of the reception of one such work - Fernando Aramburu's best-selling novel *Patria*. It outlines the extent to which *Patria* has been cynically co-opted by the Spanish political and media establishment who, in heralding the novel as a totalising and objective account of ETA's violence, have sought to bolster the hegemonic state-aligned narrative on the Basque conflict.

Thereafter, the central chapters of this thesis explore five separate novels written by female Basque authors during the post-conflict period. Focusing on the representation of location in these works, my analysis draws on feminist epistemology and feminist theories of place derived primarily from human geography to examine the ways in which these novels problematise stable perceptions of place, deploying this as a means of equally subverting static and unreflective articulations of memory, particularly in relation to the conflict period.

In carrying out this analysis, this thesis seeks to demonstrate the extent to which these authors resist the antagonistic approach to memory that has become synonymous with *la batalla del relato*. It contends that their novels instead pursue an *agonistic* attitude towards remembering the past that is grounded in a more productive conceptualisation of memory as a reflexive, multiperspectival and non-Manichean process. By making this case, this thesis emphasises the potential status of these works as an effective counterpoint to the totalising pretensions of Aramburu's novel, as well as to the conflictual perspectives towards historical memory that have shaped public discourse on the Basque conflict within Spain.

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Chapter One: Introduction

The purpose of this thesis is to explore the depiction of memory in contemporary Basque literature by examining the significance of location in the novels of five authors whose work has been published since 2011 - the year that marked the end of the decades-long conflict between the terrorist group ETA and the Spanish state.[1] Writing in the midst of an earlier ceasefire in 2006 that would ultimately prove unsuccessful, Basque anthropologist Joseba Zulaika posed a question that has, nonetheless, now assumed a renewed relevance: "Ahora que ETA se nos acaba, ¿qué reacción nos corresponde?" (*Polvo de ETA* 101). Since the advent of the post-conflict era in the Basque Country over a decade ago, complex issues such as the definition of victimhood, the promotion of peace and reconciliation, and the uncovering of state violence have come swiftly to the fore (Álvarez Berastegi). Across Basque society a range of initiatives have been developed with the aim of implementing restorative justice in terms of seeking truth, addressing suffering, and fostering a sustainable, peaceful coexistence (Zernova). Despite these welcome initiatives, the legacy of ETA continues to prove deeply divisive and, as a result, the challenge of reckoning with what Gavriel Rosenfeld has elsewhere termed an "unmastered past" (127) remains a foremost concern facing Basque society.

In that regard, what we are currently observing in the Basque Country is a tension that, according to existing scholarship on literature in post-conflict societies, often exists between "the desire to acknowledge and remember the past while, at the same time, attempting to forget about it and move on" (Andrews and McGuire 2). Indeed, one response to this tension has been a clear turn towards literature, film, and the visual arts in the search

[1] The connection between memory and location has been well-established since classical antiquity (see Yates) and in more recent times has been popularly theorised by Pierre Nora in his *lieux de mémoire*. I will expand more on this intellectual history of memory and location in Chapter Three.

for more nuanced and complex interpretations of the past that might help transcend the rigid and simplistic narratives that have come to dominate the public sphere. This is precisely the case made by the Basque author Edurne Portela whose 2016 essay on recent artistic representations of the Basque conflict argues that media such as literature and film might enable Basque society to interrogate: "cómo hemos dirimido, a partir del lenguaje creativo, el vivir en constante contacto con la violencia [...] y cómo puede contarse ahora esta sociedad herida, fragmentada y todavía polarizada" (*El eco de los disparos* 21). However, current artistic production in the Basque Country unfolds against a socio-political context where, despite the cessation of armed conflict, competing efforts to assert alternative historical narratives continue to fuel fierce antagonism within the public arena, a fact that has been highlighted by Joxean Fernández's analysis of political controversies that have arisen surrounding the release of several Basque documentary films dealing with the past ("Razones y contextos"). Nevertheless, alongside a prevailing political climate of often vehement discord around the establishment of an official historical memory, there has emerged a concomitant array of films, television series, novels and documentaries about the conflict that has even prompted one scholar to posit the existence of a "boom de la memoria" (Eser).[2] Moreover, a notable feature of the recent trajectory of historical memory in the Basque context is the degree to which these two spheres - the political and the cultural - have at times become closely implicated. A prominent example of this entanglement (and one which I will deal with at length in this thesis) has been the 2016 release of Fernando Aramburu's best-selling novel *Patria* - a work that has, on the one hand, been extolled by victims groups

[2] In the last ten years, several films about the legacy of the Basque conflict have been made by prominent Spanish directors including Borja Cobeaga's *El negociador* (2015) and *Fe de etarras* (2017), and Icíar Bollaín's *Maixabel* (2021). A number of features have also appeared on the global streaming platform Netflix such as Justin Webster's documentary film *El fin de ETA* (2017) and Manu Gómez's *Érase una vez en Euskadi* (2021). In terms of television series, notable productions include the documentary miniseries *ETA, el final del silencio* (2019) and *Impuros* (2021), as well as Aitor Gabilondo's HBO produced adaptation of Fernando Aramburu's best-selling novel *Patria* (2020). The Basque conflict has also been explored in several critically acclaimed novels, most notably Ramón Saizarbitoria's *Martutene* (2012) and Harkaitz Cano's *Twist* (2011), both of which were awarded the most prestigious Basque literary prize - the Premio Euskadi de la Literatura.

and politicians as the definitive account of the horror inflicted by ETA yet, on the other hand, chastised for its cynical perpetuation of a de-historicised, Manichean narrative of the conflict. Although himself a fierce critic of Aramburu's novel, Basque literary scholar Joseba Gabilondo has recognised its cultural and political significance, even going so far as to label the work "a phenomenon" that "might point to the way in which the Conflict will be officially dealt with by the Spanish state in future years" (*Introduction* 302). Given the novel's prominent position within disputes over historical memory in the Basque Country, the controversies surrounding *Patria* and the manner in which it has become embroiled in broader struggles to assert an overarching narrative of the past will constitute the main point of departure for this research project.

With that in mind, this thesis originates from a firm conviction that the prevailing memory disputes surrounding the legacy of the Basque conflict are a pertinent illustration of how top-down attempts to impose a single historical or collective memory, when carried out by powerful institutions such as those directly belonging to or closely aligned with the central government, frequently serve to perpetuate discord long after violence has ceased. Far from being innocent or objective, the production of historical memory is a process that is ripe for political exploitation and abuse, and, as such, is frequently instrumentalised with a view to achieving present-day aims.[3] Writing at the turn of the millennium on the Israeli-Palestinian conflict, Edward Said argued that when we talk about memory in a national context, we refer to something that is constructed "by manipulating certain bits of the national past, suppressing others, elevating still others in an entirely functional way" (179). My own research adopts a similar critical perspective towards the problems surrounding historical memory in the Basque case and, as a result, chimes on a theoretical level not only with Said,

[3] For specific scholarship on historical memory in a Spanish context see Jerez-Ferran and Amago (2010), Tamarit Sumalla (2013), Ribeiro de Menezes (2014) and Resina (2018).

but also with the view expressed by Jeffrey Olick when he cautions that "accounts of *the* collective memory of any group or society are usually accounts of the memories of some subset of the group, particularly of those [...] whose opinions are more highly valued" ("Collective Memory" 338-9). Like Olick, I am wary of the fact that any discussion of a single collective memory inevitably "over-totalizes" ("From Collective Memory" 152), thereby obscuring the plurality of individual memories, stories, and artistic representations of the past that proliferate in a given society, especially one that finds itself in the immediate aftermath of conflict.

For that reason, my use of the term *locating* in the title of this thesis signals a deliberate attempt to both expose and resist the aforementioned suppression that results from a totalising approach to historical memory. Where there exists a clear danger of the plurality of perspectives on the past being erased by the imposition of a reified collective memory, it becomes necessary to re-emphasise the individual aspect of remembrance, a measure for which Olick's alternative notion of *collected memory* advocates insofar as it "locates shared memories in individual minds and sees collective outcomes as aggregated individual processes" ("Collective Memory" 338). However, as much as I wish to advocate for a partial shift of focus from the collective onto the individual, by no means do I wish to reject Halbwachs' original concept of *les cadres sociaux* altogether. On the contrary, my understanding of memory closely aligns with that of Susannah Radstone who contends that memory "is only ever instantiated locally, at a specific place and a specific time" (117-18). Hence, it is these particular places and times that still provide the different frameworks within which individual acts of remembrance occur. Consequently, I wish to follow recent scholarship in memory studies (Dorr et al.) which argues that analytical focus be given

towards the particular locations or contexts, whether they be social, political, or historical, in which individuals remember.

To that end, this project will draw on feminist epistemology in order to examine how various Basque authors have engaged with memory in their work in a way that specifically foregrounds the located character of remembrance and, in so doing, destabilises totalising views of the past. Indeed, such an approach has been strongly endorsed by literary scholars Marianne Hirsch and Valerie Smith who have jointly posited that feminism provides a natural lens for students of cultural memory whose research works alongside the theoretical premise that "cultural memory is located in a specific context rather than subsumed into monolithic and essentialist categories" (6). As Hirsch and Smith have maintained, feminism's close preoccupation with differential power relations and the impact of these on the visibility and valorisation (or lack thereof) of certain subjective perspectives dovetails neatly with scholarship from within memory studies that, in seeking to critically interrogate and subvert hegemonic memory discourses, is concerned with how particular historical narratives can be alternately amplified or silenced.

Primary Texts

The authors whose work I have chosen to focus on in this project have been selected according to a number of considerations. First and foremost, it is worth explaining what I mean when I refer to literature that is specifically *Basque* as the term Basque literature is itself a category that remains subject to various interpretations. Even today, major studies of Basque literature such as Jon Kortazar's *Contemporary Basque Literature* (2016) and Mari Jose Olaziregi's *Basque Literary History* (2012) continue to adopt a more traditional

approach that deals exclusively with literature that is written in *euskara*. That being said, evidence of a shift can be seen in Olaziregi's preface to the latter work where she adds an important caveat, acknowledging the fact that "neither literature written in the Basque language [...] nor the language itself has provided the exclusive and complete literary expression of Basque reality" (10). An alternative approach and one that seems to be gaining greater acceptance can be seen in that of scholars such as Jesús María Lasagabaster and Joseba Gabilondo who have adopted a wider understanding of Basque literature that is defined by the fact that - regardless of whether they write in Basque, Spanish, or French - its authors originate from the Basque Country and the subjects that they explore can be seen as specifically Basque.[4]

In the present study, my use of the term *Basque literature* is more in line with this second, broader definition of Basque literature: my primary corpus consists of five novels, two of which were written originally in *euskara* and three in Spanish; all five authors were born and raised in the Basque Autonomous Community, with all but one still residing there; and, as I have already noted, the Basque conflict forms a clear narrative backdrop in each of the texts I will examine. On the one hand, my choice of primary texts stems from a desire to reflect the reality that the Basque Country is not a region that is linguistically homogeneous and, as such, my inclusion of works by authors writing in its two main languages acknowledges this diglossic situation. On the other hand, there is a more pragmatic reason behind my choice of primary texts, namely the fact that my own knowledge of *euskara* is not sufficiently advanced to allow me to read fiction in the original language. Consequently, although I have made a deliberate decision to incorporate novels written originally in *euskara*, I have been restricted to those that have subsequently been translated into Spanish.

[4] In *Before Babel: A History of Basque Literatures* Gabilondo's definition of Basque literature even includes work written in English about the Basque Country by the Basque diaspora in the US.

Olaziregi makes the important point that, despite the vital work of small, independent publishing houses and increased support from the Basque government for translation in the last two decades, it remains the case that, notwithstanding the success of individual authors like Bernardo Atxaga and Kirmen Uribe, a large proportion of literature written in *euskara* is not translated into Spanish, while that which is often finds the bulk of its readership in the Spanish-speaking Basque community ("Peripheral Being" 37-38). This unfortunate situation has also been highlighted by the writer Iban Zaldua who as recently as 2017 drew attention to the limited availability of literature written about the conflict in Basque for those with little or no knowledge of *euskara* ("Un paseo").

A further point to note is that, as well as being Basque, the five authors whose work is featured in this thesis are all women. Cristina Ortiz Ceberio and María Pilar Rodríguez have drawn attention to the fact that the last decade or so has been a prolific period for Basque female authors, a number of whom have enjoyed considerable success in both *euskara* and Spanish ("New Worlds of Fiction"). This upward trend reached something of an apex at the 2022 edition of the Premios Euskadi de Literatura when, for the first time in the thirty-year history of the awards, the winners in all seven categories were women. Such unprecedented critical success seems all the more remarkable given the fact that, as Gabilondo has remarked: "Women writers continued to be marginal until the late 1990s" (*Before Babel* 248). For her part, Olaziregi has attributed this increase in the number and visibility of women writers to both the encouragement of new literary voices by the inauguration of numerous grants and prizes, as well as what she terms "the feminization of reading" (*Basque Literary History* 177). Nonetheless, as Kortazar has cautioned, it would be inaccurate to suggest that this cohort of writers all belong to a single literary movement or generation (*Introducción*). On the contrary, amongst the authors included in this thesis there is an age-gap of almost two

decades between the youngest - Aixa de la Cruz, born in 1988 - and the oldest - Karmele Jaio, born in 1970. As such, having grown up at different stages of the conflict, the lived experiences of each of these authors would by no means have been similar, with some witnessing first-hand the worst years of violence during the eighties, and others only reaching their teens at a time when terrorist attacks had become less of a daily occurrence in the Basque Country.

However, a clear commonality in the work of all five writers is their shared concern with narrating the violence that occurred in the Basque Country over the course of the conflict. That being said, it is not the case that, like *Patria*, the sole intention of their work is to focus exclusively on the violence perpetrated by ETA. Indeed, one could argue that these novels corroborate Gabilondo's recent claim that the conflict has become a kind of narrative background in contemporary Basque literature that "points to a complex and traumatic moment whereby Basque narrative cannot account for such a violence and yet cannot but represent it indirectly as a latent reality" (*Introduction* 301). Adopting what could be termed a more holistic view of the conflict, these authors address multiple forms of violence in their work, not merely that committed at the hands of terrorist and counter-terrorist groups, and not least the misogynistic violence suffered by girls and women. In that regard, what all of these novelists evidently have in common is the feminist perspective that informs their literary explorations of not only historical violence, but also the question of how we relate to and represent that violence from the vantage point of the present. Finally, an additional prominent feature of each novel is the notable degree of self-reflexivity that characterises the narrative approach to these issues, an aspect that is illustrated by the fact that all five authors have chosen narrators who are writers themselves.

Previous Scholarship

With barely a decade having passed since ETA's 2011 ceasefire, it is unsurprising that there still exist few critical studies - particularly in English - that thoroughly examine the work of contemporary Basque authors who, writing within the post-conflict period, have sought to address issues surrounding the legacy of the recent past through the medium of literary fiction. To date, the most in-depth analysis in this area has been carried out by Ortiz Ceberio and Pilar Rodríguez whose 2020 monograph *Ellas cuentan: representaciones artísticas de la violencia en el País Vasco desde la perspectiva de género* draws primarily upon affect theory to examine several of the novels included in this thesis (as well as texts - both filmic and literary - predating the post-conflict era). Focusing on the artistic representation of what they term the "mundo afectivo" (190), the principal concern of the latter study is to examine how female authors and filmmakers have illustrated the effects of violence - both political and gender-based - from an emotional perspective and its deleterious impact on the social connections that underpinned groups and communities. Elsewhere, short analyses of several of the novels that this project explores can be found in a number of academic journals that have devoted one-off issues to the recent work of contemporary Basque women writers. For example, in her contribution to a special edition of the Canadian journal *Symposium*, Olaziregi provides only a brief assessment of Karmele Jaio's retrospective critique in *La casa del padre* of the patriarchal structures of institutions such as the traditional family and the nationalist political movement ("La casa del padre en ruinas"). Similarly, in their article on Katixa Agirre's *Los turistas desganados*, while Kortazar and Rodríguez Minambres highlight a range of elements present within the novel, from its use of metafictional devices to its playful reworking of the road novel genre, none of these aspects are explored in any significant detail ("Katixa Agirre"). For the most part, these studies

remain rather cursory, extending no further than providing an overview of the principal themes and narrative techniques contained within each novel.

Given the limitations of earlier critical studies, this thesis aims to make a substantial and innovative contribution to the paucity of existing scholarship on post-conflict Basque literature in several ways. Firstly, I intend to situate the work of contemporary Basque authors more firmly within the specific context of the critical debates on the prevailing hegemonic state and media narrative about ETA, as well as the antagonistic, Manichean and zero-sum approach to the past that this narrative perpetuates. In an effort to demonstrate how certain authors depart from the dominant discourse on the Basque conflict within the Spanish state, I will argue that several prominent works of contemporary Basque literature can be characterised by their self-reflexive attitude towards memory. To illustrate this assertion, my aim is to examine how these novels foreground and problematise the role of the writer and the very act of representing the past. Furthermore, I will argue that, in so doing, they seek to destabilise totalising and static interpretations of recent history in the Basque Country. Secondly, in making this argument, I will propose that these various literary explorations of memory in post-conflict Basque literature align much more closely with the principles of *agonistic memory* than the antagonistic discourses around remembrance that have gained greater prevalence in the public arena over the last decade or so. No existing studies of memory in Basque literature have adopted such an analytical approach and, hence, my application of agonistic memory as a theoretical lens is, in this critical context, an entirely original one. Finally, the originality of this project can be further evidenced by the critical attention it dedicates to the concept of *location* - a term employed with a dual meaning in the title of this thesis to refer to both social location, defined in terms of feminist epistemology, as well as the more geographical sense of actual physical places. By analysing the literary

depiction of the intersections woven between these distinct but interrelated concepts, I will attempt to make the case that the notion of location plays an integral role in the efforts of these authors to articulate a more agonistic outlook on memory in their work.

Structure of Thesis

The second chapter of this thesis will establish the socio-political and cultural backdrop against which I will conduct my subsequent analysis of location and memory in contemporary Basque fiction. In it, I will provide a detailed discussion of the ongoing disputes over historical memory that have come to be known in the Basque context as *la batalla del relato* ("the battle for the narrative"). My analysis of these disputes will focus on the ongoing divisions that have resulted from the intense politicisation of historical memory, the zero-sum struggle to assert an overarching narrative of the Basque conflict, the attendant efforts to delegitimise alternative historical viewpoints, and the way in which sensitive issues such as victimhood have become entangled within these rancorous disputes. Following on from this, I will examine the critical debates surrounding the publication and reception of Fernando Aramburu's best-selling novel, *Patria*, with a view to demonstrating how adherents to the hegemonic state narrative of the Basque conflict have sought to co-opt this deeply polarising work as the definitive account of ETA's violence. Finally, I will make the case that Bull and Hansen's recent theory of agonistic memory - through its endorsement of self-reflective, multi-perspectivist and non-Manichean engagements with memory - offers an effective means of conceptualising the clear divergence between the antagonistic mode of remembrance perpetuated by *Patria* and the alternative approaches to memory that have been pursued elsewhere in contemporary Basque fiction.

By first examining feminist contributions to the theorisation of *place*, the aim of Chapter Three is to establish the main theoretical framework for my later analysis. Referencing the likes of Doreen Massey and Gillian Rose, I will outline how feminist thought has rejected essentialist conceptualisations of place as a site of fixed identity and a single monolithic history, advocating instead a relational view of place that emphasises dynamic power relations, irreducible multiplicities, and competing histories. Furthermore, I will argue that differing interpretations of place are invariably a consequence of the particularities of *location* - a concept that I will also attempt to define for the purposes of this thesis through reference to key texts by Adrienne Rich and Donna Haraway that have become influential in feminist epistemological thought.

In Chapters Four and Five, I will begin the analysis of my primary texts by examining two works that bear a particular resemblance in their common exploration of the violence of the conflict period from a gender perspective, their attempts to locate individual experiences of violence within specific socio-political contexts, and their clear depiction of the underlying connections between the personal and the political. While neither work's primary focus is the political violence of the period *per se*, I will suggest that it is through their shared concern with the contextualisation and historicisation of their respective portrayals of patriarchal violence that they present an obvious departure from prevailing discourse on the conflict.

The first of these texts is Karmele Jaio's *La casa del padre*, a novel where the act of memory is located within the present-day circumstances of the feminist movement that emerged in the wake of the *La Manada* rape case, and that employs this contemporary critical lens to reexamine the years of the Basque conflict from a gender perspective. In my analysis, I will focus on the way in which Jaio's representation of the family home foregrounds its

gendered power relations, while making the case that the process by which Ismael, the novel's male author-protagonist, comes to recognise these latent inequalities serves to destabilise his nostalgic view of the past. I will argue that Ismael is forced to undertake a critical re-interrogation of his childhood memories as he attempts to come to terms with his personal implication within the patriarchal structures of the society and home in which he was raised. In addition, I will illustrate how the novel situates the patriarchal dynamics of the family home within the broader power structures of its historical context, exposing the relatedness between the public and private spheres in order to equally critique the pervasive culture of toxic masculinity within the radical nationalist movement of the period.

The focus of Chapter Five will be Edurne Portela's *Mejor la ausencia* which I will examine as a feminist Bildungsroman that problematises the genre's conventional coming-of-age journey in order to unveil the relatedness between the patriarchal violence experienced at home by the child narrator, Amaia, and the abuse to which she is subjected in the wider world. By drawing particular attention to the novel's depiction of the emerging counter-cultural movements in the Basque Country during the eighties, I will highlight the way in which Portela historicises the connections between the conflictual relations of the domestic sphere and the turbulent socio-political backdrop against which these unfold. Moreover, I will analyse how the second half of the novel takes on a self-reflexive, retrospective tone by problematising Amaia's attempts to impose a coherent narrative upon her lived experiences, while also resisting moral didacticism by portraying, in a similar vein to *La casa del padre*, the complex entanglements of the narrator's personal implication within these structures of violence and the extent to which they have shaped her own subjectivity.

In Chapter Six I will turn my attention to Katixa Agirre's *Los turistas desganados* which I will examine as a feminist reworking of the road novel that resists the genre's conventions of escapist idealism, and instead problematises the journey undertaken by the novel's Basque narrator, Ulia, and her Spanish husband, Gustavo as a means of reinforcing existing self-other relations. I will argue that the novel satirises the male tourist gaze by exposing its demarcation of the Basque Country as a place of exotic otherness that perpetuates essentialist cultural tropes of Basque identity. Crucially, I will trace the way in which Agirre posits an implicit correlation between this essentialising gaze and the demonising rhetoric of contemporary Spanish media discourse on the Basque conflict. Finally, I will draw upon the tenets of agonistic memory to consider how Ulia's attempts to relate her personal attachment to the conflict offers a narrative counterpoint that rejects the Manichean tenor of these dominant perspectives.

In Chapters Seven and Eight, I will complete the main section of my analysis by focusing on the way in which the two youngest authors featured in this thesis deal with the representational issues posed by negotiating their more mediated relationship to the conflict. In the first of these chapters, I will examine Gabriela Ybarra's *El comensal*, beginning with the novel's first section where the author depicts her own attempts to relate the real-life assassination of her grandfather by ETA, while also negotiating her indirect relationship to this traumatic event. Drawing on Marianne Hirsch's theory of postmemory, I will discuss the narrative techniques employed by Ybarra in order to locate her own status as author in the present in order to underscore the radical unknowability of the past for her. In particular, I will highlight how Ybarra renders visible the literariness of her narrative through her playfully subversion of genre and her reflexive commentary on historical source material. Following this, I will establish a connection between the novel's first part and the second by

arguing that Ybarra's subsequent portrayal of her own struggles to overcome the death of her mother illustrate the reflexive process by which she comes to understand memory as an act of representation that is invariably located in the present.

Before presenting my concluding remarks, I will round off my main analysis in Chapter Eight with a discussion of Aixa De la Cruz's *La línea del frente*, a novel that inscribes the dilemmas over the legacy of the Basque conflict within the context of the precarious aftermath of Spain's 2008 financial crisis. Building on prior studies that identify De la Cruz's work as part of an emerging *literatura de la crisis*, I will examine the author's portrayal of her narrator's anxiety over a loss of stable identity amidst a late-capitalist world where uncertainty and instability predominate. Drawing on the work of David Harvey and Foucault's concept of the heterotopia, I will argue that the novel problematises the way in which these circumstances simultaneously precipitate both the narrator's pursuit of the enclosure of place as an illusory source of stable identity and her wilful seduction by a heavily romanticised narrative of the conflict. Through its ironic framing of these parallel self-deceptions, I will make the case that De la Cruz's novel offers implicitly a wry reflection on current inclinations towards totalising narratives, deftly pointing instead to the intrinsically provisional, partial, and subjective character of all interpretations of the past.

Chapter Two: Socio-Political and Cultural Context

The End of ETA and "la batalla del relato"

On the twentieth of October 2011 the Basque separatist group ETA announced the end of an armed campaign for independence from the Spanish state that had lasted just over four decades and that, according to figures compiled by Spain's Interior Ministry, resulted in upwards of eight hundred deaths, more than a third of which constituted civilian fatalities (Galán). Three days prior to ETA's announcement an international peace conference aimed at facilitating an end to political violence had been held at the Aiete Palace in Donostia-San Sebastián. Amongst the attendees at the Aiete conference were leaders of the major Basque political parties, as well as prominent international figures such as former UN Secretary-General, Kofi Annan, former Taoiseach of Ireland, Bertie Ahern, then president of Sinn Féin, Gerry Adams, and former British diplomat, Jonathan Powell, a chief negotiator for the Blair administration during the Northern Ireland peace talks. The talks at Aiete culminated in a five-point declaration that called upon ETA to publicly declare the definitive cessation of all armed activity and urged the Spanish and French governments to initiate talks to resolve issues related to the conflict. Prompted by the outcome of Aiete, ETA subsequently issued a written press statement in which it affirmed "el cese definitivo de su actividad armada" (qtd. in Aizpeolea). At the same time, it echoed the delegates' appeal to both the French and Spanish governments to engage in a process of dialogue with a view to resolving what the separatist organisation termed "las consecuencias del conflicto y [...] la superación de la confrontación armada" (qtd. in Aizpeolea).

Although political and civic life in the Basque Country has undergone a significant normalisation since ETA's renouncement of violence in the autumn of 2011, the issue of how to come to terms with a troubled legacy of more than forty years of political violence rapidly emerged as one of the foremost concerns for Basque society in the post-conflict era. As Teresa Whitfield explains:

> Basques held widely differing interpretations of what had happened and why. Many of their efforts to promote coexistence were coloured by a partisan construction of the history and violence they had experienced that were together subsumed within '*el relato*'. They shared a desire to arrive at 'the truth', and a determination that there should be no return to the dark days of the past. But their very great differences revealed a gulf in understanding of what that 'truth' might be, and thus the role of memory (282)

Over the last decade, the existence of diametrically opposed interpretations of the past has given rise to a highly politicised struggle in the public arena to impose a hegemonic narrative - a struggle that is commonly termed *la batalla del relato*, or "the battle for the narrative". Whereas the overwhelming majority of Basque society and the international actors at Aiete have contended that the Basque question should be understood as a political conflict, the Spanish government and much of the mainstream national media have vigorously maintained that ETA's violence amounted to nothing more than an issue of wanton terrorism thereby obviating any requirement for a political solution (Zulaika and Murua 354). Put simply, whilst the daily spectre of political violence may now be a thing of the past, the past itself "has become *war by other means*" (Álvarez and Hegarty 20).

However, the will to impose an authoritative account of recent history originates from a fundamental misconception about the functioning of memory and our relationship to the past. Hodgkins and Radstone reject the notion that an objective historical truth can ever be directly accessed, asserting instead that "the past is constituted in narrative, always representation, always construction" (2). Ricoeur similarly contends that it is invariably through narrative that we make sense of past events when he reminds us that no single version of events can ever lay claim to absolute historical truth: "The idea of an exhaustive narrative is a performatively impossible idea. The narrative necessarily contains a selective dimension" (*Memory, History, Forgetting* 448). Scholarship has shown that narratives that strenuously claim to offer a single historical truth are, to quote Toth, "by definition dishonest about their partial nature" (78). As Toth goes on to say, exclusive claims to historical truth are often grounded in a traditional dichotomy between history and memory where academic historians depict their own discipline as "an objective, rigorous and impartial scholarly enterprise in search of the authoritative account of past events (the historical truth) that can be clearly distinguished from the subjective, emotional and socially constructed world of collective memory" (78).

This is precisely the strategy that has been employed by a number of historians who have vigorously challenged the narrative that ETA's violence arose as part of a wider political conflict. Given that the position articulated by these scholars is that which most closely aligns with the approach of the Spanish government towards the Basque issue, I shall first explain the arguments of these scholars, before going on to detail the approach of the Spanish government itself. In the first instance, the attitude displayed by these historians towards the past exemplifies what Michael Rothberg has previously theorised as a deeply antagonistic conception of memory where it is viewed as "competitive or a zero-sum game [...] a struggle

for recognition in which there can only be winners and losers" (*Multidirectional Memory* 3). According to such a logic of contestation, one version of the past must eventually become hegemonic within the public arena. Based on that premise, Spanish scholars that have most prominently supported the narrative that ETA's violence was exclusively an issue of terrorism have deliberately set out to malign and delegitimise alternative versions of the past. Alonso and Molina, for instance, have dismissed the notion of a political conflict between the Basque people and the Spanish state as a mere "rhetorical instrument" (165) that is designed to justify and rationalise ETA's terrorism. Fernández has expressed similar contempt for the conviction that the Basque conflict has any basis in reality, dismissing it as something that "sólo ha existido sobre el papel" (215). For their part, Castells and Molina have contended that the narrative of political conflict held within much of Basque nationalism displays "un abierto desdén por la historia académica" whilst favouring instead "la débil carga epistemológica de la memoria" (223). By rigidly opposing history to memory in a way that devalues the latter, the intention of these scholars is to assert their own epistemological privilege, as professional historians who are unburdened by ideological influence, when it comes to speaking about the past.

Yet this argument is grounded in the spurious notion of a single, historical truth to which historiography alone has access - a notion that, as I have demonstrated in the previous paragraph, many scholars now recognise as a falsehood. Were it the case that professional historians alone possessed the authority to speak about the past, the entire enterprise of historical memory would become the exclusive preserve of a privileged few. As Olick and Robbins have pointed out, historiography's traditional monopoly over knowledge of the past has been destabilised by the recognition that "history is written by people in the present for particular purposes, and the selection and interpretation of 'sources' are always arbitrary"

(110). While strenuously maintaining the falsity of a narrative of political conflict, these scholars have nonetheless expressed grave concern at the widespread acceptance that such a view of the past has achieved within Basque society. For his part, Fernández has alleged that the broad consensus around this particular historical interpretation is the product of "la muy eficiente industria cultural que le da su respaldo: asociaciones *por la memoria histórica*, medios de comunicación, editoriales, una red de librerías afines, una fuerte presencia en las bibliotecas públicas, el control de parte del sistema educativo y un entramado institucional con recursos financieros" (237). According to this logic, in the face of the *abertzale* left's[5] alleged success in propagating their own partisan narrative through a tightly controlled network of supportive institutions, it becomes incumbent upon the rest of society to forcefully oppose such an inaccurate version of historical memory which, were it to become hegemonic, would mean that ETA's terrorists would evade accountability for their actions.

However, not content with merely disputing the veracity of the political conflict narrative, these historians have inveighed against Basque nationalism itself in an attempt to portray it as an ideology that is intrinsically violent and, as such, can hold zero legitimacy in a peaceful and democratic society. The belief that Basque citizens' desire for self-determination inherently foments violence is encapsulated in Fernández's designation of nationalism's ideological foundations as "los mitos que matan" (2014). Similarly, Alonso has claimed that, even though large sectors of Basque nationalism have long rejected recourse to violent means, by continuing to question the constitutional *status quo* and maintaining aspirations to ultimately secede from the Spanish state, nationalism "endows terrorism with

[5] The *abertzale* left is the term used to refer to the spectrum of left-wing Basque nationalist parties and organisations. Presently, its main political representative is the coalition EH Bildu which holds 21 seats in the Basque parliament (28%) and was formed as a merger of Alternatiba, Aralar, Eusko Alkartasuna, and Sortu. Its leftist ideology distinguishes it from the Partido Nacionalista Vasco (PNV) - a conservative and Christian-democratic nationalist party that (barring a brief period in opposition from 2009 to 2012) has been in government in the Basque parliament since the introduction of the Statute of Autonomy in 1980. It currently holds 31 seats (41%) and governs alongside the regional branch of the Spanish Socialist Workers Party (PSOE).

an implicit legitimacy" (710). Expressing himself in no uncertain terms, Alonso makes the unfounded assertion that nationalism "bears a tradition of violence that has operated as a societal and cultural facilitator for terrorism" (711). Of course, Alonso's failure to similarly equate Spanish nationalism with any form of violence demonstrates the weak logic of his claim. By identifying political nationalism as the very wellspring of terrorism in the Basque Country, these historians contend that ETA's 2011 ceasefire can only represent a false dawn for, so long as nationalism refuses to renounce its secessionist aspirations, the spectre of violence remains dormant: "el caldo de cultivo que ha nutrido de significado al odio y la violencia se mantendrá latente bajo una fachada de normalidad democrática" (Fernández 240). More recently Alonso has lamented that the defeat of terrorism "ha resultado incompleta" and will only be fully realised whenever there is "una adecuada y contundente 'derrota política' de los terroristas" (79).

The campaign to delegitimise Basque nationalism's attempts to articulate its own interpretation of recent history constitutes a strategy conducted by state-aligned historians to reinforce their own monopoly (and that of the Spanish government) over historical memory. The Basque issue therefore serves as a clear example of Hodgkins and Radstone's assertion that - when it comes to memory disputes more generally - "the focus of contestation [...] is very often not conflicting accounts of what actually happened in the past so much as the question of who or what is entitled to speak for that past in the present" (1). By inferring a direct causality between the entire ideology of Basque nationalism and the violence inflicted by ETA, the objective of these scholars is to invalidate the authority with which Basque nationalists seek to express a reading of the past that differs from that of the state. I believe that this only serves to exacerbate antagonism in the post-conflict era by promoting an exclusionary form of remembrance that is based on, to use Toth's definition, narratives that

"exclude the possibility of representing a certain part of the past in any other way" (88). Whether deliberately or not, these historians fail to recognise the necessarily partial and subjective nature of the historical narratives they endorse. By proclaiming their own interpretation of the past as objective truth whilst simultaneously attempting to denigrate alternative narratives they stand directly at odds with what Ricoeur distinguishes as the ethical potential of narrative in a post-conflict setting. By understanding our knowledge of the past as always configured in narrative (and therefore always able to be reconfigured) memory becomes an exercise in "*telling otherwise*, and also in letting others tell their own history, especially the founding events which are the ground of a collective memory" ("Memory and Forgetting" 9). By allowing for multiple and conflicting interpretations of the past to be articulated within the public arena, historical memory becomes a democratic exercise in plurality that proceeds from the bottom-up, rather than the top-down imposition, enforced by those in power, of a single, historical truth.

Present Politics and the Perpetual Past

As mentioned above, the reason I wish to draw specific attention to the views of these scholars is that their arguments have gained considerable purchase in the actions of the Spanish state, particularly under the conservative Partido Popular, towards the Basque issue. As discussed by Toth, where the existence of conflicting historical narratives renders societal remembrance highly contentious, the state becomes a crucial actor given its unique capacity to foster a less antagonistic environment or, alternatively, to aggressively promote a single narrative often at the expense of marginalising social groups that do not subscribe to that narrative. In the Basque context, far from being a mere academic dispute, *la batalla del relato* has exerted a very tangible impact on present socio-political developments both in the

region itself and across the Spanish state. As Tellidis has pointed out, the conflicting narratives projected by both ETA and the Spanish state "may not reflect historical reality, yet their constructs dictate action that has very real effects" (539). Most immediately these effects came to bear on the Spanish government's intransigent response to ETA's 2011 ceasefire and its approach, or lack thereof, to the question of transitional justice. Whitfield has offered a thorough account of how the electoral success of Mariano Rajoy's conservative Partido Popular (PP) in the November 2011 general election reversed much of the optimism that had been created in the Basque Country following the Aiete peace conference and ETA's subsequent abandonment of violence. While the stage looked set for ETA to commence bilateral negotiations with the French and Spanish governments with a view to bringing about the armed group's complete dissolution, the actions of the PP administration served instead to prolong that process so that it did not occur until 2018. Under Rajoy's premiership, the conservative government remained driven by a steadfast adherence to the same hardline anti-terrorist discourse that they had embraced both in opposition (2004-2011) and that had been cultivated during their last term in government under José María Aznar during the early 2000s. Even when ETA had publicly announced a definitive cessation of violence Rajoy's government continued to view the Basque issue through a narrow counter-terrorist lens. The PP's refusal to countenance engagement in any sort of official process was contrary to the majority wishes of Basque society where there was a clear support for concessions on issues such as the relocation of ETA prisoners to the Basque Country (Whitfield 295-97).

Moreover, despite the assurances of the independent members of the International Verification Commission that ETA's repudiation of violence was genuine, the government refused to meet with the former or even recognise its very legitimacy, thereby scuppering any hope of dialogue. On top of this, the controversial arrests of members of the wider *abertzale*

community continued apace as the PP did little to disprove the widely-held perception within the Basque Country that its entire attitude towards Basque nationalism was still conditioned by the crude belief that "todo es ETA" - a maxim that had motivated the criminalisation and detention of significant sectors of non-violent forms of nationalism during Aznar's second term in office at the turn of the millennium. As Whitfield states regarding the PP's refusal to waver from their counterterrorist stance: "the policy was remarkable for its scant reflection of the fact that an end of ETA's armed activities had changed the situation dramatically" (258). For Tellidis, the way in which Rajoy's government persisted in acting according to a narrative that equated large swathes of Basque nationalism with terrorism served only to deepen much of Basque society's sense of alienation from Madrid. By making little distinction between the violent and non-violent actors within the *abertzale* movement, the PP government, in Tellidis' view, "has inhibited an inclusionary, legitimate, and everyday peace" (540).

Nowhere was the antagonism at the heart of *la batalla del relato* more in evidence than during the acrimonious disputes that recently accompanied the tenth anniversary of ETA's 2011 ceasefire. To mark the occasion two major political figures from the *abertzale* left, Arnaldo Otegi (General Secretary of EH Bildu) and Arkaitz Rodríguez (General Secretary of Sortu) made a joint statement at Aiete in which they proclaimed the need to recognize the hurt caused to "todas las víctimas" (qtd. in Ormazabal). Furthermore, they specifically acknowledged the victims of ETA to whom they expressed their regret for the suffering caused, stating: "nunca debió haberse producido" (qtd. in Ormazabal). This direct address to ETA's victims by Otegi and Rodríguez constituted a significant semantic shift from earlier statements. Most notably it contrasted with the language employed by ETA themselves upon their dissolution in 2018 when they had exclusively asked for forgiveness from those victims "sin responsabilidad alguna" ("ETA al pueblo vasco"). Naturally, this

qualification of victimhood was widely understood to infer the presumed existence of a separate category of victims that *had* in some sense deserved the suffering inflicted upon them. While the unqualified nature of Otegi and Rodríguez's more recent statement was cautiously welcomed in the centre-left daily *El País*, for others, the Basque politicians' words of regret had either not gone far enough or could not be accepted as a sincere expression of remorse. For example, the prominent victims' group COVITE[6] responded to Otegi by reiterating that nothing short of abandoning the very ideology of nationalism itself would atone for ETA's past violence. Refusing to accept his and Rodríguez's statement of contrition, they exhorted Otegi to renounce "la identidad nacionalista excluyente por la que ETA y sus cómplices políticos y sociales persiguieron, hirieron y mataron" ("COVITE recuerda a Otegi"). Similarly, the conservative daily *ABC* vehemently denounced Otegi's statement as part of a Machiavellian stratagem being conducted by the *abertzale* left with a view to securing political influence over Pedro Sánchez's present socialist government ("El falso perdón de un terrorista"). At the same time, *ABC* also admonished Sánchez himself for engaging in discussions with the *abertzale* leadership regarding the latter's potential support for the socialist premier's upcoming budget in the Spanish parliament ("Bildu desnuda a Sánchez"). The right-wing newspaper portrayed these discussions as a nefarious *quid pro quo* in which Sánchez was prepared to concede the release of further ETA prisoners in exchange for the *abertzale* leadership's guarantee of their support in crucial parliamentary votes and hollow public statements of regret like the one issued on the tenth anniversary of ETA's permanent ceasefire. Denying the basic fact that the terrorist group no longer exists, such expressions of outrage were echoed across Spain's political right as other prominent parliamentarians deplored Sánchez's engagement with the *abertzale* left, deeming it

[6] COVITE (el Colectivo de Víctimas de Terrorismo) was established in 1998 to advocate on behalf of victims of terrorism and their families in the Basque Country. Its current president is Consuelo Ordóñez whose brother Gregorio Ordóñez - a PP councillor in San Sebastián - was assassinated by ETA in January 1995. The other association representing victims of ETA's terrorism is AVT (Asociación de Víctimas del Terrorismo) which was founded in 1981.

equivalent to collaboration with terrorists. For instance, Santiago Abascal, the leader of the far-right party Vox, decried that "ETA está en la dirección del Estado y vamos a tener que votar en el Congreso los presupuestos de ETA" while Jaime Mayor Oreja, the former PP Interior Minister under Aznar, warned that ETA was "más presente que nunca" (qtd. in Aduriz). The aforementioned episodes are a clear demonstration of what the Basque political philosopher Jule Goikoetxea has identified as "el uso por parte de la derecha de ETA [...] el intento de mantener el relato del enemigo interno" (qtd. in Muñoz). In essence, so long as the PP and Vox can continue to extract political capital by vilifying their socialist opponents as kowtowing to terrorists, it serves the immediate electoral interests of the Spanish right to perpetuate the falsehood that ETA has not quite disappeared and that an uncompromising counter-terrorist stance remains imperative.

Prolonging Division: The Politicisation of Victimhood

One issue over which *la batalla del relato* has exerted significant influence is the prevailing disputes concerning victimhood which "are currently reproducing the political divisions from the past" (Álvarez and Hearty 20). As Assmann notes, in societies that have endured a recent history of violence, recognition of victims is one of the first steps on the path towards achieving a sustainable social peace (61). Yet, in Spain and the Basque Country, achieving consensus on who should be recognised as a victim has instead fomented division as conflicting narratives on how the past should be understood have directly informed alternative interpretations of victimhood. Álvarez and Hearty highlight how, on the one hand, Basque society's broad acknowledgement of the past as a case of political violence has resulted in greater advocacy for an inclusive definition of victimhood that recognises human rights abuses inflicted by both state and paramilitary actors; on the other hand, the

Spanish government's more circumscribed focus on victims of ETA's violence is reflective of their attachment to a narrative of terrorism (20). Against this backdrop, victimhood in Spain has, according to Crumbaugh, become something which "vying political factions scramble to define on their own terms and thus to use as a means of disqualifying opponents' agendas" (365). MacDonald and Bernardo (2006) also attest to this politicisation of victimhood pointing to how, since the late nineties, prominent victims' groups such as the Asociación de Víctimas del Terrorismo (AVT) have allied themselves with the PP, enabling the latter to claim a moral authority and greater legitimacy for its hardline anti-terrorist stance. In the eyes of many victims groups their role in *la batalla del relato* is essential as the personal testimonies they share function as an effective counter-narrative against what they perceive to be the growing dominance of the *abertzale* left's narrative of political conflict - a narrative that they believe serves to whitewash ETA's terrorism (Argomániz). Once again, this perception that victims groups are losing *la batalla del relato* originates from what Rothberg identifies as an erroneous conception of memory as "competitive or a zero-sum game" (*Multidirectional Memory* 3).

Given the considerable sway that certain victims associations have held over the policymaking of successive Spanish governments, their claim that they are losing *la batalla del relato* hardly rings true. On the contrary, Spanish politicians have routinely utilised victims groups in the forceful promotion of a single narrative by employing them to "condemn and reject any explanations for violence that referred to politics or historical grievances" (Heath-Kelly and Fernández 17). Furthermore, by utilising post-9/11 understandings of terrorism as fanatical crime rather than political struggle, the Spanish state has sought to co-opt victims groups in order to delegitimise the entirety of Basque nationalism as extremist "by labelling political movements as apologists for terrorism" (2).

This cynical co-option of victims as a means of solidifying the state's version of the past is epitomised, as Heath-Kelly and Fernández have demonstrated, in the recently inaugurated Memorial Centre for the Victims of Terrorism where the Spanish government have attempted to institutionalise a narrative that frames ETA's violence as apolitical fanatical crime. The authors offer an incisive analysis of how the state-run museum's juxtaposition of ETA's terrorism alongside more recent jihadist attacks in Spain bolsters the government's narrative by "allowing the differences between nationalist and jihadist organisations to be erased from collective memory, and 'flattening' the representation of terrorism as apolitical, fanatical, violent crime" (2). In the eyes of its critics, the museum constitutes a major step in the Spanish government's aggressive promotion of a totalising historical narrative. For example, Basque filmmaker Aitor Merino has condemned the centre's inauguration and, specifically, its stated objective to "alentar narrativas veraces" as a strategy to "afianzar el relato oficial" while Basque-language author Katixa Agirre has reproved the state's imposition of a Manichean reading of the past through what she deems to be the centre's attempts to "decir qué está bien y qué es mendaz" (qtd. in Forner). In short, with the memorial centre serving to institutionalise a single historical narrative on behalf of the state, the claims of historians such as Fernández that a collective amnesia is being generated by the dominance of the *abertzale* left's spurious version of the past appear dubious at best. Indeed, the fact that Fernández himself was appointed to oversee the centre's archival and research work means that he currently occupies a central role in shaping and disseminating the state's official narrative.

The 'Patria' Phenomenon: Collective Texts and Politicised Narratives

Thus far I have attempted to contextualise *la batalla del relato* within the political domain by providing an overview of its ramifications in both political discourse and

government policy of the Spanish state during the post-conflict era. However, this project originates from a concern that is not so much to do with political narrative itself but rather with literary narrative, and the manner in which the latter has been cynically appropriated with a view to bolstering the state-driven discourse on ETA. As such, I now wish to turn my focus to the way in which literature, and more specifically Fernando Aramburu's extraordinarily successful novel *Patria* (2016), has been co-opted into *la batalla del relato* and thus become a formidable instrument in efforts to manipulate, on a national and international scale, collective memory of the Basque conflict. That is to say, in the case of *Patria*, powerful political actors (and to a lesser extent the author himself) have sought to utilise a particular literary text in order to cement the hegemonic status of a single historical narrative by endorsing the former as a totalising and objective account of the history of ETA's violence. Plenty of evidence exists to suggest that, often enough, literary texts can exert a very real influence over perception and knowledge of the past, especially those works that have achieved a certain canonical status, or what Rigney terms 'monumentality' (2011). In fact, Rigney contends that, in comparison with the typically plainer style of historical writing, literature arguably possesses a greater capacity to mould collective memory by virtue of its "narrativizing and aesthetic power" (348). Building on Aleida and Jan Assmann's concept of the 'cultural text', Astrid Erll proposes the related notion of the 'collective text' to designate those works which can profoundly shape a given society's cultural memory whenever readers come to attribute of a certain degree of referentiality to them (164). Eventually, such works can assume an almost reverential aura amongst readers once there is a sufficiently widespread belief that they provide a 'truthful' window onto a particular period of the past. As Erll states: "What is at stake when reading literature as collective texts is thus 'truth' according to memory" (165).

However, when literature is extolled for reflecting a single historical truth, one must question to what end such praise has been granted. Erll underlines the fact that texts can often be appropriated with the aim of reinforcing a particular view of the past when she states that "literature is frequently produced and received in rather pragmatic ways, and often enough with a referentializing and disambiguating eye" (165). Moreover, the matter of which texts manage to achieve this rare stature cannot be dissociated from questions of social and political power. Given that literary texts can offer various interpretations of the past, they possess an equal potential to affirm or subvert the hegemonic narratives within a society. As such, in a socio-political context like that of the Basque Country, where historical memory is a subject of such contestation, there is obvious political capital to be gained in ascribing value to literary texts that promote one's particular vision of the past, in the hope that through their powerful appeal to affect, they might prove a useful weapon in shaping collective memory.

As I have noted above, when it comes to literary representations of the Basque conflict, one novel stands head and shoulders above the rest in terms of the cultural prominence it has garnered both domestically and abroad. First published in 2016, Fernando Aramburu's *Patria* is set in a nameless small town, located not far from the author's native San Sebastián. The novel takes place over several decades and tells the story of two Basque families whose long-standing friendship is destroyed when Joxe Mari, the hot-headed eldest son of one household, enlists in a local ETA commando leading to his subsequent involvement in the assassination of Txato, a good-natured local businessman and the father of the neighbouring family. Thereafter, a bitter rift forms between the respective mothers as Miren zealously defends her firebrand son's service to the cause of Basque independence as a member of ETA, while the bereaved Bittori encounters little sympathy for her personal tragedy from her silent neighbours, eventually forcing her relocation to San Sebastián. Set

against the backdrop of ETA's 2011 ceasefire, the novel's *dénouement* concludes with a tacit embrace between the two mothers in the town square, in an apparent symbol of tentative reconciliation. As far as success goes, it is no exaggeration to say that *Patria* swiftly became something of a literary phenomenon, achieving unrivalled sales figures for a Basque author in such a short period of time, having sold well over one million copies to date (Jiménez Torres; Bezhanova). Within four years of its publication the novel was already entering its thirty-fifth print run and had been translated into over thirty-two languages (Jones). Moreover, between 2016 and 2018, Aramburu himself would go on to receive a host of literary awards for the work including the Premio Nacional de Narrativa, the Premio Nacional de la Crítica, the Premio Francisco Umbral, the Premio Euskadi de Literatura (en castellano), the Premio del Club Internacional de la Prensa, and the Premio Ramón Rubial.[7]

However, for many scholars, the commercial success of *Patria* is far from incidental but rather an obvious consequence of the novel's adoption of a particular perspective on the past that closely resonates with the prevailing state narrative and majority public opinion in Spain on ETA's violence. It goes without saying that literary representations of the past are never produced in a vacuum but invariably draw on current memory discourses within the specific socio-political context from which they emerge (Erll 153). With that in mind, numerous scholars have attributed the popular and critical success of *Patria* to the fact that it reproduces the dominant state-narrative on the Basque conflict, namely that there was no political conflict but solely an issue of egregious terrorist violence carried out by ETA and enabled by sympathisers and apologists within Basque nationalism more broadly. For that very reason, the interpretation that the novel offers of the past fits firmly within the officially

[7] In addition, in September 2020 the American television giant HBO released an adaptation of *Patria*. In light of this, the novel also represents what Erll terms a "transmedial phenomenon" (164) - a status that enhances its influence over collective memory.

sanctioned frames of Spanish memory culture's "horizons of meaning" (Erll 165). Helena Miguélez Carballeira has posited that *Patria* constitutes yet another exponent of "un particular conglomerado de productos mediáticos post-ETA, que al tiempo que promueven formas de memoria divisiva o triunfalista sobre el conflicto vasco no pierden ocasión de apuntalar también las políticas del status quo" ("Sobre Patria"). In a more detailed analysis of these state-aligned works that Miguélez Carballeira collectively terms a 'post-ETA poetics' she argues that cultural products such as Emilio Martínez Lázaro's comedy blockbuster *Ocho Apellidos Vascos* reinforce the hegemonic state narrative through their ahistorical treatment of political violence as depoliticised and inherently pathological ("Ocho apellidos vascos"). Basque literary critic Joseba Gabilondo concurs with this view, similarly contending that Aramburu's novel aligns with the attitude of the Spanish government and mainstream media towards the Basque conflict whereby ETA's violence is represented in a deeply Manichean and dehistoricised form (*Introduction* 302).

The novel's ahistorical treatment of ETA's violence has been outlined in detail by Iban Zaldua and Ramón Zallo who have each highlighted a range of anachronisms within *Patria* that detract from its verisimilitude for a Basque readership that would have lived through the period during which the novel's events take place. Zallo, for instance, takes issue with the historical inaccuracy of Aramburu's depiction of Basque society as one that is predominantly cowed into a complicit silence by the violence of ETA. He argues that, contrary to the author's portrayal, Basque society was extremely politically active around this time, not least in its opposition to ETA, as evidenced by the emergence of civil society groups such as Gesto por la Paz and Elkarri who have taken a leading role in advocating for an end to violence from the mid-eighties onwards. For his part, Zaldua insists that the novel's representation of the *abertzale* community's fervent religiosity and their subservience to the authoritarian priest

Don Serapio is more redolent of the social climate of the sixties and seventies, rather than the eighties and nineties by which stage left-leaning sectors of Basque nationalism were becoming increasingly secularised ("La literatura, ¿sirve para algo?"). Both critics equally find fault with the near total absence of ideological debate in the novel especially considering that its events unfold at a time when reference to ideas associated with marxism and revolutionary socialism would have been common currency within *abertzale* circles. In lieu of any serious ideological discussion, through the character of the impetuous teenage son Joxe Mari, the novel reduces the decision to join ETA down to nothing more than the violent impulse of an reckless adolescent who has been indoctrinated within a culture gripped by a quasi-fundamentalist belief in independence. All in all, these various criticisms illustrate how the ahistorical character of Aramburu's novel resonates with the official state narrative on the past whereby any political or historical contextualisation of ETA's activity cannot be countenanced lest it be seen to justify the atrocities committed by the separatist group.

As outlined above, literary texts rarely amass such pre-eminence by virtue of their inherent artistic qualities alone and, as such, the key to understanding how certain works achieve the coveted status of a 'collective text' lies largely in their reception within a society. As I have already indicated, *Patria*'s success must be examined in terms of its place within the aforementioned political context of historical memory disputes that are unfolding within the Spanish state. The conspicuous backing that Aramburu's work has received from a number of prominent political figures exemplifies how the novel has been co-opted with a view to reinforcing the dominance of the state's narrative on the past. As the Basque author Edurne Portela puts it, the novel's almost instantaneous canonisation - a direct result of its critical and political reception - constitutes "el paradigma de la institucionalización del relato hegemónico a través de la ficción" ("El relato"). By way of illustration, amongst the

high-profile admirers of *Patria* was none other than Spain's former conservative prime minister Mariano Rajoy, who, upon awarding Aramburu the Premio Francisco Umbral in 2017, lauded the work as the authoritative account of ETA's violence: "hay que leerlo, también, para saber qué ocurrió; también para conocer la verdad, ahora que hay quien ha querido decretar que no hay verdades, sino diferentes perspectivas, relatos a gusto del consumidor. Para conocer la verdad también hay que leer *Patria*. También para distinguir el bien del mal y para poder contar a todos lo que un ser humano no debe hacer nunca" (Rajoy). By proclaiming the novel's clear depiction of objective historical truth and its unambiguous moral exemplarity, the former prime minister's words were quite clearly formulated with what we can understand as, to employ Erll's terms, a "referentializing and disambiguating eye" (165). In other words, recognising the power of literary texts to shape cultural memory, the former conservative premier has sought to extract political capital out of Aramburu's narrative by positioning it as the authoritative historical and moral account of ETA's violence while concomitantly denigrating the idea that a plurality of historical narratives should be accommodated.

If Rajoy's cynical championing of a literary text to bolster a political narrative is perhaps not all that surprising, the public acclaim that *Patria* has received from other enthusiasts is more blatantly disingenuous. Peruvian Nobel laureate Mario Vargas Llosa likewise eulogised the totalising vision of Aramburu's novel - which he described as "una totalidad autosuficiente" - while hailing its verisimilitude as a work that manages to "convencernos de que aquella historia no está escrita, que es la vida pura y simple, y que estamos sumidos en ella viviéndola a la par que sus personajes" ("El país de los callados"). As an author himself Vargas Llosa is doubtless aware that no literary text can purport to offer an unmediated and all-encompassing vision of the past; his inference that *Patria* encapsulates

the entire history of ETA's violence therefore seems intentionally reductionist and further proof of the political co-option of Aramburu's novel. In fact, although best known as a writer, Vargas Llosa is far from an impartial commentator when it comes to Basque politics: as well as being an erstwhile supporter of the PP, in 2007 he was also involved in the foundation of Unión, Progreso y Democracia (UPyD) which, at the time, was the sole state-wide party to actively oppose the fiscal sovereignty enjoyed by the Basque Autonomous Community under the *concierto económico* since 1981, advocating instead for a recentralisation of the Spanish state (Gray 65). As a founding member of UPyD, Vargas Llosa allied himself with the likes of Fernando Savater and Mikel Buesa, themselves prominent representatives of the Foro de Ermua - a civic organisation established in 1997 following ETA's kidnapping and assassination of the PP councillor Miguel Ángel Blanco. Since its establishment, this grouping has exerted considerable influence over the PP's hardline military approach towards ETA and been vociferous in its continued criticism of Basque nationalism, even equating the latter's supposed despotic hold over Basque society to fascism (Crumbaugh 370-72). Taking into consideration Vargas Llosa's political associations, it is easy to understand his readiness to endorse in such superlative terms a novel that presents a decidedly negative depiction of the entire *abertzale* community. However, the fact that individuals such as Rajoy and Vargas Llosa have chosen to venerate a novel that aligns with a particular discourse on the past is not an issue *per se*. What is more concerning is the dishonesty of their manifest attempts to frame *Patria* as a totalising account of the past through their wilful obfuscation of literature's fictional status and their cynical attribution of a referential character to Aramburu's work. In short, the issue is not so much that Aramburu's novel articulates a particular viewpoint on the past: what is most problematic is the misleading efforts by these powerful actors to promote *Patria* as, in the words of one

critic, "ese libro revelador que con su sola lectura ya te permite entender lo que ha pasado en Euskadi en los últimos 50 años" (Zurimendi).

Problematising 'Patria': Feigned Impartiality and the Literary Defeat of ETA

It is important to highlight that Aramburu himself has also been complicit in perpetuating this image of *Patria* as a totalising and objective vision of the past, a feat he has set out to achieve by strenuously asserting his own impartiality as an author. However, Aramburu's attempts to signal his non-partisan stance are at variance with his expressed desire to contribute to what he has referred to as "la derrota literaria de ETA" ("La derrota"). In the first instance, to persuade readers of his apparent freedom from ideological influence, the author has gone to lengths to dissociate himself from any politicisation of the novel, declaring in one interview: "No puede convertirse en publicidad para el programa electoral de ningún partido. No debe ser usada con propósitos ideológicos" ("No he escrito"). More controversially, in his efforts to denote his own impartiality, Aramburu has repeatedly attempted to project a spurious distinction between himself and Basque authors who alternatively write in *euskara*. In the past, he has alleged that the work of the latter is censured by ideological constraints on account of their reliance upon public subsidies from the Basque government - the obvious inference being that he himself is not subject to such restrictions. As he remarked at the Feria Internacional de Guadalajara in 2011 in relation to the subventions received by Basque-language author Bernardo Atxaga: "te permite ser escritor pero sabes que si te sales del camino te pierdes parte del pastel" ("Los escritores vascos no son libres"). Despite the subsequent backlash that Aramburu received for these comments, he reiterated this viewpoint during a roundtable discussion with the Basque-language author Ramón Saizarbitoria where he explicitly boasted of his own freedom

from political intervention - as a Basque author writing in Spanish - in comparison to his counterparts who write in *euskara*: "Yo puedo explicarme con total libertad y no pongo en peligro mi situación editorial" (qtd. in Moyano). Through these inaccurate assertions, Aramburu has contrived a narrative that Basque literature, in the words of Jiménez Torres, "no se había ocupado lo suficiente de la violencia terrorista, o lo había hecho desde planteamientos problemáticos" (1080).[8] By painting a picture of Basque-language authors as having neglected to confront the issue of terrorism, Aramburu is conversely intent on framing the publication of his own novel as a watershed moment that (misleadingly) heralds the long-awaited shattering of a literary taboo on condemnation of ETA's violence.

Worryingly, the spurious distinction that Aramburu has alleged between himself and Basque-language authors, and his profession of *Patria*'s apolitical status have been received with a certain degree of uncritical acceptance, as is the case with Gray, for example, who has heralded the novel as a welcome departure from "intentionally didactic novels" ("How A Remarkable Novel"). However, as Basque anthropologist Begoña Aretxaga has rightly highlighted, for those examining the legacy of violence in the Basque Country, it is delusional - or even deceitful - to claim to occupy a neutral position from which one can establish "universal moral truths and judgements" (164). As Aretxaga notes: "regarding nationalism and violence, there is no position that remains 'uncontaminated'; in other words, that does not take part, consciously or unconsciously, in the power games that the discourse of terrorism itself has demarcated beforehand" (165). Although writing in relation to her own discipline of anthropology, Aretxaga's comments are equally pertinent to Aramburu's role as an author of literary fiction insofar as he cannot seriously presume to hold a non-partisan position in

[8] Despite Basque literary scholar Jesús María Lasagabaster affirming (1990) in the late eighties that Basque writers were indeed reluctant to confront the reality of ETA's violence, as several experts have pointed out (Olaziregi 2017; Zaldua 2011), since the early nineties the conflict has been a recurring theme in the work of authors writing in *euskara*. Although such works have frequently adopted the perspective of perpetrators in order to "destabuizar[la] de sus elementos fetichistas y ritualizados" (Olaziregi 13), novels such as Anjel Lertxundi's *Zorion perfektua* (2002) and *Etxeko hautsa* (2011) have nonetheless depicted the suffering of ETA's victims.

comparison to his counterparts writing in Basque. With this in mind, Aramburu's vigorous assertion of his impartiality constitutes a deliberately self-serving and disingenuous posture that is intended to dupe his readers into believing that *Patria* contains an objective historical truth that other Basque writers are incapable of reflecting in their work.

By promoting this false dichotomy between, on the one hand, the work of partisan Basque-language authors as compromised by ideological influence and, on the other, Aramburu's own novels as those of a neutral observer, the author deploys the exact same strategy utilised by historians such as Fernández and Castells and Molina in order to assert his own authority. To reiterate, such a strategy rests on the vaunting of their own rigorous objectivity while simultaneously casting aspersions over the reliability of alternative narratives on the past, such as those held within Basque nationalist circles, by maligning the latter as subjective and politically biased. Yet far from being impartial, Aramburu evidently subscribes to the view that the *abertzale* left has nefariously propagated its own distorted account of the past in order to whitewash ETA's criminality thereby justifying the need for a "derrota literaria de ETA". In an interview with *El País*, Aramburu ventured that *Patria* might help to thwart what he considers to be a sinister process of historical revisionism, declaring his ambition that: "las generaciones venideras sepan qué pasó y lo sepan a partir de algunas versiones literarias, cinematográficas, fotográficas o historiográficas que no justifiquen el terrorismo y que no blanqueen la historia. Si esto ocurre se habrá producido la derrota cultural de ETA. Y yo estoy comprometido con esta derrota" (qtd. in Hermoso). Aramburu's defence of *Patria* as a kind of *littérature engagée* and his expressed commitment towards the cultural defeat of ETA can only be interpreted as the affirmation of a political stance, thus contradicting his proclaimed impartiality. Moreover, his words expose his erroneous understanding of memory as 'a zero-sum game' (Rothberg). In this regard,

Aramburu's attitude once again resonates with the claims made by state-aligned historians that ETA is successfully imposing its own narrative on society - a suggestion that, as I have earlier argued, holds little weight in light of the Spanish state's refusal to even acknowledge the existence of a political conflict.

Both Zaldua and Bezhanova have drawn attention to one chapter in the novel that is particularly illustrative of the author's own sense of where *Patria* sits within the ongoing memory disputes. Years after the assassination of their father, two characters - Xabier and Nerea - attend a talk held by a victims' association during which a fictional author (whom it is fairly safe to assume represents Aramburu himself) discusses the motives behind his recently published novel on the Basque conflict: "Escribí sin odio contra el lenguaje del odio y contra la desmemoria y el olvido tramado por quienes tratan de inventarse una historia al servicio de su proyecto y sus convicciones totalitarias" (528). Following on from this, the same author emphasises that, in writing the novel, he has strictly avoided "la tentación de detener el relato para tomar de forma explícita postura política" (528). The parallels between the statements of this fictional author and Aramburu's assertions about his own novel are hard to ignore. By framing *Patria* as a non-partisan response to a willed amnesia within Basque society, the author cynically positions the novel as a form of subversive memory on account of the apparent fact that it is finally giving visibility to the overlooked stories of ETA's victims. Such reasoning would be in line with Rigney's assertion that literature can often function as "a privileged medium of oppositional memory, as a "counter-memorial" and critical force that undermines hegemonic views of the past" (348). Yet, given the prominent backing it has enjoyed through the actions of state institutions and within mainstream cultural output in Spain, Aramburu's inference that the historical vision articulated by *Patria* is one that has been marginalised or suppressed is wholly untenable.

Indeed, closer examination of the novel itself highlights the obvious contradiction between Aramburu's claims to impartiality and the clearly partisan position he occupies. Zaldua points to the very structure of *Patria* as evidence of the totalising intentions of the author, noting Aramburu's "voluntad de abarcar todo" and suggesting that the author evidently set out to produce a work grounded in absolute moral and historical truth and which might ultimately become recognised as "la Gran Novela sobre el Terrorismo Vasco" ("La literatura, ¿sirve para algo?"). As well as the vast array of topics Aramburu touches upon in *Patria*, Zaldua identifies the archetypal impression created by both the novel's unspecified setting and the characters' lack of surnames as evidence of the author's universalising aspirations. Moreover, Aramburu himself has stressed how the novel integrates a range of subjective experiences, strategically highlighting its multiperspectivist narrative structure as a means of preempting any accusation of political bias that might come his way: "he querido proyectar una mirada generosa sobre la historia reciente que hemos tenido los vascos y no he querido hacerlo con un solo ojo, sino que he metido en mi novela destinos cercanos a personajes de la izquierda abertzale" (qtd in. Hermoso). As indicated by Erll, literature's predisposition towards complexity and its capacity to "create mnemonic multiperspectivity" is certainly one of its distinctive characteristics as a medium of cultural memory (151). Yet, contrary to what Aramburu would like us to believe, *Patria* does not do this: instead of creating complexity it obliquely privileges one particular reading of the past whilst, on the surface, it masquerades as an exhaustive account that supposedly integrates the experiences of Basque society in all its diversity. While there is no denying that *Patria* incorporates both the perspectives of ETA's victims and the *abertzale* left, Aramburu's wholly unfavourable depiction of the latter group - which verges on caricaturesque - manifestly belies his inference that the novel offers a balanced and non-partisan portrayal. With next to no ambiguity, the author diverts his readers' compassion entirely towards ETA victims as opposed to the

abertzale characters whose own adversities elicit much less sympathy on account of their deeply misanthropic personalities. As Gabilondo has pointed out, to construct this crude Manichean opposition between the terrorists and their innocent victims Aramburu redeploys - for the benefit of a largely Spanish readership - negative stereotypes that, since the late nineteenth century, have positioned Basques as a violent other within the Spanish imaginary ("Posimperialismo" 12). For Miguélez Carballeira, the ultimate objective of Aramburu's biased portrayal is unmistakable: by variously depicting members of the pro-independence community as exploitative, xenophobic, homophobic, and callous to the suffering of others, the author presents his readers with "loaded representations [that] are geared towards generating hostility, if not scorn, towards *abertzale* positions" ("Patria"). Through the novel's relentless demonisation of the characters who aspire to Basque independence, Aramburu ensures that his readers will only identify with the victims of ETA, while speciously purporting to include all points of view. In this way, *Patria* unquestionably promotes a "hierarchy of grief" that, as Crumbaugh has highlighted, has been a defining feature of politicised disputes over victimhood in the Basque Country since the turn of the millennium (366). In short, contrary to what the author himself has professed, the novel plainly exemplifies, as theorised by Erll, an antagonistic mode of representing the past through its use of negative stereotypes and biased perspective structures which "help to promote one version of the past and reject another" (159).

Towards Agonistic Memory: Unsettling the Battle for the Narrative

To conclude this discussion of the current issues surrounding historical memory in the Basque context, I would like to explain my use of Bull and Hansen's concept of *agonistic memory* as a means of conceptualising the disparity between, on the one hand, the

antagonistic mode of remembrance that is epitomised by the *la batalla del relato* and the related phenomenon of *Patria* and, on the other hand, contrasting approaches to the dealing with the past that favour a plurality of narratives rather than an overarching historical truth. Crucially, it is this latter approach that has gained greater purchase within the Basque Country itself.[9] Spearheaded by the likes of the Foro Social Permanente - a grassroots collective of civil society groups comprising trade unions, feminist organisations, and peace-keeping initiatives - prominent advocates of a pluralist approach to memory have called for a move beyond *la batalla del relato* towards "una memoria crítica inclusiva, que respete todos los relatos" ("Quiénes somos"). As noted by Tellidis, recent surveys have also indicated that the work of such groups enjoys strong public support within Basque society whereas disapproval of the Spanish government's antagonistic attitude towards historical memory remains high (542). It is worth noting that Bull and Hansen's development of agonistic memory emerged out of a concern at the rise in antagonistic forms of remembrance, precipitated by a resurgence in neo-nationalist movements across Europe. In the Spanish context specifically, as Ludger Mees has explained, the intransigence shown by the PP government towards dealing with the past in the Basque Country has been exacerbated by their desire to replicate the hardline stance shown towards both Basque and Catalan separatism that has resulted in the rising popularity over the last decade of the far-right party Vox (262).

My overall intention in drawing out this opposition between agonistic and antagonistic memory is to provide a firm theoretical platform for my subsequent analysis of the work of other contemporary Basque authors which, I will argue, represents a clear departure from the form of remembrance that is typified by *Patria*. It is my contention that

[9] Zernova (2017) provides a more detailed discussion of the various initiatives that have been undertaken in the Basque Country to promote restorative justice, arguing that the most successful of these have acknowledged the existence of multiple victims and enabled multiple narratives to emerge.

these authors demonstrate an implicit proclivity towards an agonistic model of remembrance insofar as their novels problematise the very notion of achieving a totalising view of the past, favouring instead forms of remembrance that are reflexive, dialogic and multi-perspectivist. Moreover, these novels look beyond Manichean attitudes towards past violence and the demonisation and othering of perpetrators by foregrounding the importance of understanding the socio-political circumstances from which that violence has emerged. On that basis, I will argue, these works bear a closer affinity to prevailing attitudes towards dealing with the past that are ongoing at a grassroots level within the Basque Country and represent a clear deviation from the zero-sum logic that characterises both the promotion of *Patria* and *la batalla del relato* more broadly.

For Bull and Hansen, the objective of agonistic memory is to "avoid pitting 'good' against 'evil' through acknowledging the human capacity for evil in specific historical circumstances and in the context of socio-political struggles" (399). Agonism is therefore a concept that sits firmly at odds with the hegemonic narrative of the Spanish government which strenuously refutes any attempts to offer socio-political explanations of ETA's violence. Bull and Hansen furthermore argue that agonistic memory offers a solution to the perpetuation of "us" versus "them" mentalities by rejecting totalising historical narratives that are built on abstract moral categories of good and evil and that posit a strict delineation between victims and perpetrators. While critics may reason that this veers dangerously towards forms of extreme moral relativism, the intention of agonistic memory is not to deny or to downplay the suffering inflicted by individual actors but, rather, to acknowledge that, in order to avoid repetition of such harms, it is incumbent on us to better understand the conditions within which violence occurred. According to Bull and Hansen, in order to achieve this, a willingness to learn from the perspectives of both victims *and* perpetrators is

necessary, especially with a view to comprehending how the latter came to inflict suffering upon their fellow citizens. Suffice to say, this equally requires a recognition of the humanity of perpetrators as well as victims, something that Aramburu's demonised caricatures of the *abertzale* left deliberately preclude. To that end, agonistic memory reflects the view expressed by Todorov: "The memory of the past will serve no purpose if used to build an impassable wall between evil and us, identifying exclusively with irreproachable heroes and innocent victims and driving the agents of evil outside the confines of humankind" (461).

Moreover, whereas Aramburu is determined to promote one version of the past as irreproachable truth by cynically disavowing any personal political leanings, agonistic memory favours a multiperspectivist mode of remembrance that acknowledges the politicised nature of different representations of past conflict and encourages a dialogic relationship between conflicting memories (Bull and Hansen 400). As scholars have also observed, agonistic memory resists the search for narrative closure, preferring instead a dynamic in which memories "confront each other in an open-ended manner, without being constrained to fit into an authoritative narrative" (Bull and Clarke 196). Finally, agonistic memory is characterised by its reflexive approach to remembering the past, an attribute that, as Bull and Hansen point out, goes hand in hand with its exposure of the "constructed nature of memory" (400). Christophe has similarly highlighted the potential of agonistic memory to destabilise hegemonic historical narratives by foregrounding their selective, manipulative character and, in so doing, generating "uncertainty where the illusion of being in the possession of truth has created too much certainty" (10). In brief, agonistic memory therefore offers an antithesis to the type of antagonistic remembrance that is intrinsic to *la batalla del relato*.

In the view of one critic, *Patria* amounts to a simplistic morality tale that only serves to reassure its Spanish readership of a facile sense of guilt and innocence, rendering the novel little more than "una epopeya narrativa que tranquilizara nuestras conciencias confirmando que ellos eran los malos y los fanáticos y los burros de pueblo y nosotros los buenos (un poco cobardes, pero buenos al fin y al cabo)" (Luque). As I have discussed above, the novel reinforces the mainstream narrative within the Spanish state that posits a rigid moral dichotomy between the depraved savagery of ETA's heinous terrorists and the absolute virtue of their victims. However, memory scholars have warned that viewing the past through simplistic moral binaries does little to resolve historic grievances and merely entrenches social division. As Rothberg states: "While there most certainly are victims to be acknowledged and perpetrators to be held responsible, a discourse that turns on absolutes of innocence and guilt can only anchor an absolutist, perhaps even apocalyptic, politics" ("From Gaza to Warsaw" 540). While undeniably the Manichean vision presented in *Patria* has been well-received by the Spanish public, it is of little surprise that within the Basque Country itself many readers have found Aramburu's malevolent depiction of the *abertzale* left decidedly less plausible. In all likelihood, this discrepancy stems from the fact that, for Basque readers, the same individuals whom Aramburu crudely demonises as evil Others are invariably relatives, neighbours, or friends. As Aretxaga puts it, characterisations of ETA militants as "simply the embodiment of all evil" often fail to ring true for Basques due to the fact that the latter form "part of the intimate social framework" (166). Edurne Portela expresses a similar sentiment in her essay *El eco de los disparos* in which she criticises Manichean representations of ETA members as "el paradigma de la bestialidad humana" (126). In her view, such portrayals preclude any recognition of the humanity of perpetrators and, thereby, inhibit a broader discussion around how socio-political circumstances can cause individuals to inflict such awful suffering upon their fellow human beings.

Chapter Three: Theoretical Framework

In the previous sections I have outlined the way in which the Spanish state has sought to reinforce a hegemonic narrative about the Basque conflict and how this has been bolstered in the cultural sphere through cynical attempts to canonise Fernando Aramburu's *Patria* by framing the novel as a totalising account of the past. Those pursuing this agenda have promoted a decontextualised narrative about ETA's terrorism with a view to inhibiting any examination of the broader socio-political context within which this violence originated. This is evident in the aforementioned criticisms that have been levelled at both state institutions such as the Centro Memorial de Víctimas de Terrorismo, as well as Aramburu's bestselling novel. This decontextualised narrative on recent Basque history is rooted in a simplistic Manichean understanding of the past that has exacerbated a dynamic of competitive victimhood and done little to diminish antagonism between political opponents. In order to consider how the past has been addressed elsewhere in contemporary Basque literature, my thesis will analyse the novels of five Basque authors that have also been published in the aftermath of ETA's ceasefire in 2011 yet which, in comparison to *Patria*, have received much less critical attention.

With a view to demonstrating that these novels represent a clear departure from the totalising approach to memory that has become associated with Aramburu's work, my analysis will focus on the representation of place. In the previous chapter I highlighted how one critic has posited a close connection between Aramburu's depiction of place and the totalising pretensions of *Patria* insofar as the archetypal nature of the novel's setting seems to betray its author's desire to present a universalist narrative of the past. It goes without saying that the concepts of place and memory have been long intertwined throughout Western

history, illustrated by historian Frances A. Yates through her description in *The Art of Memory* (1966) of the ancient mnemonic technique of *loci memoriae* - a device used in Ancient Rome and Greece whereby images were mapped in a stable arrangement onto virtual places to aid the memory of orators. More recently, in the mid-nineteen eighties Pierre Nora posited the close relationship between memory and place when he popularised the concept of *les lieux de mémoire* through his vast study of French collective memory in which he identified prominent sites that "anchor, condense and express the exhausted capital of [French] collective memory" (24). However, Nora's collection has been subsequently criticised for the conspicuousness of its myriad exclusions and thus the narrow vision of French identity and national memory that it presents. In the words of Michael Rothberg, the collection "ultimately puts forward a starkly limited conception of the nation purged of many of its imperial adventures and minoritarian inflections" ("Between Memory" 4). By presenting a supposedly stable configuration of "places" around which a wistful perception of French national memory is condensed, Nora's study inadvertently demonstrates how the concept of place can be deployed as a static entity in order to reify a selective collective memory. However, this project is grounded in the premise that even individual places cannot be reduced to a single past: they are rather "layered location[s] replete with human histories and memories" (Lippard 7). That said, as Karen E. Till has demonstrated in her study of Berlin, the way in which places are made and remade in the present often renders certain memories more visible than others, for as much as places are made to help people remember, they "are also made today to forget: they contain and house disturbing absences and ruptures, tales of violence" (9).

With these debates about place and memory in mind, I will examine how, through the prism of place, these novels problematise the reductionism of fixed interpretations of the past

by highlighting the marginalisation of alternative perspectives whilst also revealing the cultural specificity of dominant viewpoints. My reading of place in these novels is primarily informed by feminist theories that posit a relational understanding of place as something that is not static and a source of fixed identity, but "contested, fluid and uncertain" (McDowell 18). By analysing the representation of place in terms of its constitutive social relations, I will consider how these authors foreground the intrinsic multiplicity of place in a way that subverts totalising drives to reduce it to a fixed image or to stabilise its meaning, particularly in relation to the various histories attached to it. In doing this, I will equally focus on the broader power dynamics that structure these social relations and how, as a result of these, the perspectives of subjugated groups or individuals become marginalised through their interaction with place. I will also consider how these authors envisage alternative paradigms of place that foster multiperspectivity and so enable the expression of those marginalised subjectivities. In addition to this, I will examine how these novels interrogate the "place" of the individual author - understood in a metaphorical sense as their cultural or social location - in order to illustrate the epistemological impossibility of achieving either historical or moral certitude about the past.

Reading Place Relationally

Turning to geography as the discipline that is foremost concerned with place, my analysis draws predominantly on the work of Doreen Massey who, in *Space, Place, and Gender* (1994), theorised an alternative conceptualisation of place that highlighted its relationality. Massey opposed this renewed formulation of place to what she deemed simplistic understandings of place "as bounded, as in various ways a site of an authenticity, as singular, fixed and unproblematic in its identity" (*Space* 5). Her work proved an influential

departure from that of humanistic geographers from the seventies who, influenced by the philosophies of Martin Heidegger and Gaston Bachelard, had come to idealise place as a static and enclosed entity that granted a sense of rootedness and stable identity away from the unsettling flux of the modern world. Yi-Fu Tuan, for instance, contrasted the "security and stability" of place with the "openness, freedom, and threat of space" (6). Meanwhile, Edward Relph suggested that mass tourism and mass communication had given rise to the spread of "placelessness" and, with it, the gradual decline of "true" places that, in Relph's own view, had been characterised by a "persistent sameness and unity" (45). Inspired by Heidegger's association of dwelling as "*the basic character* of Being" (158) and Bachelard's contention that the home - as the epitome of place - contained the "topography of our intimate being" (xxxii), these geographers saw place as a fundamental part of the human condition. For them, a 'sense of place' was best exemplified by the comfort felt when at home, an assumption that underpinned their desire to discover the 'true' essence of places. However, Massey problematised the cultural specificity of this conceptualisation of place, asserting that the nostalgic association of place with a romanticised notion of 'Home' clearly reflected a masculine viewpoint. She contended that such an idealised view of 'Home' was unrepresentative of the lived experience of many women for whom the patriarchal home alternatively stood as a place of oppression and conflict (*Space, Place and Gender* 11).

Rejecting these essentialist views of place in terms of an ideal 'Home', Massey proposed that space in the first instance should be "seen as constructed out of the multiplicity of social relations" (*Space, Place and Gender* 4) and that place itself was therefore "a particular constellation of social relations, meeting and weaving together at a particular locus" (*Space, Place and Gender* 154). On account of the fact that such relations were always shifting, places themselves could never be seen as static but always dynamic. Given

that an individual's experience of place was contingent on their position within this network of social relations, Massey argued that place could not be reduced to a single lived experience or history. As such, she asserted that the identities of places "are always unfixed, contested and multiple" (*Space, Place and Gender* 5). By indicating the way in which place is implicated within the broader construction of gender relations, Massey demonstrated that places need to be understood in relation to the wider context in which they are situated. Referring to this as an "extroverted" sense of place, she argued that places should not be defined "through simple counterposition to the outside [but] precisely through the particularity of linkage to that 'outside'" (*Space, Place and Gender* 155). In advancing the notion that places are embedded within broader social processes, Massey demonstrated that they can never be fixed but are continually being made and remade by the evolution of broader socio-political events.

Crucially, Massey also highlighted that the social relations that constitute place are inevitably imbued with power. She argued that places should therefore be seen in terms of their "power-geometry" - defined as a "complex web of relations of domination and subordination" (*Space, Place and Gender* 265). Massey maintained that, through place, dominant groups attempt to assert control by establishing boundaries, stabilising its meaning and fixing its identity. A notable example of this is the traditional public-private distinction upon which patriarchal power structures have been sustained (Duncan). As Massey points out, this gendered spatial distinction illustrates clearly how places are caught up in the wider construction of gender relations whereby male efforts to fix women in particular places are simultaneously attempts to fix their identity, for example, as mothers and homemakers (*Space, Place and Gender* 179). Notwithstanding attempts by those in power to impose certain meanings upon a place, these dominant meanings are always subject to contestation

and never intrinsic. According to Tim Cresswell, while place is indeed "implicated in the creation and maintenance of ideological beliefs" (150), a place's meaning can never be definitively fixed as places equally represent sites of possible "transgression". For Cresswell, by behaving in a way that is perceived as "deviant" by those in power, marginalised groups and individuals can denaturalise the dominant meanings of places, exposing the asymmetrical power relations that underpin them, and potentially exert a socially transformative effect on the place itself. For Massey, given the historical restriction of women's mobility through their confinement to the home, mobility itself could constitute a subversion of patriarchal order. In this way, she too recognised the potential for hegemonic power structures to be subverted by the transgressive practices of subjugated groups who were typically fixed in place and denied mobility (*Space, Place and Gender* 11).

The value of Massey's relational view of place is that it exposes the spatial distribution of uneven power structures, underscores the irreducible multiplicity of place, and equally problematises the totalising drive behind the efforts of dominant actors to suppress this heterogeneity beneath essentialist identities through the marginalisation of subjugated perspectives. For Massey, viewing place in this way - i.e. recognising what she later referred to as place's "throwntogetherness" (*For Space*) - is a matter of inherent political import for it "implicate[s] us, perforce, in the lives of human others" as it demands that "we confront the challenge of the negotiation of multiplicity" (*For Space* 141). A similar sentiment can be found in Iris Marion Young's notion of the "unoppressive city" (1986). For Young, the "totalizing impulse" to reduce communities to homogenous identities necessitated a denial of internal difference. Against this, Young proposed the metaphor of the unoppressive city as a more desirable ideal that would be built upon a "politics of difference" and defined "as openness to unassimilated otherness" (22). In light of this, I wish to examine how these texts

not only foreground the irreducible multiplicity of particular localities but also how they map out more progressive configurations (or reconfigurations) of place that are not built on relations of domination and subordination but that rather foster productive engagement between differing perspectives. My rationale for adopting this reading of place is that it dovetails with the inclusivity that is intrinsic to both Toth's pluralist ethics of memory and Bull and Hansen's agonistic memory insofar as - in relation to historical memory - they equally prioritise the cultivation of non-antagonistic interaction between multiple perspectives as a potential corrective to the zero-sum bind of struggles to impose a hegemonic narrative of the past.

Place as Location

As well as examining their treatment of place in terms of a relational analysis of physical locations, I will also consider how these authors foreground the significance of an alternative notion of place, understood metaphorically as "a cultural or social location" (Staeheli 160). In doing this, I will assess how these novels highlight the importance of coming to terms with this secondary notion of place, particularly with regards to its epistemological implications for our ability to make sense of the past. Following Gillian Rose, I understand there to be a close connection between these two concepts of place insofar as totalising visions of actual places that reduce them to essentialist identities stem from a failure to reflect on the situatedness of one's own perspective. Rose argued that humanistic geographers falsely assumed a universalist rationality in their claim to be able to know places exhaustively and to access the "true" character of a place. In her view, this derived from a lack of reflexivity on the cultural specificity or embodiment of their own subjectivity, prompting them to ignore alternative experiences of place. She criticised the knowledge

production of humanistic geographers, insisting that their "claims to really know depend on the master subject's denials of his own specificity" (101). On that basis, my analysis of this secondary meaning of place will be framed by Adrienne Rich and Donna Haraway's related concepts of "location" and "situatedness".

In *Notes towards a Politics of Location* (1984) Adrienne Rich argued for the importance of "recognizing our location, having to name the ground we're coming from, the conditions we have taken for granted" (219).[10] Her theorisation of location emerged from a concern that feminism risked falling into the same universalist and abstract thinking that it had sought to challenge by deconstructing the "false male universal" (216). Acknowledging that white Western feminists had themselves been guilty of abstraction and generalisation when discussing the female experience, Rich advocated for a politics of location in order to avoid totalising pronouncements that failed to reflect the heterogeneity of women's experiences and that could therefore marginalise the experiences of non-white and non-Western women. Rich believed that a politics of location could enable individual women to be accountable for the specificity of their subjective view of the world and thus to avoid the patriarchal tendency towards "grandiose assertions" (215). Significantly, Rich posited that a politics of location ought to be grounded in corporeality, writing: "When I write 'the body', I see nothing in particular. To write 'my body' plunges me into lived experience, particularity" (215). She demanded that women deliberately reclaim their individual bodies as a means of enabling an awareness of the particularity of their lived experiences, and to thereby prevent totalising statements that claimed to represent a single, shared female experience.

[10] Rich's concept of a politics of location has subsequently become an important conceptual tool in feminist scholarship. See its use in studies such as Probyn (1989), Mohanty (1995), Brah (1996), Kaplan (1996), and Code (2006).

The notion of location also appeared in Donna Haraway's influential essay *Situated Knowledges: The Science Question in Feminism and the Privilege of Partial Perspective* (1988) where she similarly argued against the unaccountability of knowledge claims that she described as "unlocatable" (191), maintaining that all knowledge claims are invariably "views from somewhere" (196). Problematising traditional ideas of scientific objectivity, she contended that claims to epistemic authority were often made on the presumption of a totalising god-like vision that purported to be able to see "from everywhere and nowhere equally and fully" (191). Challenging this false omniscience, Haraway advocated alternatively for a "feminist objectivity" that recognised that all knowledge emerges out of the particular situation of the knower and so would privilege those "partial perspectives" that took their situatedness and epistemic limitations into account. According to Haraway, a feminist objectivity would comprise "politics and epistemologies of location, positioning, and situating, where partiality and not universality is the condition of being heard to make rational knowledge claims" (195). Emphasising the importance of recognising the place of the individual subject, Haraway identified the "vantage points of the subjugated" as particularly valuable given that marginalised groups would inevitably possess a greater awareness of how, through acts of repression, denial, and erasure, the powerful sought to sustain the "god-trick" of "being nowhere while claiming to see comprehensively" (191). For Haraway the value of feminist objectivity is that it "resists the politics of closure" by facilitating engagement between the partial perspectives of situated knowledges that might create "connections and unexpected openings" (196). By drawing on the thought of Haraway and Rich, my aim is to analyse how these authors thematise the process of "recognizing one's location" and posit it as a necessary corrective to totalising interpretations of the past on the grounds that it generates an awareness of one's "partial perspective". As part of my

interpretation, I will also look at how the individual body occupies a central role in the representation of this specific process.

By examining these author's treatment of place through this theoretical lens, I wish to consider how they posit the impossibility of totalising knowledge claims, especially in terms of historical memory in the Basque context. Returning to Toth, narratives that acknowledge or interrogate the situatedness of their own social, political, and historical perspective, and the epistemic limitations of this, are of greater worth in a post-conflict scenario by virtue of the fact that, by definition, they abstain from totalising views of the past that are inherently exclusionary and inevitably foster antagonism. My decision to analyse place in this way stems from a further criticism directed towards *Patria* - namely Aramburu's failure to account for the particularity of his own viewpoint, that is to say, the fact that his literary account of the past firmly aligns with the dominant state and media narrative on the Basque conflict. Whilst there is no obligation for authors to reflect upon their own positioning in relation to the events depicted in their work, in the case of *Patria*, Aramburu has clearly adopted a disingenuous posture due to his oft-repeated claims about his presumed impartiality. This, the author has inferred, situates him in a privileged epistemic position in relation to writing about the past. As I have discussed above, such suggestions on the part of Aramburu are clearly designed to positively distinguish his own novel from other literary portrayals of the Basque conflict on account of his being apparently unbound by political bias and hence more 'truthful'. Yet the detached position that Aramburu professes to occupy is illusory: to reiterate the arguments made by Aretxaga about those who analyse violence in the Basque Country, "all positions are *already* implicated in the relations between forces in a political conflict" (165). In other words, as much as those who have appropriated *Patria* as a totalising account of the past might wish readers to believe otherwise, Aramburu's view on

the past is itself a necessarily subjective and partial one; put simply - *it comes from somewhere.*

With that in mind, my application of feminist theories to cultural memory is grounded in a recognition of the intersections between the two fields which both, as noted by Hirsch and Smith, "emphasize the situatedness of the individual in his or her social and historical context and are thus suspicious of universal categories of experience" (12). Moreover, Hirsch and Smith stress how bringing together feminist theories and cultural memory helps to shed light on the underlying political struggles that allow certain memories to gain prominence whilst others are suppressed, arguing that "relative degrees of power and powerlessness, privilege and disenfranchisement, determine the spaces where witnesses and testimony may be heard or ignored" (12). Furthermore, I will consider how this foregrounding of the place of the individual subject also marks a coming to terms with the partiality of individual knowledge of the past, thereby undermining the totalising assertions that have become so prominent within political discourse on the Basque conflict and the media hype generated by Aramburu's novel. As Radstone has pointed out, at a time when scholarly interest often centres on the transcultural, transnational and transmedial movement of memories, we must not forget that "even when (and if) memory travels, it is only ever instantiated locally, in a specific place and at a particular time" (117). The implication of this is that all memories are conditioned by the social and cultural conditions of the specific environment within which individual subjects are situated. This emphasis on the locatedness of the individual rememberer is reaffirmed by Hoskins who, theorising an ecology of memory, asserts that memory is "emergent, embedded in the shifting environment, yet also constrained by the historical body of the rememberers" (354). In theorising a connected ecology in which individual rememberers continually interact in productive encounters, Hoskins is similarly

wary of an excessive focus on cementing a stable collective memory where totalising tendencies can obscure the individual subjects from which memories originate.

In light of these theoretical considerations, I will now proceed to analyse the representation and thematisation of place and location in the recent work of Basque authors Karmele Jaio, Edurne Portela, Katixa Agirre, Gabriela Ybarra and Aixa de la Cruz. Focusing on how these authors foreground relationality in the depiction of physical places in their novels, I will examine how, in doing so, they explore the multiplicity of perspectives that exist on the past and the way in which underlying power relations determine the visibility or otherwise of these various memories. At the same time, I will pay particular attention to the equal significance attributed by each writer to the notion of location - understood in terms of feminist epistemology - and outline how, through the notable reflexivity of their narratives, they mobilise this concept as a means of problematising and resisting the certitude of totalising interpretations of the past.

Chapter Four: From Present Gender Politics to Unsettling Memories of the Father's House in Karmele Jaio's *La casa del padre*

First published in 2019 in Basque under the title *Aitaren etxea* and later translated by the author herself, Karmele Jaio's third novel was awarded the prestigious Premio Euskadi de Literatura the following year, thereby becoming her most successful work to date. Employing a polyphonic structure, the novel is narrated from three different perspectives: Ismael, a middle-aged author trapped in the midst of a crippling writer's block; his wife, Jasone, who having forgone her own ambitions of becoming an author in order to raise the couple's children has now, unbeknownst to her husband, returned to writing; and Libe, Ismael's sister and Jasone's best friend, who left the Basque Country during the conflict and now lives in Germany with her girlfriend. By voicing these contrasting viewpoints through the prism of its tripartite narrative, *La casa del padre* offers an implicit reflection on the feminist concept of location, further indicated by its author's own assertion that one of the novel's central theses is the idea that "dependiendo de en qué posición nos encontremos, y desde dónde miremos al mundo, la realidad que vemos es totalmente diferente" ("Entrevista"). Set in present-day Vitoria-Gasteiz, the capital of the Autonomous Community of the Basque Country, according to its author *La casa del padre* charts "el proceso de toma de consciencia" ("Tenemos la carga") undertaken by its male protagonist as Ismael struggles to come to terms with his memories of the patriarchal atmosphere that prevailed throughout his childhood, both at home under the rule of his domineering father, as well as in Basque society more widely during the height of the conflict. Moreover, the novel explores the way in which Ismael's difficult reckoning with his past reveals to him the extent to which he himself has internalised those very same patriarchal norms - an inheritance that Jaio has

elsewhere described as “esa pesada armadura que les impone [a los hombres] el modelo de masculinidad que han heredado” (“Entrevista”).

Insofar as *La casa del padre* stages this examination of the past from a gender perspective in order to expose the patriarchal power structures intrinsic to both the public and private spheres, the intertextuality of the novel’s title - a clear allusion to a poem of the same name by the celebrated Basque-language poet Gabriel Aresti - is significant. Included in his 1964 collection *Harri eta herri* (“Stone and Country”), Aresti’s most celebrated poem - “Nire aitaren etxea defendituko dut” (“I will defend my father’s house”) - has since become an iconic text within nationalist culture, deploying the image of the father’s house as a metaphor for the Basque nation which the poem’s impassioned speaker vows to defend in the face of all manner of adversity and self-sacrificial suffering. However, Jaio redeploys the title of Aresti’s venerated text in a way that resists the valiant framing of Basque nationalism of the original poem: instead, her novel offers a critical lens on Basque society, past and present, that exposes the harmful effects of its deeply patriarchal culture, while also subverting the latent myth of a Basque matriarchal tradition by foregrounding the social reality of the home as a place of entrenched patriarchalism.

In the first section of this chapter, I will analyse the way in which Jaio’s novel firmly locates memory in the present by establishing the contemporary socio-political context within which Ismael’s eventual confrontation with his past takes place. To do this, I will consider how the novel problematises Ismael’s deliberate isolation within the family home against a backdrop of rising anti-patriarchal sentiment being voiced in the Basque Country in the wake of the high-profile “La Manada” rape trial. I will argue that Jaio posits a connection between

Ismael's initial refusal to interrogate his own privileged location as a male and his attitude towards his work as a writer.

Next, I will examine how Ismael's return to the family home forces him to undergo a critical reexamination of his own childhood that enables him to recognise the uneven power geometry of the family home. By considering the effect of his confrontation with the previously marginalised perspectives of his sister and mother, I will analyse the extent to which Ismael is able to come to terms with the relative privilege of his location within the patriarchal home and therefore able to accept the partiality of his perspective on the past. I will also outline how Jaio situates this retrospective examination of the patriarchal home within a socio-political context through her illustration of the prevalence of patriarchal norms in the political realm outside of the domestic sphere.

The Struggle to Locate Memory: Confronting the Patriarchy After "La Manada"

Mirroring the widespread denunciations of sexual abuse and sexual harrassment that have emerged as part of the recent #MeToo movement, Spanish society has itself witnessed in the past number of years a "massive mobilization of women [that has] placed structural inequality at the center of social debate" (Idoiaga Mondragon et al. 927). While the issue of gender violence has come to the forefront of national politics in Spain, demands for social transformation have often encountered fierce resistance, most notably from the resurgent far-right party Vox that has advocated for the derogation of previously enacted legislation aimed at addressing this social problem (Arriaza Ibarra and Berumen 174). It is against this fractious backdrop of rising public outcry towards male violence and the broader patriarchal structures of Basque society that the exploration of memory in *La casa del padre* takes place.

The novel's politicised social setting is conveyed to us through the internal monologue of its male narrator, Ismael, whom we first encounter profoundly disturbed by the rape and murder of a local woman in the city's surrounding hills. This recent horror evokes for Ismael events from several years previously: the real-life, highly publicised rape case of "La Manada" that occurred in Pamplona, the capital city of nearby Navarre, in July 2016 during the festival of San Fermín[11]. We learn that Ismael's memory of this prior assault bears a particularly personal significance due to the fact that his teenage daughter, Eider, happened to be attending the festival that year. The stream-of-consciousness style of Ismael's internal monologue reveals, from the outset of the novel, a psychological entanglement between this contemporary violence and perturbing childhood memories that connote his personal struggle to live up to the masculine norms of an oppressive patriarchal culture, primarily embodied by his father. As yet unable to reconcile the two, the hills where the recent killing occurred recall in Ismael's mind an ill-fated hunting trip to the same location led by his authoritarian father that has come to epitomise his inner feelings of inadequacy as a man: "El monte, el bosque, un paisaje que aún araña tu piel como las zarzas, un escenario con el que has tenido pesadillas desde joven" (14). Ismael's inchoate association between past and present hints at the culture of toxic masculinity that is intrinsic to both the present violence and his troubling memories of his father, establishing a deep relatedness that he is forced to reckon with through his own process of self-reflection over the course of the novel.

Initially, however, the second-person narrative voice in which Ismael's internal monologue is written points to a duality in his character when it comes to his response to the recent violence. The contradictory psychological impulses in Ismael are manifested through

[11] On 7 July 2016 an 18-year-old woman was gang raped by a group of five men during the San Fermín festival. The attack was filmed and subsequently shared by the men in a WhatsApp group called "La manada" ("the wolfpack"). The reduced sentence handed down to the defendants sparked a wave of feminist protests across the country under the slogan "Yo sí te creo" ("I believe you") causing the case to become widely recognised as Spain's #MeToo moment (Beatley).

a recurring nightmare in which a woman who has been sexually assaulted pleads to him for help, but he is frozen by fear and eventually flees, covering his ears to silence her cries (27). As his passivity in the dream suggests, despite Ismael's revulsion at the attacks, he equally displays an unwillingness to confront in a more self-critical manner the historical patriarchal culture that underlies these appalling acts of violence, not to mention his own implication within this culture and the nefarious impact it has had on him. Instead, we see evidence of the misogynistic attitudes that Ismael has internalised through his disquiet at the shifting gender landscape of Basque society that is mirrored by the recent inversion of the social hierarchy within his own family home. Emphasising the maxim of second-wave feminism that "the personal is political", the change in the individual circumstances of his wife, Jasone, are symptomatic of this altered social landscape. Her refusal to remain tethered to a life of maternal domesticity, coupled with their daughters having departed for their studies, leaves Ismael deprived of the traditional patriarchal role that he formerly enjoyed within the home. Resenting his wife's new-found independence, Ismael cannot help but recognise the power-geometry that previously existed within the home, encapsulated in his recollection of how his own freedom was contingent on Jasone's confinement to a traditional feminine role: "ayudando a las chicas con los deberes, o haciendo la cena, o descansando tras haber pasado la noche en el hospital con su madre primero y luego su padre, o trabajando para ti, haciendo las primeras y las últimas correcciones a tus escritos" (33). Rather than welcoming the societal reaction against patriarchal power that is visible both inside and outside the home, Ismael perceives these changes as an emasculation, tacitly ruing the loss of his privileged status as the head of the household: "Ya nadie te pregunta nada. Ya no sabes cuál es tu lugar en la familia. No mandas sobre nadie. No te necesita nadie" (54). This repeated use of negative determiners emphasises Ismael's resentment at his being deprived of a position where others are subservient to him. Therefore, as much as Ismael is otherwise appalled by

the recent spate of violent attacks against women, his inner voice illustrates a failure to recognise in himself the regressive inclinations that denote the same patriarchal mindset that gives rise to such brutality.

At a time when the traditional gender hierarchies of Basque society are being overturned and public denunciation of male violence is growing ever more vociferous, the reclusive existence that Ismael begins to lead within the home constitutes a reactionary response to this social transformation. Ismael's retreat signifies his idealisation of the home as a stable sanctuary from which he can escape the outside world, an assumption that is grounded in the traditional gendered divide between the public and private sphere, typifying the nostalgic appropriation of place that Massey dismissed as the reactionary impulse of once-privileged social groups to a perceived loss of status (*Space, Place and Gender* 147). From the beginning of the novel, Ismael's romanticisation of the home is made apparent when a sudden bout of anxiety at the thought of the murdered teenage girl prompts him to escape to the neighbouring hills. Surveying the city from his elevated vantage point, his gaze is instinctively drawn to his childhood home in an effort to soothe his frayed nerves by visualising his mother undertaking her familiar domestic routine: "Tu madre estará a estas horas fregando el suelo de la cocina, como lo ha hecho durante los últimos cincuenta años" (16). Ismael's recourse to this vision of the home as a timeless place of maternal domesticity constitutes an attempt to preserve his own self-image of traditional masculinity. The fixed image he projects of his mother's physical labour within the home contrasts with the detached perspective he himself pursues from the hilltop, reflecting his attempt to sustain a traditional gendered opposition between his own (male) transcendence and female embodiment.

The novel reveals how Ismael's growing isolation within the home conceals a reluctance to consider the inherent privileges of his own social location as a male now that prevailing power inequalities face more vigorous exposure amidst the rising anti-patriarchal sentiment within Basque society. Inside the home, Ismael seeks out an illusory sense of permanence which he wistfully projects onto an old-fashioned cafetiere that evokes a comforting feeling of timelessness and momentarily dispels the unease he otherwise experiences at the growing political agitation of the outside world. Although it jars with the largely modern kitchen decor curated by his wife, Ismael fixates on the "ritmo lento" (20) of the percolating cafetiere which seems to recall the comfort of a fading past when his position of patriarchal superiority within the home remained intact and unquestioned. Despite the material anachronism of the appliance, Ismael's stubborn refusal to dispose of it hints at a vain yearning for the traditional patriarchal role that he formerly enjoyed within the home. By trying to ensure that the home remains impervious to the shifting gender politics that are reshaping the power relations of contemporary Basque society, Ismael illustrates his inability to come to terms with the loss of a traditional model of masculinity that granted him a privileged social position in the past. Ensconced in the home, Ismael's desire to detach himself from society is further illustrated through his habit of watching only foreign news channels whose footage of violent conflict he somewhat callously welcomes as a source of relief: "CNN, CBS… Te tranquiliza. Las bombas explotan lejos [...] Por allí no se cuelan violaciones cercanas. Desde allí nadie te va a contar que esa madrugada han violado a una chica en la misma ciudad en la que ha pasado la noche tu hija menor" (21). In *Regarding the Pain of Others* Susan Sontag contends that the endless cycle of televised images of atrocities produces a desensitising effect, numbing rather than heightening the compassion of spectators. In this way, Ismael attempts to create a psychological disconnect between the home and the immediate society in which he lives: his unsettling thoughts of more proximate

acts of gender-based violence are displaced by televised images of far-off conflicts to which he bears no personal attachment and which therefore pose him, on an individual level, no imminent ethical predicament. This better enables Ismael to reinforce a psychological distinction between the public and private realms, that is, between the tranquillity he seeks indoors and the violence of the outside world: "No, esas noticias y tú no sois del mismo mundo. Ahí afuera todo va muy rápido. Dentro estáis tú y la cafetera eléctrica, atrapados en un tiempo antiguo" (21).

Ultimately, Ismael's attempts to maintain the home as a hermetic space prove ineffectual as, through Jasone, the anti-patriarchal discourse of the outside intrudes upon the domestic sphere. Once a site of unquestioned patriarchal privilege itself, the home is now exposed to the broader societal discontent with prevailing gender power relations. There emerges a tension between Ismael's prevaricating response to the recent attacks and Jasone's insistence that he recognise the relatedness between these individual acts of male violence and the more pervasive patriarchal structures of society. Ismael's casual insinuation that he believes the violence to be a recent and isolated phenomenon is fiercely resisted by Jasone who retorts: "Esto es una guerra, Isma. Y no ha empezado ayer. Es la guerra más larga de la historia" (55). Through Ismael's internal monologue we are privy to his unspoken refusal to accept Jasone's assertion that the recent attacks form part of a history of gendered oppression. Amidst his silent disagreement, he tells himself "que es un malnacido el que haya sido capaz de hacerle eso a esa chica, pero que es una violación y un asesinato. Pero no es una guerra. Que no la han violado y matado todos los hombres del mundo. Que todos no sois iguales" (55-56). By adjudging sexual violence to be the heinous actions of a few psychopathic individuals, Ismael others those perpetrators in order to ignore his own implication in the broader patriarchal structures of which such crimes represent only the most extreme

manifestation. However, in providing a forceful voice within the home for the anti-patriarchal feeling that is emerging within society, Jasone thwarts Ismael's attempted escape from self-reckoning insofar as she disrupts the artificial gendered division that he seeks to establish between the outside and a depoliticised internal domestic space.

A Gendered View of the Battle for the Narrative

Highlighting the partially metafictional character of *La casa del padre*, Olaziregi has underlined how the novel intervenes in prevailing debates on how best to narrate past conflict ("La casa del padre" 106). As well as locating Ismael's examination of his past within the context of contemporary debates over gender inequality, Jaio also situates her novel against the cultural and political backdrop of *la batalla del relato* by articulating, from a specifically gendered perspective, a veiled critique of the totalising narrative mode epitomised by *Patria*. The writer's block that besets Ismael from the beginning of the story prevents him from advancing his latest novel - a proposed chronicle of the turbulent years of the Basque conflict that he describes as "el conflicto vasco visto desde dentro" (17). However, the unfinished work is problematised as a kind of ethnic performance that is intended for the consumption of a Spanish readership, thereby inviting obvious comparisons with the crude othering of Basqueness of which critics have accused Aramburu's *Patria*. Exploiting a contemporary literary appetite for *el tema vasco*, Ismael emphasises his own Basque identity as a guarantee of literary verisimilitude that is, however, framed as a ruse designed to convince his Madrid-based publishers of the novel's commercial potential. Beneath his performativity, Ismael is shown to be incapable of recognising the particular location from which he observes reality and speculates that his current withdrawal from society is the cause of his artistic

drought: “Quizá sea esa la razón de la sequía de los últimos años. Ves la realidad demasiado lejos. No se puede ver nada encerrado ahí, tan lejos del mundo” (18).

Moreover, the grandeur of the novel’s subject-matter - a sweeping account of the conflict - is portrayed as a product of Ismael’s determination to emulate a typically masculine concept of authorship, embedded in the Romantic myth of the male writer as a disembodied genius. Wanting to project an image of himself as an authoritative and all-seeing chronicler of Basque society, Ismael persuades his publishers of his unique capacity to represent “el afilado ambiente de la Euskadi de los ochenta” (17). Nevertheless, this archetype is grounded in an idea of the male author as a privileged observer of public life - a model of masculinity which (much to Ismael’s own sense of self-inadequacy) he has never truly embodied due to his wilful evasion of the politics of his homeland throughout the years of the conflict. As such, Ismael’s latest novel amounts to little more than a clichéd representation of the past which he disparages as “una caricatura de la vida y del conflicto [...] una historia que ni tú mismo te crees” (24). The novel’s portrayal of Ismael’s creative turmoil can therefore be read as an implicit critique of actual literary treatment of the Basque conflict: built around crude stereotypes and simplistic vision of the past, Ismael’s forthcoming work seems to be a *Patria*-esque account of the conflict that is diminished by its author’s totalising pretensions and his self-concealing failure to consider the partiality of his individual perspective on the past. The direct association between the sterility of Ismael’s writing and the totalising pretensions of his novel intimates the undesirability of this approach to representing the past. It is the combination of Ismael’s pursuit of a detached perspective on the conflict and his reluctance to interrogate his own personal memories of that period that seriously detract from the plausibility of his account.

In contrast to the grandiose subject-matter and disembodied perspective to which Ismael aspires, Jasone's recent work - a harrowing first-person description of a fictionalised sexual assault - exhibits a marked distinction: deeply intimate in its tone, her text is centred on the representation of the body, constituting a much more personal narrative mode that she describes as "las historias que nacen en nuestro interior" (44). While not a victim of rape herself, Jasone's work draws explicitly on memories of her own deep-seated psychological fear at the physical threat of male violence that routinely conditioned her behaviour when out at night with her female friends. Presented as a clear counterpart to Ismael's masculine mode of writing, Jasone's work alternatively exemplifies the concept of *écriture féminine* as theorised by French feminist Hélene Cixous in her influential essay "The Laugh of the Medusa". Written as an appeal to women to overcome the historic suppression of their voices by patriarchal societies, Cixous identified the act of writing as an act of feminist resistance, stipulating that "women must write through their bodies" (886). Cixous' prioritisation of the inscription of the individual female body is reflected in the emphasis of Jasone's narrator on her physical response to the assault: "Intento apartar el aliento de la oreja, intento sujetarme los pantalones con los tobillos, intento cerrar los muslos" (40). Through the anaphoric repetition of the first-person verbal form that precedes the various physical sensations, Jasone's narrator reiterates her own subjectivity creating a prose that is intensely personal and far removed from the hollow caricatures that distinguish Ismael's attempted representation of the conflict.

Viewed in the context of her growing rejection of a traditional gender role within the home, Jasone's narrative also marks a tentative act of self-affirmation and subtle resistance to the home's patriarchal power-geometry. To reference Cixous, as a reaction to historic suppression of the female voice, writing functions as a means for women of subverting "the

familial-conjugal enterprise of domestication" (886). In Jasone's case, her intimate narrative gently subverts the patriarchal dynamic of the home in which she has long been resigned to acceptance of Ismael's exclusive status as "el escritor de esta casa" (43). Nonetheless, her refusal to divulge her writing to anyone points to Jasone's internalisation of a sense of inferiority regarding her own work, indicated by her image of herself as a mere adjunct to his creative talent: "Yo no soy más que la esposa que corrige sus escritos antes de mandárselos a Jauregi a la editorial" (43). Persuaded of the grander masculine vision of literature propounded by Ismael, Jasone devalues her own work as trivial and overly personal, dismissing it for lacking the ambitious scope of her husband's fiction: "Yo no era un escritor [...] Mis palabras, para él, no olían a la tinta de los grandes libros ni al vértigo de las grandes aventuras, sino a bizcocho de yogur y a cacao de labios" (45). By presenting this opposition between Ismael's high-profile social status and Jasone's internalised shame at the inferiority of her own writing, the novel exposes how the invisibility of marginalised narrative perspectives is perpetuated by the patriarchal dynamics of society's prevailing gender power relations.

As such, Jaio's novel reveals, through its portrayal of the gendered power geometry of the home, the hierarchical structures that underpin the struggle of different narrative voices to be expressed. The novel consequently provides a parallel with *la batalla del relato* where political power is an intrinsic part of the contest for competing historical perspectives to gain prominence in the public arena. It is shown to be Ismael's privileged social location within the home (a reflection of broader patriarchal structures in society) that has positioned him as the sole writer of the household. At the same time, Jasone's narrative voice remains suppressed by a patriarchal culture that devalues that which is deemed to be overly feminine in its excessive focus on the personal and concern with embodied experience. However, by

placing Ismael's artistic stagnation in opposition to the renewed vigour of Jasone's writing the novel ascribes an unmistakable value to the latter's narrative approach. Since returning to writing, Jasone experiences none of the same creative frustration that has plagued Ismael: "Supuso mi vuelta a escribir historias, después de mucho tiempo. Una vez descrita esa escena, no pude parar de escribir…" (42). Whereas Ismael's detached approach produces material that is contrived and superficial, the fecundity of Jasone's writing is directly attributed to her self-revealing mode of representation, characterised by a narrative that is intensely personal in its focus and rooted in the inscription of her individual body. Given this distinction, the novel can be said to valorise representation of the past that is grounded in self-reflexivity and personal, intimate narratives whilst, conversely, it problematises the totalising narrative mode pursued by Ismael. The objective, authentic account of the conflict that Ismael purports to offer proves impossible to achieve, confronting him with the fact that his own perspective on the past is inevitably a partial, subjective one.

Unsettling Homecomings and the Matriarchal Myth

A central turning point in the novel is Ismael's unexpected return to his childhood home - an event that precipitates the male author's critical examination of his past, belatedly unveiling to him the unequal gendered power relations that govern both the domestic and public spheres. By depicting the family home as a place of patriarchal dominance, Jaio's novel subverts hegemonic nationalist discourse that has often posited the matriarchal structure of Basque society as evidence of cultural particularity. Nationalist tradition has long attributed a particular symbolic importance to the mother figure, idealising her dominance over the domestic realm (Hamilton "Re-membering" 156). Moreover, the matriarch has been understood to possess a central role in the transmission of national ideals and the

Basque language, thereby rendering her a vital contributor to the formation of the nation and the nationalist project (Del Valle 232-33). Within the nationalist imaginary, the matriarch is conceived as "a fundamental guardian of Basqueness through the passing of and adherence to customary cultural norms and through the administration of punishment to those who did not carefully observe them" (Terreros Bilbao 732). However, as Margaret Bullen has explained, the origins of this presumed matriarchal tradition are rooted in ancient Basque mythology - particularly in relation to the goddess Mari - suggesting their questionable basis in material reality (129-34). Although the notion of a Basque matriarchy still persists as a differentiating myth of "Basqueness", it fails to reflect a social reality in which "the social facts and figures show that Basque society is still clearly a male-dominated society in all spheres of power and social prestige" (Díez Mintegui and Bullen 113).[12] Indeed, by relegating the idealised mother to the symbolic realm, the persistence of the matriarchal tradition obscures latent structural inequalities, "naturalis[ing] the patriarchal order and ensur[ing] the permanence of the status quo" (Terreros Bilbao 736).

Ismael's return to the family home exposes him to this latent reality of patriarchal order within the domestic sphere. Forced to care for his frail, elderly father due to his mother's sudden admission to hospital, he is gradually confronted with his prior disregard for his mother and sister's experience of the home as a place of marginalisation, thereby revealing the partiality of his own memories of his upbringing. Displaced from the self-centred, reclusive comfort of his own home, Ismael is entrusted with the responsibility of being a surrogate carer for his father, recasting him in the role previously undertaken by his mother and offering him a vicarious window onto the drudgery of the latter's life of dutiful domesticity alongside his domineering father. The timing of the call informing Ismael of his

[12] See Del Valle et al. (1985) for further criticism of the matriarchal myth.

mother's accident proves apposite, bringing about circumstances that will gradually enable Ismael to comprehend his mother's marginalised experiences of the family life. The sudden news of her injuries arrives as Ismael has abandoned his novel on the Basque conflict, opting instead to write a narrative that adopts a female point-of-view that will allow him to "acercarte a esa mujer, descubrir lo que piensa, lo que siente" (66). However, the disruption of real-life events and the subsequent need to carry out his mother's caring responsibilities for the duration of her convalescence offer a more literal opportunity to perceive the world from a female perspective. Reluctantly thrust into a role where, like his mother before him, his own needs become subordinate to those of his father, Ismael is resituated in an unprivileged position within the patriarchal home. He therefore finds himself now occupying what Haraway termed "the vantage point of the subjugated", a stance from which, she argued, unequal structures are more visibly exposed (583).

To begin with, Ismael's unexpected return brings to the fore the normalised patriarchal values that underpin his conception of the home as his interior monologue betrays the same gendered assumptions that colour his rueful attitudes towards his own domestic situation. Through his second-person narrative we observe Ismael's resentment at being burdened with the care of his father as he instead believes that such a role ought to be incumbent on his sister: "Bajo tu epidermis está marcado a fuego que Libe era la que iba de compras con tu madre y tú el que iba a cazar con tu padre. Libe era la que ayudaba a tu madre a preparar la comida mientras tú jugabas en el descampado al fútbol. Libe era la que se quedaba en casa y tú el que tuvo que acompañar a tu padre cuando tu primo Aitor se perdió en el monte. Ahora no es tu trabajo cuidar a tu padre" (74). Within this expression of inner remonstrance, the repeated binary structure of the successive clauses is reflective of the gendered duality that shapes Ismael's ingrained view of the home as a site of female activity,

denoting his attendant conviction that he himself should be unencumbered by domestic responsibility. In addition, the use of the imperfect tense in Ismael's recollection of these family routines illustrates how it is the habituality of such practices over time that has so firmly instilled his gendered assumptions. As such, it is the disruption of these gendered roles - occasioned in the first place by Ismael's substitution of his mother - that denaturalises the patriarchal norms of the home, eventually enabling Ismael to recognise the oppressive existence endured by his mother and sister, as well as his own internalisation and reproduction of such values.

Yet through the inner wrangling of his reflexive second-person narrative we observe Ismael's initial disinclination to reconcile the observed reality of his parents' present infirmities with his more idealised vision of them. With almost immediate effect, Ismael's departure from the home destabilises his fixed images of his parents as he is confronted by their physical vulnerability, fracturing the narrow gendered stereotypes that shaped his prior perception of his mother and father as, respectively, a stoutly industrious housewife and a robust patriarch. At the sight of his mother's bruised appearance in the hospital bed Ismael is struck for the first time by her frailty: "Se te hace extraño ver a tu madre tumbada, quieta, tan vulnerable de repente, sin poder aceptar que ya no puede gestionarlo todo como lo ha hecho siempre" (68). Whereas previously, Ismael's highly subjective visualisation of his mother's timeless industriousness was expressed through his use of the present continuous, his adjectival description of her present state creates a more static impression that reflects her current immobility. Ismael's internal monologue points to an initial hesitancy to come to terms with the incongruence between these contradictory images of his mother, expressed in his disbelief at her enfeebled condition: "Parece mentira, viéndola así, que sea la misma mujer que desplumaba en la cocina las codornices que había cazado su marido" (68). This

psychological refusal to reconcile the contradiction between immediate reality and his fixed subjective image of his mother is indicative of the stubborn self-assurance of Ismael's view of the world.

However, progressively, this stubbornness is tempered by a growing acknowledgement on Ismael's part of the possibility that his perspective on reality is but a partial one and that he has only ever possessed an incomplete picture of his mother's life: "Tu madre de repente es otra. Alguien que necesita protección, cuidados. Nunca hasta hoy la habías visto así" (69). To a similar end, met with his mother and sister's firm insistence that his father not be left alone due to the old man's fear of solitude, Ismael's internal monologue reveals a hubristic certitude that their concerns are unwarranted: "¿Qué tontería es esa? Todos te hablan como si no conocieran a tu padre. Se ve que no le han visto bajar las cuestas más peligrosas por el monte" (74). Presented with an image of his father that is at odds with his own, Ismael clings to his self-assured vision of the former's robust masculinity, evoking this isolated childhood memory of the hunting trip that is, in his own mind, so strongly connotative of his unwavering sense of his father's innate fortitude. In short, Ismael's unwilling departure from the imagined sanctuary of his own home serves to disrupt his stable vision of this private world: manifested first and foremost through the contradictory image of his parents that he encounters, the uncritical self-assurance displayed by Ismael in relation to his view of his own family is problematised in a way that foreshadows a more self-reflexive examination of his childhood memories.

Met with compelling evidence that his subjective image of his parents fails to reflect a more complex reality, Ismael's return to his childhood home entails a heightened sense of epistemic uncertainty on the part of the male narrator, prompting a renewed sensitivity

towards the inherent relationality of the home. The self-doubt that emerges in Ismael arises from a belated realisation that the experiences of his female relatives - Jasone, Libe, and his mother - have, until now, been of peripheral concern to him. Ismael's own social isolation is thrown into sharp relief by the uncomfortable knowledge that, unlike himself, his elder sister has long known about his mother's ill health, despite the former's emigration to Berlin almost a decade ago. With his own wistful perception of the home destabilised, Ismael begins to recognise the multiplicity of the family household, contained within the hitherto occluded experiences of his mother and sister and encapsulated now in his terse acknowledgement of the home as a place where "se quedan muchas cosas sin decir" (70). Ismael's subsequent reasoning also suggests that the present emergence of these marginalised perspectives renders the internal power relations of the home all the more visible: "Últimamente se te ha acrecentado la sospecha de que los hombres de la familia os estáis perdiendo algo. Que hay a vuestro alrededor un territorio oculto, un mundo extraño que nunca habéis conocido" (71). By conflating his own ignorance with that of his father (from whom the family have long concealed Libe's sexuality), Ismael demonstrates an implicit recognition that such disregard for the experiences of his mother and sister is inexorably a matter of unequal gender relations. Through this tentative recognition that his own perspective is a product of his privileged location within the home's gendered power geometry, the early fruits of Ismael's process of self-reflection begin to be seen. It is therefore through the intimacy of the familial context that we witness the alterations in Ismael's epistemic stance as his personal circumstances demonstrate to him the fallacy of the totalising perspective he had, through his novel, elsewhere aspired to.

Witnessing the Fractures of the Patriarchal Home

If his childhood home was once a site of suppression under paternal authority, Ismael now revisits the household as a place that mirrors the broader disruption of patriarchal power on a societal level, a change that is symbolised internally by the present frailty of his elderly father. Accordingly, Ismael begins to view his own past through a lens that is notably shaped by his exposure to the anti-patriarchal discourse that has become prominent across Basque society. As Susannah Radstone notes, memory always occurs in a local context and, hence, is unavoidably influenced by the social, cultural, and political conditions of this localisation (118). In the same way that the wider upheaval of patriarchal power has allowed the unearthing of the hitherto suppressed memories of ill-treatment, Ismael's return to the home is accompanied by a critical process of personal reminiscence that lays bare the gendered power geometry that formerly shaped the familial sphere. Contemplating the misery endured by his mother who bore the brunt of his father's volatility, Ismael recognises the suppressive atmosphere that marked her experience of the home: "Recuerdas el silencio de tu madre. Realmente acabas de darte cuenta del silencio de tu madre" (104). Furthermore, Ismael recalls the only time he ever witnessed his mother crying following his father's cruel confiscation of her savings. His memory of the incident is clearly articulated through the frames of the present as it is coloured by self-recrimination on account of the disinterest he showed at the time for his mother's wellbeing in the aftermath of his father's coercive behaviour: "Recuerdas que no te atreviste a preguntarle por qué lloraba. No sabes por qué has recordado esa escena de tu madre que creías olvidada" (105). When viewed through the lens of his present struggle to give written expression to a female perspective, Ismael directly attributes the latter difficulties to his prior indifference towards his mother's experiences, a direct result of the emotional fragmentation of the family home: "Cómo vas a poder escribir

así de una mujer, si no conoces ni a las que tienes más cerca. Es como si hubieses estado condenados a vivir en habitaciones aisladas" (105). As such, Ismael's broader struggle to come to terms with the shifting gender politics of society plays out directly in his critical reexamination of his own past as he is compelled to acknowledge previously suppressed memories that now testify to the patriarchal atmosphere that reigned within the family home.

However, aside from enabling the male narrator to recognise the marginalised experience of his mother, the erosion of the home's longstanding patriarchal authority also uncovers a more complex portrait of Ismael's father that serves to destabilise the macho archetype that he long embodied in the mind of his son. Now suffering from dementia, Ismael's father wanders the home in a constant state of anxiety at the absence of his wife, thus evoking involuntarily in Ismael himself a fleeting childhood memory of the similar disquiet displayed by his father after he was cruelly ostracised by his colleagues for his failure to support industrial action at the factory where he worked: "Lo ves nervioso, descolocado. Y ver así a tu padre te ha recordado aquella época de huelgas en la fábrica; también entonces se abrió alguna grieta en él [...] Te habían dicho que tu padre era un esquirol" (104). The fact that Ismael only now attributes significance to this discarded memory points to the selective nature of remembrance that, until now, had allowed him to sustain a rigid vision of his father's rugged masculinity. Moreover, by recalling his father's victimisation by the herd mentality of a trade union culture that was also pervaded by a culture of toxic masculinity, Ismael begins to acquire a more complex picture of the latter's implication within a broader patriarchal culture. Although Ismael acknowledges the past callousness of his father, the latter is not exclusively portrayed as a perpetrator of patriarchal oppression: Ismael's memory of his father's ostracisation highlights the distress he endured as a partial victim of the same patriarchal values that he otherwise stringently upheld. In this

way, Ismael's critical examination of the past resists a purely Manichean vision by avoiding a strictly demonising portrayal of a father whose own vulnerabilities are revealed.

Indeed, it is through the mental frailty and waning physicality of the ageing patriarch that the upheaval of the home's gendered hierarchy is metaphorically represented, relegating the once dominant father figure to a position of dependency and vulnerability. As he carefully washes him, Ismael's exposure to the nakedness of the elderly man's frail body signifies his simultaneous disillusion of the forceful image of robust masculinity the latter once embodied. Ismael likens this diminishment of his father's stature - both physically and in terms of his authority - to the deterioration of a once sturdy home: "Sientes que estás ante un edificio enorme que se derrumba. Te escuece por lo que ha sido tu padre para ti. Las paredes de su casa se desmoronan" (156). The old man's enfeebled and nervous state denaturalises the firm image of masculinity that he once easily projected, exposing to Ismael the performative construction of this gendered identity: "Tu padre, solo, parece otra persona [...] Sin ella, de repente, parece un niño miedoso que intenta esconder su miedo hablando con voz de hombre, la misma voz que aprendiste de él" (103). As such, Ismael comes to recognise the extent to which his father also strived to conform to a traditional masculine identity. Disabused of his simplistic notions regarding his parent's relationship, Ismael now discerns the artifice of his father's patriarchal authority by observing the present vulnerability of the man who epitomised that structure. If the collapse of the metaphorical edifice of his father's authority transforms the once stifling home into a place where Libe's marginalised perspective can now be heard, the faded power of the patriarch is shown to be equally liberating for Ismael. Ismael's tempered view of his weakened father as "piel sensible que ha vivido demasiado tiempo bajo una armadura" (157) signifies a fragmentation of the

oppressive image of traditional masculinity he felt obliged to attain, allowing him instead to consider its harmful impact upon himself.

Thematising the Tensions of Collective Remembrance

Ismael's engagement with the past is not simply depicted as an individualised undertaking: through the simultaneous return to the family home of his older sister, Libe, the novel portrays memory as a dialogic process, jointly carried out through the two siblings' active reconstruction of the past. Ismael's efforts to construct a more fulsome picture of his childhood are shown to be contingent on the ability of Libe's once-marginalised perspective now being freely expressed within the home. Having long abandoned the oppressive atmosphere of the patriarchal home by emigrating to Berlin, Libe's present-day return to the household further evidences the upheaval of its gender power geometry: no longer stifled by the father's forceful authority, Libe is now able to articulate her own perspective on their childhood, helping to contextualise Ismael's reinterpretation of the past. This represents a notable transformation from the earlier atmosphere of the household, exemplified by Ismael's recollection of their father's assignment of traditional gendered roles to his son and daughter as children. Visualising the effects of this through the segregated spatiality of the childhood home, Ismael recalls how this gendered separation of himself and Libe induced a growing emotional estrangement between the once-close siblings that can only now be reversed through her recent homecoming:

> Fue entonces cuando la puerta de Libe se cerró para ti para siempre. No se ha vuelto a abrir más. A partir de entonces, tu hermana se te ha escapado como una lagartija, nunca te ha dado permiso para saber qué siente, para saber quién es en realidad.

> Cómo conocer así a las mujeres. Realmente, tampoco tú has hecho un especial esfuerzo para entrar en esa cueva (62)

The novel foregrounds the particular complexities of Libe's experience of marginalisation, not merely portraying her exclusion within the home solely in terms of her gender but demonstrating how her sexuality and active engagement with nationalist politics equally placed her at odds with the conservative patriarchal values upheld by her father. Libe's sporadic visits to the home since living in Berlin have been marked by the forced concealment of her sexuality, on account of the family's tacit refusal to acknowledge her relationship with another woman, lest it displease their father, who, oblivious to his daughter's same-sex relationship, cruelly mocks her for having never married. In addition, the novel also shows the heterogeneity of the nationalist community through its depiction of Libe's direct involvement in the radical politics of the *abertzale* movement: her politics are shown to have been in conflict with the monolithic form of conservative nationalism to which her father subscribed, evidenced by his prior attempts to inculcate Ismael as a boy by teaching him the traditional Basque hymn "Inazio gure patroi handia" which he described as "nuestras canciones de toda la vida" (61). By contrast, Libe's opposition to her father's nativist concept of Basqueness is inscribed in her own musical preferences as indicated by her interest in punk groups such as Hertzainak whose lyrics conveyed resistance to "sanctified symbols of political affiliation and national identity" (Kasmir 55). The reasons that Libe's political identity therefore represented an affront to the patriarchal home are twofold: by rejecting the passive feminine role of domesticity envisaged for her by her father, she defied a conventional view of politics as an exclusively male domain; moreover, the revolutionary character of the specific ideology she embraced amounted to a further rejection of her father's Christian-conservative brand of political nationalism.

The non-conformity of Libe's participation in radical nationalist politics as a young woman sits in firm opposition to Ismael's own fearful avoidance of political commitment during what he anxiously terms "aquel ambiente oscuro de militancia política" (62). However, despite his desire to write a novel about the Basque conflict, Ismael acknowledges his complete disregard for his own sister's actual first-hand experience of those years of political turmoil: "Nunca hablaste con ella sobre lo que ocurrió, no sobre cómo se sintió esos días" (62). Ismael's ignorance is shown to be the product of Libe's enforced marginalisation within the patriarchal home where her radical political identity remained firmly taboo, even after the traumatic ordeal of her arbitrary detention for almost a week by the Guardia Civil under the pretext of draconian anti-terrorist legislation. Left unspoken, this served to preserve the patriarchal authority of the home by maintaining the illusion of the private sphere as a strictly depoliticised space. It is only in the present day that - aided by a climate of abated patriarchal oppression that is symbolised by her father's fragility- Libe proves capable of communicating her own lived experiences within the home.

However, when the home eventually becomes the setting for the siblings to engage in a process of collective remembering, this process is shown to be fraught with tension and conflict due to Ismael and Libe's opposing interpretations of their familial past. Through her return, Libe contributes an implicit feminist lens that causes Ismael to recognise the historic patriarchal culture that lies behind their father's past mistreatment of their mother. In this way, Libe's perspective proves pivotal in enabling Ismael to understand the relatedness between the public and private spheres and to situate his personal experiences within a broader social context. Confronted by his sister's intimation of the malice with which their father treated their mother, Ismael initially assumes a defensive posture, dismissing her suggestions as an unjust attempt to judge the past by present moral standards: "No tenéis

derecho a juzgar la relación de vuestros padres. ¿Cómo medir algo del pasado con ojos del presente?" (153). At first, the moral relativism displayed by Ismael when reflecting on his parents' relationship allows him to casually dismiss any incidents of mistreatment as aberrations in an otherwise happy marriage: "Seguramente más de una vez perdió los nervios y no trató a tu madre con respeto. Pero… es tu padre. Es el hombre que aparece en la foto del salón casándose enamorado de tu madre" (154). This desire to focus on the fixed image of marital harmony contained within the old photograph exemplifies Ismael's instinctual reluctance to accept a more contradictory picture of his parents' relationship; his predisposition towards an idealised view of the past prevents him from fully acknowledging the darker aspects of his parents' marriage despite them now being revealed to him.

Nevertheless, Ismael's attitude of moral relativism is countered by his elder sister's capacity for more detailed recollection as she sheds light on the toxic nature of their parents' relationship. Libe presents Ismael with facets of his mother's lived experience that had remained hitherto unexpressed due to the prevailing silence of the home, recounting how their mother "se encontraba muy sola lejos de su pueblo, de sus amistades, aislada, vulnerable" (155). Similarly, by elucidating the circumstances that provoked that very scene, Libe's account of their father's spiteful confiscation of their mother's savings for a new coat serves to frame Ismael's decontextualized childhood memory of his mother crying. When met with Ismael's attempts to rationalise their father's refusal to allow their mother to join a sewing club, Libe wearily explicates their father's domineering behaviour by situating it within context of a more ubiquitous pattern of male coercion exerted through the confinement of female partners: "Te ha dicho después, con ese tono cansino de maestra que utiliza cuando habla de los derechos de las mujeres, que aislar a las mujeres es una manera de debilitarlas, prohibiéndoles salir con las amigas o enseñándoles que su relación tiene que ser siempre

conflictiva" (155). However, Jaio avoids simply reducing Libe's character to an absolute moral voice whose sole function within the novel is to enlighten Ismael: despite the sermonising tone in which Libe is able to conceptualise their parents' relationship as part of a broader structural oppression, she too wrestles with the contradictions between her individual actions towards her mother in the past and the feminist principles she otherwise holds to.

Like the chapters narrated by Ismael, those written from Libe's perspective also adopt a second-person narrative voice that captures her own self-reflective examination of the past. Expressed in a mood of self-recrimination, through Libe's interior monologue she contemplates the potential incongruence between her strongly held feminist ideals and the manner in which, through her own haste to escape an oppressive home, she necessarily abandoned her vulnerable mother, ignoring the latter's pleas to stay. Through these contradictions, Libe's back story also illustrates the novel's resistance against viewing the past through a simplistic victim-perpetrator binary insofar as, although subjected to a marginalised position within the home, Libe equally chastises herself for turning a blind eye to the abuse suffered by her mother. It is therefore through the self-reflexive form of her narration that we observe Libe's recognition of her own complex implication in the patriarchal culture that conditioned her upbringing.

Once a marginalised figure within the home, the historical perspective that Libe is now able to articulate on their familial history helps to underline the partiality of Ismael's more idealised view of the past. Michael Rothberg posits that memory should be conceived of as "subject to ongoing negotiation, cross-referencing, and borrowing; as productive and not privative" (*Multidirectional Memory* 3). Although referring specifically to public expressions of memory, Rothberg's theory remains valid on a more intimate scale,

demonstrated by the novel's depiction of the siblings' dialogic reconstruction of their familial past through the exchange of their contrasting perspectives, and the tensions that are intrinsic to that same process. Libe's return to the family home undermines her brother's attempts to maintain a stable, idealised vision of the past, illustrating - on an intimate level - the value of integrating marginalised historical perspectives as Libe's memories offer Ismael a more coherent picture of the suffering endured by his mother. Libe counterbalances Ismael's proclivity towards nostalgia by contextualising his fragmentary memories in order to reveal the power geometry of the family home while also situating their familial past within a wider cultural context. By contextualising the misery of their mother's private experiences as part of a pervasive structure of gendered oppression, Libe emphasises the inexorable connections between the relations of the home and society more broadly, exemplifying Massey's contention that any individual place must be understood in terms of "the specificity of its interactions with the outside" (*Space, Place and Gender* 168). Moreover, Libe's determination to contextualise their personal past emphasises the agonistic view of memory contained within the novel: the abusive behaviour of their father is shown to be conditioned by - as well as symptomatic of - a broader patriarchal culture, rather than a mere case of innate malevolence that is limited to the confines of the home.

Reckoning with the Past and Reforming the Present

The main consequence of Libe's dispute with Ismael over the past is the latter's coming to terms with his own implication - past and present - within the patriarchal structures that his sister has demanded that he recognise. Ismael is forced to confront not only the reality of the home as a place of fearful oppression for his mother, but also, on an individual level, his own dismissive attitude towards her past treatment at the hands of his father.

Following Libe's rebuke of his negationist view of the past, Ismael is gripped by a retrospective horror at his own inaction and disregard for his mother's misery that manifests itself in the form of a gruesome vision in which his father shoots his mother whilst he himself passively observes, "mirando la escena sin hacer nada" (155). A subsequent vision also signifies his realisation of how his mother's situation was long suppressed and unconsciously displaced in his own mind by a more palatable image of domestic comfort: "Has visto a tu madre fregando el suelo, en zig-zag, limpiando los restos de sangre, como queriendo ocultar los rastros de su propio asesinato" (156). Whereas Ismael previously invoked a similar image of his mother mopping the floor as a soothing vision of maternal domesticity, the same action is now suffused with his revulsion at the inherent violence of her perpetual subordination within the home.

As Ismael's reflection on the past comes to focus increasingly on the nature of his own personal relationships he also begins to reckon with the deleterious effects he himself experienced on account of his implication within a pervasive culture of toxic masculinity. This is explored primarily through Ismael's memories of the relationship between himself, his father, and his cousin, Aitor - a relationship that now epitomises for Ismael the harmful impact that the toxic masculinity embodied by his father exerted on both boys. Ismael's deep sense that his father has been perpetually disappointed in him is inextricably linked to his failure to exhibit the same reckless fearlessness as Aitor who, he recalls, was by comparison always treated "como a un hombre más" (120). In contrast to Ismael's timidity as a boy, the bold audacity of his cousin represented firm proof of his masculinity in the eyes of the father, with Aitor even agreeing on one occasion to callously shoot the family's ageing dog when a horrified Ismael refused to put him down (119). Ismael comes to recognise that the persistent pressure he has felt to conform to traditional norms of masculinity is borne out of this

perceived failure to do so in the eyes of his father. In particular, he has been forever burdened with guilt due to his father's tacit knowledge that, presumably too cowardly to venture down a steep hillside, he failed to properly search for his cousin when Aitor went missing, leaving the latter in an unconscious state that resulted in irreversible psychological damage (121).

However, Ismael now realises that, even though Aitor better embodied the toxic masculine identity fostered by his father, his cousin also suffered from a desperate desire to project this traditional macho image. Through Ismael's memories of Aitor's pursuit of this image through the militant culture of ETA's political violence, Jaio establishes a relatedness between the personal and the political that is already inferred by the title of the novel itself. As mentioned in the introduction to this chapter, the title of the novel not only indicates its critique of a society ruled by patriarchal structures, but also functions as an allusion to Basque writer Gabriel Aresti's renowned poem, "Nire aitaren etxea" - a passionate declaration of sacrificial loyalty to the defence of Basque identity that has long constituted an iconic text within nationalist culture. Through the tragic figure of Aitor, the novel posits a connection between the gendered oppression that is upheld by Ismael's father within the family home and the political culture of radical nationalism that was no less immune to harmful forms of masculinity. Carrie Hamilton has observed that, although the *abertzale* movement offered women increased opportunities for participation in political activism during the seventies, its increasingly militarist character bore a firmly masculinist ethic that reinforced traditional gender norms (*Women and ETA* 176). In remembering the reckless character of his cousin, Ismael now recognises how ETA's violent political militancy offered an ideal vehicle through which a teenage Aitor could prove his manhood yet which ultimately brought about the latter's untimely death when Aitor was fatally injured by homemade

explosives. Contemplating the horrendous consequences of his cousin's determination to conform to a robust image of masculinity by pursuing its most extreme manifestations in the form of political violence, Ismael rues that Aitor's death was a result of "El miedo a deshacerse del grupo, a ser expulsado de él" (187).

However, recalling his sighting of a frenzied Aitor drunkenly shouting pro-ETA slogans in a local bar just prior to his death, Ismael confesses to himself his equal hatred towards his cousin: "Deseaste que desapareciera para siempre. Reconociste, por primera vez, que no fue solo el miedo lo que te impidió bajar por el terraplén" (163). Ismael's reckoning with his memories of the triadic relationship between himself, his father and Aitor illustrates the contradictory impact of the father's toxic masculinity. If being pitted against his cousin left Ismael with a profound sense of inadequacy, at the same time, it instilled within him a violent hostility towards Aitor. This signals his internalisation of the same antagonistic logic inherent in the father's sadistic treatment of the two boys as mutual rivals, that ultimately led to Aitor's sad demise.

As Ismael's confrontation with the past helps him to understand his own implication in the structures of a patriarchal society, the novel's denouement illustrates how this equally enables him to recognise the latent inequalities that exist in his present relationship with Jasone. When Jasone secretly submits her own work to Ismael's editor, Jauregi, the latter's refusal to believe that she is actually the author of the text reinforces an already internalised sense of inferiority, leaving her resigned to allow Ismael to publish the work as his own. By conceiving of this self-censorship as a metaphorical violation by masculine power, personified by Jauregi, Jasone dejectedly reaffirms her renewed sense of marginalisation: "Volvía obediente, a mi sitio, como un perro que acurruca a los pies de su amo. Fue como

desplazarme de una bofetada del centro de una historia, zas, al margen" (175). The dehumanised image she projects of herself reflects how Jasone experiences her decision as a further effacement of self: "Y se llevaban lo más íntimo de mí. Me robaban lo más íntimo" (177).

However, despite Ismael's initial willingness to pass off Jasone's novel as his own, he crucially reverses his acquiescence to her offer when, overcome by a sudden self-loathing, he reflects on his prior disregard for his wife's contribution to his success. This evokes again a memory of his father cruelly stealing his mother's savings, albeit where his parents are now recast in the recollection as Ismael and Jasone themselves. Establishing in his mind an explicit connection with the oppressive nature of his parent's relationship, Ismael's visualisation of "Jasone llorando sentada sobre la cama, mirando a la lata vacía" (199) underscores his own sense of culpability at his subordination of her subjectivity. Conscious of how he previously marginalised Jasone's experiences or even sought to appropriate them, Ismael's desire to atone ultimately enables a fundamental resignification of the home which becomes a place that accommodates the presence of both writers on an even footing. Jasone's active placement of her novel on the kitchen table "como queriendo marcar que aquel es su territorio" (220) symbolises the democratising transformation of the home into a place where both individuals hold equal status, evidenced further by Ismael's reference to the couple as "dos escritores sin palabras" (218) that demonstrates an appreciation of his wife's subjectivity beyond a mere adjunct to his work.

Having previously taken for granted the conditions that facilitated his preeminence over Jasone both as a writer and within the home, Ismael comes to reassess the location of his own perspective causing Libe to observe how her brother appears "nervioso, como si no

lograra encontrar su sitio en su propia cocina" (204). His realisation of the need to come to terms with his own location prompts Ismael to abandon his intent to write a novel from a female point-of-view. Instead, he resolves to narrate his own intimate experiences, specifically the traumatic hunting trip that proved so formative in terms of an internalised view of masculinity, leading him to repeat the maxim previously directed at him by Jasone: "No es fácil hablar de nadie si no sabes muy bien desde dónde miras" (205). Ismael recognises that coming to terms with his own past and the particularity of his location is essential to facilitating better identification with the perspectives of others: "Sólo contándote a ti mismo [...] podrás saber dónde has aprendido a mirar el mundo; solo reconociendo el origen de la voz que utilizas con tu padre, podrás llegar a entrar un día en la piel de la mujer de tu pesadilla" (221).

Conclusion

Although the political conflict in the Basque Country functions as more of a backdrop than a primary focus in *La casa del padre*, the extent to which the novel's examination of the years of the conflict from a gender perspective presents a more agonistic conceptualisation of memory provides a useful counterpoint to the zero-sum disputes of *la batalla del relato*. Indeed, by problematising Ismael's desire to produce a best-seller about the Basque conflict, from the outset of the novel Jaio rejects the very possibility of achieving a single, objective truth about the past. To convey this, she instead draws on contemporary debates around gender inequality as an alternative point of departure for the novel's interrogation of the past, exposing the way in which Ismael's nostalgic view of his childhood home stems from his failure to reflect on the specific location of his own perspective. Thereafter *La casa del padre* offers a portrayal of memory that is characterised by reflexivity as Ismael's reckoning with

the gendered power-geometry of the domestic sphere gradually forces him to come to terms with the intrinsic particularity and partiality of his recollections of the home. Moreover, the novel's polyphonic narrative privileges multiple vantage points, simultaneously revealing Ismael's growing acknowledgement of his partial perspective on the past whilst also granting a voice to the marginalised perspectives of Libe and Jasone. By dramatising the interaction between the siblings' respective memories of their upbringing, the novel foregrounds the way in which the past is reconstructed dialogically, insinuating that the incorporation of once marginalised perspectives can cultivate more complex interpretations of the past in which previously silenced oppressions are rendered visible.

While prioritising personal, self-reflexive explorations of the past as a corrective to the totalising perspective initially pursued by Ismael, *La casa del padre* equally demonstrates the extent to which the personal is invariably entangled within the socio-political structures of the past. In doing so, Jaio's novel offers a further commonality with the principles of agonistic memory, as well as a point of distinction from Aramburu's decontextualised representation of the past in *Patria*. By illustrating the variegated means by which prevailing patriarchal attitudes pervaded the increasingly militant industrial and political movements of the era, Jaio emphasises the complex imbrication of the personal and the political, situating the power relations of the patriarchal home within a broader historical context. The novel carefully renders the nuanced and contradictory forms of each character's implication within these patriarchal structures in a way that points to varying degrees of agency so that - except arguably for the mother - no individual character is reduced to the category of an absolute victim or perpetrator. While she undoubtedly casts greater scrutiny upon the harmful traits of masculinity exhibited by her male characters, Jaio's depiction of them is not without empathy

but shows a recognition of the extent to which they too are negatively impacted by a prevailing culture of misogyny.

Chapter Five: Coming of Age in *Los años de plomo* and the Structures of Male Violence in Edurne Portela's *Mejor la ausencia*

Prior to the publication of her debut novel, Edurne Portela had spent the majority of her professional life as an academic in the US where much of her work focused on the representation of trauma and memory in contemporary Hispanic literature. Released in 2009, her first monograph, *Displaced Memories: The Poetics of Trauma in Argentine Women Writers*, examined the representational strategies used in the trauma narratives of imprisoned and exiled writers such as Alicia Partnoy and Alicia Kozameh.[13] In Portela's later study of *En el infierno: Ser mujer en las cárceles de España* (2007) - Spanish feminist writer and politician Lidia Falcón's account of her experience of incarceration under Franco's dictatorship - she focuses on the representation of the prison as a space of violent oppression but also one where potential subversion could be effectively practised by the female inmates. The above works emphasise the female body as a location where the violence of these spaces is enacted and performed. Moreover, both studies are underpinned by a conceptual understanding of space as not an immutable, static container where memories and experiences are deposited but as a dynamic, fluid entity diffused by structures of power and domination.

Having undertaken extensive prior research into political violence within a Latin American context, Portela's focus would eventually be drawn towards the emerging post-conflict situation back home in the Basque Country. As it was, following a conversation with the Irish journalist and author of several books about the Basque Country, Paddy

[13] Both Partnoy and Kozameh have written about their experiences as political prisoners during the Argentine military dictatorship of the late seventies. In 1986 Partnoy released *The Little School: Tales of Disappearance and Survival* while living in exile in the USA - a novel in which she recounts her imprisonment in a concentration camp of the same name. Published in 1987, *Pasos bajo el agua* is Kozameh's own account of her time as a political prisoner and exile.

Woodworth, Portela came to the realisation that it was time for a shift of focus: "me hizo ver que yo escribía sobre esa violencia para no enfrentarme a la que conocía de primera mano, me di cuenta de que debía reubicarme, dejar de girar la cabeza hacia otros lugares" (*El eco de los disparos* 19). The most immediate outcome of this new engagement with the ramifications of recent history in the Basque Country would be the 2016 publication of *El eco de los disparos*. In this singular work that centres on contemporary cultural representations of the Basque conflict, Portela merges vignettes of personal memory with extended critical analysis of a selection of films and works of literature. Whilst this earlier publication and *Mejor la ausencia* can certainly be read as standalone works, an outline of Portela's main arguments in the former functions as a useful guide prior to reading her subsequent novel.

In *El eco de los disparos*, Portela adopts a critical position in relation to prevailing attitudes towards the past in the Basque Country where, she contends, there is a general reluctance to confront the actual complexity of both individual and collective connections to violence. Stating herself in forthright terms she makes the rather tendentious claim that significant sections of Basque society were - and to a large degree remain - "mayoritariamente indiferente" towards a violence that "ha sido ordinaria, omnipresente y por lo tanto normalizada" (18). Portela takes the view that "años de convivencia con y ejercicio de la violencia" have engendered an indifference and silence towards the suffering of others and that this comes as a product of imagining fellow citizens as "un ser con el que tenemos poco o nada en común" (23). She argues that representations of the past that perpetuate a rigid victim-perpetrator binary merely serve to reinforce the radical alterity of both, failing to recognize the various interrelations between individuals and thus precluding the reader or viewer's emotional engagement with "el dolor del otro" (22). As she puts it: "subrayando la radicalidad de los otros nos facilita no plantearnos nuestra propia

complicidad" (188). Her interest lies rather in a smaller number of works that present a more nuanced picture of the past by situating readers in "espacios afectivos de incomodidad e incertidumbre" (146) - these being spaces that induce a critical introspection of one's own potential complicity - if only indirectly - with violence. Through her emphasis on the need to confront individual complicity, Portela's essay invites comparison with Michael Rothberg's recent work *The Implicated Subject: Beyond Victims and Perpetrators* in which he proposes the concept of the "implicated subject" as a broad term that prompts greater considerations of individuals' positioning within the grey zones of complicity that transcend the victim-perpetrator binary.[14]

Mejor la ausencia arguably constitutes Portela's own imaginative response to the central thesis of her prior essay. If *El eco de los disparos* already represented for the author a more personal treatment of her chosen subject matter (insofar as it marks a transition from a detached academic tone to the hybrid narrative form described above), *Mejor la ausencia* is the logical continuation of that trajectory towards an increasingly intimate exploration of violence. In fact, Portela has revealed how she discarded an initial draft of the novel that was originally written from the distant perspective of an omniscient third-person narrator. The switch to a highly subjective first-person narrative would better allow for what Portela describes in an interview as an exploration of "cómo nos marca el entorno en el que vivimos cuando ese entorno está radicalmente impregnado de violencia" ("Veo todo negro"). Whilst she has denied the autobiographical nature of the events of the novel, both the geographical and historical setting roughly coincide with her own upbringing in Santurtzi in the Basque province of Vizcaya. Set in the former industrial heartlands of the Left Bank of Bilbao's

[14] It is worth noting that there are certain contradictions in *El eco de los disparos*: while a central thesis of Portela's essay is the potential of film and literature to overcome the othering of violent perpetrators, her own description of ETA members at times employs the same demonising language that she herself criticises. For instance, in her analysis of Aitor Merino's documentary *Asier eta biok* (2013) - a film in which Merino attempts to understand his childhood friend's motivations for joining ETA - Portela variously describes the latter's testimony as an "absurda justificación" (47) and "una explicación demencial" (49).

Nervión River, *Mejor la ausencia* takes the form of a first-person account of the childhood experiences of a young girl, Amaia. The narrator's upbringing spans a period from the late seventies to the early nineties, coinciding with over a decade of deep socio-political unrest in the Basque Country, shaped not only by the political violence of ETA but also the dirty war conducted by the Spanish state, and the devastating fallout from a process of deindustrialization.

Divided into two parts, the first section (which constitutes the majority of the novel) spans a period of thirteen years from 1979 to 1992. This interval corresponds with some of most turbulent moments in recent Basque history: in addition to the ever-present threat of ETA violence during the so-called *años de plomo* and the repressive counter-terrorist strategies deployed by state security forces under the guise of the Plan ZEN, the eighties was a decade marked by major socio-economic upheaval. Formerly one of Spain's most productive regions, barely five years into the transition from dictatorship to democracy the Basque Country's newly-established autonomous government faced a devastating economic recession as the global oil crisis took a particularly heavy toll on the region due to its reliance upon key sectors such as shipbuilding, mining and steelworks. This impact was most pronounced in the industrial heartlands of Vizcaya where unemployment rose from around 3 percent in 1975 to over 25 percent a decade later (Mees 144-45). Told through the eyes of the young female narrator, Amaia, Portela's novel centres around the Gorostiaga family whose home on the Left Bank of the Nervión river in a declining industrial town on the outskirts of Bilbao is a place where violence is an everyday occurrence, inflicted primarily at the hands of the father, Amadeo.

Whereas the focus of Portela's analysis in *El eco de los disparos* is the political violence experienced in the Basque Country, in *Mejor la ausencia* she offers a depiction of the same historical period but, on this occasion, examines it from the perspective of gender violence. Although the turbulent political situation still forms a clear backdrop in the novel, Portela has explained that with her novel she wished to pursue "una ampliación temática" and has maintained that "no es una novela sobre ETA o no por lo menos exclusivamente" ("Reseña"). To that end, she has expressed her discomfort over efforts to reduce interpretations of the past to the sole issue of ETA's terrorism, stating that "cualquier relato totalizante simplifica la historia y la realidad que se representa" ("La novela"). In addition, Portela has signalled her intention to resist the Manichaeism that has often framed disputes over the Basque conflict, stating her belief that "en estas situaciones podemos ser las dos cosas: víctimas de una violencia brutal y actuar después como verdugos [...] el encuadre es muy limitado y la realidad rompe ese encuadre" ("La novela"). Eager to avoid reducing the past to a simplistic morality tale, Portela has explained that in *Mejor la ausencia* she is keen to reflect the fact that "el tema de la violencia en Euskadi es sumamente complejo y no puede hablarse sólo de terrorismo, porque hay muchas otras formas de violencia" ("La novela").

Although Portela's novel predominantly explores the years of the Basque conflict through the prism of gender violence, the purpose of this chapter is to illustrate that there is an important distinction between the representation of violence in *Mejor la ausencia* and the Manichean, decontextualized view of the past presented in *Patria* where the brutality of ETA is framed as an individualised, pathological phenomenon. Despite the fact that the two works mainly deal with different forms of violence, I believe that Portela's novel offers an alternative paradigm for representing violence that might also be used to reflect on the issue of political violence in the Basque Country. In my analysis of *Mejor la ausencia* I will focus

on how Portela emphasises the naturalisation of violence, situating it within its social context through her depiction of the abuse suffered by Amaia within the childhood home. By examining Portela's portrayal of the home through the lens of Massey's concept of power-geometry I will argue that the novel underlines the way in which violent authority exercised by Amaia's abusive father is internalised and reproduced by Amaia and her male siblings.

Following on from this, I will examine how Portela further attempts to contextualise and historicise this intimate exposure to violence by alluding to the close imbrication between the turmoil of the domestic sphere and the volatility of the wider socio-political context, creating a central tension in the novel between a patriarchal authority that seeks to maintain a public/private division and an external context that threatens to destabilise this separation. Moreover, I will contend that Portela stresses the subjective experience of violence through her use of a child narrator, producing a fragmented and unreliable narrative voice that highlights Amaia's partial perspective on the past.

Subsequently, my analysis will draw on previous studies of female Bildungsroman to examine Amaia's experiences of the outside world during her adolescent years. I will contend that, by problematising the coming-of-age journey of the classic Bildungsroman narrative, the novel contextualises the female narrator's private experiences by charting Amaia's progressive realisation that the violence she has experienced within the home is entwined within a wider patriarchal social system that exerts a violent oppression of her body, denying her opportunities for self-realisation, and ultimately inhibiting her own subjective development. Finally, I will consider how Portela foregrounds the inherent difficulties Amaia faces when coming to terms with her traumatic past by equating the narrator's desire to

achieve a false sense of closure through narrative with her retreat from the outside world and avoidance of the fractured social relations that remain as a result of her unresolved past.

Depicting the "Power Geometry" of the Patriarchal Home

Through Amaia's first-person account of her early childhood experiences, the child narrator presents the family home as a place that is shaped by patriarchal violence, primarily embodied in the authoritative figure of her brutish father, Amadeo, who routinely inflicts both physical and psychological abuse upon his wife and children. The novel foregrounds the impact of Amaia's exposure to this violence upon the early formation of her subjectivity as the oppressive atmosphere that reigns within the home exerts a literal control over her physical body, positioning her as a marginalised subject within the domestic sphere. Locating female subjectivity within the body, Iris Marion Young argues that patriarchal oppression over women's bodies inhibits the female subject from fully constituting herself because her life is lived as "physically inhibited, confined, positioned, and objectified" (42). From an early age, Amaia instinctively restricts her own physical movement for fear of suffering the repercussions of one of her father's violent outbursts, underlining how exposure to a violent environment shapes the individual. Overhearing an argument between her parents, the narrator describes how such incidents entail her own confinement to her bedroom, marking the home as a place of imposed physical restriction for Amaia: "Está todo muy negro. Ama ha cerrado mi puerta. Cuando está aita, cierra. Hacen ruidos. La abuela me ha enseñado a contar ovejitas" (11-12). Through her use of the present indicative, Amaia emphasises the routine nature of violence within the home, while also illustrating how her learned physical response to her father's anger is to force herself to sleep by counting sheep. During a tense and fractious car journey over the border to visit their uncle, Amaia similarly feigns being

asleep in order to avoid inciting her father's rage: "No abro los ojos cuando paramos en la frontera. Tampoco cuando aita se enfada porque se ha perdido [...] Tardamos mucho pero yo no abro los ojos hasta que el coche se para y aita abre mi puerta, me acaricia la cabeza y me da un besito en la nariz" (20). Reinforcing a sense that Amaia's submission to patriarchal authority demands complete physical passivity, Amadeo's affectionate gesture towards his daughter at the end of the car journey is shown to be contingent upon her docile obedience, practised through the inhibition of her body and shutting down of her senses to the world around her. Often, however, Amaia is unable to even control her physical response to Amadeo's rage, further symbolising the loss of self that is produced by the trauma of her exposure to the violence within the home. Witnessing her father's brutal attack on her brother and mother, Amaia experiences a feeling of dispossession of her body that eventually results in her losing consciousness: "Yo le quiero saludar, pero no me sale la voz. Me quiero acercar a él, pero no me puedo mover. Estoy temblando y no veo bien [...] Yo siento calor en las piernas. Me he hecho chis [...] Veo todo negro. Todo negro. Sólo negro" (26).

Moreover, Amaia's narration situates her own frightening experiences within the broader social relations of the home, highlighting the interconnectedness of the individual family members and the way in which violence is variously transmitted throughout this network. The child narrator's account of the violence to which she is exposed therefore creates a depiction of the home that reflects Doreen Massey's theorisation of place as a "particular constellation of social relations" (*Space, Place and Gender* 148). Notwithstanding her young age, Amaia displays a naturalised awareness of the power-geometry of the home and the implications of this for her own personal situation. This is exemplified by her rudimentary understanding of the lowly individual position she occupies within the family hierarchy: alluding to how this conditions her behaviour, Amaia

recognises that her own wellbeing is invariably contingent on the benevolence or lack thereof shown towards her by her father. In one instance, although desperate to rush to the comfort of her mother's bed after a nightmare, Amaia stops herself from doing so to avoid angering her father: "Pero hoy está aita y si se enfada mañana no me hace cosquillas. Y no me lleva de excursión. Y le dice a ama que soy mala. Y ama se pone triste" (12). Highlighted by her anaphoric repetition of "y", Amaia exhibits a basic awareness of the multiple repercussions of her father's volatile mood, prompting her to weigh up her actions through the prism of the potential ramifications upon different family members. From the outset, Portela's novel therefore foregrounds the naturalisation of patriarchal violence within the familial sphere, illustrating how it gradually shapes the behaviour and psychological development of the younger members of the household.

Portela's portrayal of the naturalisation of violence within the home is most immediately evident in Amaia's elder male siblings who, from an early age, begin to exhibit a toxic masculinity that emerges from their subjection to their father's violent aggression. Raewyn Connell has theorised how male dominance over both women and other men is sustained by harmful and intimadatory practices such as physical attacks and verbal abuse that reaffirm patriarchal power relations (83).[15] In the novel Kepa, Aníbal and Aitor internalise the violence inflicted upon them by Amadeo, reproducing it both against each other and the father himself. This fractious dynamic is a direct consequence of Amadeo's authority which establishes a confrontational relationship in the home whereby, for example, he routinely pits the four children against each other by making them draw names from a hat to decide who will have the privilege of accompanying him across the border to visit their uncle, Josu, an ETA militant exiled in France. On one such occasion, the game's rapid

[15] See Connell and Messerschmidt (2005) and Kruper (2005) for further analysis of toxic masculinity.

descent into a quarrel between the unchosen siblings illustrates the conflict that is inherent in Amadeo's patriarchal mode of authority which forces his children to compete against each other for his affection (11).

Gradually, Amaia's male siblings come to exhibit the same model of toxic masculinity displayed by the father, who routinely encourages antagonism in and amongst them, in one instance praising Aitor for sticking his tongue out at a border guard (13). Upon overhearing Aitor and Kepa arguing, a six-year-old Amaia anxiously anticipates her impending beating at the hands of the latter: "Estoy sola en la salita. Aníbal no sale de su habitación. Tengo miedo. Si Aitor pega mucho a Kepa, Kepa después me pega a mí" (17). This chiasmic structure used by Amaia as she contemplates the physical threat from her brother suggests how violence is transmitted from person to person within the home, reproduced as a result of each family members' individual experience of abuse. Yet, the psychological and physical abuse inflicted by Amadeo paradoxically serves to both reinforce and destabilise his authority as the violence he engenders in his sons is redirected towards him. This reflects Connell's assertion that the need for patriarchal power to resort to violence in order to assert its authority is evidence of its imperfect legitimacy and inherent instability (84). Following Aníbal's expulsion from school he physically challenges his father in a manner that threatens to undermine the authority of Amadeo: "El tato le coge la mano y se la baja y le da un puñetazo. De repente es más alto que aita y más fuerte. Aita se queda parado un momento. Pone una cara muy rara. Pero le devuelve el puñetazo a Aníbal y le da otro y otro y otro" (26). The panic felt during the father's momentary glimpse of his subversion by his son induces a swift reassertion of his dominance through this act of relentless savagery, creating a cycle of violence within the home as Amadeo continually needs to reimpose his authority over his rebellious sons.

However, Portela's novel reveals a close connection between, on the one hand, the intimate experiences of Amaia and her elder brothers within the home and, on the other hand, the volatile events of its broader socio-political context - that of an impoverished Bilbao in the 1980s where there emerged a range of vigorous counter-cultural movements in response to the economic and political upheaval of the time. By establishing this link, *Mejor la ausencia* presents a depiction of the narrator's family home that exemplifies Massey's contextual notion of place as firmly embedded within wider social, political and cultural transformations. The gradual exposure of this connection between the domestic and the public spheres constitutes a central narrative tension whereby the attempts by Amaia's brothers to politicise the home present a threat to patriarchal authority and thus meet with fierce resistance from Amadeo. As Nancy Duncan notes, maintaining the gendered division between the public and private spheres serves to "preserve traditional patriarchal power structures" (128).[16] Rebelling against their father's rule, Amaia's male siblings seek to express the radical sentiment of burgeoning political and cultural identities within the home, actions which amount to a "transgression" - as theorised by Tim Cresswell (*In Place/Out of Place*) - of the hegemonic power relations of the patriarchal home. Not only do the narrator's male siblings internalise violence within the familial sphere, but the world outside of the home also provides outlets through which they can reproduce this aggression, bringing about their recourse to radical cultural and political movements of the era that were characterised by vehement rejection of traditional power structures. At the same time, the novel suggests important nuances between the different movements to which Amaia's siblings are drawn, reflecting the actual evolution of the cultural and political landscape over the real-life

[16] See Rotman (2006), Wischermann (2004), and Goodman (2010) for further analysis of the public/private separation and its impact on the binary delineation of traditional gender roles.

historical period during which the novel is set. This nuanced depiction illustrates Portela's interest in historicising the public forms of violence that constitute the fluid social context within which she locates the family home.

This carefully historicised depiction is most clearly evidenced through the character development of Aníbal and Kepa whose individual circumstances typify a generation of disaffected Basque youths that found themselves increasingly marginalised and bereft of future prospects in a society where youth unemployment had sky-rocketed by the mid-eighties as a result of the global recession that began in the previous decade (Lahusen 265). With the forced closure of large companies such as Euskalduna, General Electric and Altos Hornos, the unique dependence of the Basque economy on its industrial sector would see the region suffer disproportionately from the economic downturn (Gómez Uranga 59). As a result, Bilbao and the area along the Left Bank of the Nervión where these industries were mainly concentrated were reduced to an "industrial and urban wasteland" (Douglass and Zulaika 341). The Basque Country witnessed a sharp rise in drug abuse - particularly heroin - amongst its youth population. In Portela's novel, this grim historical reality is embodied in the fate of Amaia's eldest brother Aníbal whose marginalisation from society, precipitated by his expulsion from school, leads to his self-destructive drug abuse that ultimately culminates in his abandonment of the family home and premature death from a heroin overdose. In the case of the younger Kepa, he too becomes embroiled in a culture of violence that exists outside of the home through his participation in the radical elements of the local *abertzale* youth and his subsequent involvement in the street violence of the *kale borroka*.[17]

[17] Further explanation of the term *abertzale* can be found in the footnote on page 20. The term *kale borroka* is used to refer to the street violence carried out in the nineties predominantly by youths from the *abertzale* or left-wing nationalist community. These attacks generally targeted ATMs, bank offices, public transport, and the offices of the major Spanish political parties (the PSOE and the PP).

As in Britain, the generalised sense of pessimism precipitated by the period of deindustrialisation in the late seventies would find cathartic expression in the combative cynicism of a burgeoning punk movement within the Basque Country. Aníbal and Kepa's identification with this counterculture becomes a hostile form of subversion within the home, while their individual means of expressing their deep malcontent reflect varying stages in the historical development of the Basque punk movement. Both siblings affix to their bedroom walls posters of the numerous bands later dubbed under the collective heading of *Rock Radical Vasco*. As noted by Román Etxebarrieta, this particular moniker is problematic since its implied homogeneity fails to account for the considerable ideological divergence amongst the various groups deemed part of the movement, many of whom explicitly rejected such catch-all labels (30). However, this ideological diversity among the numerous bands usefully frames the marked differences in Aníbal and Kepa's respective identifications with the contemporary punk scene.

Prior to his death, the Eskorbuto posters that adorn the walls of Aníbal's bedroom signal the eldest brother's identification with the first wave of the nascent Basque punk scene. According to Lahusen, the nihilistic lyrics of such groups typically voiced a marginalised young generation's anarchic rejection of "cultural and political traditionalism" (266) deemed to be enshrined in the repressive institutions of the perceived establishment that were politicians, the church, the rich, the military and the police. As such, Aníbal's symbolic display within the home can be seen to constitute an act of what Lahusen describes as "anticonformism and provocation" (266). In their own account of the early punk scene, Douglass and Zulaika illustrate this initial movement's intrinsic spirit of rebellion against paternalistic order by citing the following lyrics from the Bizcayan group Zarama: "I will escape / from my father's house / and if some poet wants it / let him go defend it" (438). This

inversion of Basque-language poet Gabriel Aresti's best-known verse "Nire aitaren etxea defendituko dut" ("I Will Defend the House of My Father") encapsulates the anti-establishment sentiment that underpins Aníbal's rejection of his father's authority; this repudiation becomes synonymous with his defiance of the rules of the home and his refusal to be constrained by its boundaries. Massey has contended that patriarchal dominance of the domestic sphere is exercised through regulation of mobility of its inhabitants (*Space, Place and Gender* 150). As his addiction worsens, Aníbal progressively undermines that exercise of power through his prolonged periods of absence from the home during which he sporadically returns of his own accord - whether it be in search of a place of temporary physical respite or in a desperate attempt to steal money to finance his drug habit.

Whilst the younger Kepa replicates Aníbal's symbolic challenge to paternal authority when he inherits the latter's room following his brother's death, his transformation of the bedroom's decor again indicates the confluence of multiple identities within the home that can be further understood in terms of historical evolution of the punk scene. This is indicated by the replacement of the Eskorbuto posters with those of bands such as Kortatu whose music was, as Lahusen explains, strongly influenced by "the political and nationalist convictions [that] transformed punk groups into supportive mobilising agents" (278). The proximity of these groups to the *abertzale* left is echoed in Kepa's attempted display of pro-ETA posters in his bedroom, foreshadowing his future involvement with the Basque National Liberation Movement that eventually results in his imprisonment later in the novel. The sons' constant reinscription of the domestic sphere thus emphasises the dynamic status of the home as a place where fixed meaning is resisted and that, as Nigel Thrift suggests, is "always in a state of becoming" (314). This struggle to inscribe meaning upon the home is however one that is exclusively carried out by its male inhabitants as female agency remains diminished. Indeed,

the fact that Elvira prohibits Aníbal from listening to punk music and the grandmother orders Kepa to remove his posters demonstrates how these female characters are co-opted into upholding the father's hegemonic position by attempting to enforce on Amadeo's behalf the eradication of subversive and politicised imagery that constitutes a symbolic challenge to traditional patriarchal order within the domestic sphere.

This challenge to Amadeo's authority also plays out through language which, given its capacity to point to an external reality that the patriarchal authority seeks to mask within the home, becomes itself a "place of struggle" (bell hooks 15). Whereas the use of language by the adults is notable for the way it suppresses any reference to the outside world, for the sons language represents a potential tool of dissent that explicitly politicises the domestic sphere, and destabilises the public-private division by indicating the presence of what Massey has termed the "outside within" (*Space, Place and Gender* 168). Resorting to deliberately equivocal rhetoric, the adults strenuously avoid direct reference to the social and political upheaval that is occurring outside of the home. This is exemplified by the euphemistic language Amadeo uses when alluding to the heroin crisis to which his eldest son has fallen victim: he attempts to crackdown on Aníbal's aberrant behaviour by explicitly forbidding his son from associating with other drug users whom he refers to as "esa gente" (19). The father's use of the demonstrative pronoun signals the radical alterity of Aníbal's friends as Amadeo attempts to expel all traces of perceived deviance from the home. Similarly, when Amadeo himself is co-opted by state police to inform against his erstwhile associates in ETA, a menacing allusion to his and Aníbal's nefarious activity in the outside world is graffitied upon the outer wall of the home. Asked by Amaia the meaning of the slurs *camello* ["drug dealer"] and *txibato* ["snitch"] that are directed at her brother and father, Elvira offers a deliberately vague explanation. Through indeterminate language and crudely Manichean

simplification the narrator's mother evades her daughter's questions when she informs her that "Aníbal ha hecho algunas cosas que a sus amigos del instituto les ha sentado mal", and that "hay gente mala a la que no le gusta lo que hace tu padre, pero él está haciendo lo correcto" (48). Moreover, when Kepa boasts that his father is a *gudari* ["soldier"] for assisting their uncle Josu - an exiled member of ETA - Amaia is sharply reproached by her mother when she asks the meaning of the term, with Elvira instructing her "que jamás volviera a decir eso" (34). The fact that Kepa then labels Amaia as a *chivata* ["snitch"] signals his reproduction of language derived from the political domain within the private sphere.

However, the adults' efforts to suppress allusion to the political conflict come to prove futile as the aggressive rhetoric Kepa directs towards the traditional figures of authority in the home becomes characterised by an increasingly violent tone that reflects his growing radicalisation, as exemplified when he turns against his father after the latter's co-option by the Spanish security forces and, similarly, when, on account of her Spanish origins, he brands his grandmother a "facha de mierda y puta extremeña" (71). By depicting this conflict between the subversiveness of the sons' explicit politicisation of the home and the adults' attempts to preserve a public-private division that maintains patriarchal authority over the domestic sphere, Portela's novel establishes a central narrative tension through which the private experiences of the family are revealed to be inextricably intertwined with the turbulent politics of the society in which they live.

The Partial Perspective of the Child Narrator

As noted in the introduction to this chapter, the violence depicted in the novel is exclusively related through the eyes of the child narrator who struggles to comprehend the world around her, possessing only a fragmented, partial understanding of the distressing incidents that mark her upbringing. Throughout her childhood years, Amaia displays little awareness of the connections between the violence she observes first-hand at home and the social context within which these personal experiences are situated. Time and again, the adult characters rebuff the childish curiosity Amaia exhibits in her efforts to make greater sense of her immediate environment. Her mother and the family housekeeper Pili repeatedly attempt to preserve Amaia's innocence by restricting her knowledge of external events whose damaging repercussions are nonetheless increasingly felt within the home. Taking into consideration Haraway's argument that the partiality of knowledge is inextricably tied to the "limited location" of the individual subject, Portela's novel reveals a firm correlation between the restrictions imposed upon Amaia's physical mobility and her minimal understanding of her experiences. Although borne out of a benevolent desire to protect Amaia, the actions of Elvira and Pili inevitably perpetuate a system where the threat of patriarchal violence operates through the control and inhibition of the young girl's body, often resulting in their own aggression towards Amaia.

In one instance, when Pili avoids taking Amaia directly home from school to spare her the terror of witnessing Amadeo lashing out at Aníbal, she sternly rebukes the protests of the child who is eager to return home immediately: "Niña, no empieces con el pero por qué. No podemos y punto" (23). When they eventually return home, Elvira also attempts to shield Amaia from her father's violence with a tone of affected emollience intended to downplay

Amadeo's violent outrage: "Aita está un poco disgustado, princesa, pero no contigo. Vete a dejar tus cosas al cuarto, pero entra despacito, no le molestes" (25). Although clear attempts to shield the young girl from her father's anger, the repeated imperatives directed at Amaia by Elvira and Pili demonstrate how Amaia's safety from male violence is contingent upon control of her body, reaffirming the home's status as a place of subjugation that is synonymous with either her confinement or exclusion. As mentioned above, this control is often exerted more violently in an attempt to inoculate Amaia from the dangers of the outside world and to ensure her compliance with her parents' authority. Having returned home late from school after encountering Aníbal and his friends, Elvira angrily scolds her daughter : "Yo me voy corriendo a casa. No sé qué hora es. Ama me abre la puerta. Me coge del brazo y me lo aprieta con fuerza. Me hace daño" (32). If Amaia's lack of physical inhibition and disregard for time on her journey home denotes a momentary sense of freedom for the young narrator, this is swiftly extinguished by the physical aggression of her mother who proves desperate to police the movements of her daughter and thereby sustain the child's innocence.

Through Amaia's childlike narration Portela emphasises the young girl's inchoate understanding of the violence to which she is routinely exposed - a violence that the adult reader is, by contrast, able to infer despite the sparse detail that characterises the rudimentary descriptions of the narrator. For example, when Amaia arrives home from school to encounter her mother and brother clearly bearing the visible marks of another violent assault from her father, Amaia's words underline her ignorance of the grim reality of what has transpired in her absence. This is suggested by how she merely notes that her mother "tiene los ojos de huevo duro y la nariz muy roja. Y está despeinada" (25) - and that Aníbal "tiene la cara muy roja" (26). Amaia's narrow focus on individual body parts and her basic, repetitive syntax reflects her own minimal understanding of the violence to which her mother

and brother have been once more subjected. The narrator again demonstrates her limited ability to make sense of the upsetting scenes she witnesses in the home during Aníbal's final visit to the home when her elder brother returns to find cash to fuel his addiction. Amaia's narration indicates her failure to comprehend the reasons for her elder brother's gaunt appearance: "Aníbal no parece Aníbal. Está muy, muy, muy delgado y blanco. Hace calor, pero él lleva su chupa de cuero de siempre. Tiene los brazos cruzados y se frota como si tuviese mucho frío" (47). The child narrator's inability to verbalise her brother's horrifically emaciated figure is indicated by her adverbial repetition as well as the inadequate simplicity of the synonym she employs to describe his withdrawal-induced tremors.

Moreover, repeated telephone conversations of which Amaia only ever hears one half point to a broader social context that impacts profoundly upon the lives of the home's inhabitants. When Amadeo calls one evening to tell his wife that he is in hospital, Amaia is only able to recount her mother's perfunctory responses (35). The gaps that constitute her father's speech, transcribed in the text by the narrator, reflect the fragmented knowledge Amaia possesses, and signal through its absence an unknown external reality that is intimately connected to the private sphere. A similar effect is created by Amaia's innocent description of the iconoclastic imagery displayed in her brothers' bedrooms: while inevitably unaware of the contemporary countercultural movement associated with Aníbal's posters, Amaia's intuitive reaction to the "carteles raros" does nonetheless suggest a vague awareness of her brother's transgression of a supposed aesthetic norm within the home. Likewise, although yet to be exposed to the presence of ETA, when describing Kepa's transformation of the room, Amaia's reference to "la hacha y la serpiente" that form the insignia of the terrorist group represents an unintentional synecdoche that again underlines her "partial perspective" on the world around her. Amaia's simplistic reference to the constituent parts of the symbol

emphasises the child narrator's ignorance of the actual political referent of the poster which again is presumably inferred by the adult reader. It goes without saying that Portela's decision to situate the narrative voice of *Mejor la ausencia* in the mind of a young girl constitutes a notable epistemic distinction from the totalising approach for which *Patria* has faced strong criticism. As a young child, the partial perspective of Amaia's narration emphasises the fragmentary understanding which she inevitably possesses of the violence that pervades her immediate environment. Whereas the violence that Amaia witnesses in her early years is related in the characteristically plain manner of a child who is as yet unable to contextualise her personal experiences, the events of the narrator's adolescent years reveal more clearly to her the violent socio-political context that frames her initial exposure to male brutality within the home.

Problematising Coming-of-Age in a Patriarchal Society

Whilst Amaia's early narration of her traumatic childhood experiences is marked by an ignorance of their wider social context, the narrator's arrival into adolescence initiates a growing realisation that the brutality she has witnessed at home is in fact symptomatic of a broader patriarchal system as the public sphere is revealed to be a place where the threat of male violence is no less pervasive. Cristina Ortiz Ceberio and María Pilar Rodríguez have previously identified how Portela's novel constitutes a feminist Bildungsroman insofar as it charts Amaia's psychological development as she emerges into "una sociedad que restringe las posibilidades de realización intelectual, educativa, económica y personal de una manera mucho más severa que la de sus correspondientes protagonistas masculinos" (138). Expanding on this argument, I wish to illustrate in more detail how Portela's portrayal of the interconnections between the home and the outside world are key to understanding the way in

which *Mejor la ausencia* deviates from the narrative arc of the classic Bildungsroman in which the (usually male) protagonist's departure from the home is typically portrayed as a relatively unproblematic embrace of society's values.[18] Maroula Joannou argues that female Bildungsroman often contest the idea that "self-realisation of the individual and the individual's socialisation into society are one and the same" (200). In Portela's novel, Amaia gradually discovers over the course of her adolescence that the patriarchal values of society and her submission to them only inhibit her sense of self, and offer little more than an oppressive life of unwanted confinement within the home.

That being said, prior to her full exposure to the patriarchal structure of society, Amaia's initial attitude towards the outside world is suffused with a sense of relative liberation from a deeply fractured household, causing her to partially idealise the public space. As noted by Massey, for women who were able to leave the home the outside world could be seen to offer opportunities for them to construct their own identity away from a place of disenfranchisement and abuse (11). Moved by her friends' gift on the anniversary of Aníbal's death, Amaia forms the precipitous conclusion that the outside world offers an escape from the drudgery of life at home: "Miro mi muñequera de cuero. Me encanta. Aitor tenía razón. Estoy mucho mejor aquí que en casa" (74). Amaia's positive valorisation of the outside world emerges, however, through immediate contrast with the mourning family home where she receives little affection due to her mother's descent into alcoholism and severe depression. She is furthermore naive to the significance of it being Aitor who makes this statement given, as Amaia will subsequently realise, the relative freedom conferred upon him in the outside world by virtue of his gender - a fact that is prefigured by his imminent

[18] Translated from German as "novel of education" or "novel of formation", the term Bildungsroman was first used by the German philosopher and sociologist Wilhelm Dilthey in 1870. The birth of the Bildungsroman is typically associated with the period of the German Enlightenment and Goethe's *Wilhelm Meister's Apprenticeship* (1795-1796) is frequently identified as the original example of the genre. Frow et al. provide the following definition of the conventional traits of the Bildungsroman: "a young man from the provinces seeks his fortune in the city, and undergoes a process of education in the ways of the world such that he eventually becomes reconciled with it" (1905).

departure from the home, much to Amaia's chagrin, to attend university in Madrid. As such, the narrator's initial appraisal of the public space is framed by her own internalisation of the binary separation of the public and private realms that has underpinned her father's domestic authority and hitherto impeded her understanding of the home as intimately linked to the outside world.

The narrator's naive conviction that the public space connotes greater freedom initially emboldens Amaia who, prior to an arranged meeting with her father in a hotel bar, deliberately ignores her mother's order to imitate her own hyper-feminine appearance when the latter instructs her: "no vayas hecha un chicazo, que ya sabes que a tu padre no le gusta" (75). Stubbornly opting for a plain style of jeans and a t-shirt, Amaia's defiance of Elvira constitutes an embodied resistance to her father's authority through her refusal to allow her body to be objectified to satisfy male desire. The narrator boldly continues this resistance in her father's presence when she rebukes his attempts to infantilise her by using the pet name *Amayita*:

> - Y para que te enteres, me llamo Amaia.
> Aita me mira como si me quisiera pegar. Yo no aparto la mirada (77)

The irreverence Amaia displays towards her father as she forcefully stares him down symbolises her insubordination of patriarchal authority in a space that is marked by the conspicuous presence of the male gaze, exemplified by the collective stare of the exclusively male clientele towards her glamorous mother. However, Amadeo swiftly reminds his daughter of his authority when he furiously quashes her insolence by ordering her to return home, showing how, despite his physical absence from the home, his hegemony remains

intact as he continues to utilise the domestic sphere as a place of subordination to which Amaia is confined against her will. On a lonely train journey home during which Amaia longs to be able to explore the city, her wistful description of the urban landscape hints at the underlying patriarchal values of society that will soon be fully revealed to her: "Me monto en el lado derecho para mirar por la ventana y ver la ría. En Sestao los Altos Hornos echan el humo negro de siempre. Todavía no entiendo cómo las sábanas que cuelgan de las ventanas pueden estar tan blancas. Llegamos a Iberia. Ya veo el Puente Colgante y a lo lejos el mar. Enseguida estaré en casa" (77). Amaia's failure to appreciate that the whiteness of the hanging sheets masks the labour of generations of women whose lot in society has been confinement to a life of domesticity signifies the naive optimism she still places in the possibility of escape from patriarchal authority outside of the home.

Yet the fallacy of Amaia's initial idealisation of the outside world is starkly revealed to her when she accompanies the family of her friend Bego on holiday to a farmhouse in Otsagabia. Still convinced of the lure of life beyond the home, the narrator romanticises their destination as a bucolic rural idyll, an illusion further augmented by her burgeoning attraction towards Bego's older brother, Iker. However, when Amaia experiences her first period during the holiday, the words of warning issued by Bego's mother, Águeda, foreshadow the reality that - in the outside world as in the home - her body will remain a site of patriarchal control: "Vamos a dar un paseo y me cuenta que mi cuerpo va a cambiar, que tengo que tener cuidado con los chicos, que ya no soy una niña, que tengo que acostumbrarme a que todos los meses me pase esto" (85). The fact that Amaia's arrival at physical maturity is heralded by a warning to heed the dangers posed by a male-dominated society problematises the coming-of-age journey typical of the Bildungsroman: the narrator's passage into adulthood reveals to her the risk to which she is exposed on account of her gender as she ventures into

the outside world. Dampened by bad weather and Bego's surly mood, the anti-climactic trip prefigures the progressive disintegration of Amaia's misguided belief in the liberational possibilities contained in the outside world as a desired locus of escape from male violence at home.

In this sense, *Mejor la ausencia* further subverts the classic Bildungsroman structure by resisting a linear depiction of the protagonist's departure from the home: Amaia's attempts to venture out into the world are characterised by disillusionment and circularity as the pervasive threat of male violence repeatedly forces the female protagonist to return to the undesirable patriarchal home. A trip to her favourite bookshop in Bilbao exemplifies the restricted freedom of the public space that - through a fusion of a hostile political climate and male social supremacy - is portrayed as dangerous territory for Amaia. The female narrator is forced to rethink her plans of entering when confronted by two hefty security guards, patrolling the shopfront which is daubed with threatening anti-Spanish graffiti: "Yo sigo parada. Uno de los escoltas me mira, me sonríe un poco y me hace un gesto con la cabeza, para que me entre" (132). Intimidated by this encounter with the male gaze, Amaia's entry to the bookshop - and the escapism she seeks therein - proves to be subject to male assent, resigning her to follow the lead of a fellow female shopper by returning home. Portela further depicts how the confluence of political belligerence and male violence exerts an oppressive effect upon the female protagonist when Amaia is warned by Kepa of the repercussions of breaking a school strike declared by the youth group Jarrai, despite her own class voting against the motion: "Pues os arriesgáis a que os den de hostias en el pikete. Quédate en casa y ya está, joder" (137). Through this forceful subordination of Amaia's political expression, Kepa's foreboding injunction to stay at home demonstrates the public space's status as a locus of disenfranchisement for the female protagonist.

Gradually, the violent experiences of Amaia's passage through adolescence foster an intuition that her situation as a female subject in society is one of double displacement: from her encounters with an outside world that proves just as unsafe as the home, the narrator begins to deduce that the violence inflicted upon her is of a structural nature. Once again, this double displacement is felt by Amaia through her body, starkly illustrated when she is subjected to an attempted sexual assault by friends of Iker. The uncertain atmosphere evoked by the eerie abandonment of the neighbourhood to which she accompanies the two older boys is compounded by Amaia's increasing physical disorientation caused by her rapid inebriation, having been plied with alcohol. The inhibition of her body is emphasised during Amaia's flight from the boys' forceful sexual advances: "A mí no me sale responder, sigo andando hacia unas escaleras que cambian de distancia con cada paso. Siento que me cogen el brazo con fuerza" (98). The petrified narrator's fumbling escape and stifled vocalisation of protest towards her assailants indicates the bodily dispossession that is symptomatic of her own precarious situation in a space of male aggression, resulting in a physical disorientation that is magnified by Amaia's drunken perception of the shifting spatial dimensions of her surroundings. The incident is a grim reminder of the narrator's situation of double displacement as she laments the inadequacy of the home as a place of sanctuary in the context of her current peril, ominously stating: "No sé adónde ir. No puedo ir a casa" (98). This sense of despair is coupled with an incipient understanding that her victimisation is of a systemic and gendered nature as she ruefully surmises that her brother Aitor would not be subjected to the same violence: "Seguro que él hubiera controlado un poco o se hubiera ido a tiempo. Aunque siendo chico, nunca le hubiera pasado lo que a mí" (99).

In a subsequent sexual assault by a drug dealer, Amaia's description of the attack presents the public space as one where male violence imposes itself through the brutal appropriation and forced inhibition of the female body: "Le quiero decir que no, pero no me sale. Los brazos no me responden. Me abre las piernas con fuerza, todo lo que se permite mi pantalón. Cierro los ojos" (170-71). In the syntactical structure of her description Amaia's objectified subjectivity heightens the sense of her corporeal dispossession and thus echoes Young's assertion that the female body "lives itself as object" (*On Female Body Experience* 41). Moreover, Portela's depiction of Amaia's experience of the public space denotes it as one of scopophilic male desire, theorised by Mulvey as "pleasure in using another person as an object of sexual stimulation through sight" (10). This is symbolised during Amaia's rape by the concurrent reappearance of the male gaze, embodied this time in "un tío mirando desde la barandilla de la parte superior del faro" (171). As Amaia experiences the transformation of her body into an inert source of voyeuristic sexual pleasure - further signalled by the phallic location of the distant observer - she is once more obligated to retreat to the undesired family home, deprived of a secure place of her own. Yet far from a place of refuge, the home remains, even in the absence of Amadeo, suffused with an abiding fear evoked by his disembodied authority. In contrast to the routine absence of her male siblings from the home, it continues to confine its female inhabitants upon whom the father exerts - even from afar - a deep psychological control. Ostracised from society due to Amadeo's enforced cooperation with the Spanish counter-terrorist police, an increasingly reclusive Elvira retreats into the home where she is alternately afflicted by periods of painful nostalgia and depression: "Es como si aita estuviera aquí, con la mano levantada a punto de dejarla caer" (145). Doubly displaced within the home and the public space, Amaia finds the counterpart of her experiences in the confinement of her mother, signalling the systemic gendered oppression of which they are both victims.

The Omnipresence of Patriarchal Authority

Following the conventions of the classic Bildungsroman, the male hero's attainment of a stable place in society ultimately signifies an act of self-realisation as he is able to escape the maternal space of the home and make his own way in the world. Through its feminist reworking of the traditional Bildungsroman, Portela's novel illustrates how the opposite is true for Amaia as she comes to realise how patriarchal power pervades both the public and private spheres, and so for her to accept society's dominant values entails her submission to male dominance. In her later teenage years, Amaia begrudgingly chooses to spend the summer holidays at her father's new home in Galicia, abandoning her mother out of little more than material self-interest: "Debería irme con aita, por lo menos él tiene pasta" (104). This decision pays short-term dividends as Amaia reaps the benefits of Amadeo's opulent new lifestyle, enjoying a constant stream of money, relative freedom to roam the picturesque coastal setting, and the homely atmosphere created by Amadeo's housekeeper, María, prompting a degree of optimism in the narrator: "Me siento bien. ¿Feliz?" (110). Notwithstanding the relative material advantages Amaia can extract from this partial submission to patriarchal authority, the narrator soon realises, however, that her father's goodwill comes at the cost of considerable subordination on her own part. Young contends that the domestic stability of the patriarchal home is built on the subjugation of female subjectivity whereby she is reduced to "being-for-him" (*On Female Body Experience* 130). This idea is reflected in the subservient presence of Amadeo's elderly housekeeper, María, who repeatedly references her gratitude towards her employer. Through the maternal characteristics she exhibits, María comes to represent - for Amadeo at least - a perfect image of fixed feminine domesticity. Yet if María's dutiful homemaking abilities represent an ideal domesticity in the eyes of Amadeo, he displays distinct disinterest towards her emotional

well-being, evidenced by his indifference at her immediate return to work the day after her mother's burial (119). In other words the female housekeeper is reduced, in Amadeo's eyes, to a symbolic role that sustains his fantasy of masculine dominance in the domestic realm but that is built upon the marginalisation of her actual experiences.

Amaia herself soon realises that the material comfort she enjoys with her father is - as exemplified by María's situation - conditional on absolute subservience to him as the home once again becomes synonymous with her confinement and marginalisation, replicating the patriarchal power dynamics she has encountered elsewhere. With her father spending the vast majority of the day ensconced in his office, Amaia remains none the wiser to his shady business dealings, a state of ignorance that is actively encouraged by María who cautions Amaia: "A quien dan, no escoge, rapaciña" (154). Amadeo's new home thus becomes an equally stifling place for the female narrator where she consciously restricts her conversation to "esas cosas que no incitan a la discordia" (117) as her urge to question Amadeo about his past involvement in the political conflict is tempered "tal vez por miedo a herirle. O por miedo simplemente" (122). Even Amaia's apparent friendship with the young Beni is in reality a ruse orchestrated by her father, intended to keep a vigilant watch over his daughter's movements outside of the home - a fact that Amaia realises when her attempted escape following her father's assault is thwarted because Beni informs him about the girl's intentions. The emotional distance shown by Amadeo consigns Amaia to a solitary status within the home, forcing her to realise that "no le hago ningún servicio, salvo estar aquí" (126). For her father, Amaia's mere physical presence in the home, as in the case of María, therefore constitutes a static picture of docile femininity that serves to reaffirm Amadeo's own desired self-image of dominant masculinity, further denoted by his repeated insistence upon her wearing traditionally feminine attire.

Despite the opulent lifestyle that her father offers her, Amaia is faced with the reality that it will only ever entail a forceful subjugation of her subjectivity. As the narrator becomes more persistent in her attempts to question Amadeo about his former political ties, the latter violently suppresses her search for knowledge about the past. Amaia discovers this to her grave misfortune on her first trip when her father hits her for boldly demanding in a letter that he offer her explanations about the past before ruling that she does not raise the subject again: "No quiero hablar del pasado, Amaia. Y no me menciones la puta carta otra vez" (129). On her last trip, she is then subjected to a savage beating at the hands of her father after the reappearance of Amadeo's erstwhile police contact Carlos who admits to Amaia his earlier affair with Elvira, an act that constitutes for Amadeo the ultimate ignominy to his strained patriarchal authority. The deep emasculation felt by Amadeo as a result of his cuckolding again incites a violent reassertion of his authority within the home whereby his daughter acts as a surrogate for his abandoned unfaithful wife as throughout the attack he repeatedly yells "igual de puta" (159).

Illustrating Implication and the Internalisation of Violence

If the harm suffered by the narrator at her father's new home provides Amaia with a harrowing lesson that there exists no place for her outside of the patriarchal structures of society, the bitter disaffection that increasingly characterises the narrative voice reinforces a sense that she is herself inexorably implicated in this same violent social fabric, and that her own subjectivity is, as a matter of course, also shaped by it. It has been argued that the female Bildungsroman rejects a linear narrative progression from childhood to maturity, opting instead to focus on the "deferred maturation" of their protagonists as a product of a

society that denies them opportunities for self-realisation (Abel et al. 11). The psychological damage inflicted upon Amaia by her brutal childhood experiences is manifested in her own surrender to the logic of masculine violence through the self-destructive rebelliousness of her late teenage years. Notably, the reproduction of the violence internalised by Amaia is inscribed in spatial terms, as evidenced by the deeper hostility she displays within the home and the deleterious activity in which she engages outside of it. This wilful inclination towards self-destruction is epitomised by the numbing ecstasy Amaia derives from an alcohol-induced feeling of bodily transcendence: "Sin saber quién soy o dónde estoy. Beber un poco más hasta no saber si pienso o no pienso. Ni siquiera si existo" (163). However, what can be seen as her desire to escape her embodiment in space can only ever find temporary release as she can never fulfil her longing for what she identifies as the absolute annihilation achieved by her deceased brother, of whom she say: "Puta mierda, Aníbal. A veces no sabes la envidia que me das" (165). Short of embracing the same tragic end met by her elder brother, Amaia's only recourse is to appropriate the home as a site of symbolic resistance towards patriarchal authority in an attempt to emulate Aníbal's fatalistic nihilism, which is signalled by her possession of his old bedroom where she entrenches herself for hours on end, listening to his punk records. Replicating her dead brother, Amaia's repudiation of the traditional order of the home is indicated by her increasingly prolonged absences from it as she gradually spends entire weekends on alcohol- and drug-fuelled binges. This flagrant refusal to be confined to the home constitutes a rebellion through its exposure of the strict boundaries upon which, as discussed earlier in the chapter, masculine authority seeks to derive its control of the domestic sphere. It is furthermore upon her body, previously the locus of her oppression, where Amaia inscribes this outward aggression through a projected appearance of hyper-masculinity, connoted by her buzz-cut hairstyle and punk attire.

However, Amaia also enacts this masculine violence through her complete disavowal of the social relations which, as previously explained, are integral to the constitution of the family home. Displaying ever more hostility towards her brothers, she recalls Aníbal's pessimistic advice to Kepa: "Una vez Aníbal me dijo una cosa: en esta casa cada uno sobrevivimos como podemos" (172). Amaia's repetition of her elder brother's nihilistic maxim is grounded in a forceful suppression of the affective bonds that precipitates the complete disintegration of her familial ties, something she actively pursues as a means of self-preservation. As well as shunning the belated concern shown by Aitor and Kepa, the heightened aggression of the narrative voice marks the breakdown of Amaia's relationship with her mother. This eventually reaches its violent nadir when - in response to Elvira's tentative attempts at reconciliation and suggestion that Amaia accept her father's financial assistance - she brutally attacks her mother: "Alzo la silla por encima de mi cabeza. La voy a chocar contra la mesa pero veo su cara, esa cara de susto, la puta cara de susto de siempre y no puedo evitarlo" (179). Channelling the brutality of which she herself has been a victim, Amaia's callous words betray a mercilessness towards her distressed mother; the emotional desensitisation exhibited in the attack becomes therefore the inevitable conclusion of her own inurement to a prevalent patriarchal violence. By subjecting her mother to the self-same violence first inflicted by her father, the ramifications of the latter's patriarchal dominance can be seen to have come full circle as physical abuse is once more perpetrated within the home by its youngest and most vulnerable member. Moreover, the fact that Amaia comes to inflict such harm herself is significant in terms of the novel's presentation of its protagonist's status as a victim of violence: by refusing to depict Amaia's own actions as morally irreproachable, Portela avoids the reductionist, Manichean framing of victimhood that is exemplified in *Patria*; instead of positioning her protagonist as a "perfect victim" Portela

offers a more complex portrayal that is grounded in a recognition of Amaia's own implication within the violent structures of society and her partial internalisation of its values.

A Return Home and Dealing with the Past

In this final section I will examine the second (much briefer) part of *Mejor la ausencia* where the novel assumes a distinctly metafictional character as, returning to the Basque Country some seventeen years after leaving for Madrid, Amaia is forced to confront her traumatic past. By setting Amaia's return against the backdrop of ETA's 2011 ceasefire, Portela insinuates a parallel between the narrator's confrontation with her individual past and the societal reckoning that is underway in the Basque Country with its collective legacy of violence. Presenting Amaia's struggle to come to terms with her violent upbringing, the novel adopts a reflexive approach to the past, foregrounding the problems she encounters when trying to narrate her past experiences. The difficulties faced by the narrator are encoded in her strained relationship to the family home, the site to which she initially returns but which - as a place that has invariably been synonymous with the forceful repression of her subjectivity - proves an insufficient location from which she can make sense of her past experiences. This insufficiency is evidenced by Amaia's evasive and laconic responses to her mother's attempts at conversation on her return to the family household, whilst her repeated tripping on the worn rug symbolises the home's continued status as a locus of displacement for the narrator. Teresa De Lauretis contends that, in order to articulate "the situatedness [...] of its own thought" the female subject must undertake a "self-displacement" from a place that is familiar (138). In a gesture towards Virgina Woolf's *A Room of One's Own*, Amaia leaves behind the patriarchal home and acquires a rented attic from which she hopes to begin writing a novel, signalling its status as a place where she can establish a firmer sense of self, achieved

through the self-expression granted to her by writing. Bathed in the sunshine that pours through its skylight, the attic connotes an openness and fluidity built on relationality rather than static confinement as Amaia makes hopeful plans of reconnecting with old friends and running outside.

However, the initial sense of optimism that Amaia derives from this new life fails to displace the painful memories that still haunt the narrator on her return to Bilbao. The latent trauma of Amaia's past is mirrored in the traces of the past that are inscribed in the places she revisits across the city, prompting the narrator to form an explicit parallel between the family home in its present state and her own situation: "Las casas son un poco como las personas. Según envejecen, queda la estructura de lo que fueron, los rasgos reconocibles a pesar de la debacle del tiempo. La casa de mi madre, después de todos estos años, está ajada y entera a la vez. Como ella. Como yo" (183). Just as the home bears witness to an unavoidable personal past that Amaia nonetheless wishes to suppress, the narrator laments how the regenerated urban landscape of Bilbao presents the superficial glamour of a "versión edulcorada de lo que fue" (200) that conceals both the city's extinct industrial heritage and contemporary social inequalities. Confronted with constant reminders of her past trauma, as well as the imminent return of her estranged father to Bilbao, Amaia allows her new dwelling to become a place of self-imposed seclusion, driven by her desire to avoid coming to terms with the legacy of a past which still haunts the present. For instance, while jogging along the city streets, Amaia is plagued by the memory of her rape as she visualises: "Ese hombre en la barandilla mirando. Ese cerdo encima de mí" (197). As sites of past violence evoke memories of unresolved trauma, Amaia's instinct is to suppress her painful recollections, symbolised by her resolution to avoid this route in future: "Tengo que buscar otro recorrido. O cambiar de margen. Siempre me ha venido bien pasar al otro lado" (197). Amaia's

avoidance of the sites that remind her of the sexual violence to which she was subjected is indicative of an equal urge to avoid confronting a violent familial legacy, causing her to become increasingly reclusive.

Amaia's complete retreat from the outside world is accompanied by a desperation to impose a sense of coherence on the past as she undertakes the task of writing about her childhood in the hope that "esos fantasmas descompuestos, tomen forma y salgan de aquí dentro" (208). While Amaia attests to the fact that the process of writing proves to some degree cathartic, her desire to reinterpret the past is ultimately portrayed as a means of avoiding the fractured personal relations that bind her to the outside world, illustrated by her confession that:

> Lo único que soy capaz de controlar es el mundo detrás de esta pantalla. No es que lo entienda, pero puedo transformarlo a mi antojo: lo hago crecer según se despiertan algunas memorias, lo cerceno si lo que surge después de unas horas de escritura me desagrada [...] Aquí afuera es mucho más difícil, la realidad se me escapa (203)

Through Amaia's acknowledgement that her retelling of the past is heavily redacted insofar as she omits the most painful aspects of her upbringing from the narrative, Portela establishes a continuity with the first part of the novel where Amaia routinely references her love of literature as a means of escaping from the reality of her abusive homelife. With her own writing now assuming a similarly escapist function, Amaia's attempts to conjure up recollections of her parents are frustrated by the limitations of her personal memories, a consequence of the fact that (as I have argued earlier on in this chapter) the child narrator only over possessed a partial perspective on the events surrounding her. As such, she is only

capable of forming vague perceptions, underlined by the narrator's descriptive use of the gerund that suggests the hazy impermanence of recollected images of her father "siempre haciendo daño" and her mother "siempre sufriéndolo" (204). Highlighting the constructedness of her account of the past, the main narrative is interrupted at several points by short excerpts from Amaia's own writing which is alternately presented from the perspectives of her parents and where the narrator acknowledges her deliberate recourse to fictionalisation in order to compensate the partiality of her own memories.

Yet even if Amaia senses that she is able to achieve some closure through her writing, it is never absolute, and merely highlights the unresolved reality from which she consciously detaches herself: "refugiarme en este otro mundo en el que las cosas se concretan, adquieren sentido aunque sea mentira, en el que se puede, en una página o dos o tres, rellenar la nada. Aunque no sé si esto, si este cuarto, es realmente un refugio" (208). In her relentless drive to obtain finality in her text, an objective which comes at the expense of her deteriorating mental state, the increasingly squalid attic threatens to become a place structured according the very same inside/outside dichotomy that formerly signalled Amaia's own oppression and confinement: "El teléfono apagado y la conexión a internet desenchufada. El mundo, ahí fuera. Que se quede fuera. No quiero enterarme de si ya ha llegado o no" (223). Consequently, the novel negatively frames Amaia's search for narrative closure by equating it with the degrading effects of her growing social isolation. The stable meaning that Amaia tries to impose upon the past through narrative merely defers a more painful coming to terms with the past that can only be achieved by confrontation with her estranged siblings.

To that end, Amaia's eventual decision to abandon her isolation denotes an acknowledgement on the part of the narrator of her implication in a family that is still

fractured by a violent past. Writing about the legacy of political violence in the Basque Country, Begoña Aretxaga has previously argued that disregarding one's links to violent actors is something of an impossibility on account of what she terms "the social intimacy of violence" (168) - in other words, the reality that perpetrators are often closely imbedded within the social framework. This is suggested by the final line of the novel where she confirms both her own identity and her relationship to Amadeo in a phone call from a policeman who will inform her of her father's death:

> -Buenos días. Soy el sargento de la Ertzaintza Manuel Ordoño. ¿Es usted Amaia Gorostiaga?
>
> -Sí, soy yo.
>
> -¿Qué relación tiene con Amadeo Gorostiaga?
>
> -Soy su hija. (234)

In this simultaneous affirmation of self and parentage Amaia situates herself in a way that acknowledges her own subjectivity in terms of a mediated relationality. By forgoing direct confrontation with her father whilst refusing to disavow her relationship with him, Amaia assumes a pragmatic position that is premised on neither an ideal of reconciliation between father and daughter nor outright relational denial. Amaia's reconnection with the outside world signifies a rejection of the illusion of closure on the past that she had sought in narrative. The novel instead concludes on an open-ended note as Amaia seems tentatively prepared to rebuild her relationships with her siblings, paving the way for a dialogic approach to the past that relies on an exchange of multiple perspectives. Amaia's conscious use of Aitor's words when describing her decision to "volver al mundo" (231) suggests that she herself might pursue a similar approach to her elder brother whom it is revealed has managed

to maintain a stable relationship with both his mother and Kepa, corresponding regularly with the latter during his time in prison for - it is strongly implied - crimes associated with ETA. In fact, the potential for Amaia's reconnecting with Kepa are already hinted at when she ponders his reaction to a recent ETA attack: "¿Qué pensará Kepa cuando se entere? ¿Celebrará que sigan matando? ¿Algunos dicen que la cárcel transforma?" (190). Her curiosity to hear her brother's perspective implies at least a partial willingness on Amaia's part for reconciliation. Indeed, the circumstances of Kepa's imprisonment situate the family history within the troubled legacy of a collective past, creating a sense that Amaia's determination to confront her personal past is also entwined with the prevailing challenges faced by Basque society as it equally reckons with the suffering endured over decades of political conflict.

Conclusion

Unlike *Patria*, Portela's novel rejects a vision of violence as a pathological phenomenon, setting out instead to examine how it is socially conditioned. Through her use of the Bildungsroman form and its narrative journey from childhood to maturity, Portela charts her young narrator's gradual discovery that the violence she experiences at the hands of her father within the confines of the home is indissociable from a broader social context that is pervaded by an oppressive patriarchal culture. Whereas critics have highlighted the de-historicised and de-contextualised nature of Aramaburu's representation of *los años de plomo*, by frequently revealing the interconnections between the family household and the wider world, Portela carefully plots the disintegrating familial relations within the home against a contextual backdrop of the turbulent political and cultural developments that characterised the historical period. In terms of where *Mejor la ausencia* sits alongside other

post-ETA works, while it is fair to say that Portela's focus in the novel is patriarchal rather than political violence, by firmly embedding Amaia's individual experiences within their social context the author highlights the close entanglement between these various forms of violence, illustrating this interconnection primarily through her depiction of the social marginalisation and radicalisation of Amaia's male siblings. Moreover, Portela's decision to narrate the events of the novel through a highly subjective first-person narrator emphasises the deleterious psychological impact of Amaia's exposure to violence: the stark contrast between the innocent perspective of the child narrator at the beginning of the novel and the hostile tone of disaffection and callousness that increasingly infiltrates the narrative voice firmly demonstrates the effects over time of the violence suffered by Amaia. In tracing this psychological regression Portela's novel offers another crucial point of distinction from *Patria* that concerns its portrayal of victimhood: while there is no doubt that Amaia is a victim of male violence in the novel, Portela boldly resists a Manichean characterisation of her protagonist in terms of a pure innocence that has elsewhere come to predominate public discourse on victimhood in the Basque context and that can be seen reflected in Aramburu's depiction of ETA's victims in his own novel. It is alternatively suggested that Amaia's own implication in a patriarchal society inevitably leads to her partial internalisation of its attitudes, eventually resulting in her own reproduction of violence in her latter teenage years. Finally, through her portrayal in the second part of the novel of Amaia's struggles to confront a traumatic personal history, Portela suggests that narrative - while potentially cathartic - presents the dangerous temptation of imposing fixed meaning on the past, while avoiding the greater challenges posed by mending the fractured human relations that are the consequence of an historical legacy of violence. If Amaia's retreat from the outside world betrays an unwillingness to come to terms with an unresolved past, her final reemergence symbolises a

recognition of her intimate ties to a legacy of violence which can only be overcome through engagement with other perspectives.

Chapter Six: Locating the Tourist Gaze and Demystifying Basque Violence in Katixa Agirre's *Los turistas desganados*

In this chapter I will analyse Katixa Agirre's debut novel *Los turistas desganados* which was first published in Basque in 2015 under the title *Atertu arte itxaron* and subsequently translated by the author herself prior to its release in Spanish in 2017. Unlike Agirre's subsequent novel *Las madres no*, and despite the potential appeal of *Los turistas desganados* to a wider readership due to its focus on the Basque conflict, the Spanish translation received little critical attention in comparison with the original Basque version which, by contrast, enjoyed some success, earning the author the Premio 111 Akademia (Pérez Isasi and Sampedro 181-82). Agirre's novel is narrated by Ulia - a mezzosoprano and musicology doctoral student who, having grown up in the capital of the Basque Autonomous Community, Vitoria-Gasteiz, now resides in Madrid with her Castilian husband, Gustavo. Comprising several storylines, the central thread of the narrative follows the couple's summer road trip to the Basque Country where Gustavo is eager to discover more of Ulia's homeland. Just prior to their departure, however, a shocking revelation has been made to Ulia by her mother that she is yet to reveal to Gustavo: her father, whom she presumed to have died when she was a child, is in fact an imprisoned ETA terrorist who, now terminally ill, has requested release from prison on compassionate grounds in a case that has gripped the national media and prompted mass protests across the Basque Country. As well as documenting the events of the couple's road trip, the novel also explores Ulia's attempt to make sense of her parents' relationship and, namely, to come to terms with her personal implication in a historical legacy of violence.

In the first section, I will examine Ulia's narrative as a feminist reworking of the road novel in which the traditional romanticisation of the road as a place of cultural discovery and escape from societal norms is problematised. Viewing the novel through this lens, I will argue that the couple's road trip only serves to reflect Ulia's Spanish husband's essentialist view of the Basque Country, and that it reinforces an existing self-other hierarchy between Gustavo and Ulia, which is depicted in terms of both Spanish-Basque and gender relations. I will further demonstrate how the novel situates this vision of Basque essentialism within the context of *la batalla del relato* by inferring a close alignment between Gustavo's exoticising gaze and hegemonic media portrayals of ETA's violence as a pathological and depoliticised phenomenon. In the second section, I will analyse the way in which Ulia's own ironic retelling of the road trip destabilises her Spanish husband's totalising gaze by revealing its cultural specificity. I will illustrate how the narrator highlights latent tensions on a political and personal level that are concealed beneath a fixed image of the Basque Country that is manufactured for the enjoyment of tourists. Finally, through the lens of agonistic memory, I will consider Ulia's uneasy exploration of her personal history in the novel's sub-narrative in order to demonstrate how the novel offers an alternative paradigm for dealing with the past that rejects the totalising media discourse that has dominated representations of ETA's violence in Spain.

The (Un)romantic Roads of Exotic Euskadi

In her monograph on female writers' engagements with the road novel, Alexandra Ganser illustrates the way in which women's road narratives have subverted the genre's traditional romanticisation of the road as "a privileged public space in which difference is negotiated and selves and others are brought into dialogue" (38). Ganser's study examines

how works written by female authors provide a counterpoint to the cultural dominance of male representations of the American road as a place of adventure and escape by representing it as a space where hegemonic social hierarchies remain as female characters are confronted by their otherness (306). Katixa Agirre adopts a similarly critical approach to the road novel genre in *Los turistas desganados* where the female narrator's retelling of her summer vacation to the Basque Country with her Spanish husband highlights the manner in which the trip simply serves to reaffirm the latter's heavily exoticised view of the region. From the opening lines of Agirre's novel, an irreverent attitude towards the conventions of the genre is suggested by the tongue-in-cheek manner in which Ulia reels off its typical features: "La carretera y el viaje, metáfora de asfalto, camino hacia el autoconocimiento, penitencia, exilio, cuarenta años de travesía por el desierto" (9). Moreover, she playfully remarks that Kerouac's *On The Road* - one of the most renowned examples of the road novel genre - is "sobrevalorado, según mi humilde opinión" (9). Resisting a Keroaucian depiction of the road as a romanticised site of non-conformity and spirited adventure, Ulia's ironic narration exposes the fact that Gustavo's perception of their destination is underpinned by essentialising cultural discourses within tourism, literature, and anthropology, that have long served to reaffirm the otherness of the Basque Country and its inhabitants within the Spanish popular imagination. In other words, Agirre not only subverts the masculinist conventions of the generic road trip to expose the uneven gender relations between its two protagonists but, crucially, she also transposes the novel's central journey to the specific geographical context of the Basque Country in order to critique prevailing Spanish attitudes towards the region.

Gabilondo has argued that, in order to affirm a sense of Spanish superiority, the Basque Country has been historically defined by a "dual otherness" since the second half of the nineteenth century and the decline of Spanish and French imperialism. To compensate

the loss of their colonial subjects outside of Europe, Gabilondo contends, Spanish and French writers came to represent the Basque Country as an internal colony that was simultaneously populated by the most ancient of all European races, yet also a gateway to the Orient: "To the European eye, the Basque difference is both a form of exoticism that slips into both an Orientalism that is exterior to Europe and a form of premodern historical otherness that resists European modernity from within" ("Imagining Basques" 150). According to Jon Juaristi, the rise of modern tourism enabled the Spanish and French bourgeoisie to enjoy this internal dual otherness, leading to the attribution of an Arcadian character to the Basque Country which grew to be perceived as "una tierra de paisajes verdes y costumbres patriarcales, muy adecuada para pasar el verano" (60). As McClancy notes, this illusion of Basque exoticism has remained profitable into the twenty-first century, and is still marketed towards visitors seeking the pleasures of an "authentic" encounter with cultural otherness (52).

In Agirre's novel, we are told through Ulia's narration that it is precisely this illusion of a rural Arcadia that Gustavo pursues during the couple's journey across the Basque Country - a place where he seeks the escapist pleasure of "unas vacaciones tranquilas, buen vino y quedarte mirando al mar" (11). The escapist fantasies that Gustavo projects onto the Basque Country are firmly grounded in his preconceived notion of an ancient Basque otherness and of the timeless character of the region as a place that is wholly untouched by the frenetic pace of modern, urban life. Eager to secure respite from the cosmopolitan, jet-setting lifestyle he leads as an internationally renowned legal scholar in Madrid he imagines the Basque Country as the absolute antithesis of the Spanish capital, as a place that is, by complete contrast, reassuringly suspended in time: "Las carreteras olvidadas de Álava. Los valles olvidados. Las batallas obviadas. Te encanta esto. Este silencio, este abandono. Y

a mí también, por qué no. Tan lejos de Madrid. Lejos de la amenaza cruel de sus cielos infinitos" (33). However, through her repeated allusions to Gustavo's deliberate avoidance of the region's modern motorways in favour of the more recondite corners of the Basque Country's "carreteras secundarias" (11), Ulia points to the contrived character of their journey which her husband has devised to satisfy a very particular image of the region that is framed exclusively in terms of an idyllic, premodern rusticity. The narrator ironises her husband's desire to sustain this exoticised picture of the Basque Country as she recounts his deliberate yet un-self-reflective pursuit of picture-postcard locations that validate and symbolically stabilise Gustavo's preconceived vision of a Basque Arcadia: "De todas formas, el pantano plateado nos da la postal que buscabas y el pueblo de Artea resulta tan bucólico como esperabas" (63). Consequently, the couple's road trip serves little more than to reinforce Gustavo's pre-existing belief in the exoticism of the Basque Country, subverting generic conventions of the road novel where travel is typically portrayed as a means of broadening horizons, destabilising cultural assumptions, and challenging prevailing notions of self and other.

On the contrary, Ulia observes how her Spanish husband's exoticisation of Basqueness conceals a latent sense of cultural superiority and a neo-colonialist mindset that underpins the narrow image of primitive rurality which Gustavo imposes upon the region. This is suggested in the distinct air of condescension she detects when Gustavo proposes a visit to the Historical Archive of Basque Nationalism which she senses to be a prospect "que te hace mucha gracia, como si fuera un chiste" (61). Gustavo's supercilious disregard for a Basque national identity is further suggested by a photograph he gleefully captures of the peculiar and comical sight of a scarecrow stood in a field wearing a *txapela* - a typical Basque beret - that reads "GORA EUSKADI" and that is coloured in the green, white, and

red of the *ikurrina* - the official flag of the Basque Autonomous Community and a prominent symbol of nationalist identity. This snapshot of such a frivolous expression of Basque national identity proves deeply appealing to Gustavo as - devoid of any seriousness in its representation of Basque political culture - it merely validates for him an underlying sense of Spanish superiority. Furthermore, Ulia's description of their visit to the site of an ancient battle between Roman troops and indigenous forces in the tranquil Cuartango valley exemplifies the neo-colonialist mindset that drives Gustavo's deliberate pursuit of an image of primitive Basque exoticism as she sardonically refers to them both as "exploradores, conquistadores, geógrafos británicos" (34). Presented with a quaintly unremarkable rural setting Gustavo takes great delight in imagining the grimly barbaric violence perpetrated centuries ago against the formidable Roman army by "la tribu local" (34). Dismissing Ulia's more prosaic historical explanation for the Romans' surprise defeat, Gustavo prefers to remain enraptured by his morbid fantasies of primal brutality: "Imagínate la sangre. El puré de sesos por doquier. Un montón de *morituris* por todas partes" (35). As far as Gustavo is concerned, the battleground epitomises an atavistic Basque savagery that, now pacified and safely encountered as a placid rural scene, can be consumed as touristic pleasure, presenting him with a static image of Basque exoticism that, once again, he fixes symbolically by capturing carefully framed photographs of the site before their departure.

However, the road trip serves an additional function for Gustavo beyond confirming his exoticised image of the Basque Country in and of itself: in his illusory pursuit of an authentic experience of Basque exoticism Gustavo seeks out a landscape that is the perfect reflection of Ulia herself as an exotic other. From the outset of their relationship, under the exoticising gaze of Gustavo, Ulia's otherness has been specifically marked by her Basqueness as she recollects his comments to her during the couple's first meeting - a chance encounter

on the Madrid metro during the 2004 train bombings: "Supe que eras vasca desde el principio, tu acento te delata" (55).[19] As well as his fixation on her accent, Ulia further highlights Gustavo's fetishisation of her Basque identity when she wryly recalls the "pinchos y pacharán exótico" (97) of the faux Basque bar in Madrid where he proposed to her. Her deliberate use of a hispanicised spelling gently satirises the clichéd style of the establishment as a contrived image of Basqueness that aims to satisfy Spanish cultural assumptions and which, for Gustavo, is therefore the perfect reflection of the exotic Basque identity he projects onto Ulia. Positioning Ulia as an exotic other, Gustavo imposes an air of impenetrable mystique onto his wife as indicated when he is convinced she will enjoy his titillating anecdote about the Roman emperor Heliogabalus because she has an "alma turbia" (37). As such, Gustavo's eagerness to visit the Basque Country is driven by a desire to anchor his wife's identity in a place that is just as exotic as he imagines her to be. In his pursuit of a genuine encounter with Basque exoticism Gustavo's ultimate intention is to reinforce a self-other dichotomy between himself and Ulia that he achieves by firmly tethering her identity to her homeland: "Pongamos que, de una vez por todas, quieres conocer a fondo mi tierra, mi cuna, el origen de todo esto [...] Quieres empaparte de mi tierra, mi terruño, mi tierrita" (11). To that end, it is significant that the couple's first destination is Ulia's childhood home in Vitoria-Gasteiz where Gustavo finds apparent confirmation of a mysterious and parochial Basque identity that he imposes upon Ulia, imagining her to feel "un desproporcionado apego por esta ciudad, uno de esos sentimientos que no se pueden explicar con palabras, tantas veces atribuidos a los vascos" (43).

[19] On 11 March 2004 al-Qaeda terrorists carried out a series of bombings against the Madrid commuter rail network, killing 193 and injuring over 2000. In the immediate aftermath, leaders of the governing PP wrongly blamed the attack on ETA. According to opposition politicians, Aznar's administration wished to conceal the involvement of Islamist extremists to prevent the attack being perceived as a riposte to their unpopular participation in the Iraq war.

Nevertheless, Ulia acknowledges her own willingness to sustain Gustavo's exotic fantasies to the extent that she allows herself to be defined within the rigid frames of the essentialist identity he projects onto her rather than articulating her own subjectivity. Having recently discovered the truth about her father's identity as an ETA prisoner, Ulia's reluctance to resist her husband's essentialising gaze can be seen to stem from a fear of coming to terms with her own identity as the daughter of a publicly reviled terrorist. Despite her evidently wry attitude towards Gustavo's essentialising gaze, time and again she acquiesces to his pursuit of Basque exoticism during the road trip, framing her submission in romantic terms: "que me pliego a tus deseos amorosamente" (12). Consequently, the road trip perpetuates the prevailing power relations between the couple in terms of both gender and ethnic differences that - as illustrated by Ulia's recollection of their marriage ceremony - are rooted in the foundations of their relationship. The narrator recalls her guilt at how, on the pretext of fulfilling the last wishes of Gustavo's dying mother, she acceded to his desire to marry in a traditional Catholic ceremony, and in the process agreed to be baptised and to accept her first communion. In relating her memory of the event, she imagines the shame felt by her progressive-minded mother that is encapsulated in "su mirada de para-esto-hicimos-la-revolución-feminista" (98). However, as well as symbolising the subordination of female subjectivity to male desire, the ceremony - set within the medieval walls of Ávila in the traditional lands of old Castille - also represents a metaphorical assertion of Spanish cultural and political superiority over Basque identity, evidenced by Ulia's blunt summation of her account of the wedding as an absolute compliance with Gustavo's desires through the deliberately ironic use of the age-old cry of Spanish nationalism: "Viva" (98). Moreover, through her peculiar use of legalistic terminology in her wry description of the apparent consensus between the couple, Ulia inscribes their marriage within a broader frame

of the present constitutional arrangement of Spanish-Basque relations, noting how they are duty-bound to:

> Ser siempre cordiales el uno con el otro: un mandato. Eso por encima de todo. La cortesía como *conditio sine qua non*. Ese tono que nunca sube más de la cuenta. Discusiones cortadas de raíz, por no comparecencia de las partes. El sofisticado arte de quedarse callado y seguir adelante (98)

This codification of Ulia's own relationship in quasi-legalistic terms of tacit consensus and commitment to the future rather than preoccupation with the past alludes to the more abstract position of the Basque subject within the political status quo where historic injustices are left unresolved under the guise of preserving a peaceful co-existence - a political arrangement that nonetheless sustains Spanish sovereignty over Basque society which in this context is embodied in Gustavo's authority over Ulia.

Yet Ulia's role in upholding Gustavo's exotic image of Basqueness is not entirely passive: the fact that she employs the plural possessive pronoun when she describes their road trip as "nuestra pequeña visita etnográfica" (17) infers an awareness of her own complicity as she actively satisfies her husband's desires to encounter an authentic image of Basque exoticism. By characterising their visit as ethnographic visit, Ulia also exposes the supremacist mindset that underpins Gustavo's desire to discover the Basque Country. According to postcolonial criticism, ethnography is a discipline that has conceived of itself through the positivistic assumption of an "encounter between a sovereign European observer and a non-European native occupying [...] a lesser status and a distant place" (Said "Representing" 212) and that has therefore reinforced imperialist representations of

non-Western societies as populated by "as a backward, unregenerately primitive people" (Said "Representing" 219). That said, Ulia herself is an active participant in conveying this essentialist image of Basqueness to Gustavo exemplified early on in the novel when, as the couple drive past motorway signs that herald their arrival into the Basque Country, she breaks into a folk song by the twentieth-century Basque composer Alfredo Donnay. In her retelling of the scene Ulia emphasises her own performativity as she sings, ironically describing her affected sentimentality at the prospect of her homecoming: "Álava, oh, Álava. El corazón me da un pequeño vuelco y comienzo a cantar" (16). Noting how the song's nostalgic lyrics wistfully evoke the traditional white *baserri* farmhouses and woodland of the Basque countryside's "*bella rusticidad*" (17), Ulia concedes that her performance of this essentialist Basque identity is wholly intended for the pleasure of Gustavo. She replicates this performance of an identity that is at once sexual and ethnic when she pleasures Gustavo in a hotel room in Bilbao while reciting street names to ensure that she can feign an intimate knowledge of the Biscayan city: "quiero echarle un último vistazo al mapa de Bilbao, por nada del mundo quiero perderme y quedar mal delante de ti, pero mientras tanto introduzco mi mano por debajo de la toalla [...] Lo hago como despistada, soy una joven inexperta que no sabe bien lo que hace" (69). Simultaneously assuming the role of sexual and ethnic other to satisfy Gustavo's fantasies, Ulia is loath to disabuse him of his essentialist vision of the Basque Country lest it mean she is forced to confront a more turbulent political reality within which her individual past is closely implicated.

Thus, if the road trip offers the illusion of escapism in a land of exotic otherness for Gustavo, despite herself, Ulia equally indulges this search for a contrived image of Basque essentialism insofar as it enables her too to escape the difficult prospect of having to articulate her personal story. Ulia's willingness to satisfy Gustavo's exoticising gaze in order

to conceal the truth about her familial past is epitomised by the fact that, just prior to the sexual encounter described above, she is interrupted by her husband while secretly checking for news updates on the protests against her father's incarceration. Her swift recourse to self-exoticisation in this instance as a means of distracting Gustavo's attention and concealing from him the reality of her personal implication in the ongoing ramifications of the Basque conflict speaks to her own unease at coming to terms with the past. At several points in the novel, we witness how, when confronted with evidence of the latent political reality in the Basque Country, Ulia prefers to submit to Gustavo's pursuit of the escapist pleasures of the road trip. When coverage of her father's case appears on a television screen during a brief stop at a motorway service station, she anxiously hurries Gustavo back to the car before he catches sight of the footage (63). Similarly, when she encounters a poster in a bar displaying a photograph of her emaciated father and demanding his compassionate release, a panicked Ulia hastily insists that they continue on their journey (131). Faced with the challenge of reckoning with her own past, Ulia recognises that the indulgent pleasures of being "turistas lánguidos, desganados" (135) is a much easier option. Although fully conscious that the timeless rural Arcadia presented to the couple on their road trip is wholly contrived, Ulia partly submits to the appeal of suspending disbelief in such illusions as opposed to confronting a more uncomfortable reality, a realisation that is reflected in her impressions of a faux-rural hotel room in which the couple briefly stay: "Esta habitación está en las antípodas del mundo rural, pero así nos gusta recordar nuestro pasado: con buen olor" (148).

Sensationalist Media in a 'Disneyworld of Terrorism'

However, Ulia's hesitance to relate her own story is shown to facilitate its exploitation by cynical actors, primarily in the shape of Sarah - a Madrid-based journalist whom the

couple encounter in the midst of covering the case of Ulia's father for a conservative digital news publication. Sarah's reportage on the ongoing political tensions possesses a distinctly Manichean tone that embodies the hegemonic media discourse on ETA that, as I have discussed in Chapter Two, is also reproduced by Aramburu in *Patria*. In Sarah's coverage of the protests against the continued imprisonment of Ulia's terminally ill father, she utilises tropes that characterise the Basque nationalist community as intensely fanatical, brainwashed by ideological dogma, and indifferent to the suffering of the innocent victims of terrorism. Agirre presents excerpts from Sarah's sensationalist articles - which Ulia secretly reads behind Gustavo's back - in the form of a pastiche of Spanish conservative media coverage of ETA. For example, in her melodramatic account of one event Sarah ominously describes the protestors as "una masa local y amenazante", underlining their xenophobic suspicion towards her on account of her being a "corresponsal *extranjera*" (87). Furthermore, in order to delegitimise the political assertions of the young protestors, she italicises specific vocabulary they employ - "*Estado español, represión, proceso democrático y derechos humanos*" (87) - and dismisses it as the parroted slogans of "adoctrinadas bocas" (87). In doing so, she infers that these terms are nothing but empty signifiers and thus, divesting them of all substance, she reinforces a depoliticised view of ETA's violence that has been perpetuated within the mainstream Spanish media.

Moreover, Sara's article adopts a strictly hierarchical attitude towards victimhood, further reproducing the zero-sum discourse that, as mentioned earlier on in this thesis, has heavily shaped conservative media and political discourse on the issue. Clearly intent on distinguishing the "genuine" victimhood of those persecuted by ETA from the grievances of Basque nationalists, Sarah crudely belittles the latters' own complaints of persecution as *victimismo*, thereby replicating a strategy which, as argued elsewhere, has been regularly

deployed by conservative opponents of nationalism who dismiss denouncements of injustice as a pathological attachment to the past (Crumbaugh 373). Her scornful disregard for nationalist remonstrance is evidenced by her dismissive judgement of their "manidos discursos", of which she writes, "ya todo suena a pasado" (88). Relating her encounter with the elderly mother of two ETA prisoners at the protest, she lampoons the woman's attire as a hollow performance of victimhood, intimating that the latter's white headscarf - a presumed evocation of the Mothers of the Plaza de Mayo - is but a vulgar attempt to equate her own situation as a self-alleged victim of state oppression with the "genuine" suffering of victims of Argentina's military junta of the seventies. The woman's posture of victimhood is further discredited through Sarah's exaggerated description of the sharp rebuke she receives - which seems to belie an initial impression of her frailty - when she approaches the woman for an interview (88).

Likewise in her sensationalist portrait of Ulia's father, Sarah's malevolent depiction of the imprisoned terrorist conveys an innate depravity that is crystallised in his menacing gaze which, she states, "aún refleja el odio irracional que lleva a un ser humano a quitarle la vida a otro" (149). By explicitly characterising Ortiz de Zárate's hatred as irrational Sarah's article perpetuates a Manichean interpretation of ETA's violence that - as noted in Chapter Two of this thesis - has become prominent within mainstream cultural depictions of the terrorist group in Spain (Miguélez Carballeira "Ocho apellidos vascos"). Locating violence entirely within the individual, Sarah occludes any sense of a socio-political context within which the terrorist's crimes were committed, intimating instead that such violence is purely pathological. Consequently, Sarah's mode of representation follows what Edurne Portela has identified as hegemonic media constructions of the terrorist as "inhumano, carente de subjetividad, voluntad o vida más allá de la relacionada con su actividad terrorista [...] el

paradigma de la bestialidad humana" (*El eco de los disparos* 126). Similarly, Zulaika and Douglass have argued that the discursive construction of terrorists as subhuman or monstrous serves to justify the "premise that we cannot afford to be too humane when confronting terroristic inhumanity [...] that we, too, perhaps must practise a little terrorism, but of the right kind, in order to contain the malignancy" (155-56). With an almost morbid focus on the suffering of his innocent victims that deliberately obscures any structural issues, Sarah's article employs a fiercely emotive tone to delegitimise the appeal to human rights of her terrorist subject: "La sangre de estos niños inocentes, de sus padres y de los veinticuatro guardias civiles heridos en aquella aciaga noche aún inyecta la mirada de ese asesino que, desde la cama de un hospital, dice reclamar 'justicia'" (150). By identifying him exclusively in terms of his crime, Sarah dehumanises Ortiz de Zárate in order to discredit his pleas for more humane treatment by the Spanish state on account of his terminal diagnosis.

Nevertheless, far from presenting Sarah's perspective uncritically, Ulia's narration demonstrates the constructed nature of the former's demonising reportage and exposes the cultural othering that, like Gustavo, underpins her disdainful attitude towards the Basque Country. Indeed, the novel implies a complicity between the respective viewpoints of Gustavo and Sarah that is symbolised by Ulia's eventual discovery of their affair. Whereas Gustavo's exoticising gaze fixes the Basque Country as a timeless rural arcadia, Sarah's macabre articles alternatively resonate with more recent cultural discourses that, as Gabilondo has analysed elsewhere, have represented the region as a "Disneyworld del terrorismo" ("Posimperialismo" 103). In his critique of popular works such as *Patria*, Gabilondo argues that these cultural products grant Spanish readers access to:

> un País Vasco posterrorista, de manera mucho más relajada, es decir, de manera turística, para observar, experimentar y disfrutar de lo que es 'un escenario de violencia primario' en España: el pasado de ETA y el terrorismo vasco y todo lo que es vasco como terrorista ("Posimperialismo" 103)

Yet as Gabilondo elsewhere contends, this present othering of the Basque Country as a place intrinsically associated with terrorist violence should be understood as a continuation of discourses of otherness and essentialism that have defined the region in the Spanish imaginary over the last two centuries ("Imagining Basques"). Relating the journalist's account of her current assignment through indirect speech, Ulia's ironic paraphrasing of Sarah's story amplifies the latter's exoticising attitude towards the territory, framing her investigation as a kind of colonialist venture into dangerous alien territory: "Nos cuenta cómo se ha infiltrado ya en los pueblos más pequeños y herméticos de la Patria, muchas veces mintiendo a los aborígenes sobre el medio para el que escribe" (84). Ulia's metonymic use of "la Patria" implies Sarah's reductive subsumption of the Basque Country under a chauvinistic nationalist identity that is - through her reference to the locals as "aborígenes" - intertwined with a notion of Basque primitivism. In the same way, Ulia paraphrastically underscores Sarah's othering of her Basque subjects by italicising the journalist's use of demonstrative determiners to dissociate herself from "*esos bares*" and "*esa gente*" (85).

Situating Sarah's perspective within the contemporary discursive context of *la batalla del relato*, Ulia furthermore disparages the conservative publication for which she writes as "Un *confidencial* de esos que se dedica a propagar sensacionalismo y pura invención con una palpable falta de criterio [...] otro medio barato más que intenta sacar al *tema vasco* su último jugo" (85-6). Epitomising the exploitative sensationalism of her publication, Sarah's own

professed compassion for the victims of ETA in her articles is shown to belie a more cynical hypocrisy that is reflected in her laying of flowers at the site of each terrorist assassination in San Sebastián which, according to Ulia, she refers to melodramatically as "los escenarios del terror (*sic*)" (170). The addition of the narrator's parenthetical qualification points to the incongruity between Sarah's sensationalist language and her actual emotional indifference, a fact that is reaffirmed by the inference that her gesture of apparent condolence is more an act of hollow performativity, as indicated when Sarah glibly remarks: "He perdido la factura de las rosas, seguro que ahora no me devolverán el dinero" (171). This exposure of Sarah's insincerity is replicated by her trivialisation of recent civil disobedience that has been sparked by the ongoing protests against the continued imprisonment of Ulia's father: "Los radicales quemaron dos contenedores. Menuda postal para los turistas, ¿verdad?" (171). With Sarah's caustic remark echoing Gabilondo's notion of the Basque Country as a "Disneyworld del terrorismo", the novel denaturalises the totalising view of the Basque Country as a place intrinsically linked to terrorist violence that the journalist seeks to perpetuate in her articles. By unveiling the fundamental cynicism behind Sarah's perspective, the vision of the Basque Country she possesses is shown to be an unreflective product of the same essentialising and othering cultural discourses that shape Gustavo's view of the region. Yet on account of Ulia's unwillingness to confront her own past during the road trip, these totalising, essentialist discourses remain unchallenged, thereby displacing the perspective of the Basque narrator whose presence on the journey continues to be silent and passive, as she offers limited resistance to the more forceful imposition of the reductive viewpoints of Gustavo and Sarah.

Ironic Narration and Demystifying the Male Tourist's Gaze

Viewed in and of itself, the central journey in Agirre's novel offers a feminist slant on the road story by exposing the extent to which the road trip merely perpetuates hegemonic self-other dualisms between Gustavo and Ulia - depicted in terms of Spanish-Basque and male-female relations. Drawing on Ganser's study of women's road narratives, *Los turistas desganados* can therefore be seen to resist mythification of the road as a space where cultural assumptions are destabilised and where dialogue is enabled between self and other. Rather, the couple's journey simply reinforces Gustavo's essentialist vision of Basqueness while also illustrating, through the character of Sarah, the alignment between this totalising cultural vision and a hegemonic media narrative on ETA's terrorist campaign that similarly derives from an othering of the Basque Country as a place intrinsically and ahistorically linked to violence. Ulia's largely submissive role during the road trip inhibits her from challenging these totalising perspectives *in situ* and articulating her own subjectivity. Nevertheless, it is through her retrospective retelling of their journey that she is able to destabilise these reductive narratives by exposing them to ironic mockery and simultaneously narrating her own personal history.

Crucially, Ulia's narrative - written largely in the second-person - is specifically addressed towards Gustavo and thus articulates a direct resistance to his essentialising gaze. Denaturalising Gustavo's fixed image of the Basque Country as an exotic rural idyll, Ulia alternatively portrays her homeland to him as a postmodern, late capitalist space that is shaped by the commercialising forces of globalisation and where, in a bid to satisfy the tourist gaze, a manufactured image of Basque particularity is externally projected that is simultaneously rooted in timeless local tradition and cosmopolitan modernity. In his analysis

of Bilbao's iconic Guggenheim Museum, McClancy contends that one of the building's principal functions has been to alter the external image of both the city and the Basque Country more broadly by creating an identity that is "non-terrorist, cultured, creative, modern and cosmopolitan" (171). The way in which Ulia's ironic narration exposes the manufactured nature of this external image of the Basque Country serves to reveal Gustavo's "partial perspective" (Haraway) to him, underlining how he only perceives a superficial picture of Basqueness. Moreover, by destabilising his static image of the Basque Country itself, Ulia equally resists the fixed identity, which is firmly rooted in that same place, that Gustavo imposes upon her.

First of all, the narrator's repudiation of an essentialist identity is revealed through her retelling of the couple's brief stay at her step-father Joseba's *baserri* (farmhouse) and the latter's abandonment of urban life in favour of the quaintly rustic existence he attempts to recreate in his new rural home. As Kurlansky has noted, within Basque nationalism belonging to a *baserri* long represented a central marker of Basque cultural identity (6). For early nationalists in the nineteenth century the rural world - of which the *baserri* was the foremost symbol - was heralded as "the repository of the essence of Basqueness" whilst rapid urbanisation was alternatively viewed as a corrupting influence that "severely diluted indigenous culture" (Woodworth 32). Nowadays, however, Zulaika argues that, in the modern Basque Country, the *baserri* has lost much of its potency as a quintessential site of an immutable Basque identity, and has come to be viewed as "reservoir of a past society's idealized past" (*Basque Violence* 103). By presenting Gustavo with her critical perspective on Joseba's *baserri* life, Ulia further underlines the illusory nature of her Spanish husband's own vision of Basque essentialism - of which the rural farmhouse in which Joseba resides is a prominent but waning symbol. Ulia frames her step-father's new circumstances in these

same critical terms, portraying his rural way of life as a quaint form of indulgent nostalgia, spurred by the illusion of recapturing an idyllic past: "Joseba considera haber vuelto a los orígenes, a unos soñados" (179). She casts the hermetic and self-sustaining existence Joseba leads as an anachronistic attachment to the past through her description of the farmhouse's actual state of ghostly decay: "sigue produciéndome desasosiego: este aislamiento, la decrepitud de todas las cosas, la azada que se oxida en un extremo olvidado de la huerta infraexplotada, los aullidos fantasmagóricos de todos los animales que alguna vez vivieron aquí" (179).

Yet Ulia similarly adopts a critical perspective on the modern cosmopolitan image that the Basque Country seeks to project of itself. In her sardonic account of their journey the narrator emphasises the unpleasant atmosphere of the touristified landscape, accentuating her sense of emotional disconnection from her birthplace through the detached ironic tone of her narration, and hence, through the text itself, countering Gustavo's desire to fix her in an essentialist, placed-based identity. Upon the couple's arrival in a rainy San Sebastián, the farcical sight of North American tourists merrily jumping in puddles elicits gentle mockery from Ulia who scoffs at the city's *urban chic* image, drily remarking: "Esto es julio *dans la côte basque*" (161). Through her deliberately teasing use of French the narrator infers a growing equivalence between the unpleasantness of the crowded scenes they encounter in San Sebastián and the French Basque Country which has long been more heavily marketed at foreign tourists (Woodworth 31). Moreover, during their visit to her hometown in Vitoria-Gasteiz, Ulia debunks Gustavo's assumption that she feels a nostalgic affection towards her hometown, describing instead how it evokes a feeling of unfamiliarity on account of the couple's arrival at the height of summer when the streets are teeming with tourists. Rather than finding her hometown as she remembers it - with the "catálago habitual" (41) of

languid teenagers, well-to-do families, and elderly pensioners - the mass of sightseers prompts an attitude of wry disillusion from Ulia who ridicules the ebullient crowd at a popular jazz festival while she recollects them "dando palmas arrítmicas, cantando con un pésimo acento y una peor afinación" (42). The discordant mood suggested by Ulia's description of this scene thus highlights the discrepancy between the frivolous experience of the tourists and her own sense of detachment from her birthplace which she subsequently narrates to Gustavo: "Si supieras que a esta ciudad me une más bien poco, convendrías en que este día muerto por Vitoria-Gasteiz oculta algo. Mi madre no está. Tampoco tengo familiares a los que visitar. Si alguna vez tuve amigos aquí, ya los he olvidado" (41). Rejecting an essentialist identity imagined for her by Gustavo that is squarely anchored in place of her birth, Ulia's reference to erstwhile friends and her absent mother points to a sense of self that is relational and that extends beyond the narrow spatial limits of her hometown.

Throughout the novel, Ulia's narration foregrounds the superficiality of the image of a modern, cosmopolitan Basque Country that is projected towards its foreign visitors. As opposed to Gustavo - who pursues only an idealised picture of Basqueness - Ulia asserts that her own perspective avoids such a reductionist attitude towards her homeland: "puede decirse que tengo una visión bastante plural de la realidad" (44). Confessing that she has been surreptitiously following the media hype surrounding her father's case, Ulia's narrative draws Gustavo's attention towards the latent historical tensions - represented in terms of fraught relations on both a personal and political level - that simmer beneath the anodyne facade of the touristic sites they visit. In this way, Ulia's narrative offers Gustavo a more complex perspective on the Basque Country than his own essentialising gaze allows him, as she shines a light on each place as what Massey terms "a particular constellation of social relations"

(*Space, Place and Gender* 154). This is neatly encapsulated by their visit - at the behest of Gustavo's wildly ostentatious colleague, Gabriel - to a fashionable cocktail bar in Bilbao called 'JK'. Named after the initials of two brothers who originally owned the establishment but became estranged after a bitter dispute, the bar and its history epitomise the suppression of a fractious and unresolved past which - reduced to mere anecdotal curiosity by the force of commodification - is buried beneath a materialistic veneer. Nevertheless, Ulia's explicit appreciation of the kitsch décor - described by her as "un bar de nuestro estilo" (77) - denotes her own capacity to perceive the superficial appearances of their environment and its masking of multiple underlying realities.

One such example is Ulia's own troubled past for which Gustavo - content to maintain the mystique of his exotic image of her - shows little concern. Observing his lack of interest in her unstated reasons for booking a bland, modern hotel in Bilbao, the narrator - in her recollection of the trip - discloses the personal significance of the hotel's site where once stood the Coliseo Albia - a theatre to which her step-father would take her as a child and where she developed a love for opera (65). In the present context of having recently discovered the real identity of her biological father, the site assumes an even greater resonance as, revisiting it, she contemplates how she never truly conceived of Joseba as a father figure during her childhood. Intertwined with these traces of her personal history, Ulia's narrative also emphasises the prevailing political tensions linked to the Basque conflict that remain otherwise inconspicuous amongst the pleasant touristic settings that she and Gustavo visit. While attending a Jackson Browne concert in San Sebastián, the brief disruption of protestors bearing placards demanding the repatriation of Basque prisoners elicits little reaction from the foreign audience before the activists are swiftly removed. In contrast to the awkward silence between her and Gustavo, the narrator attests to her inner

dread at the impending media sensationalisation of the incident. By recounting this moment of suppressed political dissent, Ulia demonstrates how the couple's pleasure-seeking road trip perpetuates an other-directed image of the Basque Country where a manufactured touristic experience displaces confrontation with her personal history that is itself firmly implicated within that aforementioned unstable political reality.

Whereas the road trip itself is shown to have merely perpetuated Gustavo's essentialist vision of Basqueness and reinforced the self-other relations between him and Ulia, through her subsequent narration of their journey, Ulia is finally able to articulate her own perspective and demystify her husband's totalising view of the Basque Country by confronting him with the cultural specificity of his own subjectivity. The text enables Ulia to resist the marginalised position she previously occupied during the road trip where she remained submissive to Gustavo's desires, largely acquiescing to his pursuit of an "authentic" experience of Basque exoticism and offering little opposition to the reductive identity he ascribed to her. In her critique of humanistic geographers, Gillian Rose contends that universalist claims to be able to objectively perceive the "true" character of a place derive from a failure to recognise the specificity or embodied nature of one's own subjectivity. Through the second-person form of her narrative, Ulia confronts Gustavo with the fact that his totalising image of the Basque Country similarly stems from a refusal to reflect upon the location of his own subjectivity. Gustavo's self-assured assertion that his profession is ultimately concerned with the use of "sentido común" (79) illustrates his hubristic presumption that his own interpretation of reality is one of rational objectivity. Yet the narrator directly chastises her husband for his unreflective character, bemoaning his "no menos conocida autocomplacencia" (81) and accusing him of being "convencido de que te conoces ya a la perfección, el abandono de la introspección por el que te has decidido" (71).

To counteract this, Ulia's narrative subverts Gustavo's lofty perspective as the narrator - addressing herself directly to him - resorts to a ribald humour that exposes the embodied nature of his subjectivity, which she reveals to be the particular viewpoint of a Spanish male subject. This is evident in Ulia's derision of Gustavo's fetishisation of Basque cuisine as she demystifies the exotic vision he holds of the Basque Country as a rural Arcadia. McClancy has pointed out how local fare has become closely intertwined with essentialist conceptions of Basqueness that are tied to an agrarian and ancient identity: "For today many Basque foods are seen to be as green as what remains of the verdant Basque countryside. They are regarded as traditional, 'pure' and 'authentic', a reassuring taste of the past" (85). As McClancy goes on to say, this manufactured image of rural authenticity that is projected through food has been vigorously promoted by those within the Basque Country who wish to emphasise a sense of Basque particularity: "these eulogizers of the neo-rural are creating a taste of what should be, a flavour of a created past, heavily oaked with an oneiric nostalgia" (85). Ulia mocks Gustavo's excessive zeal to sample local produce, revealing the constructed nature of the image of Basque authenticity sought by her husband. Having deliberately designed their holiday schedule according to the culinary recommendations of a food blog titled "El País Vasco de restaurante en restaurante", Gustavo's planned route for the couple's road trip is clearly contrived to satisfy his own preexisting image of the Basque Country as a gastronomical idyll - an image that is vigorously marketed at tourists. Casting an ironic light on Gustavo's enthralment to this manufactured Arcadian image, Ulia mocks her husband's fetishistic drive to indulge in lavish gourmet ingredients - *bonito del norte*, *queso de Idiazábal*, *pimientos de Ibarra* - that are cynically marketed as tokens of rural Basque authenticity:

> Gustavo, no sé si te habrás dado cuenta, pero cuando entras en un supermercado de Madrid compras leche, huevos, cereales de marca blanca y Coca-Cola. Cuando entras en uno de la Patria, sin embargo, tus ojos sólo reparan en las delicatesen. Si el Departamento de Comercio y Turismo del Gobierno Vasco necesita una prueba viviente del éxito de sus campañas publicitarias, aquí estás tú, Gustavito, ven y cómelo (31).

Through her playful irony the narrator exposes the heavily manufactured nature of the cultural authenticity that Gustavo craves, unveiling it to be the product of the commodification of Basque particularity for the consumption of Spanish visitors on the part of an autonomous administration eager to project a firm sense of national difference.

Moreover, Ulia emphasises Gustavo's corporeality to locate the cultural specificity of his viewpoint and the embodied nature of his subjectivity. When observing Gustavo as he devours gourmet Basque produce - indicative of his fetishisation of an essentialist Basque identity - Ulia offers a grossly caricaturesque description of exaggerated physicality as she imagines him becoming a bloated gourmand, pontificating about fine wine "mientras el jugo de una buena chuleta le corre barbilla abajo" (32). Similarly, the narrator employs a distinctly scatological tone to lampoon Gustavo when he is forced to interrupt their drive to the Historical Archive of Basque Nationalism in order to find a bathroom. Undermining her Spanish husband's condescending attitude towards the museum and Basque identity more broadly, Ulia's farcical description of his embarrassing discomfort is notable for the irreverent physicality of its detail as she notes Gustavo's "gesto constreñido" (62) while rushing to the toilet, and his "andares elegantes" (63) after he has relieved himself. By painting this burlesque physical portrait of Gustavo's decadence, Ulia's satirical description

undercuts the air of cultural superiority that sustains his lofty attitude towards the Basque Country which for him is reduced to cultural curiosities.

Equally, Ulia satirises the gendered particularity of Gustavo's (male) perspective, illustrated through her humorous portrayal of his infatuation with his brand new BMW in which the couple undertake their road trip. In her study of women's travel writing Sidonie Smith argues that modern masculinity has been performed through the car - an object that has become fetishised due to the fantasies of unlimited movement that it inspires (176). Deriding her husband's excessive devotion to his BMW, Ulia alludes explicitly to the symbolic power of the car "en la identidad y autoestima de los hombres del primer mundo" (13). Moreover, the narrator points to the way in which Gustavo's attempts to project a stable identity of modern masculinity are performed in an embodied manner: through comical physical description, Ulia ridicules the fetishistic nature of Gustavo's affection towards the car, recounting how she caught him purchasing driving gloves so that he could "masajear con delicadeza su sensual superficie" (14). Ulia also mocks the performative way in which Gustavo tries to project an image of confident masculinity when she pokes fun at the affected posture he adopted for photographers during an interview about his career: "Otra foto meditabunda, mirando por la ventana, con el gesto reconcentrado [...] Saliste bastante bien en aquellas fotos, metiste bien barriga" (81). By undermining Gustavo's pomposity through her comically irreverent focus on his corporeality, Ulia playfully exposes the embodied specificity of the universalist, masculine perspective he holds on the world, holding it up to ridicule and thereby subverting his totalising viewpoint.

Abandoning Basque Essentialism for an Agonistic Approach to the Past

So far, my analysis has focused on Ulia's account of the road trip which, approaching the genre from a feminist perspective, resists a romanticised view of the road, showing instead how the couple's journey reinforces hegemonic self-other relations. Beholden to her husband's search for confirmation of his exoticised view of the Basque Country, Ulia's personal story is marginalised throughout the road trip, displaced by essentialising cultural discourses. In the context of coming to terms with the legacy of the Basque conflict, the novel infers a complicity between Gustavo's essentialist view of Basque identity and hegemonic media representations - epitomised by the character of Sarah - of ETA's violence as Manichean and depoliticised. If Gustavo's essentialist viewpoint is reinforced by the contrived itinerary that he plans for himself and Ulia, the rare moments in which Ulia actively deviates from this prescribed route are presented as a brief liberation from his desire, enabling the possibility of articulating her own subjectivity through the narration of her personal history.

While Ganser maintains that women's road narratives have often represented the road as a space where existing gender power relations continue to exist, she contends that such works also present female mobility as a form of resistance to patriarchal spatialities (54). During the couple's visit to the seaside town of Lekeitio, Ulia's decision to venture out of the hotel alone assumes a clear symbolism when, in the midst of contemplating how to reveal to Gustavo the truth about her father, she encounters a woman writing on the beach: "Garabatea con un bolígrafo rojo. Se me ocurre que quizá sea una escritora. Alguien que me ayudará a dar algo de coherencia a esta historia" (122). By suggesting that Ulia's solitary excursion fosters the tentative possibility of her articulating her own story, her mobility is presented as

an act of resistance to her subordination as Gustavo's travelling companion and the marginalisation of her subjectivity. Whereas, in his presence, Ulia submits to Gustavo's exoticised fantasies of both her and the Basque Country while strenuously concealing her personal history, her literal abandonment of him comes to signify a belated refusal to yield to the essentialist identity he imposes upon her by instead articulating her own story. This distinction is subsequently confirmed by the final chapter where it is revealed that the entire novel (which is supposedly written by Ulia and in which she finally narrates the story of her parents) is only begun after the events of the road trip whenever Ulia leaves Gustavo to take up a temporary artistic residence in England. Moreover, whereas Gustavo tries to impose upon Ulia a fixed identity that is rooted in an essentialist Basque Country, her eventual articulation of her own subjectivity resists a fixed place insofar as her account of her family story transcends the spatial limits of the Basque Country, spanning various locations across Spain and France.

Although Ulia's account of the road trip forms the central narrative thread of the novel, it is interwoven with her reconstruction of the story of her parents as the novel - viewed in its entirety - also constitutes the female narrator's attempt to come to terms with her recent discovery of the identity of her father and, consequently, the implication of her personal history within the context of a violent past and resultant political tensions that are ongoing. In this final section, I will examine Ulia's own engagement with the past through the lens of agonistic memory with a view to demonstrating how her exploration of her personal history offers an alternative paradigm to prevailing attitudes towards the legacy of ETA's violence that are elsewhere problematised in the novel through the narrator's critical presentation of the hegemonic media narrative on the past and its links to Gustavo's essentialist view of Basqueness.

In prioritising greater understanding of the socio-political contexts within which historic acts of violence are perpetrated, agonistic memory clearly diverges from the depoliticised treatment of ETA that is exemplified in the novel by Sarah's sensationalist and demonising reports on Ulia's father and the protests against his imprisonment. By contrast, in her dramatic reconstruction of her parents' relationship Ulia situates her parent's first encounter at a very specific time and place - the events of the Vitoria massacre on 3rd March 1976. It is of no small significance that Ulia's narrative on her parents commences with this infamous historical event when armed Spanish police shot dead several striking workers (and injured over one hundred more) having forced them - through the use of tear gas - out of a church in which the workers had barricaded themselves. Franco's death - which occurred only a few months prior to this tragedy - is also briefly alluded to in Ulia's retelling of the scene as she evokes a climate of political instability and fractious industrial relations which characterised the early years of Spain's transition from dictatorship to democracy. Although Ulia does not interrupt the narrative in order to state explicitly that this horrific act of police violence was the definitive reason for her father's subsequent enlistment in ETA, her fictional representation of the incident seems a deliberate attempt to contextualise his later radicalisation by recreating the climate of state terror that endured after Franco's death when many of his leading acolytes still held positions of power within the Spanish government. At the same time, by drawing attention to this historical and political context, Ulia's narrative becomes a repudiation of the dominant media depiction of violence as a pathological and individualised phenomenon.

Moreover, Ulia's account of the past eschews the melodramatic rendering of terror typified by the sensationalist articles of Sarah which she problematises as a strategy of

reinforcing a sense of "us and them" by identifying the absolute malevolence of ETA members. Whereas the excessive passion of Sarah's sensationalist tone seeks to increase her readers' antipathy towards the Basque nationalist community, Ulia's representation of her parents reflects the tenets of agonistic memory insofar as, not foregoing emotion, it nonetheless "shuns passion in favour of compassion" (Bull and Hansen 398). Despite Ulia's initial resentment towards her mother for having kept her father's true identity a secret, the narrator's fictional recreation of her parents' reconciliation clearly constitutes a compassionate attempt to empathise with her mother's perspective. In this sense, her depiction of her mother as the loved one of an ETA member is a far cry from Sarah's portrayal of the *abertzale* community as fanatical and misanthropic. Through her writing, Ulia attempts to understand the events of the past from her mother's point of view, now and then transitioning into a narrative style of free indirect speech which, by partially embodying the perspective of her mother, serves to produce an impression of greater intimacy with the latter's experiences. For example, representing her mother's decision to reestablish contact with her father after seeing a poster in an *abertzale* bar denouncing his imprisonment, Ulia imagines the inner conflict that afflicted her mother as she depicts the latter's attempts to comprehend the experiences of the relatives of other prisoners: "Y preguntarles. ¿Cómo es todo en esos lugares lejanos? ¿Guardáis las apariencias durante las visitas? ¿Se os hacen conocidos vuestros familiares, queda algo, aunque sea un poco, de aquello que fueron?" (39). Ulia's portrayal of her mother's attempt to empathise with these strangers thereby forms a mirror-image of her own endeavour to empathise with the former's past ordeal which serves as the basis for also understanding her present decision to renew her relationship with her imprisoned father, despite the crimes he committed.

Not only does Ulia attempt to empathise with her mother's experiences but also those of her father whose perspective she also sets out to comprehend, further reflecting the principles of agonistic memory which prescribes incorporating the testimonies of perpetrators with the aim of understanding their recourse to extreme violence (Bull and Hansen 399). Her narrative therefore offers a resistance to the dehumanising media portrayal of Ortiz de Zárate by breaking what Zulaika and Douglass have described as the taboo of terror whereby "the very attempt to 'know' how the terrorist thinks or lives can be deemed an abomination" (149). Contrary to dominant media depictions of him as a depraved psychopath, Ulia's attempt to comprehend the perspective of her father constitutes an implicit acknowledgement of his humanity. The narrator reconstructs a short dialogue between her parents during her mother's visit to a Spanish prison in which the pair argue over whether or not Ulia should be told the truth about her father (155). The recreation of this scene is significant insofar as the voice Ulia gives to her father - albeit briefly - constitutes a recognition of his subjectivity, distinguishing him from the silent monster he is depicted as in the media. Moreover, Ulia imagines a private prison visit between her parents in which she further humanises her father by portraying the couple's gestures of physical and spoken affection toward each other. As with her mother, Ulia evokes the thoughts of her father through her use of free direct speech as she imagines his reaction to her mother's recollection of his arrest while exiled in Saint-Jean-de-Luz: "Le quedan tan atrás esos días, que lo escucha todo como si se tratara de una película. ¿Quién era él entonces? Era otro, alguien con su mismo nombre" (110). By using this narrative technique Ulia is able to create the impression of expressing the intimate subjectivity of her parents while simultaneously gesturing towards her own mediation of these thoughts as the narrator to avoid unduly appropriating the perspective of her parents, maintaining the distance between her parents' experiences and her own. Her use of free direct speech equally allows Ulia to embody momentarily a range of successive viewpoints

which create the overall impression of a narrative that inclines towards a multi-perspectivist approach to the past. Once again, this differentiates Ulia's narrative from the totalising discursive mode that has characterised *la batalla del relato* and the struggle to impose an overarching historical narrative.

In emphasising the mediated nature of the scenes she reimagines, Ulia repeatedly foregrounds the past as something that is not directly accessible but reconstructed through narrative. While she arraigns Gustavo for his lack of self-awareness, her own narration is notable for its explicitly self-reflexive tone as she constantly interrogates the interpretative role she occupies in representing the past. Ulia bookends the reimagined exchanges between her parents with explicit statements to Gustavo about the constructed nature of her representation of the past where she acknowledges her inescapable recourse to fictionalisation:

> No tengo que contar nada que no haya ocurrido en realidad [...] Los lugares son todos reales. Las conversaciones sólo tengo que ocuparme de reconstruirlas tal y como las recuerdo. Y cuando se trata de recrear situaciones que no presencié, mis fuentes son del todo fiables [...]
>
> Y sin embargo, me topo una y otra vez con los obstáculos de la ficción. Es hora de rendirme ya a la evidencia. Sobre todo: el ritmo, la dosificación, los preliminares, hasta dónde forzar los límites del suspense (93-94)

In a similar vein, Ulia concludes her retelling of her parents' arguments by ironically highlighting the provisional character of her representation: "Algo así. Más largo o más corto. Con más o menos dosis de chantaje emocional. Con caricias lisonjeras o súplicas

desesperadas" (155). Acknowledging her awareness that her account of the past is heavily narrativised and could have been retold in an alternative manner, Ulia implicitly recognises that multiple interpretations of past events are possible. This recalls Ricoeur's assertion that the value of recognising that the past is configured in narrative is that it facilitates a plurality of memories about the past ("Memory and Forgetting" 9). Far from positioning her personal story as a totalising account of the past, it is humbly framed as an individual narrative which, nevertheless, opens up the possibility for further dialogue. This is encapsulated by the final sentence of the novel in which, staring out from the English coastline at the expansive horizon of the North Sea, Ulia writes to Gustavo: "Aún tengo muchas cosas que contarte" (198). Exemplifying the "open-endedly dialogic" (Bull and Hansen 400) character of agonistic memory, Ulia's text therefore rejects any sense of narrative closure as she instead concludes her written address to Gustavo with the promise of further discussion of the past.

On a final note, it is worth indicating that the preference for a pluralist form of memory that is implied by Ulia's narrative is, however, not idealised as a panacea that eradicates conflictual dynamics from remembrance. On the contrary, Ulia discloses the inherent difficulties of engaging in dialogue about the past whilst also intimating the potential benefits of doing so. This is exemplified by Ulia's conversation with Joseba in which the pair finally discuss the revelations about her father and in which her step-father attempts to assuage Ulia's anger towards her mother by explaining the latter's decision to conceal the truth from her daughter for so long. Noting her deep unease at the conversation, the narrator expresses an instinctive desire to leave but resists this urge therefore symbolising a determination to assume her personal implication in a violent past: "Pero no, debo quedarme aquí porque se están repartiendo culpas y seguro que algo me toca" (183). When Joseba concludes his plea for Ulia to show empathy towards her mother, the effect of having endured

these difficult revelations about her past produces in Ulia a certain catharsis: "de repente todo me parece más fácil. Embriagada por el humo, me relajo" (186). Notwithstanding this potentially cathartic effect, Ulia does not downplay the moral difficulties posed by coming to terms with her implication within this violent past. Recollecting her visit to the site of the bombing carried out by her father, Ulia expresses her turmoil at the moral quandary presented by her attempts to reckon with her irreversible personal connection to that atrocity: "Yo, de paseo. Yo, por esta acera. Yo, petrificada de pronto. Yo, perdida en pensamientos morbosos. Yo, intentando relativizar todo. Prosigo el paseo. Los dos niños. Sus padres. Hace tanto tiempo. Perdida en pensamientos morbosos. Yo" (150). The narrator's repetition of "Yo" and her reference to her shifting physical location on the street symbolise her attempts to position herself morally in relation to her father's appalling crime. While not denying her horror at the suffering inflicted by her father's actions, the fact that Ulia arrives at no definitive conclusion to this painful interrogation of her own moral stance points towards the intrinsic challenges of establishing absolute moral judgements on the past, again resisting simplistic binaries of good versus evil that are characteristic of antagonistic forms of memory.

Conclusion

To sum up, *Los turistas desganados* offers a playful subversion of prevailing cultural discourses that have historically defined the Basque Country within the rigid frames of an exoticising and essentialising lens. By problematising this reductive vision of Basqueness through its feminist reworking of the road novel, Agirre's novel exposes the uneven power relations that underpin Gustavo's exoticising gaze: the first-person narrative of Ulia continually foregrounds the cultural specificity of her husband's totalising perspective, locating its particularity in terms of Gustavo's latent male chauvinism and sense of Spanish

superiority. Crucially, the novel also posits a relatedness between the unreflective exoticism of Gustavo's fixed image of the Basque Country and the demonising rhetoric that characterises Spanish mainstream media discourse on ETA. Therefore, through its ironic critique of the unreflective nature of both viewpoints, *Los turistas desganados* seeks to destabilise the totalising narratives that have shaped public discourse on the Basque conflict. However, the novel's Basque narrator interrogates her own complicity in allowing such discourse to perpetuate, evidenced by her recognition of the intrinsic emotional and moral challenges posed by coming to terms with her personal implication in the legacy of ETA's violence. That being said, the narrator's eventual attempts to do so provide a paradigm of confrontation with the past that, as I have argued, resists the antagonistic view of memory that is elsewhere critiqued in the novel and that instead bears a greater inclination towards an agonistic approach to memory by prioritising a contextualised, reflective approach to the past that openly forgoes any sense of closure or facile moral judgement.

Chapter Seven: Narrating Loss and Postmemory in Gabriela Ybarra's *El Comensal*

Having previously worked in social media analysis, the 2015 publication of Gabriela Ybarra's debut novel - *El comensal* - brought her immediate literary success: awarded the Premio Euskadi de Literatura en castellano in 2016, two years later the book's English-language translation by Natasha Wimmer also went on to earn a nomination for the prestigious International Booker Prize. More recently, a film adaptation of Ybarra's novel by the director Ángeles González-Sinde was released in 2022 in which Basque actress Susana Abaitua (who had previously played a leading role in the HBO adaptation of Aramburu's *Patria*) starred as Ybarra herself. Born in 1983 into a family that had long been prominent in Bilbao's conservative circles, Ybarra's family history and her own upbringing are closely entwined with Spain's national politics over the course of the last century, evidenced not least by the disruption to her own childhood by her parents' decision to relocate the family to Madrid following threats to her father's life by ETA. It is, however, a prior family tragedy that serves as the focus for the first part of Ybarra's novel in which she explores the events surrounding ETA's kidnapping and subsequent murder of her paternal grandfather, Javier de Ybarra y Bergé. Having fought alongside Franco's victorious nationalist forces in the Spanish Civil War, during the subsequent years of dictatorship Javier de Ybarra would become an influential political figure in the Basque Country, serving as the president of two of the region's main newspapers - *El Correo* and *El Diario vasco* - and through his election as the mayor of Bilbao in the mid-sixties. Over a decade later on 20 May 1977, while Spain was preparing for its first democratic elections following the end of dictatorship, Ybarra was kidnapped from his home in the affluent suburb of Neguri by an ETA commando - disguised as nurses - who demanded that the family pay a ransom of one billion pesetas and that the Spanish government release a number of Basque prisoners. Despite the family's efforts to

rescue him, Ybarra was found dead on 22 June in woodland south of Bilbao. The first part of *El comensal* follows Ybarra's attempts to narrate the events that preceded her grandfather's death in order to comprehend the pain felt by her father at this tragic loss. The author sets out to explore this chapter of her family's history by means of a typically postmodern work of historiographic metafiction - a term coined by the Canadian literary theorist Linda Hutcheon to designate works which "are both intensely self-reflexive and yet paradoxically also lay claim to historical events and personages" (5). By adopting a self-reflexive narrative mode to reconstruct the history of the kidnapping and assassination of her grandfather, Ybarra foregrounds her own interpretative role in recreating these real-life events by way of her explicit synthesis of documentary evidence and fictionalisation. In the second part of the novel, Ybarra deals instead with her own experience of overcoming loss following the death of her mother to colon cancer in 2011.

In the first part of my analysis, I will argue that Ybarra mobilises the aesthetic tropes of postmemory (Hirsch) in order to represent ETA's kidnapping of her grandfather in a way that inscribes her own second-hand knowledge of these events which preceded her own birth. Given that Hirsch's theory has been principally applied to artistic works centred on victims of state violence (most notably in her own analyses of the narratives of children of Holocaust survivors), I recognise that my proposed application of this theoretical lens to a novel that deals with the death of a prominent state agent of a fascist dictatorship may appear problematic. That said, I believe that my decision to examine Ybarra's work through this lens is justified on the grounds of the novel's aesthetic structure exhibiting many of the stylistic conventions of other postmemorial texts. Moreover, Hirsch herself makes no distinction between the descendants of victims or perpetrators when considering the applicability of postmemory and, indeed, in her analysis of W.G. Sebald's *Austerlitz* she contends that "lines of affiliation can cross the divide between victim and perpetrator

postmemory" ("Generation" 119). Highlighting various distancing techniques deployed by Ybarra in her self-reflexive reconstruction of the family tragedy, I will demonstrate how the author firmly locates herself in the present, utilising a postmemorial structure to underline the heavily mediated nature of her individual relationship to these events, while also implying that the past can only ever be accessed in an indirect and fragmented manner through the medium of narrative. In particular, I will consider the detached tone employed by Ybarra, her self-reflexive use of various generic conventions as a means of highlighting the overt fictionality of her narrative, her explicit problematisation of the reliability of her source material, and her use of photographic material as further illustration of her mediated relationship to the killing.

Although a number of scholars have already noted Ybarra's deployment of the tropes of postmemory in *El comensal* (Ortiz and Pilar Rodríguez 2020; Billard 2019), much less consideration has been given to the way in which the events related in second part of the novel clearly inform the author's narrative approach and her understanding of memory when dealing with the history of her grandfather's killing. In my reading of the second part of the novel I will demonstrate how Ybarra's own experiences of coming to terms with the death of her mother to cancer shapes the "partial perspective" (Haraway) that frames her postmemorial representation of the traumatic events of the earlier family tragedy. Using Todorov's distinction between literality and exemplarity, and drawing on Rich's politics of location, I will trace the evolution in Ybarra's own conceptualisation of memory in the aftermath of her mother's death, setting out the gradual process by which she acquires a recognition of remembrance as an act that is located in the present. I will highlight how Ybarra emphasises the importance of the body in this process of coming to terms with her location and the implications of this for her ability to make sense of the past.

Postmemory and an Unknowable Past

According to Hirsch, works of postmemory are characterised by a foregrounding of the past as textual representation whereby the past is revealed to be "mediated not by recall but by imaginative investment, projection, and creation" (*Generation* 7). Having not directly experienced the events they set out to depict, the information possessed by the postgeneration about a past trauma is necessarily "received, transferred knowledge" that is "transmuted into history, or into myth" (*Generation* 3). This mode of representation denotes an acknowledgement on the part of the second-generation author of the unknowability of the traumatic past in question even though its formidable legacy may continue to cast a significant shadow over the present. As noted by Hirsch, second-generation writers have acknowledged this complicated legacy in their work by problematising the accessibility of the past and rendering visible their own "location in the aftermath" ("Generation" 106). This logic informs both of the paratexts that frame Ybarra's novel - the 'Nota previa' with which the author prefaces *El comensal* and the brief concluding 'Créditos' section that bookends the narrative. In a short introductory text in which Ybarra underlines the fictionality of her subsequent retelling of her grandfather's killing, the author is explicit in locating herself temporally in the present. Describing the proceeding account of her grandfather's kidnapping as "una reconstrucción libre de la historia de mi familia" (11), Ybarra affirms the indirect nature of her own relationship to the reimagined events which, she reminds the reader, occurred "seis años antes de que yo naciera" (11). In a manner that foregrounds the constructedness of her narrative, Ybarra describes the account as "una versión propia", adding that it has been created through her synthesis of anecdotal accounts heard outside of the home, and "conversaciones escuchadas en casa" (11). At the end of the narrative - in the aforementioned 'Créditos' section - Ybarra again explicitly acknowledges the second-hand nature of the information she possesses about the killing. In this short appendix, she

references the provenance of the direct quotations included throughout her novel, citing various newspapers, whilst also commenting that these extracts "contienen modificaciones leves" (170). Aside from direct extracts, even the scenes of the kidnapping recreated by Ybarra are, she notes, inspired by journalistic articles written at the time of the events. As such, through the paratextual detail that she provides, the author affirms the status of her narrative as a work of assemblage, positioning herself firmly outside the historical events in something more akin to an editorial role, and outlining the process of redaction involved in her own construction of the text.

By using the 'Nota previa' to locate the retelling of her grandfather's killing in the present-day, Ybarra frames her narrative as a projection of her own desire to understand her father's reaction to the more recent passing of her mother in July 2011. The author presents this desire as a "necesidad de profundizar en los detalles del asesinato de mi abuelo" (11). She maintains that this will help her to gain a better understanding of why, in the aftermath of her mother's death, her father "había empezado a hablar de la muerte de forma extraña" (12). Ybarra's determination to shed light on the mystery of her father's emotional response to this more recent familial tragedy leads her to trace a connection between past and present, thereby echoing Hirsch's assertion that it is present concerns that cause the less proximate to possess a "frustrated need to know about a traumatic past" (34). In the opening line of the first part, Ybarra explains the family adage that lies behind the novel's title - *El comensal* - in order to reinforce the centrality of this unstable link between past and present: the ghostly presence of the figurative dinner guest that is said to appear at ever family meal indicates the haunting legacy of their private trauma, the force of which even "borra a alguno de los presentes" (15). In this sense, Ybarra suggests that the family has never fully come to terms with the brutal killing of her grandfather whose death continues to exert an overwhelming influence over the

familial sphere, and who thus functions in the present as what Zizek terms a "living dead" which, as the latter asserts, "will continue to chase us [...] until we give them a decent burial, until we integrate the trauma of their death into our historical memory" (23). By connecting her grandfather's death with that of her mother, Ybarra's novel therefore represents an attempt to integrate the former family tragedy into her own personal story.

Even though Ybarra's narrative originates from a present desire to comprehend her father's previous experience of grief, her use of a postmemorial structure indicates her resignation that any kind of fulsome understanding is impossible to achieve. This recalls Susan Sontag's assertion in *Regarding the Pain of Others* where she contends that, as much as we might wish to understand horrific experiences that we ourselves have not been through, ultimately we "[c]an't understand, can't imagine" (126). Ybarra's representation of her grandfather's kidnapping underlines this sense of the past as radically unknowable as she employs various distancing techniques that preclude any kind of straightforward emotional identification on the part of either the author or the reader with the dramatic real-life events contained within her narrative. For the most part, Ybarra relates these occurrences in a firmly dispassionate tone and with sparse description, foregoing lyrical sentimentality despite the highly emotive and traumatic nature of the events portrayed. Ybarra's resistance towards sentimentality in her account of her grandfather's killing also provides a crucial point of difference between her novel and the narrative tropes that, according to Miguélez Carballeira, have privileged sentimentalised treatments of ETA's violence in post-conflict state-aligned cultural products. By adopting a minimalist style throughout the first part, Ybarra instead creates an impression of her emotional detachment from the familial tragedy which serves as an implicit reminder of her own indirect relationship to the historical events depicted. For instance, the author's characterisation of her relatives is notably depersonalised: in a manner

that divests them of any individuality, the author exclusively identifies her family members by the monikers of *mi padre* or *mi tío*.

In addition, Ybarra resists any form of psychological realism by refusing to elaborate on the emotional responses of her relatives to the events of the kidnapping, signalling a further recognition of her fundamental inability to comprehend the trauma they endured. Similarly, only the most basic descriptive detail is offered about the kidnappers who are simply referred to as *el hombre* or *la mujer*. Instead, Ybarra's description of the kidnapping limits its focus to the terrorists' actions that she notes perfunctorily in an unadorned style. To that end, her use of the preterite perfect tense throughout her narration of the kidnapping functions as an additional indicator of the temporal distance that separates Ybarra from the family tragedy, complementing the tone of emotional detachment with which she sustains a sense of the unbridgeable gap between herself in the present and the historical events portrayed. A distinct self-reflexivity thus underpins the minimalist style in which Ybarra describes her grandfather's killing as she continually alludes to the fragmented nature of her own knowledge of the kidnapping, underlining the fact that this major episode in her family's history remains, for Ybarra herself, ultimately elusive.

Whereas Hirsch's theorisation of postmemory identifies the family - within which stories are traditionally passed down from generation to generation - as one of memory's principal sites of transmission, this generational transfer of knowledge about the past is problematised in Ybarra's case by the silence maintained amongst her relatives concerning the killing of her grandfather. Hirsch contends that the familial aspects of postmemory "tend to diminish distance, bridge separation, and facilitate identification and affiliation" ("Generation" 116). However, as Ybarra herself has remarked in an interview: "For many years, my family lived as if these traumatic events had never happened. I could infer their

pain through their silences, but lacked a story" ("Imagining Truths"). She reaffirms this fact in *El comensal* when she states that, in the aftermath of her grandfather's kidnapping, "En mi familia el mutismo era absoluto" (30). The virtual silence on the past that reigns within Ybarra's family therefore precludes what Hirsch posits to be this potential bridge between the author and the tragic events endured by her relatives, rendering the structures of postmemory that connect her to the past all the more tenuous. Faced with a considerable lack of knowledge about the past from within the familial sphere, Ybarra displays her unavoidable recourse to publicly available information in order to reconstruct the circumstances of her grandfather's death - an undertaking that is aided by the latter's significant public profile which meant that his kidnapping was the subject of intense mediatisation at the time of its occurrence. Crucially, as mentioned in the 'Nota previa', the author first learnt of her grandfather's high-profile death outside of the family home, prompting her recourse to journalistic material to compensate for the silence maintained by the family about their private tragedy. Rather than choosing to imagine the conversations held between the family during this period, Ybarra again stresses the radical limitations of her own knowledge by relying for the most part on official recorded testimony given by family members to the press, and letters exchanged between the family and her grandfather. However, Ybarra points out that even the versions of these texts that she is able to obtain were redacted by her relatives prior to their publication in order to preserve some degree of privacy for the family. Moreover, practically the only instances of direct speech from her relatives that Ybarra includes in her narrative are perfunctory responses to media inquiries that only serve to demonstrate the circumspect manner of her family's public testimony at the time - such as that of her uncle who, she notes, "contestó a casi todas las preguntas con evasivas" (33). The author thus highlights the questionable reliability of the limited textual material that is available to her, undermining both its status as a source of stable historical truth and an

accurate means of conveying the private suffering of her relatives. Therefore, by her own admission, Ybarra's investigation comes to be defined more by uncertainty, partiality, and fragmentation, as opposed to any firm belief in her own capacity to produce a coherent, totalising account of her grandfather's killing.

Accepting these impediments to her own desire to know about her grandfather's killing, Ybarra foregrounds her detachment from the events depicted, displacing herself from the primary narrative by assuming the position of an extradiegetic narrator. From this removed vantage point, she periodically interrupts the main historical narrative in order to comment upon her source material, repeatedly casting doubt over its reliability and, at times, adding a corrective to existing records. This latter material, acquired from the author's online research and visits to newspaper archives, mostly comprises excerpts of journalistic reports from national newspapers or the family's own written communication to the press. By overtly displaying her use of such a technique, Ybarra underlines the constructedness of her own historical account and indeed implies that any narrative account of the past is necessarily a construction. The constructedness of her narrative is similarly reflected in its fragmentary form: the first part is separated into eight individual chapters each of which is further divided into fragments of varying length that are visibly separated by asterisks; these oscillate between the historical events retold in the main narrative and Ybarra's intermittent commentary in the present-day. The author's comments furthermore directly interrogate the veracity of contemporary records of the kidnapping that nonetheless constitute her principal documentary evidence. She acknowledges, for instance, the lack of detailed information available to her from during the immediate aftermath of the kidnapping. In a separate interjection Ybarra also enumerates a series of inaccuracies contained within documented reports of the events, systematically contesting information obtained from her sources

regarding the name of the family house, her grandfather's words to his kidnappers, the presumed escape of her aunt, and the starting date of her uncles' negotiations with the terrorists. She emphasises rhetorically the unreliability of these accounts through her anaphoric use of the phrase "No es cierto que…" (28) that precedes each of her corrections. By revealing how even the supposedly factual material from which her narrative is constructed is of dubious veracity, Ybarra casts serious doubt over the capacity of any text - historical or otherwise - to function as an unproblematic reflection of the past.

Fictional Pasts and the Subversion of Genre

As is typical of works of postmemory, which foreground the absence of certain knowledge about the past, Ybarra openly relies upon imaginative investment in order to represent her grandfather's kidnapping, making this visible through the overt fictionality of her narrative which further contributes to its self-reflexive character and its status as a work of historiographic metafiction. According to Linda Hutcheon, such novels "install and then blur the line between history and fiction" (113). Having already demonstrated how Ybarra problematises the historical texts at her disposal, I will now examine the way in which the author weaves fictional material into her account of her grandfather's killing in order to reveal the artifice of her narrative and reaffirm the impossibility of Ybarra achieving any coherent historical truth. In my analysis of these fictional elements, I wish to highlight the particular significance of place which, I will argue, is continually encoded as unstable and inaccessible in Ybarra's fictionalisation of the past in order to reflect the uncertainty that characterises the author's own knowledge about her grandfather's death. This feature of my analysis is influenced by Gabriela Nouzeilles' examination (2005) of postmemory in the documentary *Los rubios* by the Argentine filmmaker Albertina Carri in which the latter investigates the forced disappearance of her parents during Argentina's military dictatorship

in the seventies. In her analysis Nouzeilles identifies the filmmakers' tortuous search for places that had been associated with her parents as one dimension of the documentary that reflects the present frustration that hampers their quest for certainty about the past. As I will demonstrate later on in this chapter, the rendering of place as elusive in the first part of *El comensal* contrasts notably with the concrete materiality of the real-life places that Ybarra revisits when she is mourning her mother's death, signalling the distinction between this latter loss which Ybarra observed first-hand and that of her grandfather which she never directly experienced and therefore remains frustratingly unknowable.

Ybarra makes visible the act of literary representation from the very beginning of *El comensal* with the inclusion of a poetic couplet from Antonio Machado's "Las encinas" that forms the novel's epigraph: "*Quién ha visto sin temblar / un hayedo en un pinar?"*. As Ybarra later explains, the verse - regularly recited to her as a child by her father - seems of profound resonance to him due to the fact that the imagined pine forest in Machado's verse recalls the wooded hills where his own father's emaciated corpse was tragically discovered. Assuming the function of a linguistic symbol, for Ybarra, this rendering of place as elusive and hypothetical comes to stand figuratively for her father's traumatic experience of the assassination, an event from which she, by contrast, is irremediably detached. In the preface, conflicting anecdotal accounts of her grandfather's death, relayed to Ybarra by classmates at different points of her childhood, serve to illustrate her own uncertainty regarding the tragic events of her grandfather's kidnapping. Crucially, the central contradiction of these competing accounts is the actual location where her grandfather's body was discovered: informed by one school friend that his corpse was retrieved from the Nervión River, Ybarra is later told how the body was found near a train station at Larrabasterra. As I will later discuss, this spatial imprecision contrasts notably with the exactitude with which, in the second part of

the novel, Ybarra retraces the precise topography of her mother's dying months, a period of time which she conversely experienced in a direct and embodied way. Consequently, from the outset, Ybarra's novel establishes a motif of place (namely the site of her grandfather's captivity and assassination) as radically uncertain, becoming emblematic for Ybarra of the ultimate unknowability of her grandfather's death at the hands of ETA.

Utilising elements from diverse literary genres, Ybarra sustains this underlying motif of place as unstable and inaccessible in the novel's first part by intertwining stylistic traits with a fluidity that disrupts and subverts conventional generic boundaries in a way that is typical of postmodern pastiche. In doing so, Ybarra emphasises the fictionality and imagination upon which her narrative is constructed, reflecting her prior admission in the preface that "[a] menudo, imaginar ha sido la única opción que he tenido para intentar comprender" (12). In one passage, for instance, Ybarra juxtaposes her sober retelling of the kidnapping with a more overtly lyrical description of the material world which is invested with a quasi-anthropomorphic energy that contrasts with the prosaic description of the family home: "En la avenida de los Chopos el agua invadía la calle, cubría las aceras y entraba con violencia en los garajes. Las luces de algunos coches se encendían solas. Desde dentro de la casa la lluvia se oía fuerte, como si alguien estuviera tirando mendrugos de pan contra los cristales" (18). Creating a sort of pathetic fallacy, Ybarra displaces the emotional turmoil of the family members onto the physical elements: whereas her depiction of her relatives is notably lacking in descriptive detail and affect, the physical world is attributed a supernatural power transforming it into an active subject in the narrative. The invasion of the family home by these external forces also disrupts the sanctity of the domestic sphere and prefigures the forthcoming media interest in the kidnapping due to her grandfather's public profile.

To the same end, Ybarra makes subversive use of the tropes of detective fiction in her portrayal of the tortuous search for her grandfather's body as she negates the traditional teleological assumptions of the genre to suggest her own inability to impose narrative coherence upon the events of her grandfather's death. Nicol contends that detective fiction is "the genre above all in which the modernist/Enlightenment fantasy of order and control finds expression" (172). The classic detective story usually progresses towards narrative closure as the rationality of the investigating protagonist typically enables them to resolve the mystery introduced at the beginning of the tale. However, this rationalist tradition is disrupted in postmodernist detective fiction where the efforts of both the protagonist and reader to interpret the mysteries presented to them are beset by frustration, problematising the ability of the individual human mind to impose stable meaning on a chaotic reality. As Marcus explains, postmodernist renderings of the detective genre reject teleological principles, positing instead that "the quest for knowledge is doomed to failure" (246). In Ybarra's reconstruction of her grandfather's kidnapping, numerous written texts appear which, although initially heralded by her family as clues, turn out to be at best dubious, ultimately proving both indecipherable and ineffectual in aiding the discovery of the grandfather's place of captivity. For instance, an anonymous phone call leads to the police's discovery of an enigmatic letter that is deposited in a random phone box in San Sebastián, far from the family home in Bilbao. Nonetheless, this anticipated lead turns out to be worthless and merely prolongs their search for the grandfather: "[...] estaba redactado de forma que inducía a pensar que era falso: ni se hacía una reivindicación clara del secuestro ni se ponían condiciones para el rescate" (26). This is followed by a subsequent letter which references two missing earlier documents that purportedly indicate the location of the grandfather's body. By elaborating this bewildering sequence of written clues Ybarra confounds the

conventions of the classic detective story, creating a typically postmodern narrative confusion, at the heart of which remains the perpetual unlocatability of the grandfather.

In a similar vein, the family's failed efforts to communicate cryptically with the grandfather via the medium of text also echo what Marcus has elsewhere identified as the postmodernist anti-detective story's critique of the limitations of positivist reasoning and its exploitation of the potential for puzzles and clues to be misread. Ybarra concisely outlines a local newspaper's publication of a perplexing series of encrypted messages and pictorial clues. Far from aiding the grandfather's rescue, however, the family immediately distance themselves from the use of these strategies in their press statements. Meanwhile, their very usefulness is itself disputed by some media sources which suggest that Ybarra's grandfather "nunca dio señales en sus cartas de haber recibido mensajes en clave" (39). By subverting the traditional conventions of the detective genre, the author adopts a playful mode of representation that sustains the motif of the grandfather's place of captivity as elusive, reflecting the inexorable frustrations that mark Ybarra's own investigation into her familial past.

This subversion of literary genre by Ybarra as a means of indexing the impossibility of stable representation of the past is further exemplified by the author's playful inclusion of tropes and stock characters derived from fantasy literature, a genre which, as noted by James and Mendlesohn, critics tend to agree is primarily concerned with "the construction of the impossible" (1). Recreating scenes that feature a series of quasi-mythical characters, Ybarra's deployment of the topoi of fantastical literature runs counter to the more objective tone she adopts elsewhere in the narrative, again destabilising the boundary between fact and fiction in the novel. One such figure is that of an unnamed priest whose mysteriousness is

accentuated by Ybarra's interchangeable use of *el sacerdote* and *el cura* to designate him. Embarking on a quest-like journey to locate the captive grandfather, the priest figure, trusting in the supposed magical powers of his quartz pendulum, appears to rely upon psychic intuition in his search for the body. This investigation ultimately comes to a fruitless conclusion, captured bathetically in the exasperated priest's epigrammatic style: "El péndulo dice que está en la ribera pero en la ribera no hay más que sapos" (36). In the same passage, Ybarra presents an obviously fictionalised visit by her father, together with the priest, to an old clairvoyant whose tarot readings attempt to locate the grandfather. The seer's melodramatic performance of her psychic powers reaches an equally abrupt ending, as tersely noted by the narrator: "no vieron nada, solo el interior de sus cuencas" (36). A final character encountered by the police search party is the elderly grey-bearded *escobero* whose hermetic existence in a cabin in the woods and physical appearance evokes the archetypal old sage who typically offers guidance to adventurers. Ybarra again subverts this literary trope, building dramatic tension as the old man slowly opens his door before this is punctured when the nonchalant *escobero* frustrates any hope for new information; concluding his brief appearance the old man responds with indifference to the police's solicitations of assistance: "el habitante de la chabola se encogió de hombros y cerró despacio la puerta" (42). Through Ybarra's playful subversion of these literary archetypes she reimagines the search for the place of her grandfather's captivity as labyrinthine and seemingly unending. In doing so, she rejects the conventional linearity and conclusiveness of the quest motif that commonly features in fantastical literature. As defined in Clute and Grant's *The Encyclopedia of Fantasy*, the external adventure embarked upon by the protagonist of fantasy traditionally concludes with the accomplishment of either a desired object, person, or knowledge (796). By contrast, the bathetic atmosphere that pervades Ybarra's depiction of the search for her

grandfather transforms it into a quest without finality, symbolising the author's own resignation to the elusiveness of absolute truth in her engagement with the past.

Absence and Presence in Photographic Remnants

Concluding my analysis of the first part of the novel, I would like to briefly consider Ybarra's use of photographic material, an aesthetic trope that is also common to works of postmemory. Within the narrative, she inserts two press photographs of her father, taken on the day of the kidnapping. Barthes has famously articulated the power of photographs as incontrovertible proof of the actuality of the past, asserting how their "power of authentication exceeds the power of representation" (88-9). Deployed within postmemorial texts, Hirsch has theorised that photographs function as "fragmentary remnants" which simultaneously authenticate the existence of the past whilst signalling its "insurmountable distance" for the viewer in the present (*Generation* 37). Although Ybarra's use of photography is minimal, it is nevertheless significant as a further indication of the discontinuities that shape the author's tenuous relationship to her family history. Bearing in mind that the primary motive of Ybarra's retelling of her grandfather's killing is to understand her own father's suffering, the actual content of the photographs denotes the impediments to her fulfilling that ambition while simultaneously affirming the reality of the events in question. Hirsch's assertion that photographs function as "spaces of projection" for the desires of the individual viewer is, in this instance, complicated by the impassive expression displayed by Ybarra's father. The image offers little indication of the emotional impact of her grandfather's kidnapping upon him and thus frustrates Ybarra's own desire to comprehend the pain he underwent. In terms of the aforementioned dual function of photographs outlined by Hirsch - that is to say their capacity to both authenticate and signal

the distance of the past - the inscrutable images of her father obtained by Ybarra tend more towards the latter purpose as they merely seem to reinforce the unknowability of his experience. To the same end, while Hirsch contends that family photographs in particular can diminish this emotional distance experienced by the postmemory generation, the source of the photographs of Ybarra's father - taken by press journalists - impedes this greater sense of intimacy. In other words, the provenance of the images from outside the domestic sphere emphasises the inhibited intergenerational transmission of the family tragedy and conveys Ybarra's reliance on public imagery to mitigate the unknowability of this private memory.

In addition to the images of her father, Ybarra also makes explicit reference to several actual photographs of her deceased grandfather that she discovers through Google Images: one depicting his covered corpse being loaded into a funeral hearse, and another displaying his uncovered head. Unlike the pictures of her father, however, Ybarra decides against the reproduction of these images within her narrative, opting instead to merely describe their content. As well as establishing a further layer of mediation that compounds the sense of distance established between her present investigation and the reality of her grandfather's killing, the author's decision to forgo the insertion of photographic material in this second instance is also indicative, in my view, of a consideration for the potential insensitivity towards her family of including such potentially distressing images.

In my preceding analysis of the first part of *El comensal*, I have outlined how Ybarra's narrative mode serves to emphasise the author's detachment from the circumstances of her grandfather's killing: underlining the impossibility of attaining secure knowledge about the past through her writing, she mobilises the structures of postmemory in order to locate herself in the present, emphasising the fact that her access to the past from this vantage

point is uncertain, fragmented, and incomplete. Turning my attention to the second part of the novel - in which Ybarra relates her own coming to terms with the loss of her mother to cancer - I will examine how this personal experience of grief fosters a shift in the author's conceptualisation of memory that consequently informs the aesthetic approach she adopts in the postmemorial representation of her grandfather's death. In an interview, Ybarra has confessed that one of the foremost difficulties she encountered when writing about her mother's death was, indeed, locating her own perspective: "Lo que más me costó fue elegir el lugar desde el que contar a mi madre, sentía que se me escapaba y no era capaz de saber cómo contarlo" ("Entrevista con la escritora"). In my analysis of this part of the novel I will examine how Ybarra overcomes an initial desire to recuperate the past as a stable object**,** her progressive realisation that the past cannot be retrieved in any pure form, and her subsequent recognition that memory constitutes an act that is located in the present and the implications of this in terms of the author's limited ability to acquire certain knowledge about the past. Throughout my analysis, I will pay particular attention to the centrality attributed to the body in Ybarra's process of coming to terms with her own epistemic location. The author rejects the use of a linear chronology as the chapters jump back and forth between the events leading up to her mother's death, her return to New York in the aftermath of this loss, and various childhood recollections that situate her private experiences within a broader socio-political frame. Despite Ybarra's non-sequential narrative form in the second part, my own reading of it will follow the actual chronology of the period comprising her mother's death and her subsequent coming to terms with this loss. My rationale for this mode of analysis is that, in my view, by tracing Ybarra's gradual process of overcoming the death of her mother, we can observe this fundamental shift in her conceptualisation of memory that, ultimately, informs the particular manner in which she represents her grandfather's assassination in the preceding section.

Mourning the Past: Relocating the Body and the Self

While Ybarra's metafictional retelling of her grandfather's killing underlines her profoundly mediated relation to those distant events, the second part focuses on an experience of loss that is, by contrast, direct and embodied. The author portrays her pain in coming to terms with her mother's death from cancer as a metaphorical struggle to relocate her sense of self in the aftermath of this loss. Moreover, the individual body, theorised by Linda McDowell as the primary locus of our identity (91), is represented by Ybarra as the specific medium through which she attempts to resituate herself in the present in order to overcome the traumatic death of her mother. As a direct witness to her mother's precipitous debilitation, Ybarra is confronted with her own corporeality and the felt transience of her physical body. Her prior disregard towards death and belief that "las muertes prematuras pertenecían a la ficción" (62) is displaced by an acute awareness of her physical body and concomitant sense of her own mortality: "[...] me concentro en el hincharse y deshincharse de mi cuerpo y tomo consciencia de que soy mortal" (79). Ybarra's sudden fixation on her body is explicitly intertwined with her sense of self, as illustrated by her confession that, since her mother's illness, she routinely spends "una tarde entera reflexionando sobre lo que mi rutina de belleza dice acerca de mi identidad" (79). The unstable sense of self that besets Ybarra in the aftermath of her mother's death subsequently manifests itself corporally as she notes: "A veces me veía desde fuera y me costaba reconocerme como la persona que trabajaba y estudiaba" (150). Ybarra perceives her struggle for self-recognition as an anxious sense of dislocation from her physical body. This is mirrored in spatial terms by an attendant feeling of physical disorientation invoked by the material landscape of New York where the constant visible presence of the city's urban sprawl from her glass-panelled penthouse apartment "hacía imposible la abstracción" (151). The dislocating effect of the traumatic loss of her

mother is again signalled whenever, prompting her eventual return to her family in Madrid, a psychologist diagnoses that Ybarra "había perdido [sus] referencias" (150) .

Ybarra's inability to relocate herself physically following her mother's death can be understood as a consequence of the intimate connection established between the two during the illness. As a near-constant companion throughout much of her treatment and final months, Ybarra depicts the intimacy between mother and daughter in terms of a close physical identification that is almost suggestive of a symbiotic connection. The way in which Ybarra's own identity is closely linked to her mother's through their physical bodies is prefigured at the beginning of the second part by the author's brief allusion to the small crook in her nose that marks their physical resemblance (59). In her retelling of her mother's diagnosis and treatment, Ybarra goes on to emphasise her close proximity to these events: "'No creo que haga falta operar', dijo. Se lo traduje a mi madre y asintió. El médico volvió a hablar. Repitió la palabra *ulcerated*. No sabíamos si *ulcerated* era grave o no, pero nos sonaba mal. Él parecía no alterarse por lo de *ulcerated*. Luego dijo *chemotherapy* y *radiotherapy*. Mi madre y yo asentimos. *Next week*. Volvimos a asentir" (66). Not only does Ybarra assume the role of a translator for their interactions with the American oncologist, requiring her to literally speak on behalf of her mother, her recurring use of the first-person plural also connects the two to the extent that Ybarra, alongside her mother, becomes a direct addressee of the diagnosis and they similarly respond as one. The close identification between mother and daughter is sustained by Ybarra's continued use of the first-person plural forms during her account of a further consultation where the doctor explains in intimate physical detail the anticipated effects of the cancer treatment on the mother's body (74-5). This symbiotic bond is epitomised by the image Ybarra sketches of herself and her mother upon leaving the hospital: "Mi madre y yo salimos del hospital. En mi

mano sujetaba la receta: braguitas desechables, pañales, pomada calmante para el escozor de la zona pélvica, pastillas para controlar la diarrea y crema solar. Junto a mí, mi madre sujetaba el estuche verde con los tubitos y ojeaba el folleto" (76). The almost symmetrical structure of Ybarra's prose and the fact that she carries the medical paraphernalia provided by the doctor presages the inevitability of her mother's forthcoming physical dependency on her daughter as her condition worsens. The symbiotic connection that Ybarra establishes between her and her mother reaches its apex at the moment of the latter's death as the author describes how her own body appears to replicate the violent involuntary movements of her dying mother: "Tal vez mi inconsciente quería que mi cuerpo se moviera como el suyo, que perdiéramos a la vez el control [...] La conciencia de mi madre desaparecía y la mía quería escapar" (132). However, the moment of death is significant insofar as it registers Ybarra's physical separation from her mother as her desire to escape is frustrated by the constraints of her individual embodiment.

Altering the Approach to Memory: From Literality to Locatedness

Ybarra's struggle to relocate herself in the sudden absence of her mother causes her recourse to memory as a means of reliving the past in a manner that can be read through the lens of Todorov's notion of "literal" memory. While mourning the loss of her mother, Ybarra's relation to the past is first characterised by literality through her attempts to sustain what Todorov identifies as "a rigid continuity between the past and present" (14). Born out of grief, her urgent desire to memorialise her mother sees Ybarra compulsively retrace a fixed topography of the final months of her life. In keeping with the anniversaries of progressive stages of her mother's illness, the author revisits various places in New York that bear a deep emotional resonance due to their connection to her recent personal tragedy. However, in

doing this, Ybarra attempts to reaccess the past as it was directly experienced, thereby demonstrating her inability to accept its ultimate irretrievability and, more importantly, to come to terms with the irreversible loss of her mother. This is exemplified by her conscious repetition of her precise movements on the day of her mother's first colonoscopy: she has dinner with the same man, later sleeps with him, and the following day eats lunch at the same Mexican restaurant where she had met her mother a year previously. Rather than being able to reembody the past, however, the awkward reencounter merely serves to remind Ybarra of the irremediable absence of her mother and leaves her feeling "ridícula" (71). The author derives an equal feeling of estrangement from the past during her solitary returns to the waiting rooms where she had accompanied her mother during her treatment. Upon her visits, she silently transcribes her impressions of each physical space as she reenters it; in this way, Ybarra attempts, through writing, to attribute a fixity to these sites, borne out of her desire for them to become stable places of memory where the past can be unproblematically preserved and reinhabited.

Ybarra's compulsion to memorialise her mother via her literal return to these places therefore becomes, to quote Todorov, a "cult of memory" (22): this comes to dominate her present reality and is a consequence of her inability to recognize her individual embodiment in a radically changed present where her mother is no longer alive. Nevertheless, despite her efforts to detach herself from her immediate environment Ybarra is reluctantly confronted by her own physical embodiment in the present, as demonstrated by an uncomfortable exchange when one patient returns her gaze: "La señora me mira como si supiera que estoy escribiendo sobre ella y gira la cabeza hacia otro lado para dejar que la sigo observando" (72). In the same way, when the author revisits a radiotherapy waiting room, her response to an elderly man's attempt to initiate conversation with her is one of vexation at her attention being drawn

to her own presence: “No parece importarle que esté escribiendo” (81). Belied by her repeated use of the present continuous in these extracts, Ybarra’s return to these places does not grant her unmediated access to an immutable past; rather, her visits merely emphasise her separation from the past and her embodied location in a dynamic present as her attempts at quiet contemplation are continually disrupted by the activity taking place around her. Her erroneous expectation that revisiting these places will lead to a recovery of the past in a pure form is thus never fully realised as she is instead forced to confront the fragility and limitations of her individual memory. For example, when unable to recall the name of her mother’s oncologist, she agonises over the gaps in her memory, stating: “[...] ahora siento que no recuerdo nada” (72). This constant anxiety at her inability to remember her mother prompts an uneasy estrangement from the past that manifests itself in physical discomfort, further reminding Ybarra of her embodiment in the present: “Siento el mismo letargo de hace un año [...] Tengo la sensación de que mi madre ha pasado a su sesión de radioterapia, pero no es así” (82). The radical inaccessibility of the past is epitomised on her return to her mother’s old hospital room which - despite her heightened anticipation upon her arrival at what she nostalgically terms “mi casa” - is now occupied by another patient. Barred from entry to the room - symbolic of a past that is irrecuperable - Ybarra wanders aimlessly through the hospital corridors, giving rise to a physical feeling of anxiety and disorientation that is symptomatic of her struggle to relocate herself in the present.

Ultimately, Ybarra’s ability to come to terms with the loss of her mother is shown to be contingent on an explicit reclaiming of her physical body which, at the same time, fosters a recognition of the “locatedness” of memory, defined by Radstone as an act that is “instantiated locally, in a specific place and at a specific time” (117). On a visit to her mother’s burial place in Pozuelo de Alarcón the author recalls her ability to identify the smell

of her mother from the latter's black dress that Ybarra herself had been wearing during the funeral. On her return, however, Ybarra is struck by the absence of this smell, now masked by that of her own body. This prompts her to explicitly foreground the importance of imagination in aiding her to evoke its scent and, by association, the memory of her mother: "Es ahora, imaginando ese aroma, que la siento cerca" (138). By stressing her own embodied location in the here and now, this moment represents for Ybarra a shift away from an approach to remembrance premised on an unrealisable desire to fully reinhabit an immutable past. In place of this literal approach to remembrance Ybarra formulates a renewed understanding of memory as not a direct return to a fixed past but, rather, in the words of Assmann, a product of "continuous reinscription and reconstruction in an ever-changing present" (53). Ybarra's reconceptualisation of memory is grounded in an emerging awareness that her memory of her mother is conditioned and constrained by her own location in the present and fundamentally reliant upon the creative force of her own imagination. For instance, upon rediscovering an old photograph of her mother, taken in Death Valley in the Atacama desert, Ybarra articulates a more nuanced understanding of the subjective dimension of memory and its inexorable link to the present: "Es habitual que, tras la muerte de un ser querido, sus familiares y amigos miren y compartan fotos para recordarlo. En esta situación, la percepción de los espectadores suele estar alterada. Nada parece fortuito, todo son pistas capaces de aclarar las causas del fallecimiento" (154). Her recognition that the past is only belatedly assigned meaning from within the frames of her present perspective sensitises Ybarra to the constructed, subjective, and therefore unstable nature of memory: "Cada vez que pienso en mi madre la recuerdo vulnerable, aunque creo que antes de su enfermedad no la veía así. Este pensamiento es una construcción que mi cabeza ha hecho a posteriori, mientras buscaba indicios que pudieran anticipar su muerte" (154). This reasoning affirms

Ybarra's growing acceptance of the belatedness of memory and the way in which the circumstances of her present location invariably shape the form and significance of the past.

As I have argued above, Ybarra's ability to come to terms with her mother's death by resituating herself in the present is contingent on the reclaiming of her physical body which is theorised by Rich as the grounds of individual location. This is exemplified when Ybarra finally discards the old clothes that she had kept unwashed in order to preserve the traces of her mother's scent. Through her compulsion to wear these during her period of mourning they had previously functioned as a cipher for her literal memorialisation of her mother. Ybarra's description of how the smell of her own sweat eventually masks the scent of her mother on her favoured black dress prefigures an emerging acceptance of her own embodiment in the present. During a subsequent visit to her father's office with the intention of sorting out her mother's old clothes, she appears to renounce her attachment to the clothes, signifying a rejection of them as a direct link to her deceased mother and an implicit move towards accepting this irreversible loss: "Me esfuerzo en recordar, pero es difícil. Muchos de los vestidos no me suenan de nada, y otros me sugieren instantes sin significado" (165). No longer fixated on sustaining a pure memory of her mother, her attention is sharply redirected towards her location in the present. Distracted by the external commotion caused by the funeral of former president Adolfo Suárez that is taking place in the street below, Ybarra's nostalgic contemplation of her mother's belongings is sharply disrupted by the immediacy of the historic events presently unfolding outside her Madrid apartment: "Me gustaría pensar en mi madre, repasar sus prendas, anotar lo que recuerdo de ella… pero no soy capaz. Solo pienso volver la vista a la calle. Es el funeral de Suárez. El presidente que eligieron pocos días después de asesinar a mi abuelo [...] Hay varios viejos con los codos apoyados sobre una valla, yo soy como ellos, pero desde mi ventana" (165). Ybarra's direct allusion to the

particular physical vantage point from which she observes Suárez's funeral is indicative of a recognition of the specificity of her own subjective position that marks a major shift in her attitude towards the past. By recasting her past-oriented gaze onto the political events occuring in her immediate environment, Ybarra reintegrates her private experience into a wider collective frame, firmly locating herself within a particular socio-political context. As indicated by her reference to his assassination, the nexus of this connection between individual and collective memory turns out to be the death of her grandfather, an event that was at once both private tragedy and of immense public significance.

Together with the publication of several obituaries to her mother, Ybarra develops a deeper sense of how, by virtue of her grandfather's public stature, her family life has invariably been entwined within a broader political context: "Mi intimidad aún es política. La muerte de mi madre también. El lenguaje, los silencios, la casa, la convivencia, los sentimientos… Todo es política. Incluso la literatura. Es política que uno de mis libros preferidos de niña fuera *La vida nueva de Pedrito Andía"* (140). As epitomised by her allusion to the novel written by Rafael Sánchez Mazas, the founder of Spain's fascist Falangist party, Ybarra expressly underscores her family's close historical connection to Spain's conservative political tradition. Given Rich's assertion that recognition of our location also requires a consciousness of "the conditions we have taken for granted" (219), the link Ybarra makes between her personal memories and her family's political heritage signals a recognition of the specific socio-political context that has formed the backdrop to her own private experiences and that is key to defining her own epistemic location. The juncture between the public and the private is made explicit by the direct connection Ybarra establishes between her mother's death and the cessation of armed conflict in the Basque Country: "Un mes y medio después de que muriera mi madre, el 20 de octubre de 2011, ETA

anunció el cese definitivo de su actividad armada" (141). Reintegrating the public and the private, Ybarra inscribes her personal tragedy within a collective frame that compels her to consider the way in which her family's experiences have always been located within a larger political context. Subsequently, it is through this lens that Ybarra is able to contemplate her family history in a way that, in the present, facilitates her reidentification with her father following their shared personal tragedy.

The Necessity of Imagination and the Exemplarity of Memory

In this section of my analysis I wish to examine how Ybarra mobilises memory in order to understand her family history, namely with the empathic purpose of helping her to identify in the present with her father's suffering, both in terms of the traumatic loss of his own father and the haunting legacy of this politically-motivated killing, the ramifications of which overlapped with her own childhood. Deploying the Freudian concept of mourning, Ricoeur asserts that loss can only be overcome by "reconciliation with the impossibility of going directly to the truth" ("Memory and Forgetting" 6). At first unable to come to terms with her mother's death, Ybarra initially seeks to utilise memory as a direct means of recovering the past, exemplifying Ricoeur's reading of Freud's contrasting notion of melancholia which he claims, through its drive towards repetition of the past, leads to a loss of a "sense of one's self" ("Memory and Forgetting" 7). However, Ybarra's confrontation with her family history - conversely grounded in a reaffirmed sense of self - demonstrates a renewed approach to memory that is accompanied by a recognition of the inexorable limitations imposed on her knowledge of the past by her epistemic location. Derived from her personal experience of coming to terms with private tragedy, Ybarra's incipient awareness that individual memory is, in the words of Hoskins, "constrained by the body of

the rememberer" (353) can be seen to justify her recourse to imaginative investment in her efforts to reconstruct particular scenes from her childhood that illustrate the reality of her family's prolonged implication over many decades within the evolving political context of the Basque conflict. Rather than allowing the past to exert an all-consuming force over her, Ybarra comes to utilise memory in the service of a future-oriented purpose, namely that of bridging the emotional distance that has grown between herself and her father over the years. In this way, the novel illustrates (albeit on an intimate rather than societal level) Maier's assertion that a "surfeit of memory" - as exemplified by Ybarra's initial compulsion to memorialise her mother - can act contrary to future interests, erecting an obstacle against the healing of present social relations[20]. Likewise, Ybarra's resignification of memory again recalls Todorov's distinction between literal and exemplary memory: if the former is a product of the individual's inability to overcome loss and failure to integrate the past into the present, the latter makes productive use of the past to understand new or analogous situations. In other words, exemplary memory involves the transformation of the past into "a principle of action for the present" (Todorov 14). In Ybarra's case, her ability to reintegrate her personal loss into a present socio-political context enables her to make productive use of the past in order to formulate an understanding of her father's perspective. Without obscuring the singularity of their respective experiences, following Todorov's theorisation of exemplary memory, Ybarra's process of reidentifying with her father emerges out of a recognition of the points of commonality in their individual circumstances. For instance, she notes how both were twenty-seven when they experienced the sudden loss of a parent, both were living in New York at the time, and both had often felt anxious to dissociate themselves from their middle-class background.

[20] As noted, Maier's study concerns what he views as the excesses of collective mobilisations of memory and how these might inhibit the capacity of individual societies to overcome present social divisions.

The second part of the novel is interspersed with various episodes from Ybarra's childhood that, the author recognises, now prove salient due to the way in which they illustrate the reality of her family's imbrication within the Basque conflict and the prolonged threat posed to them by ETA even after their forced relocation to Madrid. These memories help Ybarra to reconstruct a fragmentary picture of her own tenuous connection to the Basque conflict via the wider experiences of her different family members. Through this disjointed reconstruction of the past, Ybarra forms an understanding of how, even after the killing of her grandfather, the threat of violence remained a constant presence in her father's life, overlapping with her own childhood. Despite the fact that, by her own admission, she herself was kept "más o menos al margen" of this sinister reality, she comes to appreciate now how certain events of her childhood "eran poco corrientes" (84). Nevertheless, possessing only hazy recollections of such events, she is confronted with the radical limitations of her subjective knowledge of the past and must therefore rely heavily upon incidents related to her by others over the course of her childhood. Given her indirect and partial knowledge of the past, Ybarra repeatedly highlights either the potential fallibility of her own narration or her deliberate recourse to imagination due to the fact that she did not directly experience some of the incidents she relates. In doing this, she demonstrates an implicit recognition, garnered from her own coming to terms with her mother's death, of the constructedness of memory. Moreover, this reveals her acceptance of the constraints imposed upon her knowledge of the past by her location in the present and the way in which, even at the time of their occurrence, her parents sheltered her from many of the threats they faced. In spite of its imperfections and instability, memory remains nonetheless the primary means of relating to the past in a way that helps Ybarra to understand the suffering endured by her father and his experience of living under the constant threat of violence, long after the killing of his own father.

The manner in which Ybarra deliberately undermines the veracity of her own version of past events is prefigured by her description of her childhood as a period that "resultaba lejana y desdibujada, como una película de la que solo se recuerdan fragmentos aislados" (84). By likening her past to vaguely remembered cinematic scenes, Ybarra discloses the sense of estrangement she feels in relation to her early years while simultaneously acknowledging that her narrative of the past is inevitably suffused with a substantial degree of fictionality, necessitated by her reliance upon received knowledge and imaginative investment. For instance, when recounting the time a letter bomb intended for her father was mistakenly sent to her uncle's address, Ybarra expressly points up the uncertainty of her own narration. She admits that her account of her young cousin's dramatic escape from injury is inevitably subject to fictionalisation by stating "O así me la imaginé yo" (86). Further doubt is then cast on the memory when Ybarra notes her recent discovery of a news article whose version of the same event is at odds with her own, leading her to deduce: "Ahora, releyendo las noticias, tampoco sé si es cierta la historia de mi prima" (87). Similarly, recalling her own sinister encounter the following morning in the metro when a young man told her "Habéis tenido suerte", Ybarra even questions the truth of this direct experience, asking herself "si fue real o alucinado" (87), and hence allowing for the possibility that this personal memory is nothing but a mere figment of her imagination. In a similar vein, Ybarra stresses her total lack of knowledge in relation to a further tragedy that occurred during her childhood: her uncle's suicide which took place several years after the killing of her grandfather. Although alive when this happened (albeit a young child) Ybarra possesses no memories about this latter tragedy that undoubtedly devastated her relatives: "Hoy soy incapaz de recordar su cara. Tampoco recuerdo ver a gente triste, ni que nadie mencionara su funeral o su entierro" (101). In her efforts to reassemble an empathic image of the terror that perpetually haunted her family, Ybarra displays an acute awareness of the radical limitations of her individual

memory and therefore foregrounds her reliance upon imaginative investment as paradoxically this becomes the best means of comprehending the reality of her parents' experience.

Indeed, on occasions, faced with the absence of any memories upon which to construct her narrative of the past, Ybarra resorts exclusively to fictionalisation in order to acquire an approximate sense of her parents' fear at the threat they faced. This is illustrated by the style in which Ybarra reimagines the unsettling events of a real encounter her mother had with two Civil Guards who mistook her car for that of a terrorist fugitive who had recently murdered a fellow officer. In a more lyrical passage that is notably laden with descriptive detail relating to the landscape, her mother's emotional state at the guards' aggressive intimidation, and the physical sensations she would have experienced, Ybarra firmly emphasises the fact that the scene is merely a product of her imagination. This is exemplified by her repetition of "imagino" at the beginning of each sentence and by her narration of the imagined episode through the conditional tense in order to emphasise the speculative nature of the events. Moreover, Ybarra redeploys imagery from the fictionalised first part of the novel when, in a subtle allusion to her earlier description of the housemaid boiling water just prior to the terrorists' arrival at her grandfather's home, she likens the noise of the car engine to "cuando el agua rompe a hervir en una cazuela [...] como el zumbido de una olla de presión" (102). By drawing this parallel between her retelling of her grandfather's kidnapping and an event that occurred during her own childhood, Ybarra foregrounds her understanding of the primacy of creative fiction as a necessary tool in mediating her relationship to the past. This serves to explicate the approach she adopts in her representation of her grandfather's assassination in the first part of the novel.

The final chapter of the novel reconnects the second part with Ybarra's prior retelling of her grandfather's assassination: the tone in which Ybarra recounts her visit with her father to the place of her grandfather's killing shapes the frame of reference that she adopts in her creative engagement with that earlier trauma through the structures of postmemory. Ybarra's wish to view the site of the assassination is notably accompanied by a consideration for potential misappropriation of her father's trauma. This is illustrated by her explicit reference to his disinclination to accompany her into the forest where his father's body was discovered. In narrating her approach to the site of the killing Ybarra once more employs a fictionalising descriptive mode that serves to indicate her own detachment from the tragedy. She compares her familiarity with the setting to that of the Empire State Building or the Eiffel Tower. For instance, Ybarra's description is marked by a notable sense of unreality, exemplified by the sound of Elgar's 'Enigma Variations' that plays through the car stereo and the ephemeral weather conditions whose constant changes leave the author with "la sensación de que entraba y salía constantemente de un mismo sueño" (166). The presumed site of the killing thus assumes a distinct impermanence that is mirrored by the way in which the rainfall causes the ink in her notebook to run, denoting the inherent difficulties in Ybarra's own endeavour to represent a past that seems to defy straightforward narration. The ephemerality that permeates her portrayal of the physical setting of her grandfather's killing comes to symbolise the very instability and discontinuity of Ybarra's personal relationship to this past family trauma. The primacy of fiction in mediating the author's relationship to the past is reinforced by her inclusion of a concluding extract from Swiss novelist Robert Walser's *The Walk*: "Sería hermoso tener en el bosque una tumba pequeña y tranquila. Quizá oyera el canto de los pájaros y el susurrar del bosque sobre mí. Lo desearía" (169). The hypothetical mood of the quotation that is denoted by the use of the conditional tense and the imperfect subjunctive, and its thematic concern with human mortality reflects Ybarra's speculative

connection to her grandfather's death. Moreover, her redeployment of Walser's text evokes her previous reference to it earlier in the novel: in this previous passage she focused predominantly on an accompanying photograph of Walser's corpse lying in the snow. Illustrating her recurring preoccupation with the perspective of the individual subject on the past, Ybarra remarks that her primary interest in the image lies in the particular viewpoint of the photographer who has taken several steps back in order to capture a more complete picture of Walser's corpse. As such, Ybarra's subsequent allusion to Walser's death highlights her acceptance of the necessarily detached posture she must adopt in order to relate the killing of her grandfather. As I have explained earlier in this chapter, this stems from a recognition of her individual location in the present, the intrinsic constraints that this places upon her capacity to acquire stable knowledge about the past, and the resultant prerequisite of imagination.

On a separate level, Ybarra's confrontation with the reality of her family's prolonged implication within the Basque conflict promotes a concomitant reappraisal of her own perception of the ETA militants who, in that same context, sought to persecute her relatives due to their prominence within political conservatism in the region. For the author, this takes the form of an uncomfortable reevaluation of the Manichaen view to which she had formerly subscribed in her conception of the militants responsible for her family's suffering. Previously, Ybarra, by her own admission, conceived of the terrorists as nightmarish fictional beings, confessing: "Para mí nunca tuvieron ni cara ni aficiones. Siempre los imaginé con cuerpo y sin cabeza; con una nebulosa encima del cuello" (83). Yet, through a conscious effort to investigate the real lives of various ETA members, Ybarra begins to acquire a more humanised vision of her family's assailants that tempers the terror they once inspired in her as a child. For example, the personal information she discovers online about an imprisoned

ETA militant who sent a letter bomb to her father enables Ybarra to construct a more humane portrait of him. Viewing images of his family home and reading about his close relatives disabuses Ybarra of her fear as she states: "El Miguel que encuentro en Internet no me da miedo" (87). In a similar vein, her Facebook search for a childhood friend, Kepa, who has close personal ties to the *abertzale* community results in her discovery of several photographs of him alongside ETA members. Moreover, Ybarra's research produces an article that reports allegations of torture committed against detained members of the *abertzale* community, as well as a statement from Amnesty International denouncing the widespread denial of the systematic use of torture by the Spanish state. Juxtaposed to the personal portraits she has assembled of individual ETA members, the interaction of these various texts destabilises the rigid victim-perpetrator binary that previously conditioned Ybarra's view of the terrorist group by compelling her to recognise the respective suffering undergone by individual ETA members. Ybarra explicitly acknowledges that the transformative effect of contemplating the humanity of these men is decidedly unsettling: "Me cuesta aceptarles, porque asumir su humanidad significa reconocer que yo también podría llegar a hacer algo así. Mi conciencia estaba más tranquila cuando imaginaba que eran locos o que no eran personas. Marcianos. Ficción" (159). Ybarra's expression of disquiet strongly echoes the neat terms in which Todorov summarises the productive potential of memory as its disconcerting capacity to instruct us that "the big criminals in history are as human as we are" (453). While Ybarra's attempts to offer a more contextualised interpretation of the violence perpetrated by ETA are limited, her allusive suggestion of the historical contingency of violent perpetration does imply a cautious shift away from a pathological perspective on terrorist violence towards an apparent willingness to contend with the broader socio-political circumstances of the conflict.

By considering the humanity of her family's assailants and by shining a light - if only a cursory one - on allegations of the Spanish state's systematic human rights violations, Ybarra's novel makes an important intervention in relation to the ongoing memory politics of the Basque Country. Although I am hesitant to suggest that Ybarra engages in a fulsome reckoning with her own family's implication within the state apparatus of Spain's fascist dictatorship, her novel does resist the demonising frames of intelligibility that have dominated characterisations of ETA in conservative media and political discourse. Admittedly, the author somewhat glosses over her grandfather's powerful role during the Francoist era by stating in rather euphemistic terms that "ETA lo marcó como objetivo porque lo consideraba el referente intelectual de Neguri y porque pertenecía a una de las familias que tradicionalmente habían ocupado altos cargos en la provincia" (52). Nonetheless, bearing in mind her family's historical proximity to the upper echelons of the Francoist regime, Ybarra's mere acknowledgement of the abuses committed at the hands of state forces represents a departure from the moral absolutism of the hegemonic state narrative on ETA's violence. Indeed, Ybarra's implicit recognition that the persecution inflicted by ETA has not been the only form of violence perpetrated over the course of the Basque conflict is clearly at considerable odds with the more entrenched attitudes of some of her more hardline relatives. For example, public declarations made by her paternal cousin, Javier Igartúa, the founder of Asociación Reacciona por España (ARPE) [21] - a foundation established in memory of their grandfather Javier Ybarra - reveal an uncompromising stance towards the legacy of ETA and the legitimacy of the current political representatives of Basque nationalism, evidenced by his assertion that the apparent rehabilitation of Arnaldo Otegi - a former ETA prisoner and now the leader of the Basque nationalist coalition EH

[21] Founded in 2016, the objective of the ARPE is not merely the commemoration of the victims of ETA: it is unequivocal about its ideological alignment with more reactionary forms of Spanish nationalism, indicated by Igartúa's own statement that the organisation's mission is "defender el amor a España, a sus costumbres y a sus tradiciones [...] defender nuestra nación frente a todos aquellos que quieren romperla y dividirla" ("No se olviden de las víctimas de ETA")

Bildu - merely proves that "ETA está ganando la batalla a los demócratas", and by his condemnation of political engagement between the *abertzale* left and the moderate PNV whom he dismisses as "los mismos perros pero con distintos collares" ("Otegi es un terrorista"). If Ybarra's novel lacks a deeper critical examination of her family's prominent position under the Francoist regime, its significance as a novel that resists the Manichean attitudes and the hierarchical interpretations of victimhood that have pervaded discussions on ETA should nevertheless not be downplayed.

Conclusion

Whereas at the heart of *la batalla del relato* there exists a struggle to assert an overarching historical truth, *El comensal* offers a deeply reflexive engagement with memory in which Ybarra consistently negates the notion that knowledge of the past can ever be stable, showing instead how memory is invariably constructed in the present and can never actually retrieve the object of remembrance itself. Insofar as it lays bare the constructed nature of memory, the novel bears a much greater affinity with the tenets of agonistic memory than the totalising narrative approach epitomised by *Patria*. By mobilising the structures of postmemory, the author repeatedly signals her own detachment from the events of her grandfather's killing, affirming her location in the present and therefore indexing her acknowledgement of the unknowability of this family tragedy. In doing so, Ybarra firmly situates herself at the heart of her story, constantly revealing the artifice of her narrative and undermining the veracity of her retelling of the past.

I have furthermore demonstrated how the second part of the novel is key to understanding the approach taken by Ybarra in her retelling of her grandfather's killing.

Beyond merely charting the events leading up to her mother's death, the second part of *El comensal* functions as a kind of individual meditation on the workings of memory as Ybarra's own efforts to come to terms with loss of a loved one prove contingent on her ultimate recognition of the impossibility of retrieving the past. Again, Ybarra positions herself at the centre of this process, illustrating how it is her ability to locate herself in the present that enables her to remember the past in a way that is meaningful yet does not overwhelm the present. Moreover, through the integration of her personal history with a broader political one, Ybarra tentatively explores her family's imbrication within the Basque conflict in a way that destabilises Manichean interpretations of ETA. Alluding to the fact that those who sought to terrorise her family were also subjected to violent abuses, Ybarra's novel subtly departs from the moral absolutism of mainstream attitudes towards the conflict - a fact that is of no small significance given her family's conservative political heritage.

Chapter Eight: Memory in Crisis and Mythical Militants in Aixa De la Cruz's *La línea del frente*

Born in Bilbao in 1988, Aixa de la Cruz is the youngest of the writers examined in this thesis, yet had already made a considerable name for herself as an emerging literary talent by the time she released *La línea del frente* in 2017. While still completing her undergraduate studies, both her debut novel, *Cuando fuimos los mejores* (2007), and its successor, *De música ligera* (2009), were shortlisted for the Premio Euskadi de Literatura, a prize De la Cruz would eventually go on to win a decade later for *Cambiar de idea* (2019). Despite not receiving the same critical accolades as the aforementioned works, the novel that is the focus of this chapter, *La línea del frente*, nonetheless proved similarly popular upon its release, a fact that is doubtless due, in part at least, to contemporary cultural interest in the novel's treatment of issues relating to the memory of the Basque conflict. That being said, De la Cruz has stressed that the primary focus of her work is not the violence of ETA in and of itself which instead functions in the novel as more of a backdrop against which she undertakes a broader philosophical exploration on the question of "cómo construimos ficciones para explicarnos nuestro pasado, para explicarnos nuestra identidad… pero también para explicarnos quiénes son los otros" ("Inventamos recuerdos"). This premise is reinforced by the epilogue to *La línea del frente* in a quotation from Basque literary scholar Santi Pérez Isasi that prefigures the novel's problematisation of totalising claims about the past and its depiction of all representations of the past as highly provisional and inexorably reliant upon imagination: "porque para contar el pasado con cierta fidelidad haría falta repetir el pasado y eso no es posible porque repetir el pasado punto por punto no sería repetirlo sino representarlo y representar es mentir [...] todo es texto, todo es ficción, todo es literatura" (9).

The novel largely takes the form of an internal monologue, narrated in the first-person by Sofía, a twenty-something Basque women who, having recently separated from her partner Carlos in Barcelona, has relocated to her family's old holiday home in Laredo, a coastal town in northern Cantabria where she plans to spend the quiet winter months alone. The ostensible reason for Sofía's move to Cantabria is to concentrate on writing her doctoral thesis which centres on a fictional ETA militant, Mikel Areilza, who committed suicide while living in exile in Buenos Aires, and whose life the narrator attempts to reconstruct via the diary extracts of an Argentine dramatist, Ángel Cozarowski, who was working with Areilza at the time of his death. Yet surreptitiously, Sofía's decision to revisit Laredo is also due to the fact that her former boyfriend, Jokin, whom she briefly dated in her late teens, is currently serving a prison sentence on a false charge of hate crime aggravated by terrorism following his arrest for assaulting an *ertzaintza* during a demonstration against the conviction of a local rapper for a series of tweets and verses accused of exalting terrorism. As Sofía simultaneously attempts to make sense of the enigmatic figure of Areilza and to rekindle her romance with Jokin, she attempts to impose the mythologised persona of the former onto the latter, unaware of the fact that Jokin is not the heroic revolutionary she imagines him to be, and that his presence at the demonstration was a matter of pure coincidence.

To reiterate, while De la Cruz has insisted that her novel should not simply be interpreted as a work about the violence of ETA, that does not mean that issues surrounding the legacy of the Basque conflict are of peripheral concern in *La línea del frente*. On the contrary, in a number of interviews the author has situated her novel within the context of current struggles of *la batalla del relato*, maintaining that *La línea del frente* "trata de desmontar que hay una cosa como la verdad o como la falsedad: de pensar la historia en

binarios" ("Inventamos recuerdos"). Affirming her opposition to the notion of establishing a single narrative about the past, De la Cruz has stated:

> Los relatos únicos son esquemas generalizadores que cercenan los flecos y dejan a muchos fuera [...] Para narrar desde lo literario lo que ocurrió en Euskadi creo que necesitamos multitud de versiones, cuanto más intimistas, subjetivas y parciales, mejor. Me interesa que hablemos de lo público desde lo personal para que obtengamos un tapiz de versiones complementarias y contradictorias. Creo que solo así, confrontados con un rompecabezas que no tiene solución, podremos entender lo que nos ha pasado ("Un libro al día")

Acknowledging the fact that, unlike her parents' generation, she did not witness the most violent years of the conflict, De la Cruz has stated that *La línea del frente* is in part a reflection of "cómo fue vivir en Euskadi para aquellos que nacimos a finales de los 80, los que no sufrimos los años de plomo y apenas recordamos el asesinato de Miguel Ángel Blanco y, sin embargo, nos sentimos profundamente marcados por el contexto que nos legaron nuestros padres" ("Todo lo que nos contamos"). As someone with close ties to the *abertzale* community and whose teenage years coincided with a climate of draconian counter-terrorist measures enacted by the Aznar administration, De la Cruz has admitted that her personal experience of growing up in the Basque Country was marked more by the harsh repression of the Spanish state and its security forces than by the atrocities committed by ETA which, by her own admission, she and her peers viewed as "reprochables, pero [...] la reacción lógica de un pueblo que está siendo pisoteado" ("La otra literatura vasca"). In this regard, De la Cruz appears to make a distinction between her own generation and that of her parents which, from the late nineties onwards, became more resolutely opposed to ETA's armed campaign on

account of having had more direct experience of its harrowing violence. Echoing the sentiment of Edurne Portela that Basque society ought to reckon with its tacit complicity in sustaining support for ETA, De la Cruz's reflections on her own past indicate a degree of self-recrimination for the way in which ETA and its members were partially mythologised within the circles she frequented: "tengo la percepción de que por entonces en mi entorno se cuestionaba muy poco lo que veíamos a diario y se adquirían ciertos automatismos sin pararse a pensar en ellos" ("La otra literatura vasca").

However, if *La línea del frente* functions to some extent, according to its author, as a critical mirror for a generation which was at times too willing to embrace a narrative that idealised ETA's armed campaign, De la Cruz's choice of narrator renders its reflection highly ironic. By the latter's own admission, the apolitical bubble of bourgeois comfort in which Sofía has been raised bears little resemblance to her own experience of growing up in a society that was heavily politicised. Sofía is presented as someone who, unlike her contemporaries, bears little sense of connection to the conflict, a fact that is underlined by the simplistic Manichean viewpoint she previously held, denoted by her unreflective conviction that "el terrorismo es sinónimo de barbarie, toda vida es sagrada, se pueden cambiar las cosas sin romperlas" (63). It is only after Jokin's arrest that the narrator is prompted to reckon with her own personal connection to the politics of her homeland: "No tomé conciencia del país en el que vivía hasta que detuvieron a Jokin y apenas han pasado dos años. Aún me cuesta encajar mi relato en su contexto" (19). We are told how the narrator's parents went to considerable lengths to insulate their daughter from the political reality of the Basque Country, confiscating a wallet gifted to her by friends that was embroidered with a map of Euskal Herria, removing her from cultural events deemed overly political, and concealing her uncle's imprisonment for membership of ETA by fabricating foreign postcards designed to

convince their daughter he was travelling around the world. In this sense, Sofía is depicted as an individual whose view of the world has forever been distorted by a heavy dose of fiction as she states: "Los míos tuvieron mucho cuidado de mantenerme al margen de cualquier conflicto que pudiera ensuciarme de realidad" (64). Through her deliberate choice of a narrator whose complete disconnection from the political turmoil of her upbringing is patently implausible, De la Cruz appears paradoxically intent on articulating an implied critique of her generation while simultaneously disavowing the authority of her narrative as any kind of faithful reflection of historical or social reality. If the degree to which Sofía's fervid embrace of narratives which idealise the world around her is entirely unrealistic, this is commensurate with the narrator's own status as a mere literary creation who is not intended to be an absolute reflection of real world attitudes but rather an ironic mirror through which what De la Cruz perceives as the partial idealisation of ETA might be critically observed.

Having said that, De la Cruz does not set out in *La línea del frente* to solely problematise a historical narrative that idealises the armed campaign of ETA: the unjust circumstances of Jokin's imprisonment in the novel also allude critically to the manner in which the prevailing state and media narrative on ETA continues, even after the organisation's disappearance, to distort mainstream journalistic coverage and to perpetuate the repressive actions of state security forces in their approach to the Basque Country. Describing the television coverage of the incident Sofía notes the melodramatic tone of a journalist whose rhetoric is indicative of the kind of media and political discourse that is still commonly utilised: "[...] aclaraba con grandilocuencia que el apocalipsis no era sino *el último coletazo de un conflicto que no muere*" (45). Equally, the events leading to Jokin's arrest echo several high-profile cases that, in recent years, have epitomised the Spanish state's continued application of a stringent counter-terrorist lens, underpinned by the logic of "todo

es ETA", in their response to political dissent in the Basque Country. For instance, the protests against the conviction of a rapper at which Jokin finds himself prior to his arrest recall the actual judicial cases of Cassandra Vera and Pablo Hásel who, under the auspices of Spain's highly repressive penal code (the so-called *ley mordaza* or "gag law"), were also charged with exalting the terrorism of ETA in their respective tweets and lyrics (Lloret and Purcell). Similarly, the draconian sentence handed down to Jokin for a hate crime aggravated by terrorism shows clear parallels with the controversial *caso Alsasua* in Navarre where a group of Basque youths were charged under anti-terror legislation following a bar fight with two local police officers (Sagardoy). The sudden political awakening that Sofía undergoes following the discovery of Jokin's arrest sensitises her to the injustice of this situation as she explicitly acknowledges a reality where the treatment of the Basque Country by both the Spanish judiciary and security forces is marked by a continued disproportionality: "No se juzga igual un crimen en Donosti que en Granada y tampoco se dispara con la misma fuerza" (46).

A Generation in Crisis and Nostalgic Illusions of Place

In order to fully assess the way in which De la Cruz enacts an ironic critique of the epistemic certainty that underlies the politicised narratives of *la batalla del relato*, it is important to consider the significance of a further historical event in the novel, the 2008 financial crisis, and its particular relevance in terms of the novel's unstable representation of place. Situating De la Cruz's work alongside that of other Spanish authors whose writing seeks to examine the enduring effects of the crisis of global capitalism, Bezhanova views *La línea del frente* as an example of an emerging genre that she terms "la literatura de la crisis" ("La novela de la crisis"). According to Bezhanova, as these writers seek to make sense of

"la fluidez creciente de nuestra existencia" their novels respond to a deeply precarious socio-economic reality in which the global workforce consists of "individuos que no se sienten apegados a ninguna localidad, carrera, un grupo laboral o identidad fijos" ("La novela de la crisis" 208). As David Harvey has theorised, the forces of global capitalism drive this sense of existential flux, causing the places where individuals live their lives to constantly transform themselves in order to attract mobile capital, thereby eroding any sense of permanence or stability. To resist this capitalist logic, Harvey contends, individuals and communities attempt to appropriate specific places, imagining - and frequently romanticising - them as authentic sites of a stable identity and past ("From Space to Place").

The fallout in Spain from the crisis of global capitalism provides a clear backdrop in *La línea del frente* as De la Cruz adopts a protagonist whose personal circumstances typify the hollowing out of the country's middle class that gave rise to the anti-austerity movement commonly referred to as the *indignados* or the 15-M. As Monedero contends, this protest movement was unusual in that it was not led by the traditional working classes but rather emerged from a "proletarianization of the middle classes" (26), and was spearheaded by those who had previously enjoyed the comforts of consumerist capitalism but were now "expelled from the paradise of the mall, the studios, global tourism, housing and healthcare" (29). It is, according to Monedero, this group's lack of any traditional identification with the labour movement that has generated such an acute crisis of identity (28). In the novel, Sofía reflects this generational insecurity as she acknowledges how the luxuries of a middle-class lifestyle are no longer available to her since "se torcieron los negocios familiares" (42). As a doctoral student she finds herself living precariously month-to-month, unable to afford indulgences like taking her clothes to the dry cleaners as before, and forced to ask her parents for money when her stipend is delayed (42-43). This reversal of fortunes that have placed her in an

unprecedented position of relative financial precarity compared to her previous comfort have led her to have "descubierto el valor del dinero" (43). Ignoring her mother's exhortations to marry her affluent boyfriend Carlos in order to compensate for the family's financial woes, a disillusioned Sofía abandons the life of stable yet insipid bourgeois domesticity that he offers her in Barcelona amongst his circle of wealthy friends and colleagues. Illustrating Monedero's assertion that the impact of the crisis on the former middle classes generated a "re-politicization within sectors that up until then had not concerned themselves with any matters of the *res publica*" (29), Sofía now witnesses with unease the social inequalities upon which hers and Carlos' relative comfort is built, exemplified by her disgust at Carlos' decision to dismiss their house cleaner whenever the latter becomes pregnant.

The resultant crisis of identity which Sofía undergoes in the novel manifests itself through a profound shift in her attitude towards place that reflects Harvey's commentary on the search for place as a site of rootedness in a world of flux. Thrust into a position of greater precarity, Sofía comes to a belated realisation of how her privileged background once enabled her to benefit from a world of mobile capital where - under the homogenising forces of globalisation - "todas las ciudades son iguales" (43). No longer able to avail of the freedom that enabled her to study in whatever city she pleased, Sofía recalls the complacency with which she browsed university prospectuses "subrayando y tachando destinos por capricho" (42). However, the uncertain world in which she finds herself due to the effects of the financial crisis directly influences Sofía's desire to leave Barcelona for her family holiday home in Laredo - the site of blissful childhood memories and thus the source of a deep sense of nostalgia. In escaping the Catalan capital, Sofía alternatively idealises the sleepy Cantabrian seaside resort as the complete antithesis of life in the bustling metropolis whose cacophony epitomises the sense of radical instability she longs to escape: "La contaminación

acústica a la que estoy acostumbrada tiene la riqueza de una gran sinfonía voces en contrapunto, cambios de ritmo" (13). If Sofía now rejects the shallow bourgeois values of her urban life with Carlos, in its stead she falsely imagines Laredo as, akin to Heidegger's farmhouse, a place of authenticity where she can cure her existential anxiety by obtaining a sense of rootedness in a romanticised past. Upon her arrival in Laredo, Sofía immediately seeks to indulge in this sense of nostalgia, becoming overwhelmed with emotion when she discovers an old sea shell that evokes fond memories of her mother's voice. Yet this nostalgic gaze with which Sofía regards her childhood is, by her own diagnosis, a consequence of a deeply uncertain present in which she, along with many of her peers, now finds herself bereft of future prospects: "Intuyo que es generacional, que la nostalgia prematura es nuestro emblema [...] Parecemos supervivientes de un cataclismo que borra y reescribe el mundo a cada minuto y que, por tanto, idealiza cuanto recuerda. Estamos ávidos de pruebas de vida. Somos una raza de coleccionistas" (29). As such, from the outset of *La línea del frente*, the narrator's perspective on the past is presented as highly contingent via the depiction of her nostalgic disposition towards Laredo, which is shown to be a product of her desire for stability in a world where none exists.

Through her evocation of the stark dissonance between the sterile, late capitalist landscape that is presented to Sofía and the rose-tinted image she had possessed of Laredo, the narrator's attempts to anchor herself in a stable sense of place are confounded by her encounters with the world around her which continually expose the fact that the blissful past she longs for is merely a construction of her memory. As she wanders aimlessly around a town deadened by the eerie quiet of the winter months, Sofía finds herself in a place that offers few signs of human existence, conjuring up a post-apocalyptic atmosphere that is drastically out of kilter with her blissful childhood recollections: "Todo cuanto me rodea está

quieto. Los peces muertos, ni un solo barco en la entrada de mar que separa Laredo y Santoña. Las aguas lucen tan mansas que desconfío. El cielo es de un gris uniforme; no se mueve una nube [...] Estoy borracha de aire y quiero gritar aquí estoy, aquí estoy, va en serio" (12). Confronted with a bleak landscape that evokes none of the warmth with which she remembers Laredo, the narrator's desperate desire to cry aloud her own presence illustrates her inability to find the stable sense of self she had anticipated. Moreover, on the rare occasions that Sofía converses with the town's enigmatic inhabitants, these encounters merely compound the uncertain atmosphere of the town, belying the narrator's confidence in her own ability to interpret the world around her with any conviction. For instance, the elliptical responses of a laconic ticket seller at the docks, whose stern appearance leads Sofía to imagine him to be a former prisoner, leaves the narrator vaguely speculating about this hypothetical identity (29). Likewise, Sofía is repeatedly perturbed by her exchanges with Agustín, the apartment block's elderly concierge, whose inscrutable mien renders him similarly enigmatic: "A veces lo sorprendo inmóvil frente a mi fachada, absorto, como si intentara resolver un acertijo, un código cifrado en las teselas verdes. Si lo saludo, no contesta. No me ve" (39). Sofía's strained interactions with the spectral locals therefore undermine the narrator's faith in her ability to interpret the world around her, frustrating her search for a stable sense of place. Indeed, Laredo's failure to fulfil the narrator's modernist desire for secure ontological terrain is neatly encapsulated by the foreboding warning issued to her by an elderly cleaning lady whom she casually asks for directions: "Ten cuidado al bajar, que está muy resbaladizo" (30).

Far from offering a refuge of authenticity from a world destabilised by neoliberal forces, Laredo reveals itself to be a place that bears the self-same traces of the whims of global capitalism that underpin Sofía's present crisis of self. The successive economic cycles

of boom and bust that are etched upon the town's material landscape indicate a place that seems no less unstable than the urban environment Sofía has left behind. This is exemplified by her description of the faded decadence of the apartment block where the family's summer home is situated: built during Spain's construction boom of the sixties, in the ghostly silence of the off-season, the present dilapidation of the building becomes all the more apparent, symbolising too a past that is radically inaccessible: "[...] sólo quedan las ruinas, las teselas verdes de la fachada que se desprenden con los golpes de viento" (12). Similarly, where there was once an abandoned dock that lay in squalor and was untainted by mass tourism, Sofía now discovers an ultra-modern marina, part of a municipal regeneration project carried out prior to the recession, and explicitly branded "el puerto deportivo más grande del Cantábrico" (28). If the opulence of the newly-furbished dock appears entirely redundant in the wake of the financial crisis, the very sight of it instinctively offends Sofía's nostalgic sensibilities and her search for authenticity: "Siento rabia de esa que me hace morderme los labios, pero no es auténtica, no la quiero. No es propia de mí, sino del típico reaccionario para quien todo pasado siempre es un pasado mejor" (28). Devoid of any authenticity and offering merely an artificial sense of place that is contrived for the consumption of tourists, Sofía views the rampant commercialisation of the coastal town as a vulgarity: "El paisaje ha cambiado porque ahora me hace pensar en postales, en vallas publicitarias, en los fondos falsos que utilizan los estudios de fotografía. Lo miro con desdén. El mar, el mar, el mar…" (70). Finding only a landscape that denotes the superficial splendour of mass tourism, Sofía's return to Laredo uncovers a highly contingent world where the search for authenticity is futile, where everything is a construction, and where her desired sense of rootedness in place and the past is impossible to achieve.

What this equally serves to reveal is that the blissful world Sofía thinks she remembers from her childhood was itself only ever the product of her subjective construction of reality. The novel repeatedly emphasises how Sofía's knowledge of the world around her has always been mediated through the lens of literary narratives and thus is unreflective of any objective external reality. For instance, the narrator recalls how, as a child, she transposed the thrilling adventures contained within works such as *Treasure Island* and *The Count of Monte Cristo* onto the coastal landscape of Laredo: "Todos ellos sucedían en aquel peñón boscoso [...] Del antiguo presidio excavado en la roca se escapaban los criminales más temidos" (11). Likewise, Sofía revisits a tunnel where she used to play only to find it barely recognisable, causing her to realise that even as a child her perception of it was framed by romantic tales of "piratas que habían buscado refugio en aquel paisaje agreste" (30). Struggling to find any sense of coherence in the eerie atmosphere of Laredo, the narrator's continual instinct is to resort to pre-existing cultural texts in order to impose frames of intelligibility on the world. Even when she realises that her prior certainties about the world are mistaken, Sofía seeks reassurance in the coherence of narrative in order to make some sense of her situation. This is exemplified by her attempts to explain the anxiety she feels when, during a boat tour of the bay, the guide corrects her wrongful assumption about the location of El Dueso prison: "Conozco este miedo. Me lo han contado mil veces. En *La vida es sueño*, en *Un mundo feliz*, en *Blade Runner*, en *Abre los ojos*… Se ha vuelto un cliché, pero siempre funciona porque es un miedo doble: miedo a que nuestra vida se asiente sobre un gran error y miedo al instante en el que el error se descubre" (34). Paradoxically, although the literary texts through which Sofía has come to make sense of the world are shown to be deeply unreliable, they remain her sole means of imposing any kind of coherent meaning on the world itself.

Shelter from the Look: Mythologised Militants and Mauvaise Foi

Having examined how Sofía's return to Laredo presents her with a distinctly postmodern landscape where stable knowledge remains elusive, I will now analyse the narrator's increasing hermeticism within the family apartment as evidence of her refusal to reconcile herself to a position of epistemic uncertainty. Rather than coming to terms with the contingency of the world, Sofía clings to a modernist drive to establish absolute truths about her existence, epitomising the view of Anthony Giddens that the response to a crisis of self in late modernity is the "sustaining of coherent, yet continuously revised, biographical narratives" (5). Unsettled by her encounters with the mysterious inhabitants of Laredo whose presence attests to multiple, unknowable perspectives on reality, Sofía attempts to deny her existence in this intersubjective world through her deliberate self-confinement within the home which she variously refers to as her "búnker" (74) and "trinchera" (111), indicating its status as a place where her idealisation of Jokin becomes firmly entrenched. In doing so, she seeks to appropriate the apartment as an enclosed realm of solipsistic certitude in which she can sustain her fantasies of Jokin as a heroic revolutionary and herself as his romantic other. This depiction of Sofía's hermeticism as an absolute retreat into the confines of her own solipsistic narrative can be seen as an ironic reflection on the intransigent state of affairs that constitutes *la batalla del relato* by implicitly problematising the siloed positions that are assumed by those who posit totalising truth claims about the past whilst ignoring the partiality and particularity of their own subjective perspective. By severing her ties to the outside world, Sofía tries to escape what Jean Paul Sartre termed *le regard des autres* on account of the fact that it is this gaze that brings about an awareness of her subjectivity in relation to others that would otherwise disrupt her solipsistic posture by exposing her to the existence of alternative perspectives on the world.

Within the apartment Sofía sets about constructing the illusion of a self-enclosed world in which she is sheltered from the unsettling gaze of those on the outside, contentedly comparing herself to "una astronauta encerrada en su cápsula espacial" (18). Reiterating the famous line from Sartre's play *Huis clos* - "l'enfer c'est les autres" - Sofía expresses an equal fear that the subjective gaze of others might destabilise the solipsistic narratives that she attempts to project about Jokin and her romance with him: "la ansiedad es culpa de los otros" (73). This sense that the presence of others might disrupt any romanticised vision she projects is foreshadowed by her remarks at her own nostalgia towards the old seashell found in her childhood bedroom: "No me importa que esta imagen sea cursi, ni que se me escapen las lágrimas, porque puedo, porque nadie mira" (13). In this example, Sofía's ability to sustain a posture of wistful reminiscence is wholly contingent upon her solitude as, were anyone else to be present, her blatant sentimentality would be exposed to her. The discomfort Sofía feels when confronted with the gaze of others is epitomised by her encounters with the apartment's elderly concierge, Agustín. Through his obsequious demeanour and the antiquated formalities of his "tono zalamero" (14), the latter becomes an unsettling reminder for the narrator of her bourgeois origins and, by extension, her complete disconnection from the political reality of the Basque Country during her upbringing. Indeed, when conversing with Agustín, the narrator feels compelled to assume the role inherited from her affluent mother: "En ausencia de mi madre, me veo obligada a ser ella" (14). Yet rather than reconciling herself to these inalterable facts of her own upbringing, Sofía's belated self-reproach for this detachment only hastens her withdrawal into the hermetic solitude of the apartment where she can sustain the self-deceptive fantasy that she is now the lover of a heroic revolutionary.

Gradually disavowing all ties to her former self, Sofía appropriates the apartment as a place in which she can refashion a stable self-image that is defined exclusively through her relationship with Jokin. Attempting to erase all material traces of her middle-class upbringing, Sofía rummages through the bedroom drawers to empty them of "objetos que parecen inventarios de mi infancia" (13). Constructing instead a space that will allow her to project her desired self-image, Sofía resorts once more to literary narrative in order to impose a sense of solid meaning upon this hermetic world, mawkishly imagining her own reclusiveness to be akin to that of the writer Emily Dickinson (74). Discarding signs of her familial past, she adorns the apartment's shelves with volumes of literary criticism with the aim of imprinting a new identity upon its interior: "Y tengo la ocurrencia de que los libros no existen para ser leídos, existen para reposar de esta forma y con fines colonizadores, para que nos adueñemos del espacio y este dormitorio que hace unos instantes no era el mío, ahora, en cambio, sí lo sea" (17). Yet, through their subject matter - *Posmodernismo y teatro en Latinoamérica, De la fenomenología a la semiótica performativa, El nuevo teatro en Buenos Aires* - these texts ironically subvert the very self-assurance that the narrator complacently hopes to derives from them: instead, they function as ciphers for the fallacy of Sofía's illusions of a stable self, her belated recognition of the instability of grand narratives and the ultimate revelation of the performative dimension of all human identity that is unveiled by her reencounters with Jokin.

As Sofía's hermeticism within the apartment becomes more extreme, she creates a kind of Baudrillardian hyperreality that threatens to substitute the external world, symbolised by her impression that the relationships of soap characters she follows are slowly displacing her memories of her neglected friendships on the outside. Unwilling to abandon her seclusion even to purchase food, Sofía resorts to online shopping, reducing her minimal

contact with the outside world to the mediation of screens, transforming the apartment into a place where, she notes, "todo es simbólico" (74). In pursuing this radical state of self-isolation in order that her realm of solipsistic fantasy might become impenetrable, Sofía devotes herself entirely to achieving a new sense of self under the gaze of Jokin. Wrongly convinced that his prison cell looks onto the apartment window, she masturbates nightly, imagining that he is watching her. Yet inside the apartment Jokin's gaze remains just that: an imagined gaze. Sofía falsely believes that, by seeing herself exclusively through Jokin's eyes, her self-identity can acquire an objective solidity that will be revealed to her "como si no me perteneciera, desde la distancia, para así juzgarme con imparcialidad, o con los ojos del otro" (20). Eventually closeting herself in the living room, she papers every inch of the wall with her letters from Jokin in an effort to further eradicate any indication of own past and to create a world that is completely subsumed to her adoration of him: "quiero, sobre todo, que desaparezcan las cenefas romboidales, los retratos de mi madre y sus hermanas, y las litografías de caza [...] y compruebo que ha merecido la pena. La casa de veraneo ahora es un templo. Como versículos del Corán en una mezquita, la caligrafía de Jokin, pequeña y retraída, lo invade todo" (120).

However, through Sofía's hermeticism and her attempted erasure of her past in a bid to sustain this realm of solipsistic fantasy, she is guilty - in Sartrean terms - of a clear act of *mauvaise foi* in which she wilfully vacates her own subjectivity, allowing herself to be objectified under the male gaze. Surrendering herself to the imprisonment of her idolatrous love of Jokin Sofía exemplifies the paradoxical nature of Sartrean bad faith by using her very freedom to actively deny it: "Avanzamos hacia el encierro. Quienes podemos permitírnoslo" (74). Indeed, the narrator's adoption of this posture of bad faith epitomises De Beauvoir's exemplum of "the woman in love" that she theorises as follows in *The Second Sex*: "through

her flesh, her feelings, and her behaviour, she will exalt as sovereign the one she loves, she will posit him as value and supreme reality; she will efface herself before him. Love becomes a religion for her" (774). Just as De Beauvoir's exemplum involves self-effacement on the part of the female lover, Sofía's quasi-religious adoration of Jokin and absolute confinement within the apartment threatens the disintegration of her sense of self as her existence eventually comes to resemble that of a "crustáceo autosuficiente" that exists in its own "ecoesfera" (134). This indication of the self-annihilating effect of total withdrawal from the world manifests itself in Sofía's physical deterioration and, eventually, her loss of consciousness as the confinement of the apartment becomes entirely asphyxiating. By portraying Sofía's ability to sustain her idealisation of Jokin as entirely contingent on her absolute entrenchment and the complete renouncement of her subjectivity *La línea del frente* invites an ironic comparison with *la batalla del relato*, wrily insinuating that those who cling to the fiction of absolute truth posited by totalising narratives do so by disregarding their own subjective location.

Moreover, it transpires that the idealised image that Sofía projects of Jokin is itself entirely derived from a pre-existing narrative that is of dubious reliability - an obscure memoir written by the exiled ETA militant Mikel Areilza, the subject of the narrator's doctoral research. In the same way as the narrator's view of Laredo is filtered through the prism of literary paradigms, the self-aggrandising tone of Areilza's work provides a suitably romanticised lens through which she can construct a fulsome understanding of Jokin. In his memoir, Areilza's articulates a distinctly self-serving depiction of his years of militancy in ETA, portraying himself as a heroic revolutionary figure and framing his past as a tale of epic adventure: "las reuniones clandestinas en sótanos fronterizos, alumbrados por ascuas de cigarro como hombres primitivos que conspiran contra la prohibición del fuego; la fe en un

enemigo claro; la intemperie; la barba crecida; la capacidad de sacrificio" (95). As the thrilling tenor of the memoir patently chimes with Sofía's inclination towards a romanticised view of the world, she eventually allows Areilza's story to become dangerously conflated with her image of Jokin: "Mientras leía, pensaba en Jokin. Sin conocer su verdadera historia, aprendía a entender sus razones [...] Hubo un tiempo en el que los imaginé superpuestos, como si el muerto albergara en el vivo" (96). Moreover, Sofía forms a firm conviction in Areilza's story as one of absolute authenticity that she fallaciously contrasts with the reductive moral vision she has found in fictional representations of the Basque conflict which are "por lo general maniqueos, de víctimas intachables y etarras malísimos, incapaces, al fin y al cabo de plasmar una complejidad que a mí también se me escapaba" (94). However, Sofía's espousal of Areilza's self-serving narrative of heroic militancy as a paradigm for understanding Jokin is in fact motivated by her own desire to expiate a sense of personal remorse. As such, it is the more palatable moral vision of Areilza's story, one of daring revolutionary adventure rather than barbaric violence, that renders it such a seductive narrative for Sofía in her desire to construct a desirable image of her own relationship with Jokin that might function as an antidote for her prior political apathy. Consequently, the greater authenticity that Sofía attributes to Areilza's memoir does not correspond to any intrinsic objective truth; rather, it should be understood as indicative of this highly subjective narrative's particular suitability for Sofía's idealisation of Jokin.

At this juncture, it is important to consider the function of Cozarowski's diary extracts which act as a mise-en-abyme that highlights Sofía's own misapprehensions in her quest to fully understand Jokin and her disregard for the way in which her individual desire informs the idealised image she constructs of him. Offering an ironic parallel to Sofía's situation, the Argentine director's diary entries provide a cautionary tale on the pursuit of totalising narratives about the past as they chart the way in which Cozarowski's initial hubris is

overcome by his chastened realisation that it is impossible to formulate a straightforward, objective account of Areilza's life. In the first extract, Cozarowski haughtily disparages the theatre audiences of Buenos Aires and their utter enthral at the popular *comedia de enredos*: writing in 2002 - a period when Argentina was in the midst of a severe economic depression under the presidency of Carlos Menem - Cozarowski dismisses such theatre as "basura menemista", characterising the playwright as "el dealer" whose "comedia insípida" acts like a mind-numbing opiate for an audience longing for escapism from a society plunged in disarray (23). However, just as the theatregoers of Buenos Aires seek temporary relief from their present societal turmoil in the anodyne plays upon which Cozarowski pours his scorn, through Areilza, Cozarowski come to realise that he too chooses to view the world in a manner that satisfies his individual desires.

When related to the main narrative, this highlights the way in which, enamoured with a romanticised narrative of Jokin's heroism, Sofía wilfully adopts a subjective lens that best remedies her present crisis of identity. Yet, just like Sofía's modernist pursuit of absolute truth, Cozarowski's eventual recognition that the past is always constructed from a subjective perspective is at odds with the attitude initially he first displays when he derides a pluralistic concept of memory as a mere fad: "No tolero el lugar común, la monserga de que todos tenemos una historia que contar, desde el oficinista del banco hasta mi tía Eugenia la de Iruya. Es la estupidez benevolente que abarrota los talleres literarios, donde nunca falta una abuelita que quiere escribir sus memorias" (25). Cozarowksi implicitly reveals a predisposition towards totalising narratives that underlines the surety with which he sets out to stage a biographical representation of Areilza's life that is defined by its presumed veracity. Mirroring Sofía's credulity in the authenticity of Areilza's story, Cozarowski's artistic endeavour is conceived as a "biodrama" that represents "una vuelta a lo real" (24).

Yet, just like Sofía, Cozarowski's confidence in the realist pretensions of his project is soon eroded when the constructedness of the ex-militant's life story becomes manifest as the director realises that he can never know with absolute certitude whether or not the narrative Areilza presents about his past corresponds to any objective truth: "Si alguien ajeno a mi proyecto se enfrentara a estas anécdotas no tendría forma de saber si son reales o ficticias, si cuentan la vida de una persona o de muchas personas" (80). In the end, Cozarowski's lengthy interviews with Areilza only serve to reveal the latter's propensity towards self-fictionalisation, causing the director to describe him as a "cuentista de profesión" (50). Witnessing how Areilza's dramatic anecdotes seek to captivate and deceive his interlocutor, the director realises that his desire to produce anything that purports to be a truthful representation of Areilza's life is an elusive goal: "Tengo como objetivo trabajar con su experiencia, con la verdadera, con los hechos históricos. Pero si decide mentirme estoy a su merced. Podría ser que Mikel Areilza quisiera utilizar este biodrama para reinventarse, para reescribir su historia" (50). Bewildered by the contradictory and chaotic portrait he has compiled of his subject during their meetings, Cozarowski deduces that both the image he forms of Areilza and that which Areilza projects of himself are inexorably conditioned by their respective desires. Cozarowski eventually arrives at the realisation that, in attempting to retell the life story of Areilza, it is impossible to produce a narrative that is not a subjective reconstruction of the past: "[c]onstruye al hombre como las muchachitas a su primer enamorado, seleccionando al jugador más fachero de la cancha y volcando en él su discurso henchido, conveniente" (80). As well as recognising that any narrative he formulates of Areilza is conditioned by his own subjectivity, Cozarowski suspects that Areilza's initial willingness to regale Argentine audiences with his "historias de luchador comprometido" (36) was only ever a reflection of his desire to compensate for the actual remorse he felt

about his past as an ETA militant. Sofía's appropriation of Areilza's memoir as the basis on which she seeks to construct a true image of Jokin is therefore rendered highly ironic in light of Cozarowski's disillusionment following the utter failure of his own efforts to produce a faithful representation of the militant's past. The diary entries therefore come to represent an implicit caution against Sofía's modernist pursuit of absolute truth and her refusal to come to terms with the fact that all perspectives on the past are inexorably subjective and provisional.

Performing Carceral (Dis)Illusions

Ultimately, Sofía's visits to Jokin in prison reveal the irreconcilable gap between the romanticised image she projects of him and his actual refusal to conform to this, therefore destabilising the idealised narrative to which she fervently clings about her ex-boyfriend's incarceration. The narrator wrongly assumes the prison to be a place in which her fantasies will take on a stable reality through her anticipated encounters with Jokin as the absolute embodiment of the heroic militant and romantic other. Through Sofía's naive expectation of this stable reality, the prison can be seen to represent, in the mind of the narrator, a heterotopia - the term theorised by the French philosopher Michel Foucault to describe "a space that is other, another real space, as perfect, as meticulous, as well arranged as ours is messy, ill constructed, and jumbled" ("Of Other Spaces" 27). Having previously cited the prison as an example of a heterotopia, in *Discipline and Punish: The Birth of the Modern Prison* Foucault developed his analysis of the modern penal system since the mid-eighteenth century. Through his use of Jeremy Bentham's model of the panopticon, Foucault argued that the architecture of modern prisons was designed so that the behaviour of prisoners could be regulated through the illusion of constant observance, therefore subjugating inmates into controlled individuals which could be rigorously analysed or - as Foucault himself puts it - "docile and knowable" (172). If Foucault viewed the prison as a space in which the state

sought to exert absolute power over deviant citizens, Sofía's yearning for its illusion of stable order renders it more akin to an inverted heterotopia where she too can consummate her desire to fully "know" Jokin. In this sense, the narrator's positive attraction towards the prison is more in line with Hetherington's later conceptualisation of heterotopia as a space that enables the "use of the limits of our imagination, our desires" (40).

Within the prison, Sofía finds herself presented with a contrived imitation of the outside world and, despite her explicit awareness of its artificiality, she allows herself to become increasingly seduced by this crude reproduction, conveniently disregarding the fact that it is a construction as she becomes enthralled by the illusion it offers of a coherent reality that is totally detached from the epistemic uncertainty of Laredo. The narrator idealises the prison as a desirable alternative to Laredo where she is conversely beset by epistemic uncertainty, ultimately forming the delusion that the self-confined space of the prison offers the possibility of a kind of total knowledge, as evidenced when she confesses to Jokin: "El problema es que lo quiero saber todo" (57). Sofía's first impressions demonstrate the conscious self-delusion that underlies her conviction in the utopian character of the prison: "Obviando el alambre de espino, parece un buen lugar para vivir" (69). The romantic simplicity of her vision of the prison is, as the narrator explicitly admits, contingent upon her wilful disregard of its grimmer material reality - clearly visible in the site's barbed-wire fencing. Similarly, Sofía invents clichéd backstories for the other visitors in order to sustain the illusion of the prison as, in contrast to Laredo, a perfectly knowable world. For instance, she envisions one elderly couple to be the parents of an *etarra* who have spent decades travelling across Spain in order to visit their son whilst imagining another woman to be a Russian prostitute who is pregnant with the child of her pimp. Uncomfortable with the prospect that a total understanding of reality is beyond her grasp, Sofía disingenuously

creates these trite biographies to mask the actual limitations of her own epistemic position, as expressed in her fear that "hay un mundo detrás de este mundo que ellos ven y tú sólo temes" (68). The more the narrator learns about the artificial society that exists within the prison, the further she allows herself to be seduced by its apparent constitution as a perfectly self-enclosed world. For example, Sofía initially recognises the inauthenticity of the aesthetic similarities between the prison and the outside world: "alguien se ha tomado demasiado en serio la tarea de reproducir lo humano, de fingir que todo está bien, pero no cuela. Y lo mismo me pasa con este sitio" (56). However, the information Sofía gleans from her conversations with Jokin gradually allows her to compile a more fulsome picture of the prison society that seems to her to verify its existence as a heterotopic world. This is exemplified by her enthusiastic response to Jokin's explanation of the slang used by the inmates that, for him, threatens to displace the language of the real world:

> SOFÍA: ¿Olvidar qué?
>
> JOKIN: Que fuera las mantas no se llaman piojosas. Que la gente se mueve en autobuses y taxis, no en canguros. En fin, esas movidas.
>
> SOFÍA: ¿Piojosas?
>
> JOKIN: Eso es. Y las celdas son chabolos, un violeta es un violador, la libertad es la bola, el psiquiatra nos receta ladrillos para la ansiedad…
>
> SOFÍA: ¡Me encanta! ¡Dime más! (103)

Nevertheless, the stable order that Sofía hopes to discover within the enclosure of the prison is revealed to be an illusion: instead the prison reveals itself to be a *performative* space in which Sofía's romanticised narrative about Jokin is not reproduced but constantly subverted, exposing its insufficiency as a totalising lens through which she can make sense of

him. Applying Judith Butler's notion of performativity to space, feminist geographer Gillian Rose contends that "space is a doing, that does not pre-exist its doing, and that its doing is the articulation of relational performances [...] space then is not an anterior actant to be filled or spanned or constructed [...] space is practised, a matrix of play, dynamic and iterative, its forms and shapes produced through the citational performance of self-other relations" (248). Indeed, the performative dimension of the prison in *La línea del frente* is rendered explicit through the textual form of the chapters in which Sofía visits Jokin: unlike the rest of the novel which is written as an internal monologue, the prison visits take the form of a theatrical duologue between Sofía and Jokin and are accompanied by italicised stage directions that indicate each of their physical gestures. Further textual allusions underpin the performative character of the prison such as Jokin's reference to the fact that a theatre group has been set up for the inmates who are currently rehearsing a Pinter play (105) and his retelling of an anecdote about an exiled Nazi war criminal whose family adopted an entirely new identity after fleeing to Buenos Aires (101). Crucially, rather than performing in a manner that conforms to the romanticised narrative Sofía projects of him, Jokin repeatedly acts in a way that is entirely at odds with this heroic vision. At this point, it is worth noting once more the parallel with the novel's frame narrative where Cozarowski's meticulously planned staging of Areilza's life story is ultimately sabotaged by the latter's unexpected defiance of his director's authority when he spontaneously goes off-script mid-performance. In the penultimate extract of his diary Cozarowski relates how, much to his own irritation, during the live premiere of the *biodrama* Areilza diverges from his rehearsed monologue by acting out his own impromptu alteration of the prescribed speech (122-123). In a manner that mirrors Areilza's subversive improvisation, Jokin similarly fails to conform to the predetermined narrative that Sofía projects onto him, thereby revealing the instability of that selfsame narrative that the female narrator stubbornly embraces. Cozarowski's realisation

that no single narrative about Areilza can ever capture the totality of his past consequently offers an obvious intertextual parallel with Sofía's own failed pursuit of a totalising understanding of Jokin who, just like Areilza, refuses to perform the precise role she desires of him.

As Sofía attempts to act out her romantic fantasies in the physical space of the prison, her efforts are continually undermined by Jokin's repudiation of the role in which she seeks to cast him. For example, despite their years apart, Sofía's idealised image of Jokin rests upon her delusion that the couple's present reencounter is merely the continuation of their teenage romance. However, this assumed continuity is destabilised as the narrator's memories of their shared past are revealed by Jokin to be highly questionable. When she first enters the prison she seeks out validation of this continuity between past and present, expressing delight when she sees that Jokin's dress sense has scarcely changed over the years (68) and exhorting him to call her "Sofi" rather than "Sofía" because this is how she remembers him calling her during their youth (54). Jokin challenges Sofía's rose-tinted vision of their earlier romance by, for instance, disputing the veracity of her nostalgic recollection of them writing their names in the sand as teenagers:

> JOKIN: Pues yo no recuerdo haberlo hecho.
>
> SOFÍA: Cómo que no. Conmigo. En una noche de San Juan. Nos quedamos horas esperando a que subiera la marea porque queríamos ver cómo desaparecían las letras poco a poco.
>
> JOKIN: Madre mía! Estás segura de que era yo?
>
> SOFÍA: Tú qué crees?
>
> *Silencio* (54)

This clash between Jokin's scepticism and Sofía's nostalgia exposes the inherent fictionality of the latter's narrative about their past, casting a doubt over the certainty of her own viewpoint that is inscribed in the above stage direction that indicates the pair's silence and which disrupts the smooth flow of their dialogue. In a subsequent meeting, the stage directions again point to the unease that Sofía experiences whenever Jokin's memories contradict her own. Sofía's sentimentalised recollection of the night they first made love turns out to be at complete odds with Jokin's rather more mundane account of the same moment: "Pero si no llegamos a follar! Yo lo propuse y casi te convenzo, pero entonces apareció un perro y…" (84). In this exchange, Jokin's contrary tone, the crude sexual slang he employs, and his reference to the quite unerotic image of a dog disrupting their frustrated encounter combines to create a bathetic effect, contradicting Sofía's romanticised version of the past and thus subverting the nostalgic posture she tries to sustain. Once more the stage directions stipulate how the disparity between their respective individual memories unsettles Sofía, leaving her "*trabada a mitad de pregunta*" (84). Jokin's interjections consequently highlight the subjective and partial nature of Sofía's memory, serving as a direct corrective to her earlier solipsistic perspective against which he now cautions her: "A ver, Sofi. Ni yo tengo tan mala memoria ni tú la tienes tan buena" (85). The encounters between Jokin and Sofía gradually erode the latter's confidence in her individual view of the past as she laments: "Comienzo a pensar que no recuerdo nada en absoluto; que sólo invento" (87). However, if Sofía's pessimistic remark implies an almost nihilistic attitude towards memory, Jokin's rejoinder serves to relativise her fear that the past is nothing but pure invention when he replies: "Creo que nos pasa a todos. Rellenamos huecos" (87). In other words, Jokin forces Sofía to recognise that, by projecting a totalising narrative of their past that is woven around a heavily romanticised vision of him, she attempts to conceal the actual lacunae of her

subjective memory in order to sustain the self-delusion of possessing a secure understanding of the world.

As well as problematising Sofía's conviction in the accuracy of her individual memory, her encounters with Jokin further destabilise the narrator's romanticised narrative due to the incongruence between her idealised image of him and the more sordid mood of their actual encounters that, ultimately, impedes her efforts to acquire her own sense of self through him. Over the course of her visits, Jokin fails to live up to the role of the romantic hero that Sofía envisages as he instead displays a tone of outward lasciviousness that is entirely discordant with her idealised image of him, regularly making smutty gags and deploying a dark sense of humour that Sofía repeatedly fails to comprehend. Sofía's situation thus resembles that of De Beauvoir's archetype of the woman in love whose search for absolute identification with the male object of her desire is, invariably, an unrealisable one. As De Beauvoir maintains, the realisation that her beloved is "sadly contingent and mundane" (774) inevitably disappoints the female lover's conviction that "the measure of values and the truth of the world are in his own consciousness" (784). Throughout Sofía's visits to the prison, she yearns to gain complete access to Jokin's consciousness, repeating her desire to "saber todo" vis-a-vis his life story, and thus exhibiting a thoroughly Modernist belief that - as De Beauvoir avers of the paradigmatic woman in love - his "consciousness discloses an uncontested reality" (778). In Sofía's longing for absolute identification with Jokin she even goes so far as to want to be imprisoned alongside him: "Y ojalá pudiera estar de ese lado. Cumpliría la condena contigo" (105). Yet despite her best efforts, Sofía is incapable of discovering in Jokin an ideal romantic other through which she can acquire a stable sense of self.

On the contrary, not only is Jokin's character incongruous with the romantic hero that Sofía had envisaged him to be, he also proves a distinctly impenetrable figure, a fact that is symbolised by the way in which the stage directions indicate the pair's forced physical separation on either side of a glass screen (53). Sofía's persistent attempts to establish a coherent narrative about the truth of Jokin's imprisonment are repeatedly obstructed: the dialogue between the pair is meandering and tangential, their conversations frequently digressing from the matter of his incarceration as he deliberately evades her efforts to interrogate each and every aspect of his life. For example, when she declares to him "hay tantas cosas que quiero preguntarte" he sidesteps her attempted inquiry with a dismissive retort to her questions: "Es que de mí no hay mucho que contar" (57). When Sofía perseveres with her efforts to achieve a more fulsome picture of him that might validate her romanticised narrative, Jokin angrily rebukes her interrogation by ironising the naive image that she projects onto him: "¿Pero qué dices? No funciona así. No tenemos una hermandad de criminales con conciencia política; la gente no se reúne al caer la noche para leer poemas de Sarri. En España ni siquiera existen los presos políticos, ¿no? Pues qué más da. Aquí cada uno a su rollo, y así es mejor" (58-59). By deriding Sofía's aggrandised vision of him as a Basque nationalist hero, bound in solidarity with his fellow political prisoners, Jokin lays bare the reductionism of this romanticisation, exposing the trite narrative through which Sofía imagines his imprisonment. The tension between Sofía's desire for Jokin to embody the romantic hero of her fantasies and the frustrating reality of his elusive character fails to be reconciled. Instead, he explicitly reproves her willed idealisation of him, forcefully shutting down her incessant questioning when he remarks: "no soy el puto Che, hostias" (103). As such, Jokin's repudiation of the romanticised narrative that Sofía projects onto him exposes its highly subjective nature; when Sofía attempts to impose that self-same narrative onto reality during her visits its inherent instability is revealed and she is thus forced to confront

her own subjective position. This culminates in the narrator's eventual recognition that she has made the mistake of analysing Jokin as if he were a literary character who could be systematically deciphered: "No puedo practicarle una autopsia narrativa. Lo repetiré en voz alta: Jokin no es un personaje" (132). Sofía thus comes to acknowledge that, unlike the fictional works that she is more accustomed to dealing with, reality cannot be reduced to any totalising narrative but, rather, always retains an element of unknowability as it is always interpreted from a particular and partial perspective: "Que la vida está llena de cabos sueltos, pero en la ficción sólo encajan las piezas que confluyen hacia un final necesario, inevitable" (132).

In the end, it is Jokin's belated acknowledgement of his own bad faith which subverts the totalising narrative that Sofía has sought to impose on him as he admits that, ashamed at his own past, he concealed the truth of his imprisonment so that Sofía would not be disabused of her romanticised image of him. In making this admission, Jokin confronts Sofía with the fact that the particular narratives we tell ourselves and others do not correspond to any objective truth about the past but serve present needs and desires, his own being an unwillingness to assume responsibility for the harm caused by his actions: "Es una fantasía, pero cura; por un rato, alivia" (147). During their final conversation, conducted via a prepaid call from the prison, Jokin recites a scripted speech to Sofía in which he discloses the supposed truth behind his incarceration. He explains how, having suffered for years with addiction, he had arrived at the site of his arrest, not as a supporter of the planned political protest, but with the intention of purchasing drugs. At the same time, Jokin's confession illustrates the necessary role of contextualising individual histories in order to destabilise totalising narratives, indicated by the reasons he gives for his speech: "Para que te pongas en mi lugar, para que conozcas el contexto, para que me entiendas un poco" (147). However, in

keeping with the postmodernist scepticism of the novel, even this confessional monologue retains an air of uncertainty due to the unnatural rhythm of Jokin's recitation, as indicated by the stage directions: "*Toma aire y comienza a leer muy rápido. Omitirá a menudo las pausas entre oraciones. Su prosodia es poco natural, como la de un niño que recita un poema que no entiende*" (146). As Jokin's call is automatically cut off mid-sentence, Sofía is denied any opportunity to interrogate his scripted *mea culpa* and therefore unable to definitively attest to its absolute veracity or otherwise. Although there would appear to be little reason for Jokin to fabricate this unself-serving account of his life, given the elusive character he has otherwise shown himself to be and the stilted manner in which he makes this revelation, Sofía cannot accept his version of events with absolute conviction. The narrator is consequently left to contemplate the radical limitations of her epistemic position: far from achieving any true understanding of Jokin, the only information she ever manages to glean about him remains fragmentary and contingent. Consequently, the novel reaffirms - with a typically postmodern twist of playfulness and self-reflexivity - the notion that all narratives, itself included, should be viewed with a degree of scepticism lest we mistakenly believe that they contain any kind of stable meaning.

Accepting the Locatedness of Subjectivity

The disillusionment produced by Sofía's encounters with Jokin ultimately overturns the narrator's modernist conviction that she can achieve an objective understanding of the world through the frames of narrative. Instead, Sofía comes to realise that whatever narrative lens she adopts is the product of a subjectivity that is embodied and located, and which therefore constrains but also enables her knowledge of the past. While throughout the novel Sofía is desperate to escape her privileged background, her corporeality is repeatedly shown to be an inexorable tie to her past: "Porque los bebés son un collage de miembros de la

morgue: los ojos del abuelo, su carcinoma en el gen BRCAI, la esquizofrenia del país de origen, las creencias religiosas de los padres, el pelo rizado de una tía abuela que murió muy joven" (67). On one occasion, wishing the bruises left on her by Jokin during sex would last as a testament to their relationship, Sofía again contemplates the extent to which her subjectivity is inexorably inscribed upon her body as she observes scars that, unlike the constructions of memory, are a more faithful reminder of past experiences: "A pesar de lo caprichosa que es mi memoria, guardo un recuerdo vívido sobre el origen de cada cicatriz" (91). Furthermore, Cozarowski's diaries provide yet another intertextual parallel with Sofía's narration as the Argentine director concludes each entry fixating on his blood pressure: "Mi tensión en 140/90 es lo real. Los ictus, los ataques cardíacos son reales. Pero juraría que todo cuanto escribí esta tarde lo imaginé" (51). By contrasting these inescapable reminders of his waning physical health with his inability to decipher Areilza's past, Cozarowski similarly implies that the individual body is the most certain ground for knowledge.

For the most part, *La línea del frente* depicts Sofía's efforts to escape this embodied subjectivity that, overcome by guilt, she believes to be bound to the banal political detachment of her past. Seeking a more ideal self-image, she romanticises Jokin in the hope of projecting a reality in which she is the lover of a heroic revolutionary. As Sofía belatedly recognises, in her readiness to resort to narratives that are "fuertes y fáciles" (67), she responds to Jokin's arrest by cynically appropriating his situation to create her own fictitious sense of self: "Quizás sólo amaba a Jokin porque me cedía su lucha" (159). Moreover, given the failure of Sofía's absolutist search for a secure identity through this romanticised narrative, the novel demonstrates the inherent fictionality of all totalising narratives that we project about ourselves and others, whilst also positing the impossibility of reducing the past to the stable structures of a single interpretative lens: "la narrativa juega con círculos, pero la

vida es más de espirales" (156). Arriving at this realisation, the narrator espouses a view of reality where individual subjectivity is understood as embodied and the self as continually constituted through our actions. This realignment of Sofía's philosophical outlook - an echo of Sartre's notion that we are our acts - is foreshadowed in the novel's epigraph, taken from The Killers' song *All These Things That I've Done*. Through Jokin's regret about what he himself has done in the past, Sofía comes to recognise that she too cannot renounce her past experiences as they are the very grounds for her present subjectivity. Resisting the romanticised narrative that Sofía projects onto him, Jokin assumes responsibility for the crime he committed and the fatal consequences that it caused for one protester as a result of the police's brutal retaliation. He maintains that to otherwise deny his past actions would itself be an act of self-denial: "y si no hubiéramos hecho lo que hicimos, seríamos otros" (133).

For her part, Sofía returns to the particularity of her body as the inescapable basis of her subjectivity: "Nada como el dolor para recobrar la perspectiva. Vuelvo al cuerpo, a mi cuerpo, y con él, recupero las líneas del espacio" (133). Recognising her embodied subjectivity, Sofía resigns herself to the facts of her individual location, including the mundanity of her past, asserting that her prior attempts to exploit Jokin's imprisonment amounted to an attempted act of self-evasion borne out of her guilt for having led a life of such relative comfort. She echos Jokin in her assertion that, no matter how prosaic her own past may be, it nonetheless cannot be renounced as, being inscribed in her body, it too constitutes the very grounds of her subjectivity: "pero qué remedio, si es lo que es, si somos lo que somos" (156). Sofía's ultimate acceptance of her embodied subjectivity in an intersubjective reality that can never really be fully known is represented through her altered perspective on place. The narrator eventually abandons her self-confinement in the family

apartment only to discover that Laredo has been devastated by an overnight storm. However, once more presented with the radical instability of the coastal setting, the narrator is no longer anxious to anchor herself on firm ground. By contrast, she now displays a more sanguine attitude towards the world of flux in which she is situated, calmly affirming: "me siento cómoda a la intemperie" (161). Sofía's acceptance of the ontological impermanence evoked by her physical surroundings is simultaneously a coming-to-terms with the contingency of the self as she describes herself as "un náufrago" (162). Having overcome her compulsion towards the totalising frames offered by narrative as a means of transcending the particularity of her situation, she now accepts her embodied location as the bedrock of subjectivity.

Towards the end of *La línea del frente*, Sofía's encounter with her destitute neighbour consolidates the novel's entreaty to eschew totalising narratives in favour of the partial perspectives that are intrinsic to embodied subjectivity. Considered within the present socio-political context of the *batalla del relato*, the story told by Sofía's neighbour functions as an ultimate reminder of the novel's ironic caution against the dangerous reductionism caused by society's recourse to totalising narratives. Describing his former life as distinctly unremarkable, the neighbour recounts to Sofía the brutal beating and cruel interrogation he received at the hands of the police who mistook him for an ETA accomplice while he was innocently walking his dog. Moreover, he also relates his discomfort at how, upon his release, he was greeted by an *ongi etorri* as crowds waving *ikurrinas* hailed him as a heroic *gudari*. The misfortune that the neighbour suffers due to others' desire to distort the facts of his individual situation to fit pregiven, partisan narratives becomes an ironic censure of society's latent willingness to apply the simplifying lenses of obsolete narrative frames onto contemporary events.

Conclusion

As a final consideration, I would like to reflect upon my analysis of *La línea del frente* in terms of its potential status as a work that highlights some of the tenets of agonistic memory - a term discussed earlier in Chapter Two of this thesis. Firstly, by charting the philosophical journey through which Sofía is gradually disabused of her conviction that she can reduce Jokin's history to a single, coherent narrative, *La línea del frente* offers a highly reflexive exploration of our relationship to the past where memory is problematised as deeply unstable and unavoidably inflected by fiction and imagination. De la Cruz creates a highly ironic reflection of *la batalla del relato* by presenting us with a narrator in whom the drive towards totalising narratives is taken to such extremes that narrative threatens to displace the real world. Throughout the novel, Sofía's determination to impose a stable narrative on the past proves to be a futile and wholly uncertain endeavour as the narrator gradually arrives at the realisation that whatever story she wishes to tell about the past will inevitably be a construction and that this itself is more a function of present desires than any true reflection of objective reality. To that end, the novel predicates Sofía's fervour to espouse such an idealised narrative about Jokin on the personal crisis into which she is suddenly thrust by the fallout from the financial crash. Similarly, Jokin's willingness to allow Sofía to entertain this narrative is shown to be a product of his inability to come to terms with the consequences of his past actions. Sofía's modernist quest to obtain stable meaning in a world that resists reduction to absolute truths founders on contact with a reality that can only ever be perceived from subjective perspectives, each of which indicates present motivations.

Moreover, *La línea del frente* points to the way in which dialogue subverts totalising narratives by revealing the often intractable differences between alternative perspectives on the past. Through its depiction of Sofía's deliberate isolation from the outside world, the

novel suggests that only by a radical disengagement from other perspectives can narratives that are as reductive as the one she adopts be in any way sustained. By representing Sofía's hermeticism as an act of bad faith, De la Cruz problematises this refusal to engage with alternative viewpoints as an equal refusal to interrogate the certainty of one's own knowledge. Crucially, Sofía's realisation that her narrative is crudely misaligned with reality directly emerges when she eventually does engage in dialogue with Jokin. Yet the fact that their meetings fail to produce any consensus over the past reinforces the novel's implicit rejection of the imposition of a single interpretation on events. Nonetheless, both her exchanges with Jokin and, to a lesser extent, the one she has with her neighbour, enable Sofía to acquire a more contextualised understanding of their respective pasts: the personal stories they tell subvert the reductive narrative she previously possessed, revealing its inadequacy when measured against the nuances and contradictions of individual, lived experience, and illustrating with humorous irony the real complexities that emerge when totalising viewpoints are discarded and individual voices are allowed to be articulated.

Chapter 9: Conclusion

At the beginning of this thesis I set out to demonstrate that contemporary Basque literature problematises and resists, in various ways, the antagonistic approach to memory that has shaped discourse, both at a political level and in the mainstream Spanish media, about the legacy of ETA. Through a detailed overview of the development of the memory disputes that have emerged in the Basque Country since the end of ETA's armed campaign, Chapter Two demonstrated the extent to which historical memory has been treated as a zero-sum game in the public arena, triggering what has become known as *la batalla del relato*. In that chapter I offered a thorough account of the way in which fierce confrontation has continued well into the post-conflict era as a result of often virulent efforts to strenuously impose a totalising narrative that could objectively define the supposed historical truth about ETA's violence and the Spanish state's response to it over the course of many decades. Adopting a critical view of the reductive narrative that has been perpetuated by the Spanish state and mainstream media, I problematised the continued desire of both institutions to frame ETA's terrorism as little more than fanatical criminality and the attendant refusal to interrogate the political circumstances within which violence emerged.

Following on from this, I scrutinised the various reasons behind the unusual notability achieved by Fernando Aramburu's best-selling novel *Patria*, drawing together a range of criticisms levelled at the work in order to illustrate the degree to which the novel reiterates the decontextualized, Manichean narrative on ETA maintained over a number of decades by the Spanish state. In doing so, I demonstrated how literature itself has become co-opted into *la batalla del relato* in order to reinforce the hegemony of the state-aligned narrative, highlighting the myriad ways in which both the author himself and high-profile admirers of

his work have sought to proclaim the referential character of his work whilst delegitimising alternative perspectives on the conflict by cynically vaunting Aramburu's non-partisan credentials and arraigning the writing of his Basque literary peers as profoundly tendentious, implicitly denigrating depictions of the past that deviate from the hegemonic frames of representation. Having outlined this current state of affairs, I proposed that the critical notion of agonistic memory provides a more accurate means of conceptualising the creative approach adopted by a number of contemporary Basque authors in their literary explorations of memory and the past. By way of a final reflection, I would like to summarise my preceding analysis of contemporary Basque literature by drawing on my various discussions of the representation of place and location in order to return to my original proposition. With that in mind, I will now offer my concluding remarks on the extent to which my analysis has revealed that the novels examined in this thesis tend towards an agonistic conceptualisation of memory both in their general representation of the process of remembrance, as well as their specific confrontation with the legacy of the Basque conflict.

Writing Reflexivity and Constructing Memory

While the alleged objectivity of *Patria* rests on the spurious assumption of its author's supposed neutrality, reinforced not only by Aramburu's own public pronouncements but also his virtual invisibility in the novel, my analysis of all five works examined in this thesis has shown how they alternatively locate the writer at the very heart of the narrative. Whereas *Patria* has been cynically attributed a pure referentiality by those keen to assert the absolute truth of its historical vision, the other novels I have analysed are openly predicated on the constructedness of memory, exhibiting a firm awareness that the past can only be made available in the present through representation. Reflecting this fact, to varying degrees each

author thematises the inherent difficulties of attributing meaning to the past through narrative while interrogating the particular, subjective locations from which their individual perspectives on the past originate. *La casa del padre* thematises this reflexivity by tracing Ismael's revisions of his memories of childhood and his belated recognition of the patriarchal power geometry of the home. In doing so, Jaio's novel firmly locates the male protagonist's reevaluation of his past in the present context of a growing visibility of uneven gender relations. Crucially, Jaio posits a close connection between the greater reflexivity that Ismael eventually comes to acquire and his writing practice, pointing towards the value of his rejection of a detached authorial stance in favour of a more intimate and self-aware mode of literary engagement with the past. Meanwhile, the metafictional character adopted in the second part of *Mejor la ausencia* foregrounds Amaia's struggle to narrate her memories of violence - a struggle that is metaphorically depicted as a relocating of her subjectivity in present-day Bilbao and that implies the inexorable limitations of narrative as an unproblematic means of dealing with a traumatic past. Through her explicit description of Amaia's process of narrating her childhood experiences, Portela underlines the unbridgeable gap between representation and reality, affirming the status of the narrator's rendering of her family history as a subjective construction of the past.

Reflexivity in *Los turistas desganados* can be summarised in two ways: on the one hand, Ulia's narrative functions as an ironic mirror that, directed towards her supercilious husband, reveals to him the essentialising gaze that shapes his fixed, reductive vision of the Basque Country while also pointing to its subtle alignment with the sensationalist tenor of prevailing media depictions of ETA. On top of this, the novel also foregrounds the reflexivity of the narrator herself as Ulia prevaricates between reluctance to confront her personal relationship to the conflict and uncertainty over what sense to make of the violence that

haunts her family history, eventually resolving to write her own narrative about her father's involvement with ETA as a way of finding such meaning. However, Ulia emphasises throughout the provisional character of her literary reimagining of her parents' story, acknowledging her recourse to fictionalisation as a means of overcoming an absence of memory. The concern of the narrators in both *El comensal* and *La línea del frente* is how best to represent the past when their individual connection to it is irremediably detached and mediated. However, the two novels take a completely contrasting approach to the exploration of this issue: whereas Gabriela Ybarra's use of a postmemorial structure is underwritten by a solemn recognition that the trauma endured by her father following the murder of his own father amounts to a psychological experience that she herself can never truly comprehend, Aixa de la Cruz offers a more playful response to this dilemma through her wry depiction of Sofía's self-deceiving attempt to repudiate her tenuous connection to the conflict by projecting a totalising, romanticised narrative about the past that proves patently at odds with reality. In Ybarra's case, she renders the artifice of her narrative entirely visible by crafting an account of her grandfather's killing that eschews any realist pretensions and bears a closer resemblance to historiographic metafiction in which, for instance, her actual use of archival material and her playful subversion of generic conventions are made deliberately apparent. For her part, De la Cruz's presentation of a world in which reality can only be made sense of through representation shines a continual spotlight on the act of literary construction, illustrated most notably through Sofía's use of a pre-existing literary archetype to shape her understanding of Jokin's past.

Multiperspectivist and Dialogic Memory

As well as utilising a narrative structure that is itself multiperspectival, *La casa del padre* foregrounds the inherent value of this mode of remembrance insofar as Ismael's proper recognition of the patriarchal power geometry of the home is shown to be contingent on both a deeper consideration of his mother's perspective and the discomforting dialogues that he eventually has with his estranged sister about their past. Depicting the gender power relations - both past and present - that underpin the marginalisation of certain perspectives on the home, Jaio points to way in which these inequalities might be overcome - or at least brought to light - by granting expression to other viewpoints and therefore providing - as is proven to be the case for Ismael - a more fulsome and critical picture of the past. Portela's use of the fragmented, subjective voice of a child narrator in *Mejor la ausencia* also highlights the inexorably partial nature of any individual experience of the past, making it necessary for Amaia to re-envisage the past from the perspective of her parents when it eventually comes to confronting the trauma of her upbringing. While suggesting the value of its imaginative possibilities, Portela nonetheless resists overstating the curative potential of narrative. Instead, she forgoes a sense of closure, concluding her novel with a hint towards the uneasy dialogues that Amaia is yet to have with her siblings, intimating that these might offer more lasting solace from the burden of her past.

In *Los turistas desganados* Agirre creates a central conflict between competing perspectives on the past, emphasising through her exploration of power dynamics expressed in terms of Spanish-Basque and gender relations the factors that underpin the silencing of Ulia's personal story on the past. Amidst this conflict, the text itself becomes the female protagonist's primary means of dialogue, visible first and foremost in her use of a

second-person narrative voice. By finding a place beyond her homeland from which she can write, Ulia is eventually empowered to contest her hubristic husband's exoticising view of the Basque Country, tentatively articulating her own perspective on the Basque conflict that acts as an antidote to the totalising visions acerbically lampooned throughout the novel, while maintaining the provisional character of her reimagination of her parents' story and likewise resisting closure on the past. Ybarra's novel is similarly predicated on the irreducibility of individual perspectives on the past - namely her own and that of her father which she is resigned to never fully comprehending. Accepting this premise, *El comensal* thereafter becomes an attempt on the part of its author to locate her particular perspective on her family's traumatic history, and, in doing so, to realise a suitable form of representation that will allow her to depict her mediated relationship to her father's loss and also to understand his individual response to her mother's untimely death. Finally, *La línea del frente* thematises Sofía's reluctance to contend with the existence of other, unknowable perspectives on reality: departing from the comforting enclosure she has fashioned for herself as a sanctuary from a world of radical instability, the narrator's meetings with Jokin - scripted as a theatrical duologue - serve to destabilise the fixed image of heroic militancy that she projects onto him, presenting a wry reflection on the provisionality of all narratives. Therefore, it is through her actual encounter with alternative perspectives that De la Cruz's narrator arrives at a point where she is forced to accept for herself a position of epistemic uncertainty.

Contextualising Violence

In contrast to the decontextualised portrayal of the Basque conflict presented in *Patria*, I have demonstrated the extent to which the authors examined in this thesis underline the contextual backdrop against which the experiences of their characters take place. While

the depictions of the years of the conflict in *La casa del padre* and *Mejor la ausencia* foreground their narrators' respective experiences of patriarchal violence within the family home, both authors firmly resist the framing of this violence as an individualised phenomenon. Instead, Jaio and Portela carefully trace the shifting historical dynamics that shape the interconnections between the public and private spheres in order to reveal the myriad forms in which personal experiences are entangled within broader societal structures, thereby offering a parallel critique of the gendered nature of contemporary political violence. *Los turistas desganados* offers a more explicit resistance towards a hegemonic decontextualised representation of violence, presenting Ulia's own reconstruction of her parents' story as a direct counterpoint to the demonising rhetoric of mainstream media coverage of ETA. By mapping the chronology of her parents' relationship against the turbulent socio-political climate in the Basque Country, Agirre suggests that only by locating her father's radicalisation within its historical context can Ulia's acquire a more nuanced understanding of his eventual recourse to terrorism and subsequently transcend the inadequacy of the reductive historical narratives that otherwise prevail. Making a similar critique, *La línea del frente* alternatively provides an ironic reflection on the perils of totalising narratives, cleverly suggesting the extent to which they obscure the particular context of individual experiences by exposing the way in which both Sofía's romanticisation of Jokin and the obsolete counter-terrorist approach of the Spanish judiciary fail to account for what is revealed to be the actual banality of his crime.

Resisting Manichaeism

By exploring pasts in which they foreground the extent to which their narrators are perforce implicated, all five novels forgo the kind of straightforward morality that has

become an unequivocal feature of *la batalla del relato*. The explicit acknowledgement of these varying degrees of implication by the narrators of each novel inhibits them from assuming a detached vantage point on the past from which absolute moral judgements can be decreed. In the case of *La casa del padre* and *Mejor la ausencia*, although neither novel falls into the trap of relativism in its portrayal of patriarchal violence, the use of narrators who exist within the same oppressive structures of which they themselves become victims complicates dichotomous categorisations of victimhood and perpetration. Portela's diachronic depiction of the evolution of Amaia's subjective voice encapsulates these nuances as, notwithstanding the physical violence to which she herself is subjected, the female narrator is shown to internalise the aggressive toxicity that permeates the patriarchal culture in which she is raised, eventually resulting in her own recourse to violence. Furthermore, Amaia's own attempts to narrate the past seek to probe beyond the image of her father as a violent abuser. In a more understated way, Jaio positions Ismael as someone who, while having clearly inherited many of the same regressive, misogynistic attitudes exhibited by his father, also manifests the psychological burden that he himself has borne in trying to attain the robust form of masculinity rigorously enforced upon him by society. In *Los turistas desganados* Ulia's reimagined account of her parents' private encounters serves to highlight the inadequacy of the demonised portrayal of her father that dominates the national press. By crafting a humane depiction of him that nonetheless does not disregard the severity of his crimes the narrator ventures tentatively beyond the simplistic moral binaries that have typically framed representations of ETA's violence. In *El comensal* Gabriela Ybarra charts the alteration of her own attitude towards the past that comes about as a result of her investigation into her grandfather's killing, evidenced by the way in which her unreflective image of ETA's pure malevolence becomes displaced by a discomforting recognition of the humanity of those who formerly sought to persecute her family.

To sum up, this thesis has illustrated the fact that, by casting a wider gaze over contemporary Basque literature, there is an abundance of evidence that authors dealing with the legacy of the Basque conflict in their work have refused to reproduce the antagonistic approach to memory that has been so apparent in the rancorous debates that have taken place in Spain since the end of ETA. In fact, the novels featured in this study reflect an evident desire on the part of their authors to overcome the zero-sum struggle towards asserting an overarching narrative on the past. In this regard, they differ considerably from *Patria*, forgoing and, indeed, problematising efforts, such as that of Aramburu, to promote a totalising account of the Basque conflict. Rather, they seek to explore the uneasy process by which individuals come to terms with their personal implication in a troubled and violent past, whilst, at the same time, demonstrating how individual acts of remembrance are invariably located within present contexts, not least the wider societal reckoning with the legacy of the conflict that is now underway in the Basque Country. By doing this, the works examined in this thesis display a clear inclination towards a pluralist, dialogic vision of memory, one that is composed of multiple individual histories, each recognising and reflecting upon their partial nature while refusing to settle for the easy comfort of facile moral judgements or simplistic metanarratives. Crucially, as I suggested at the end of Chapter Two of this thesis, this less hierarchical conceptualisation of historical memory is entirely in keeping with the many grassroots initiatives centred on memory and reconciliation that are being pursued across civic society in the Basque Country. As such, we might justifiably conclude that, for all the attention that Aramburu's partisan account of ETA's violence has received, perhaps it is best that we move past *Patria* and instead focus on the value of these novels as a more accurate reflection of Basque society's commitment to dealing with its past.

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