

Terrorism as Memory: The Historical Novel and Masculine Masochism in Contemporary Basque Literature

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Any analysis of contemporary Spanish culture that takes into account the recent proliferation of literary and nonliterary historical discourses must take Basque literature into consideration. This essay argues that the recent multiplication of historical discourses has to be connected to attempts to imagine anew the national foundations of the democratic communities that make up Spain. To illustrate this assertion this study focuses on the recent historical fiction of two prominent Basque writers, Bernardo Atxaga and Ramon Saizarbitoria. By studying the way in which the historical fiction of these Basque writers articulates a specific national memory and subject position, we can draw some general conclusions about the formation of historical discourses in post-Franco Spain.¹

Benedict Anderson's *Imagined Communities* discusses the importance of historical discourses in national processes of community imagining. When Anderson introduces his theory of the nation as an "imagined political community—and imagined as both inherently limited and sovereign" (15), he underlines the importance of the historical convergence of capitalism, language diversity, and print (46). However, when attempting to explain the "attachment" (129) or "political love" (131) nations elicit from their citizens (without which nations would fail as social constructs) Anderson returns to language's natural fatalism—in the sense that languages are not chosen by the people—and its connection to history: "If nationalness has about it an aura of fatality, it is nonetheless a fatality embedded in *history*.... Seen as both a *historical* fatality and as a community imagined through language, the nation presents itself as simultaneously open and closed" (133). The proliferation of historical discourses, such as in Spain, can be understood as a sign of change in the ways in which a nation imagines its historical openness in the face of language's fatality. In the case of the Spanish state, the political sanction in the Constitution of other historical national communities ("*nacionalidades*") and the globalization of a society isolated by 40 years of Francoism would explain this

need to historicize and re-imagine the openness of the closed Spanish state and its nation(s).

The latest literary texts by key Basque writers Bernardo Atxaga (1951-) and Ramon Saizarbitoria (1944-) exemplify Basque literature's own turn to history. This turn represents a radical departure from previous production, for this time around Basque literature addresses the issue of terrorism, the problem at the core of Basque society, head-on in its historical complexity. In the last few years, both authors have published an historical novel in which Basque terrorism takes center place in the process of imagining the history of the new democratic Basque Country.² I am referring to Atxaga's *Gizona bere bakardadean* (1993; translated as *El hombre solo* and *The Lone Man*) and Saizarbitoria's *Hamaika pauso* (1995; translated as *Los pasos incontables*, henceforth *Many Steps*). Both novels tell the stories of protagonists who were involved in the Basque terrorist group ETA during the Franco era but, after democracy is restored, decide to lead a normal life in civil society. In the end, however, each protagonist is haunted and destroyed by an accidental encounter with present ETA members. In order to capture the radical departure these novels represent it is worth quoting Jesús María Lasagabaster's remarks about Basque literature: "It seems as if Basque writers are afraid to face historical and social reality, be it past or present" ("Introduction" 19).

So far ETA has been approached by both Basque and Spanish literatures as either the leading political movement of Basque nationalism or the exotic political other of the Spanish state. In either case ETA's terrorism has merely served as political justification or background for the development of narratives that were little concerned with the Basque problem in itself. As Darío Villanueva already pointed out in 1987, this treatment was connected with a literary tendency, journalistic and otherwise, to feed on the immediacy of contemporary events: "The novel in general, not only those written by journalists, takes advantage of events deriving from the most immediate, and frequently painful, reality. Terrorism has been, in this order of things, one of the most exploited topics" ("La novela" 45, my translation). In the context of Basque literature, the novels by Atxaga and Saizarbitoria represent the first attempt to break away from this opportunism as well as the literary reluctance, prevalent in previous years, to address the issue of terrorism in its social and historical complexity.³ They constitute the first attempt to write historically about ETA without either endorsing or marginalizing it.

The fact that literature has been the first to speak up about terrorism without attempting to reduce it to a political truth—or to any type of party ideology—is no coincidence. No other discourse has the political autonomy to do so, not even film.⁴ In this respect these novels are not simply a “literary re-presentation of a political problem.” As I will elaborate in this article, these historical narratives about terrorism—the political problem at the core of the Basque Country—point to the mobilization of memory in the process of imagining the Basque community as nation. The “national memory” resulting from these narratives can be individually experienced as literature and hence it can transcend other accounts constructed as history or politics, which ultimately respond to particular political interests. In other words, these novels are a first sign of the formation, not of the political truth about the Basque Country and its history, but of a memory that can be potentially shared by the entire national community, regardless of its political ideology.

Needless to say, memory is also political. However, memory cannot be easily reduced to the dominant nationalist party system prevalent in contemporary Spain and more specifically in the Basque Country. In this respect, “memory” can be accessed or received as national, that is, as a recollection shared by the entire national community. Moreover and as I will argue below, the memories articulated by these two Basque historical novels are not fully successful “national memories.” The contradictions which the novels incur in articulating such a national memory explain the subject position that (as I will elaborate in this article) lies at the core of their discourses: masochist masculinity. That is why these historical fictions are one of the most eloquent testimonies of the political situation of contemporary Basque and Spanish cultures as well as their ability to enable processes of community imagining.

Foundational Fictions and Subjects in the Spanish State

The two historical novels by Sazarbitoria and Atxaga can be inscribed within the general revival that the historical genre has experienced since the publication of several seminal novels over the last two decades. Marguerite Yourcenar’s *Memoirs of Hadriane* (1951, popularized in Spain during the 80s by Julio Cortázar’s translation) and Umberto Eco’s *The Name of the Rose* (1980) are two of the most popular. The two Basque novels are also part of a new widespread interest in

historical discourses experienced throughout the Spanish state. From popularizing historical accounts such as inexpensive encyclopedias sold in installments at newspaper-stands and monographic series published in newspapers to literature and film, a general interest in history is on the rise. More precisely, these two Basque novels can be grouped alongside the new trend of historical novels anticipated by Juan Benet's *Volverás a Región* (1967) and consolidated by Eduardo Mendoza's *La verdad sobre el caso Savolta* (1975). Since 1975 several well-known authors from different generations have published many historical novels thus emphasizing the importance of the genre. Without attempting to be exhaustive, one could cite among others, Camilo José Cela, Manuel Vázquez Montalbán, Arturo Pérez Reverte, Antonio Muñoz Molina, and Julio Llamazares (Bertrand de Muñoz 30).

However, Basque historical novels present a marked difference from their Spanish counterparts when it comes to choosing the historical period to narrate, for they revisit the aftermath of 68 rather than the Civil War—the most important period in the Spanish historical novel. As Villanueva contends, the Civil War “continues to be the fundamental subject of the Spanish novel in Castilian from a fifty-year perspective since its beginning” (“La novela” 46, my translation). Santos Sanz Villanueva remarks that most recent novels revisit the Spanish Civil War in order to redefine it as myth rather than memory or political *compte-rendue* (263). Thus, and regardless of the memorialist or mythical treatment of the Civil War, one must conclude that in general the Civil War constitutes the foundational moment of modern democratic Spain. Here I mean ‘foundational’ in the sense that Doris Sommer establishes for the nineteenth-century Latin-American historical novel, following George Lukács’s own ground-breaking study of the English historical novel of the romantic period. As Sommer concludes, “the inextricability of politics from fiction in the history of nation-building” defines the foundational historical novel of Latin America (*Foundational Fictions* 5-6). In this respect, the two Basque novels of our study can also be considered foundational for they too fictionally revisit the “political and historical origin” after which the modern democratic Basque Country is built. However and as I pointed out above, the two Basque novels choose a different historical period from their Spanish counterparts when attempting to narrate their foundation. Instead of the Civil War, the Basque novels cipher the insurgence of ETA and the armed resistance to Francoism in the late 60s and early 70s as the foundational moment of the Basque Country. Here Maryse Bertrand de Muñoz’s remarks about the Spanish histori-

cal novels written after 1976 are most pertinent. She claims that, even when the historical novels take the specific shape of autobiographies and locate their main narratives in the later decades of the 60s and 70s, they ultimately retrace their narrative foundation to the Civil War. She concludes that “even though since 1976 the aftermath of the war acquires greater importance than the war itself, i.e. the initial story of the [autobiographical] works is situated in the aftermath years, in many of them in the decades of the 60s or the 70s, through recollection and memory they return to the war in an almost automatic and obsessive way” (26, my translation). Hence the historical difference in the choice of founding events between Spanish and Basque novels points to the existence of, at least, two coexisting but different foundational fictions within the Spanish State.

The other distinctive and differential characteristic of the Basque historical novels lies in the subject position they articulate. Following Freud and Deleuze, this position can be best defined as *masculine masochism*. In both Basque novels the protagonists give closure to the narrative by sacrificing themselves to the conflict between the Spanish state and Basque terrorism. They voluntarily take up the role of the terrorist they encounter and assume the deadly consequences of their decision in their own body. This subject structure is not common in the Spanish historical novel. Bertrand de Muñoz refers to Cain’s myth—*cainismo* or Cainism—in order to capture the central and foundational myth of most Spanish historical novels written after 1976. She concludes: “In these books, however, the fight between political rivals is not the primordial conflict; we are, in fact, confronted with the infamous myth of Cain” (33, my translation). Cainism is definitely present in the first important historical novel about the Civil War written after 1976, Cela’s *Mazurka For Two Dead Men* (1983). The novel’s references to both the weather’s immutability and nature’s law in connection with the murders of two people establish Cainism as the mythical foundation of the novel. In this respect Cainism reflects a *mythical* and fatal *continuity* of a double subject structure that transcends history. In the words of one of the characters of *Mazurka For Two Dead Men*, “It’s not me who’s killing you, it’s the law of the mountain, I cannot stand in the way of the law of the mountain” (304).

Contrary to Bertrand de Muñoz’s claim, I would contend that the myth of Cainism and its structure of ahistorical continuity are not central to later narratives. The novels of one of the most important writers of the younger generation, Antonio Muñoz Molina, represent an important change in the narrative structure of the foundational

myth of the Civil War. The first two novels of his trilogy about the town of Mágina are historical: *Beatus ille* (1986) and *El jinete polaco* (1991).⁵ In these two novels, the Cainite myth and the ensuing structure of ahistorical continuity are subordinated to a new myth.⁶ More specifically, this new myth is defined by the historical discontinuity that cuts across the Civil War and the Franco dictatorship on the one hand and the arrival of democracy on the other. Muñoz Molina's two historical novels tell the myth of a *discontinuity* that, although historical, is narrated as both *mythical* and *foundational*: only those narrative characters who do not have a direct life experience of the Civil War survive Francoism, through the arrival of democracy, and thus become the protagonists of the novels. The two novels by Muñoz Molina ensure the foundational and mythical discontinuity between the Civil War and present time.

At the same time, the myth of discontinuity present in Muñoz Molina's novels is invariably coded as the fulfillment of the male protagonist's heterosexual desire, so that his self actually functions as the subjective marker of such a mythical discontinuity. His novels sanction the foundational and mythical status of the Civil War by articulating a heterosexual, masculine, postbellum self—a new mythical self—that differs from the older Cainite, double self present in novels such as Cela's. Both Muñoz Molina's novels end their narratives by having the protagonist fulfill his desire: the encounter with a woman who has not experienced the Civil War either but, nevertheless, is introduced or "procured" to him by a fatherly figure who has experienced the Civil War. The encounter with the woman sanctions the protagonist as the "new self" of the novels. Consequently, the subject position enabled by this "new self" and his specific identity become mythically discontinuous with the Civil War. In *El jinete polaco* for example, the protagonist Manuel ends the novel when he encounters the woman of his desire, Nadia, who is mythically invoked:

Dog, Diod, Brausen, Elohim...master of irony, destruction, and chance... you who made her to the exact measurement of all my desires... you who... sent him [Nadia's father Galaz, a Republican commander in the Civil War and father figure] to exile with the only purpose of making possible her birth twenty years later... [I beg you to] dictate to us [Nadia and Manuel] a future that for the first time in our lives we do not want to desert. (576-77, my translation)

In the final sentence of the novel *Nadia* ends the story by mirroring the protagonist's wishes. She becomes his perfect object of desire, one that transcends time and space and consequently turns mythical: "I do not remember anything, I did not realize that it already began to get dark, I do not know whether I am with you in Mágina, New York, or Madrid, says Nadia, but I do not care, I only feel gratitude and desire" (577, my translation). A detailed analysis of the changes undergone by the mythical foundation of the Spanish historical novel lies beyond the limits of this study. However, the juxtaposition of Cela's and Muñoz Molina's work tentatively points to the refashioning of a postbellum self, one that stresses a mythical discontinuity with the Civil War and converts the latter into its past, its foundational history, by articulating a new, masculine, heterosexual desire.⁷

The subject position of male masochism, central to the two Basque historical novels, is different from the two myths (that of the Cainite continuous self and the postbellum discontinuous self) that characterize Spanish historical fiction. This difference is crucial to understanding the national differences existing between the two groups of historical novels. At the same time, a comparison with the Spanish foundational myths is essential to the better comprehension of the Basque case. Like the Spanish myth of the postbellum self, the Basque novels also mark a historical discontinuity between present and foundational moments. Unlike either Spanish myths, however, the Basque novels narrate the protagonist's unwillingness or inability to survive such a discontinuity. The Basque novels recount the myth of a discontinuity that cannot be survived or experienced; it is the myth of a discontinuous subject position that cannot be occupied.

Furthermore, this difference between Spanish and Basque historical novels must also be evaluated in the light of other Spanish subject positions. The tendency of women and/or homosexual writers such as Carme Riera, Terenci Moix, Lourdes Ortiz, Paloma Díaz Más, or Julia Ibarra to locate their narratives in periods other than the Civil War, from the Roman Empire and the Middle Ages to early modernity, might be crucial to pinning down the foundational specificity of the Civil War (Bobes Naves 47-53). Although the concrete relation between historical periods and subject positions exceeds the scope of this article, it is worth mentioning it. This relationship points to the traces of a larger picture of which the Basque historical novel is only a fragment. Perhaps the specific subject position articulated by the Spanish historical novel about the Civil War—the historically discontinuous, heterosexual, masculine self—might be determined not only by

nationality, as the Basque case suggests, but also by gender, sexuality, and race.

In sum, the differences between Basque and Spanish processes of foundational imagination underscore the highly nationalistic nature of any process of community imagining. In other words, the analysis of Basque historical literature helps to highlight the multiplicity of communities and imaginations coexisting in contemporary Spanish culture(s). From the standpoint of Basque literature, the Spanish novel's revisiting of the Civil War becomes connected with a specific literary tradition and subject position, which is not universal or coextensive to the Spanish state and its putative history. Nevertheless such a historical narrative legitimizes itself as hegemonic, as occupying the subject position of an impossible "Spanish community" and consequently an analysis of the Basque case ultimately intends to call into question the specific discursive and cultural maneuvers by which this specific tradition takes hold of state hegemony.

Recent Basque Literary History: From Canonical Allegory to Foundational History

Both Atxaga and Saizarbitoria had already become the two key canonical writers of contemporary Basque literature prior to the publication of their respective historical novels. From the media (newspapers, television, radio, etc.) to critical accounts of contemporary Basque literature (Juaristi 131-34; Kortazar 123-28, 133-36) and school curricula, both authors are the most mentioned, quoted, read, and translated. Historically, they collaborated together in the same literary group (Ustela) back in the 70s, quarreled bitterly afterwards, and went on in separate ways to develop the two major literary and narrative projects of contemporary Basque literature.⁸ Atxaga also went on to found another literary group, Pott, which had the same impact in the 80s Ustela had had in the 70s (Juaristi 130-33; Landa 67-77). Saizarbitoria became the key canonical author of the late Franco era. His three novels, including *100 metro* (1975, *100 metros* and *100 Meters*) placed him in the forefront of Basque literature. After the publication of his third novel *Ene Jesus* in 1976, Saizarbitoria stopped writing and did not publish again until the appearance of *Many Steps* in 1995. In Atxaga's case, the unsurpassed popularity and recognition of his *Obabakoak* (1988) turned him into the new key canonical writer of the late 80s. If *100 Meters* slowly became a best-seller with thirteen editions

throughout the late 70s and early 80s, *Obabakoak* developed into an overnight best-seller in 1988. *Obabakoak's* sales (thirty thousand copies in Basque plus another eighty thousand in Spanish)⁹ remain unmatched by any other Basque novel. Considering that only four hundred thousand people, in the most optimistic of estimates, can read Basque, an estimate of one in thirteen Basque readers bought, if not read, *Obabakoak*. Although *100 Meters* remained a domestic best-seller, *Obabakoak* went on to receive the Spanish national award for narrative in 1989, thus making Atxaga the first Basque author, writing in Basque, ever to receive such official Spanish recognition. Since then, his book has been translated into thirteen languages.

100 Meters and *Obabakoak*, derive from very different traditions: the *nouveau roman* in the case of Saizarbitoria, Borges and magic realism in the case of Atxaga. Nevertheless both are spatial allegories of the Basque Country. The narrative axis of both books is spatial rather than temporal and, as I have argued elsewhere (“Obabazkoak”), the repetition and difference of the spatial structure common to all the short stories and fragments organizing both novels yields a multi-layered spatial or topological allegory of the Basque Country. At this point Anderson’s account of the nation as “imagined political community” (15) helps to understand the importance of these two novels. The publication of *100 Meters* and especially *Obabakoak* represented the culminating moment in the history of a community of Basque readers and consumers imagining themselves as Basque. This moment was enabled by the political and literary conditions of the post-Franco era. Both novels represented the maturation of Basque literature as the first discourse to permit the Basque Country to imagine itself as a community. At that point the rest of the Basque media had just began to consolidate under the auspices of the Basque government. In this process of consolidation, literature, as the intersection of language and national identity, was one of the first and most important sites of community imagination in the cultural sphere. Basque literature, and its most accomplished allegorical works (Saizarbitoria’s *100 Meters* and later on Atxaga’s *Obabakoak*) acquired the political and cultural capital to allegorically signify the Basque Country as a nation.

However, by the early 90s, a Basque public sphere had been finally consolidated by a new Basque national media system: television, radio, the daily press and other publications (Lasagabaster “Promotion”). As a result, allegorical representations such as the ones effected by Saizarbitoria’s and Atxaga’s literature no longer were indis-

pensable to the process of community imagining: the different media of the Basque Country had taken over this activity in a diversified way. By the mid-90s literature had been incorporated into the new national media-system as a non-central subset. In this context, the historical novels written in the 90s point to a negative but nevertheless historical development: Basque literature no longer is engaged in creating new allegorical and spatial versions of the Basque community as nation. Basque literature has abandoned its spatial, allegorical thrust of the 70s and 80s and has moved into the 90s to explore the historical foundations of its community. In this shift from spatial to temporal representations of the Basque Country, Basque literature nevertheless is attempting to become once again the discourse with which to imagine the Basque Country as a nation. However, this time literature is aiming at capturing not only the Basque Country's spatial unity but also its historical continuity. Hence the need to narrate the historical foundations of such community: only a founding narrative would allow Basque literature to retell the story of a community imagining itself anew from its foundations. This "retelling" is a process of consolidation in which we move from space to history in order to imagine a more "four-dimensional" community. Paraphrasing Anderson (133), I would argue that, not only language, but also space is linked to the natural fatality of a community and the ensuing sense of closeness. Thus Anderson's remarks about the historical openness necessary to balance the closeness generated by language's (and space's) fatality in the creation of "political love" (129) or "attachment" (131) are crucial here. If history represents a community's sense of openness in time, Basque literature's turn to history represents first and foremost a further consolidation in its ability to generate such political love and attachment. This time, instead of allegorizing the spatial closeness of the Basque community, Basque literature is representing the historical openness of such a community through the historical novel.

The foundation of the Basque nation as narrated in these texts is linked to an act of violence: the insurgence of ETA during the 60s and 70s. The arrival of democracy has not historically superceded this violent foundation, unlike what happened after the Spanish Civil War.¹⁰ Terrorism continues to be front-page news in the 90s. Terrorism still remains the founding moment of the modern democratic Basque Country and its most important present political problem. The continuity of this historical problem explains why the Civil War is relegated to a secondary place in Basque literature. In a sense there is

another “war” going on, one that needs to be solved first. At the same time, violence’s continuity explains the narrative structure and strategy deployed by the Basque historical novels in telling their impossible story: they narrate the foundational act of violence that a community needs to transcend but is unable to, in order to imagine itself as a national community.

Basque violence’s historical continuity also explains why Basque literature is again the first discourse to approach terrorism in its historical complexity. As I pointed out above, literature can create an individual memory of history, a memory that lies outside the direct reach of violence and politics. This is so because literature presents an institutional and historical link with the private sphere in democratic civil societies, which other media such as television or film lack. Literature, and more specifically realist literature, is linked to the very formation of the private sphere and the bourgeois individual in capitalist Europe as far back as the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries. Habermas’s explanation of the formation of the bourgeois individual, “the human being *per se*,” depends on the formation of the differentiation between public and private spheres:

To the degree to which commodity exchange burst out of the confines of the household economy, the sphere of the conjugal family became differentiated from the sphere of social reproduction. The process of the polarization of state and society was repeated once more within society itself. The status of private man combined the role of owner of commodities with that of head of the family, that of property owner with that of “human being” *per se*. The doubling of the private sphere on the higher plane of the intimate sphere . . . furnished the foundation for an identification of those two roles under the common title of the “private”; ultimately, the political self-understanding of the bourgeois public originated there as well. (28-9)

Habermas also explains the role early realist literature such as Richardson’s played in the formation of the private sphere as the cultural technology that helped to internalize the distinction between public and private:

Around 1750 its [bourgeoisie’s] influence began to predominate. The moral weeklies which flooded all of Europe already catered to a taste that made the mediocre *Pamela* the best seller of the century.

They already sprang from the needs of a bourgeois reading public that later on would find genuine satisfaction in the literary forms of the domestic drama and the psychological novel. For the experiences about which a public passionately concerned with itself sought agreement and enlightenment through the rational-critical public debate of private persons with one another flowed from the wellspring of a specific subjectivity. The latter had its home, literally, in the sphere of the patriarchal conjugal family. (43)

I believe it is worthwhile quoting Habermas extensively because the Spanish case in general, and the Basque in particular, pose an interesting problem with far-reaching consequences. The arrival of democracy in 1975 represents, after forty years of dictatorship, the first time in the twentieth century in which the institutions of civil society allow for the implementation of the distinction between public and private spheres in its full democratic and capitalist sense. Furthermore, this process is far from being fully consolidated and its results, at least according to Víctor M. Pérez-Díaz's *The Return of Civil Society*, still remain "mixed" (41). In the case of the Basque Country, this is the first time in which a Basque public sphere is organized as such—probably with the exception of a brief period during the Second Republic. Consequently, it is not a coincidence that the historical novel is the first genre avoiding the fears and limitations Basque literature has demonstrated in the past when representing Basque reality (Lasagabaster "Introduction" 18). The realist approach to Basque society taken by the historical novels allows this genre to bridge public and private spheres in order to tell the foundational story of the Basque community in ways that both previous spatial-allegorical literature and other contemporary media cannot.¹¹

Basque Historical Novels

When I maintain that the Basque historical novels adopt realism, rather than allegory, in order to represent the foundational moment of contemporary Basque society, the use of the term "realism" requires some clarification. It is meant to describe the most traditional narrative forms of historical storytelling based on either first- or third-person narratives that comply with historical factuality regardless of the levels of narration and focalization (Bal 100-14, 134-149). In other words, these narratives do not have recourse to any form of alternative realism (magic, surrealist, etc.) and ultimately their roots can

be traced back to nineteenth-century realism. Historical realism, defined in this broad sense, enables the production of a private and individual voice and subject position: the protagonist's. From within the individual space of the protagonist's life, Basque historical novels create a privileged space for their readers to imagine the Basque community as a nation with its own historical foundation. The space of the individual's private sphere, present in democratic civil societies and absent or policed in dictatorships and other totalitarian regimes, is essential because it escapes the direct over-determination of any political problem or public reality. The protagonist's private sphere is the only place from which the story of the Basque nation's foundation can be told in the form of memory.

Both historical novels begin with a story in which the protagonist is introduced in third-person narrative. At the same time and from the beginning of the respective introductions, one can detect traces of past literary traditions to which the authors originally belonged: *nouveau roman* and high modernism in the case of Saizarbitoria and magic realism in Atxaga's. In Saizarbitoria's novel, the modernist obsession with self-referentiality, the author's own consciousness about story telling, permits the narrator to introduce the end of the story in the first paragraph of the first chapter. Nevertheless, this modernist style does not preclude the novel from presenting the protagonist in a traditional realist way, that is, by using a third-person (free) indirect style. The novel begins: "Already, he knows that he will die somewhere in his field of vision in few hours: the story could begin then, or perhaps before, because he knew beforehand that he would choose a window—the one in Julia's living-room—on the house facing the bay as his gaze's visual support" (7, henceforth always my translation). In the case of Atxaga, the introduction of the protagonist, awakening from a dream, gives the author some leeway to recuperate a magic element in his realist narrative. The novel begins: "The man known to everyone as Carlos realized that the icy sea he was contemplating was merely an image in a slowly fading dream, and he realized too ... that he ought to get up from the sofa where he was lying" (3). In short, the authors continue to mix previous styles with realism, as if their literary pasts would not allow them to elaborate full-fledged realist historical novels, but rather narratives that properly speaking could be best categorized as "hybrid realism."

By the end of the first part, both novels introduce a lonesome, single, male character. In the case of Saizarbitoria's *Many Steps*, Iñaki

Abaitua, the protagonist, is a linguist working on a normative dictionary of Basque language. His profession is also another hint at the novel's literary and linguistic self-referentiality: the protagonist is creating the normative language that will help the author to write the novel *Many Steps*. In Atxaga's case, Carlos the protagonist runs a hotel with two other ex-terrorists and their spouses in the outskirts of Barcelona. Whereas Iñaki Abaitua had helped terrorists in a getaway back in the 70s, Carlos had actually been a member of ETA.

The main characteristic defining both the protagonists' selves and the novels' literary styles is the memory the authors elaborate around the protagonist's past involvement with ETA. In the case of *Many Steps's* Abaitua, he is also writing a novel about a member of ETA, Daniel Zabalegi, who was killed by the Spanish police. As yet another way to increase literary self-referentiality, Iñaki Abaitua's novel is also entitled "Many Steps." This narrative mechanism of novel-within-a-novel or novelistic *mise-en-abîme* ultimately points to a modernist fashioning of memory. Abaitua attempts to encapsulate the memory of his own involvement in ETA as a literary memory: a novel about a dead terrorist. Very much in line with the *nouveau roman's* modernist credo of "the novel as the adventure of writing," *Many Steps* narrates the adventure of writing about a protagonist who is writing a novel about a dead terrorist. Consequently the novel presents other two beginnings throughout the narrative. The first one is an alternative, foundational beginning based on memory: "The story could begin at the point he met Eduardo Ortiz de Zarate [the terrorist he encounters in the present], alias Zadorra, or usually Zigor. In Barcelona, in the fall of 1973, when Iñaki Abaitua made a trip in connection with the dictionary job " (25, my emphasis). The second beginning belongs to the *mise-en-abîme* novel Abaitua himself is writing.

In the case of Atxaga's *The Lone Man*, the protagonist's memory of his involvement in ETA resurfaces in the form of what could be called "an allegorical memory." In other words, Carlos's memory is not represented in the novel through the narration, in first or third person, of past events. Literally, Carlos's memory is told by several inner voices that dialogue with Carlos's own consciousness. His memory is not a single voice but the collection of all the people's voices that have been important in his life. The recurring voices are three: the "Rat," a condensed and unspecified voice that utters Carlos's evil thoughts, his brother Kropotky, and Sabino the terrorist instructor from his formative years in ETA and ironically enough the fatherly voice of Carlos's consciousness. The novel is full of inner dialogue. For example, after

Carlos realizes that one of the women at the hotel is suspicious about the food he is bringing to the terrorists in hiding, the narrative introduces Carlos's thoughts in the form of an inner dialogue:

he went down the three steps leading on to the front yard and headed off towards the storehouse [the terrorists's hiding place] where he kept his two hunting dogs. 'Not so fast, Carlos,' he heard a voice say. It was Sabino. 'People will get suspicious if they see you racing off like that with those trays. Forget what just happened and act naturally.' 'That stupid woman could make things difficult for me' thought Carlos, slackening his pace, but Sabino said nothing more. (17-8)

In this way, Carlos' memory is the allegory of all the people with whom he has interacted in the past. Carlos's voice, in its polyphonic form, still represents not a person but an entire community of people. This community simultaneously founds Carlos's own memory, ETA, and thus the Basque Country's history. The fact that these people's voices appear as an inner polyphony points to a form of magic realism that, nevertheless, no longer is spatially allegorized as the Basque Country. This form of "magic realism" is rather contained within the protagonist's memory and thus stands for an allegory of his memory.

At the same time, the memory of both protagonists is also constructed in geopolitical terms in the novels. In both cases the stories take place in the Basque Country and Barcelona. In both novels Barcelona stands for a space that is twice negative: it is marked by neither the Basque Country's national history nor that of Spain. Therefore, the fact that Barcelona is perceived as marked by nationalism but simultaneously uninvolved in the conflict between ETA and the Spanish state renders this city a nationally-marked, Spanish, urban space that, at the same time, is nationally neutral. The protagonists travel to or live in Barcelona. In turn, the Basque Country becomes the opposite end of this geopolitical spectrum: the place the protagonists return to or come from. Ultimately, in both cases, Barcelona functions as a utopian space in which both protagonists can live outside of the terrorist conflict. This city allows them to leave their national past behind and, by doing so, also permits them to encapsulate their national past as memory. Memory becomes not only temporal but also spatial. Once again, the balance between openness and closeness prompted by language and history, of which Anderson speaks when defining nations, becomes duplicated and contained within the characters's individual memories.

Finally, it is important to emphasize that as long as the national conflict is contained within the protagonists's memories, it becomes individual and private. In this way, the containment enables the emergence of a new public sphere and civil society that, in the new context of Barcelona as a national but neutral space, becomes both national *and* democratic. This national space is free of the foundational violence of the Basque Country.¹²

Both novels narrate the way in which violence destroys the original and delicate balance attained by each protagonist between memory and present life. The protagonist's encounter with terrorism disrupts his civil life. In both novels, ETA asks the protagonist to hide a terrorist, introducing violence into his life. ETA's request represents violence's introduction into the protagonist's private sphere; literally the terrorist moves into the protagonist's bedroom or sexual hideaway. As a result of the protagonist's compliance with ETA's request, terrorism stops being a memory and becomes a present reality in his life. Ultimately, the terrorist intrusion becomes the disruption of the protagonist's memory: memory becoming life-threatening.

In the case of Saizarbitoria's *Many Steps*, Abaitua is approached by a terrorist he met back in the 70s. The terrorist, Eduardo Ortiz de Zarate, asks Abaitua for another favor: to hide him for few days in his home. Eventually Ortiz de Zarate starts to sleep in Abaitua's bed while the latter moves to the living room. The terrorist also disrupts Abaitua's attempts to write his novel. At that point terrorism can no longer be contained through literature as a past memory; it has become a present reality in Abaitua's apartment.

At the beginning of *The Lone Man*, Carlos, the protagonist of the novel, is awakened from his dream by a Spanish television program about the Basque Country. The first appearance of the Basque Country is already public and yet signified as absent, thanks to its televisual presence. This first representation, in turn, allows the narrative to introduce the terrorist hidden in the house. To be more precise, there are two terrorists in the story, although the narrative only focuses on one of them: Jone, a woman. The protagonist's interaction with Jone ignites his own memories about the 70s and his past involvement in ETA. In other words, the visual introduction of an absent public Basque Country is followed by the narrative representation of a terrorist, which in turn allows the protagonist to travel through his recollections back to the Franco era when he himself participated in ETA. In this way, the present and political terrorist intrusion becomes at the same time an individual memory, which, as a result of

the protagonist's new involvement with ETA, also becomes a present reality. Here too the terrorists hide in the secret room Carlos uses for his sexual encounters:

Carlos concentrated on the screen. The shot widened out and the rock became a beech wood, then the green summit of a mountain. On the horizon, beyond many other mountains—which were no longer green but blue—appeared the luminous line of the sea. . . . [Basque landscape] Carlos dialled an internal number in the hotel, number seventeen. Then he hung up and dialled a second time. 'Are you watching television?' he asked, when they picked up the phone. 'If you switch to Channel 1, you'll catch a glimpse of the Basque country, the area around the Zarauz coast. You've been away for a whole fortnight now. You must be feeling homesick. . . .' However, the names marked on the map that had reappeared on the screen—Biarritz, Zarauz, Guernica, Bilbao—awoke the Rat [inner voice] inside him, and his memory, far from helping him, began showing him distressing, unpleasant images from his own past. Carlos saw the main square in Zarauz with its bandstand in the centre and, further on, a winding street where there was a cinema. Once in the cinema, the memories. . . travelled on, first to the projection room and then to a windowless room beneath it—a people's prison. From a hard, narrow bed, the businessman he had kidnapped was looking at him as if to say: What's going to happen to me? (7,9).¹³

As a result of what I have called the terrorist intrusion, the protagonist's private and present self, a civilian self, is pushed through the recollection of his memories back to the Franco era when he was a terrorist activist. As a result, the protagonist's present civilian self is forced to become also his past political self, which until the encounter with the terrorist was simply a memory. This conflict between selves, civilian and political, present and past, becomes the central narrative structure of the two historical novels.

Here again it is necessary to recall Lukács's and Sommer's remarks about the importance that subject structures (defined by sexuality, race, gender, and ethnicity) play in articulating fictions of national foundations. In the two Basque historical novels, the unsolvable problem between two incompatible political realities is reduced to a personal and private conflict between the protagonist's two selves, eventually solved symbolically by recurring to gender and sexuality. Both

novels attempt to solve the present persistence of terrorism by negotiating it within the protagonist's private sphere and memory. Furthermore, the negotiation will literally take place in the protagonist's most private space: his bedroom. Both terrorists and lovers will occupy the same place—the bedroom—because the protagonist's privacy becomes the site of negotiation. In other words, the political problem of terrorism moves to the sphere where sexuality is negotiated, so that desire rather than history becomes the new basis for a subject structure capable of solving the political problem. Curiously enough, both novels will resort to a very specific form of desire: fetishism, or to be more precise, the political fetishization of women.

Freud pointed out in his article on the topic that the perversion of fetishism is basically a solution to an unresolvable conflict between two different sexual realities which are prompted by the infant's perception of "women's castration." Talking about the case scenario in which the male infant views female genitalia as "lacking the penis," Freud characterizes the infant's shock and disbelief by asserting that "He has retained that belief, but he has also given it up.... in his mind the woman *has* got a penis, in spite of everything; but this penis is no longer the same as it was before. Something else has taken its place... We can now see what the fetish achieves..." ("Fetishism" 154). Freud defines the fetish as this "something" that signifies both the female penis' presence and absence. Although he did not theorize separately the psychic structure at work in fetishism, he termed it 'disavowal' (*Verleugnung*, "Fetishism" 153). In a later essay entitled "The Splitting of the Ego in the Process of Defence," he broadened the structure of disavowal found in fetishism to the general conflict between ego and reality. Freud hypothesizes that "a child's ego is under the sway of a powerful instinctual demand which it is accustomed to satisfy and that it is suddenly frightened by an experience which teaches it that the continuance of this satisfaction will result in an almost intolerable real danger" (275). Freud elaborates the scenario of 'disavowal' in the following way: "Thus there is a conflict between the demand by the instinct and the prohibition by reality. But in fact the child takes neither course, or rather he takes both simultaneously, which comes to the same thing" (275). In more psychoanalytical terms, he explains the double action of disavowal, consisting in simultaneous rejection and acknowledgment, by emphasizing that the child "replies to the conflict with two contrary reactions, both of which are valid and effective. On the one hand, with the help of certain mechanisms he *rejects*

reality and refuses to accept any prohibition; on the other hand, in the same breath he *recognizes* the danger of reality, takes over the fear of that danger as a pathological symptom and tries subsequently to divest himself of the fear" (275, my emphasis). Freud concludes his article by emphasizing disavowal's instability and dangers: "But everything has to be paid for in one way or another, and this success [disavowal's] is achieved at the price of a rift in the ego which never heals but which increases as time goes on" (275-76).

In the two Basque historical novels, we encounter a similar scenario to the one Freud describes in the two articles cited above. In both historical novels, the protagonist's self or ego is split into two selves: his present, civil self and his past, political self that has become present and threatening. As a result of the terrorist intrusion in the protagonist's present life, his past, terrorist self stops being a memory and becomes a threat to his civilian, present self. His actualized political self is the result of the threat posed by the political present reality. Similarly to Freud's scenario, here also there is a conflict between the protagonist's ego and reality, between his civilian self and his past terrorist self actualized by terrorism's reappearance. He is split between his civilian self and his actualized terrorist memory.

Similarly to the Freudian description of fetishism, the two novels resort to women in order to create a fetish that allows the protagonist to disavow his political self, and hence reality's political threat. In both historical novels, women themselves—their selves—become fetishes of reality's political threat to the protagonist's civilian self. Here too women are the fetishes that symbolize both the acknowledgment of reality's threat and its rejection.

In order to fetishize women as symptoms of political reality, women are simultaneously rejected and acknowledged as either a sexual or a political threat. As far as rejection is concerned, women are constructed as subjects without access to the "threat" of either terrorism or sexuality. They cannot be both sexual and political subjects. Consequently, they become fetishes that cannot threaten the protagonist either politically and sexually. They are "castrated," either politically or sexually. Thus women become either apolitical sexual objects (submissive or prostitute-like) or the opposite—non-desirable political subjects (national mothers and "manly" women) who are "not capable of sex." Their sexuality marks them as lacking a political self and vice versa. The two novels also acknowledge the political threat women represent as symptom or trace. In both novels, each protagonist is

sexually involved with two women who are clearly marked and differentiated by their origin as either Basque or “non-Basque.” This double involvement ensures that later on the disavowal of reality’s political threat takes place across the national divide between ETA and the Spanish state. Women’s political subjectivity is acknowledged, although only symptomatically. The specific and symmetrical construction of the two “non-Basque” women as apolitical, sexual objects and their two Basque counterparts as non-sexual, political subjects proves that the nationalities of all four women are not coincidental but symptomatic. They can always be sexually disavowed: “Non-Basque women are a sexual threat but are politically castrated, whereas Basque women are a political threat but are sexually castrated.” As a result, women’s bodies become the site at which the political problem of terrorism is sexually renegotiated. Women relocate this political problem within the confines of the protagonists’s private spheres and fetishist reach. Politics becomes sexuality.

The two non-Basque women are constructed as sexual objects toward which the protagonists have no feelings. In *Many Steps*, Abaitua declares that: “His relationship with Susana was the only one with women he did not try to idealize. It is difficult to grasp why he wanted that attachment to be void of any type of feeling, but he tried with a discipline that was out of the ordinary” (52). Hence Abaitua treats Susana, the non-Basque woman, as a sexual object and threat, a sexual fetish. In *The Lone Man*, Carlos reflects on María Teresa, the non-national woman, and concludes that “María Teresa liked to lie still—still and naked—while he studied her by the light of a torch, and her body reacted to the slightest stimulus. Being with her was easy” (24). In other words, María Teresa is purely sexual and submissive. Thus both non-Basque women have only a civilian, private self, which is only capable of love because it is a “politically castrated self.” However, their symptomatic political identity as non-Basque does not disappear: their non-Basque origin makes them sexual fetishes.

To the first expression of love on the woman’s part, the protagonist reacts by fleeing the scene in what can only be considered “panic.” At that point, the non-Basque woman stops being a sexual fetish. She can no longer be sexually disavowed because she herself acknowledges her “political castration:” “she does not care about politics, her desire is purely sexual.” Her national difference stops being a symptom and so she can no longer be sexually disavowed. She no longer is a non-national sexual fetish; she becomes a desiring subject that voids national difference. It is worth quoting the details of the case of Susana

in *Many Steps*. The moment the situation threatens to stop being a sexual affair and appears to develop into a love relationship, Abaitua rejects her by fleeing the scene:

That was the first time she talked about love, and she would never do it again. 'I love you deeply' she told him in a thin voice, 'I love you with all my heart' [in Spanish in the original, so that her non-Basqueness is emphasized]. The sentence seemed miraculous to Iñaki Abaitua. It seemed to him that the sentence, in its notorious anachronism, just like the newest and most exotic words, captured its clear meaning, its incorrupt strength. 'I love you with all my heart.' He said nothing. He decided to get up by pressing his hands against the top of his knees. Then, after he took a couple of steps, without turning back, he mentioned he had to go. (51)

In *The Lone Man*, Carlos has casual encounters with María Teresa, the “non-national” woman: she is an employee in his hotel in Barcelona and is an “immigrant” from southern Spain. Several coincidences provoked by the terrorist intrusion lead María Teresa to believe that Carlos is about to correspond to her advances with a marriage proposal. This misunderstanding further enhances Carlos’s resolution to abandon María Teresa.

The two Basque women are constructed as non-sexual, political subjects. They are Basque political subjects who are “sexually castrated.” As soon as both women acknowledge their position as more than purely sexual objects, they stop being a sexual fetish. In this case, both women cannot be sexually disavowed because they exceed femininity: they become either mother figures or “manly” women. They can no longer be sexually disavowed because they themselves acknowledge their “sexual castration:” “they are not interested in sexuality, they are purely political subjects.” At that point these women no longer are “women.” In *Many Steps*, unsatisfactory sexual relationships, marked by the protagonist’s violent ambivalence and the woman’s own demands for affection, cause the protagonist to reject the woman. In this case, the non-sexual character of the woman, Julia, is emphasized by her construction as a maternal figure—the epitome of national female subjectivity in Basque culture.¹⁴ As mother, she is beyond sexuality and desire; “she is not a woman:”

He was sorry he showed such determination to leave. He had to leave but he did not want to. He turned towards the street and

then back towards Julia, as he thought he had to hold her in his arms. But he did not. A reason he could not understand held him back, and this time too, it was not lack of courage. Perhaps it was her eyes. Her eyes seemed to him those of a docile animal with soft fur that is awaiting a petting hand to close its eyes, those of somebody who would hold her child, long after [the child's] death. Her entire body oozed motherhood: her full-fledged breasts, her dark womb... her subjugated surrender. The first night—she said 'my dearest' and her eyes looked watery, full of light—she accepted his perhaps violent advances, but later on she would complain 'they hurt,' grabbing one of her breasts between her middle and pointing fingers, as to feed a baby. It was then that he felt for the first time a feeling of inhibition, both uncomfortable and at the same time paradoxical, for he was usually confused instead by desire. This feeling made him want to hurt her, and that was his intention. (22)

In *The Lone Man*, the terrorist Jone has sexual relations with the protagonist in order to win him over to the terrorist cause. The protagonist cannot reduce her to the status of sexual object and consequently her political threat cannot be sexually disavowed. In the end, the protagonist decides that Jone's desire can only be motivated by tactical and political reasons and thus is not sexual. When Jone makes a casual question about ETA Carlos becomes confused about the sexual encounter they just had:

'What do you think of the line the organization is taking at the moment?' she asked. He had only to hear that question to understand what was happening.... He saw with utter clarity the story he could read in those other eyes, in Jon's eyes. The story went: 'It wouldn't take very much to get this man to rejoin the organization, that's why he's agreed to hide Jon and me.... It would be a real coup and it would solve a lot of our accommodation problems....' He had quite enough to go on. The story explained everything, her questions and her over-confidence. It could even explain—and again the idea surprised him—that sexual encounter.... *He couldn't be sure though.* (32, my emphasis)

The reason, as Carlos earlier explains, is that Jone "is not a woman:" "Since she had probably spent some time in prison, those muscles must be the result of frequent visits to the prison gym. Anyway, she

wasn't the kind of woman he needed for his amatory games" (25). Neither Julia nor Jone are, in the end, "women." They exceed their femininity and status as sexual objects by becoming either mothers or political activists and as such they cannot be fetishized as "castrated women." The moment the women exceed their femininity, they stop being a sexual fetish of a political threat and become non-sexual, political selves. They no longer are fetishes and so they can no longer be sexually disavowed as such.

If before the eruption of terrorism the civilian and private self of the protagonist could utopically exist in Barcelona by turning his past self into memory, after the appearance of terrorism this possibility no longer exists. However, the fetishist disavowal of women permits once again the rearticulation of such a utopian space by rejecting terrorism's real political threat while acknowledging it. Women constitute the new private space in which the protagonist's civilian and private selves utopically exist again. In both novels, by rejecting the two women associated with national identity, the protagonist fetishistically disavows terrorism. He simultaneously acknowledges and rejects terrorism in his private sphere. In this way, he disavows the threat posed by terrorism's political reality to his civilian and private self. By this disavowal, the protagonist's two selves, the political and the civilian, the past and the present *coincide*. This allows for both the rejection and acknowledgment of their difference.

After the disavowal of women fails, the presence of terrorism and the protagonist's own involvement in the latter does not go away. The conflict between his two selves escalates to a critical point, as described by Freud in his article about the splitting of the ego (275-76). The ends of both novels narrate the dissolution between the protagonist's self and reality, so characteristic of narcissism (Freud, "Narcissism" 73-4). The protagonist's two selves collapse. The two novels are full of references to the protagonist's loneliness and inability to function in normal life. At the very end, the protagonist gives in to his narcissistic tendency to be both selves, even if this desire turns out to be deadly. He collapses the difference between his two selves by becoming both the terrorist and the object of terrorism. He performs the political conflict between terrorism and Spanish State in his own individual, private sphere, i.e., in his own body.

When Deleuze refers to masochism by rephrasing Freud's famous sentence of "a child is being beaten" as "a father is being beaten," (66) indeed he makes the case that the (male, heterosexual) masochist

occupies and performs the fatherly position. In a double positionality as father and child, the masochist attempts to punish the father, abolish the latter's law (threat of castration), and ultimately disavow sexual difference. At that point there no longer is difference between father and mother; there is no longer difference between desire and reality. The masochist's ego and reality become one. The masochist attempts to bring back the imaginary moment in which the sexually undifferentiated mother is both the father's law and the object of desire. In this way the masochist can be again reunited with the undifferentiated mother: the masochist becomes subject and object. Ultimately, the conflict between ego and reality disappears in the masochist scenario. In Deleuze's words "The masochist thus liberates himself in preparation for a rebirth in which the father will have no part" (66). In the two Basque historical novels, the protagonist also assumes a double positionality as father and child, as reality and ego, as memory's political threat and civilian self. By embodying both, he punishes political reality's threat to himself, even if such punishment also brings his own death. This explains the logic that leads the protagonist's split ego to immolate itself in the closing scene of both historical novels.

In *Many Steps*, the protagonist Iñaki Abaitua stops writing, ceases any activity, and sets out on a path of aimless narcissism. In this case, even the modernist attempt to contain memory as a novelistic account fails; he stops writing. At night, he brings the terrorist Ortiz de Zarate to the Spanish border with France. There, at the river, Abaitua impersonates the terrorist and attracts the attention of the customs police. In the meantime, the terrorist reaches the French side of the border where he then is safe. In the end, Iñaki Abaitua dies at the hands of the Spanish customs police while signifying his double self in his own body:

He could hear the noise of gravel on the other side, which was telling him that somebody was getting out of the water onto dry land, but he did not turn around to find out whether it was Ortiz de Zarate as he suspected. He took a few steps and turned back to calculate the distance from his pursuers. Then he walked backwards, exposing his face to the flashlights. When he secured his feet on dry land, he introduced his right hand into his jacket's inner pocket in order to take out the gold-plated black Mont Blanc and, extending his arm, he pointed the pen, as if it were a weapon, in the direction of the lights. He had time to hear two shots, two stark noises. They reminded him of an animal-trainer's whipping in the circus, just before he fell on the grass by the river's side. (445)

In *The Lone Man*, Carlos's plan to help the terrorists escape results in the accidental death of a child. Carlos starts a fire in order to distract police from the terrorists' flight to another refuge. Inadvertently, the child of one of Carlos's colleagues is left unattended and burns to death.¹⁵ At this point, Carlos has again killed an innocent victim, which once again makes him a terrorist. As a consequence of this new final split into civilian and terrorist, his self literally splits into the different inner voices that constitute his memory. These voices are no longer his memory but his now fragmented self. While Carlos's conscious self tells him to run away from the police, Sabino, the voice of the terrorist trainer, leads him towards the police in order to have him killed:

His feet ran, trying to get away from these voices.... In his head, the voices were all mixed up and getting louder and louder.... By the time he reached La Banyera, the voices were hurting his head.... Once in the water, his arms and his feet propelled his body towards the crevasse....

'This is the guy I told you about,' said the voice from outside. Carlos looked up. Fatlips [the policeman's nickname] and two other policemen were standing about five yards from him.... He felt something graze his throat and then, as if that pain had given him new life, he decided that he must escape from there.... It seemed to him that the policemen were left far behind ... and he continued on up the path until he reached a place relatively high up the hillside. Then he remembered the fire and looked over towards Amazonas, but there was no trace of any blaze. There was only water.

'The firemen must have flooded everything with water,' he thought. 'No, Carlos,' Sabino said, 'you've been hallucinating.' 'What's happening to me?' he asked, seeing that he couldn't move. 'You are dying, Carlos, and you're coming with me, that's all,' Sabino said in the calmest of voices. He knew then that the water surrounding him was the water of La Banyera, and that what his friend was telling him was true. (323-25)

Although at the plot level the self-immolation of the protagonist is explained as escape, his inner voice is fully aware of his destiny, thus justifying the closure of the narrative beyond pure coincidence. The discourse narrates the protagonist's own contemplation, through split selves, of his self-immolation. As both protagonists die at the hands of the police, the split between their two selves ceases and the threat of

political reality is punished with death. The terrorist and the Spanish state are punished in the protagonists' civilian and private space: his body. Only the historical novels themselves remain to narrate the protagonists' death. The textual body of the novels takes the place left by the protagonist's body.

"Political Reality Is Being Beaten":

On Foundational Narratives and Memory

Following Deleuze, we could rephrase Freud's dictum by stating that "political reality is being beaten" in the Basque historical novels. By occupying the political position of the terrorist in his civilian present, the protagonist performs the political reality at the core of the Basque Country, the conflict between terrorism and the Spanish state, in an attempt to punish it in his own body. The goal is to create a new national space in which the Basque community can imagine itself beyond its political conflict. The protagonist transforms his body into the only site left to the Basque community to imagine itself, through violence, as nation.¹⁶

This masochist performative structure enables the narration of a national, foundational history in the form of individual memory. But the final narcissistic conflation of national history and individual memory in the protagonist's self forces the narratives of both novels to end with the protagonist's self-cancellation. As a result of this masochistic structure, the resulting narrative space is impossible to occupy. This narrative is impossible to imagine, unless it is imagined as impossible. The foundation of the Basque Country can be told but cannot be occupied by any subject; it is an empty subject position.¹⁷ I define this impossible position as masculine and masochist for one reason: only by disavowing women can the protagonist become the self-canceling subject of the Basque Country's foundation and memory. Ironically enough, this masculine subject becomes both national and foundational by removing himself from history, and thus by negating himself. This is the political contradiction of a foundational and historical Basque subject and its memory: it can only legitimize itself by negating its own self and others'.

When I entitled this article "memory as terrorism," I meant to emphasize this material reality. The foundational memory of the Basque Country is constituted not only by a representation of terrorism but also by a terrorist representation: the novel performs terrorism in its

discourse as a means to become national foundation and memory.¹⁸ Commenting on Anderson's remarks, I pointed out earlier that, although history gives nations a sense of openness, the foundation articulated by the Basque historical novels does not open up the Basque community to history. Rather, the historical novels enclose their community into a non-ended foundation. However, one could also argue that the structure of masochism present in both historical novels emphasizes the fact that Basque foundational history does not reject history but rather disavows foundations. In the Basque case, its foundation is still history in the making. The foundation of the Basque community is not simply a discontinuous past but an ongoing, open history.

In this respect the foundational myth the Basque historical novels articulate is based on a historical continuity between the foundational moment and the present, for the subject is the same in both moments. However, there is a discontinuity in subject positions because no subject can occupy the present position. In short, the foundational myth of the Basque historical novels is that no self, old or new, can be its historical subject. There is history but no subject to occupy it. At the same time, the subject legitimized to perform this impossibility remains masculine and heterosexual.

I mention above that in Muñoz Molina's case, historical novels articulate the foundational myth of a new, postbellum, Spanish self, one that is discontinuous with the historical foundation of Spanish history—the Civil War. Furthermore, I argued that this “new self” becomes the marker of a mythical and foundational discontinuity precisely as a result of its masculine and heterosexual positioning. In Muñoz Molina's novels women become the new historical objects that legitimize the masculine, heterosexual subject as such foundational subject.

From the vantage point of the Basque historical novel and its masculine, masochist subject position, now we can better formulate the differences between Spanish and Basque historical novels, on the one hand, and between their foundations and subject positions on the other. Whereas Basque historical novels disavow women in order to acknowledge the historical continuity of its foundational myth, Spanish historical novels such as Muñoz Molina's disavow historical continuity in order to acknowledge a new subject who is defined by its heterosexual desire towards a new historical object: women. In other words, Basque historical novels disavow women in order to establish a

“subjectless” national history. Spanish historical novels such as Muñoz Molina’s disavow history in order to establish a new ahistorical, heterosexual, masculine, national subject.

A narrative that would simultaneously narrate both foundational moments, the Basque and the Spanish, or all the foundational moments of the different national communities of Spain, remains to be written. Still, there is not a historical novel that is both “Spanish and Basque” (and so fully “Spanish”). At the same time, the rest of historical novels that articulate subject positions other than the heterosexual and masculine remain outside of the foundational history of both nations.¹⁹

Notes

¹There is no agreement on the usage of the adjectives “Castilian” and “Spanish” when labeling literature written in Castilian in the Spanish State. In this article, the term “Spanish literature” will descriptively refer to literature written in Castilian, the only official language of the entire Spanish State. Although Basque, Catalanian, or Galician literatures are also Spanish (but not only Spanish), contemporary literary criticism still writes under the pretense of considering literature written in Castilian as the natural and universal literature of the Spanish State. Francisco Rico’s canonical collection of essays on contemporary Spanish literature written in Castilian is a good example of such pretense: *Historia y crítica de la literatura española. Los nuevos nombres: 1975-1990* (my emphasis). The opening study written by the editor of the collection, Darío Villanueva, captures the contradiction between the title of the volume and the literary language studied. When referring to the conflict that arises in each Spanish nationality between its own language and Castilian, he affirms that it is “a conflict of languages which, entangled in politics, tends to provoke a dialectic between two cultures, the vernacular and the *ill-labeled* “Castilian,” about the supposition that there is no place for balance, and rather one will have to uproot the other” (“Los marcos” 15, my translation and emphasis). The collection then goes on to exclusively study literature written in Castilian as “Spanish” and to conversely “uproot” the other Spanish literatures not written in Castilian from the volume.

Therefore, I believe it is tactically and politically productive to call literature written in Castilian “Spanish.” This denomination captures best the underlying political conflict and its universal pretense: literature written in Basque, Catalanian, and Galician is the only “Spanish literature that is not Spanish.” In this way, one can juxtapose for example “Spanish and Basque literature” in a way that renders the pretense of universal status granted to literature written in Castilian as obvious as contradictory. A Derridean approach would dictate either a reversal or a dissemination of the literary hierarchy. Although such an approach exceeds the limits of this article, it would not be too difficult to demonstrate that Spanish literature written in Castilian “is not Spanish either” (dissemination) or that only Basque, Galician, and Catalanian literatures are “truly” Spanish (hierarchical reversal).

²The national construct “Basque Country” does not represent a single political reality. Basque speakers are spread throughout the Autonomous Basque Community, The Autonomous Community of Navarre, and the western part of the French Region of the Low Pyrenees. However, Basque literature encompasses this multi-layered political reality and thus makes the use of the national term “Basque Country” valid on a literary and cultural level.

³There are several older texts written during Francoism, such as Saizarbitoria’s own novel *100 Meters* (1976), in which terrorism is central. However, because of the political context, terrorism serves in these texts as a nationalist indication of the separatist division between “them” (Spanish) and “us” (Basque). Terrorism is not foundational but differential; it marks the limits of a divide that is neither historical nor social but “natural”—the ahistorical “Basque nation” versus the oppressor. Furthermore, terrorism unites the “Basque nation” and hence does not tolerate inner difference and otherness. In this sense, terrorism is simply one more marker of a nation’s natural fatalism rather than its history and foundation.

In recent years, terrorism has taken an unprecedented central position in Basque literature. Besides the two novels I have already mentioned, Laura Mintegi has written a novel dealing with the issue entitled *Nerea eta biok* (not translated, *Nerea and I*, 1995), and Atxaga himself has finished a sequel to his novel entitled *Zeru Horiek* (1995, *Esos cielos*). They are not historical novels; rather than recurring to founding myths and narratives, they use terrorism in order to organize what I call elsewhere “national desire” (“Travestismo y novela terrorista”).

⁴Basque films with a high content of violence but without direct references to terrorism, such as Alex de la Iglesia’s *Acción mutante* (1992) and *El día de la bestia* (1995) as well as Daniel Calparsoro’s *Salto al vacío* (1997) deploy a representational strategy based on an active disavowal of terrorism. They do not represent terrorism referentially; instead they disavow it by displaying meaningless violence marked, nevertheless, as Basque. This representation of “Basque violence without political content” makes possible their filmic disavowal of terrorism. Imanol Uribe’s *Los días contados* (1994) is perhaps one of the few Basque films portraying Basque terrorism. However, and as I have argued elsewhere (“Masculinity’s”), terrorism here is used as a way to legitimize the Spanish national order and “other” terrorism. Ultimately, and although this discussion would require a separate study, I would like to suggest that Basque cinema’s intended audience is not the Basque nation, but the Spanish. Hence this cinema’s need to represent violence while disavowing terrorism.

⁵The third novel *Los misterios de Madrid* (1992) takes place around 1992.

⁶Muñoz Molina’s other “historical” novel *Beltenebros* is a detective or suspense story set in the past and it will not be considered here as “foundational fiction,” even though the story refers to the Civil War in important ways.

⁷In the same way, Spanish historical novels about Basque characters such as Manuel Vázquez Montalbán’s *Gallindez* (1990) are also based on the protagonist’s willingness to sacrifice himself for a political cause. However, the protagonist’s death does not constitute the narrative solution of the novel. Such a death is presented as an historical *fait accompli* from the outset of the novel. Furthermore, the protagonist’s

sacrifice articulates a new form of historical continuity. As Hartmut Stenzel comments "There is room for spontaneous solidarity ... which, in the moment of his [Galíndez's] death unites Muriel Colbert and the Basque leader in *Galíndez*. It is not the case that Vázquez Montalbán wanted to sketch out new hopes after the defeat of history. But in his "historical" novels, the act of writing... refuses to give in to the evident destruction of meaning in history" (121, my translation).

In Muñoz Molina's work the structure of male masochism, central to the Basque historical novel, can be detected at least once in *Beatus Ille*. But in this novel, male masochism is circumscribed to the characters who have experienced the Civil War (Jacinto Solana and Minaya's uncle Manuel) and thus do not make it to the narrated present of the end of the novel.

In the case of Julio Llamazares's *Luna de lobos* (1985), the other key foundational novel of contemporary Spanish literature, the protagonist's survival is not stated. At the end of the novel, the protagonist is about to flee Spain and opt for exile as a third political space. Thus, the narrative's open and utopian end absolves the author and the reader from having to establish the existence of a historical continuity or discontinuity between the Civil War and the present in the novel.

⁸One could argue that Andu Lertxundi and the group of writers gathered around the publishing house Alberdania constitute a third alternative or project. Interestingly enough, Andu Lertxundi has also published a historical novel *Otto Pette* (1994, *Las últimas sombras*) that unlike its other Basque counterparts takes place in the Middle Ages. This novel can also be read as foundational although its foundational thrust lies not at the narrative level but at the discursive one. The novel tells the murderous story of two men, which can be allegorically read as a variation of the myth of Cain and Abel. However, the novel uses a literary language perfected and stylized to the point of not having any comparisons in recent Basque literature. As a consequence, language itself, the pre-modern literary language void of any "modern conflict," becomes the new and real foundation of Lertxundi's novel.

⁹The publisher of the book (Erein) provided this information in 1995.

¹⁰The armistice declared by ETA in 1998 might change this fact and thus the contemporary construction of Basque history and memory.

¹¹Obviously, theorizing the larger historical repercussions of the late development of public and private spheres in Spain exceeds the scope of this article. However, it is important to note that the Spanish case is interesting in its postmodern non-synchronicity because it occurs at a moment in which the commodification of the individual self around the first world is reorganizing the original distinction between both spheres.

¹²Ultimately, this duplicitous containment of memory in space and time can also be read allegorically as the two authors' own harnessing of their respective past literary styles and works. Realism becomes the style that allows both authors to encapsulate their past work as literary memory.

¹³The last sentence in the original reads as follows: "In the hideaway, lying down in a folding bed, there was a businessman he had kidnapped and afterwards killed with one shot" (15). The translation omits the murder.

¹⁴The novel actually makes references to a real Basque psychoanalyst, Juan Jose Lasa, who in the novel theorizes the psychoanalytical and social importance of the mother in Basque society (86-7). For a discussion of the figure of the mother in Basque literature see my “Del exilio materno.”

¹⁵The death of an innocent child is also an element deriving from his previous magical realist phase. The opening stories of *Obabakoak* are centered around the death of such innocent children.

¹⁶Aldekoa has theorized this masochism as melancholia (139). Although this interesting approach opens up a theoretical question about the relationship between masochism and melancholia—which undeniably exists and which Freud connects to narcissism—Aldekoa’s ahistorical theorization resorts to classical tragedy to explain it and thus forecloses any possibility for a theoretical elaboration of the problem.

¹⁷As Marijose Olaziregi argues, from an aesthetic-of-reception point of view, “in the last instance, the writer wants to construct a new ‘reality’ in his novel, a reality fully ‘coherent’ and ‘believable,’ yet one that has not as a single referent to the world and the past” (64, my translation).

¹⁸Also on an allegorical level one could claim that, by writing realist accounts of their own previous literary works, both authors Atxaga and Saizarbitoria have removed themselves from the literary subject position of national author and key canonical writer.

¹⁹After writing this article, Saizarbitoria published another novel (*Bihotz bi*, 1996; *Two Hearts*) in which the eldest characters tell stories about the Civil War. Properly speaking, this novel is not a historical novel but a romance. However, the structure of the novel is once again based on the disavowal of two women, this time marked as either related or non-related to the Civil War. In this novel both women are national but both have a relationship with a non-national man. Interestingly enough, the attempt to revisit the Civil War ends with the main character becoming psychotic. Thus the novel stresses once again both: history’s continuity and the lack of a subject position capable of occupying it. Needless to say, this novel needs a separate study.

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