

Writing Victims: Post-Terrorist Fiction(s) in the Basque Country and Spain

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Synopsis

This paper examines the recent evolution of fiction in and about the Basque Country. I focus on depictions of the victims of ETA's violence, and literature that documents their plight in the genres of the novel and short story. One trend is the movement away from "terrorist" and toward "victim" as the narrative focus. Another is an art increasingly in service to a political agenda. Although much of this corpus focuses on everyday details richer than those found in the mass media, social-scientific literature, or victim testimony, these forms often blur in their rhetorical styles.

Biography

Roland Vazquez is Associate Professor, Social Science and Anthropology, at Upper Iowa University. His research interests include Basque and Spanish politics, especially links between institutional realities and culture. His *Politics, Culture, and Sociability in the Basque Nationalist Party* (University of Nevada Press, 2010) is an ethnographic study of partisan competition.

Essay

1. Introduction

I headed to Euskadi, or the Basque Country, in Spain, in 2009-10 for a year of research convinced of the novelty of my project. I was to study the discourse and infrastructure surrounding the movement of the victims of the terrorism of ETA (*Euskadi 'ta Askatasuna*, or Basque Homeland and Freedom), a group that had been an important parapolitical and even political actor in Euskadi and Spain since the 1960s. ETA's continued violence after the Spanish transition to democracy in the late 1970s was indicative of suspicions among a sector of the Basque populace regarding the veracity of the transition and questioning Euskadi's belonging in Spain altogether (Linz et al.). Indeed, during ethnographic fieldwork I had conducted in the mid-1990s, Basque nationalism and its reclamations represented the dominant political discourse in Euskadi, and support for the extreme incarnation of Basque nationalism, while far from majority, was well entrenched, and represented the squeaky wheel of Basque politics.

In 2009, words such as "peace" and "dialogue" were disappearing from the panorama. The late Mario Onaindia seemed correct in his assessment of the meaning

of the watershed moment of the mass demonstrations following the summary 1997 kidnapping and killing of the Ermua PP city council member Miguel Ángel Blanco: that the Basque people were no longer asking for peace, but rather demanding freedom (Onaindia). And, even this last word struck me in the stark change of its meaning. In my earlier research, the dominant meaning of “freedom” was collective, referencing independence from Spain, whether invoked by supporters or critics of the concept. In contrast, in 2009, the term was nearly exclusively an individual-based concept. In her historical analysis on the issue, in an implicit engagement with Adam Smith, Lynn Hunt (210) writes of the long-term and even partly counterintuitive success of conscience trumping the “soft power” of humanity to solidify the discourse of individual human rights, with their requisite responsibilities. Although I wish to take care not to overstate, it appeared to me that, in my absence, the concept of the Basque citizen had been born.

Local, regional, and global events had rendered the use of violence for political ends illegitimate. The attacks of September 11, 2001 drove this home, as did the March 11, 2004 al-Qaeda Madrid train bombings, which served as a shocking public mirror of horror in both method and scale. With respect to ETA in particular, a variety of ideas and actions discredited the group. The December 2006 bombing at Madrid’s Barajas Airport without prior warning in the midst of a so-called “ceasefire” only served to further demonstrate ETA’s madness to Basque public opinion.¹ The group still existed to the extent that it was, quoting Joseba Zulaika, the “ashes” of its former self (*Po/vo*). In short, ETA was discredited to the point that it had been reduced to a straw man in societal understanding and an easy target in political rhetoric.

Such a discourse was accompanied by mobilizing realities. Within the public sector, in 2001, under the aegis of the Basque Ministry of the Interior, the Department for Attention to Victims of Terrorism was established, under a Basque-nationalist-led coalition government, but in no small part the result of pressure from non-governmental groups that had mobilized around this singular issue. The theme of the remainder of this paper brackets the better part of the institutional infrastructure, civic organizations, and many other related initiatives to focus on the realm of fictional literature. One genre that shares strong thematic and formal elements is the burgeoning “non-fictional” victim testimonial literature (e.g., Arteta; Pagazaurtundua, *Los Pagaza*; San Sebastián; Villa); it will not be discussed further here because it explicitly stakes a claim to narrating reality *as such*. In looking at fiction, I elide questions of whether some or even most of this production is in fact “Basque literature.” The very attempt to answer this cultural and linguistic question is engulfed by the very political field that it purports to study, and is perhaps an essentialist will to classificatory power.² I am also at pains to make it clear that I am *not* claiming that the literature I am focusing upon has been the only important strand of fiction in and about Euskadi dealing with politics and violence. At least since the publication of Ramon Saizarbitoria’s *A Hundred Meters* in 1976, some of the most important literature, especially in the Basque language, has focused on such violence (Arruti, 122; as exemplars see Atxaga; Saizarbitoria, *Hamaika*), and it has done so from a perspective that is explicitly or at least implicitly centered on ETA. Indeed, to cite one example, the Spanish translator of Saizarbitoria’s 1995 *The Uncountable Steps*, Jon Juaristi, called that work “the great Basque novel of my generation” (Blas, Saizarbitoria, and Juaristi). Nevertheless, the literature described below is grounded in a distinctive vision. And, it has experienced a meteoric ascent in production and acceptance alike.

2. Literary Precursor

In an interview done shortly after having received Spain's prestigious National Prize of Letters in 2006, Raúl Guerra Garrido, the author based in the Basque coastal city of San Sebastián since having moved there half a century ago, expressed his opinions about the Basque political situation and the relationship of the trajectory of his work to it. According to Guerra Garrido, one of his ambitions was to write the post-terrorist Basque novel. His desire, he admitted, was ultimately political rather than literary, and he stated that such a work would be "a very tiresome love story, about two young people who are completely foolish and infatuated with each other," adding that it would be so "because that's what we need, a decent period of boredom and peace of mind" (Marín).³ In the same interview, Guerra Garrido also claimed that, literarily speaking, he had nothing further to write about the Basque political situation, even going so far as to suggest that there was nothing more to be said in the political climate of the day. Indeed, Guerra Garrido had a long trajectory of writing about social tension having its roots in his perception about social, political, and economic marginalization of Spanish immigrants to the Basque Country, beginning with his 1969 novel *Cacereño* about an immigrant from western Spain who becomes a factory worker in a large industrial town in the Basque province of Guipúzcoa.

Guerra Garrido's work since 1969 has led him to be lauded as one of the leading practitioners of the "social realism" school of writing in Spain, making his work ultimately "something more than literature" (Ortiz, 12), and his Basque-theme writings in particular have been praised to the point of canonization by those who argue that his literary trajectory represents a critical voice of the marginalization of the non-Basque Spanish immigrant in all respects, from issues of economic well-being to issues of identity. Regardless of one's ideological positioning vis-à-vis Guerra Garrido's writing, what is clear is that he was a forerunner in many respects. As Pedro Chacón (71-73) notes, Guerra Garrido's novels were chronicling a distinctively immigrant point of view even before some of the classic Spanish-language social scientific literature appeared on the subject of identity politics in the Basque Country.

Within a year of that interview, he had published another novel centered upon the Basque situation. Its very publication would appear to suggest that Guerra Garrido's evaluation of his own creative flow was misplaced.⁴ But, I would argue further that so, too, was his estimation of "post-terrorism." Speaking specifically of post-Marxism and postmodernism, Terry Eagleton has noted: "The term 'post', if it has any meaning at all, means business as usual, only *more so*" (381). Taking Eagleton's formulation as a point of departure, of necessity, the "post-terrorist" novel is an important part of the literary landscape insofar as it represents an accentuation of the Basque "terrorist" novel of times past. Furthermore, if Joseba Zulaika (*Polvo*, 149) is correct in his assertion that any ETA activity since 2006 only guarantees the defeat of that organization's national project, it would not seem a huge leap to assert that, in spite of ETA's continued existence, current reality in Spain and the Basque Country is more legitimately classified as *post-terrorist* rather than *terrorist*. But, then, what exactly does the "only *more so*" mean in this case? It is a *quantitative* leap in terms of the sheer number of

works that have been produced in this type of literature and authors producing them in the genres of the novel, the short story, and theater. And, it is *qualitative* in terms of the increased depiction of ideological certainty of the story told about the civic project.

3. The Post-Terrorist Literary Moment

In more recent times, a critical result in the shift in focus is what type of characters ultimately become the central focuses of these literary forays and, just as relevantly, which type are downplayed or excluded altogether. One clear example of this trend comes from Luisa Etxenike's 2008 novel *The Blind Spot*. The novel consists of two parts, the first called "The Novel," followed by "Original Version," which is supposed to be the "true" story behind the novel in the first part, written by the main character, fictional author of the second. *The Blind Spot* was awarded the 2009 prize for Basque Literature in Spanish, with the jury extendedly praising the novel's literary merits, but also lauding it "for dealing with a serene reflection and denunciation, from the point of view of the victims, of the irrational violence and its consequences" (Premios Euskadi).

The novel's main character is Martín, an adolescent who is suddenly forced to grow up without his father, a bodyguard who dies in the line of fire protecting a politician targeted by ETA. The novel focuses on the character of Martín and his great emotional distress in light of his father's death. It is clear that, if his father is a victim, then so is he. The introspection and interior life of the protagonist and his mother stand in marked contrast to the introduction of the antagonists as actual people, rather than uniquely as filtered through the emotional tribulations of the primary characters. In the entire novel, the direct introduction of such characters occurs only once: when Martín enters a radical nationalist⁵ bar in San Sebastián. His intention is to hang postcards of places in the city there that he has just bought, postcards that on some level appear to remind him of his relationship with his father. His mementos seem to stand in implicit opposition to the large signs of "Independence," "Prisoners Home," and other such proclamations draped throughout the bar. As he sits at the bar and begins to glue the postcards, his gesture meets with the opposition of the bartender and another worker in the bar, who tell him to take them off, with the bartender finally knocking them to the floor with a violent thrash of his arm. They tell Martín to leave, with the second bellowing "Do you want me to beat the crap out of you?" (35). In this scene, Martín and the bartenders, unnamed, occupy the same physical space. But, it is for only an instant. Their respective moral spaces are distinguished by an absolute chasm marked off by great ideological differences, but also by small details and gestures. As Etxenike notes twice (once for each of the radical nationalists presented) so as to reiterate this subtle symbolic point, what separates Martín from either of them, "what distinguishes them from each other are the postcards, the reason and meaning of the postcards" (34, 35). Again, this is the only interaction that Martín has with people from "that world;" indeed, it is the only time that any such individuals appear in the novel—and, they appear as unnamed, hostile individuals without life trajectories who utter single sentence, aggressive comments where the possible escalation of violence is ever present. Before leaving the bar, Martín turns and reflects on the chasm in attitudes and life possibilities separating him from them:

This bar belongs to them—the ones who are not sorry about my father's death, the ones that are happy they have assassinated him. Surely they have offered a toast right here, at this bar counter, at these tables. Celebrating the assassination of at least a bodyguard right here, at least one of the two has fallen. Surely they have offered a toast.

Presoak etxera, prisoners home, written on the walls. What is not written is that they are prisoners because they are criminals and, to what home? Because what is home for them, the country, the Basque Country, is not home for me anymore. Home is a place where people are not afraid, where you don't have to worry that someone will jump out of a corner or from the shadow and put a bullet in your head (36).

These depictions of radical nationalists, especially their limited emotional character development, stand in marked contrast to the great degree of insight that we get into the characters from Martín's close circle. For example, he lists the things lost in death: "To die is to lose that smell of bread forever. And to lose everything else forever: fine sand, the pattern of San Sebastián's octagonal blue and white sidewalk panels, the fishing boats surrounded by yachts and sailboats ... the orange air at dusk" (27). Through some of these reflections, the reader is presented with victimization on a number of levels: Martín and his mother in life (as a result of their emotional distress from the death of his father), Martín's father as a result of his own death, but, even earlier, Martín's father and mother in their shared life, due to the oppressive atmosphere that resulted from their situation, as they strived to fight against it by placing themselves in the "blind spot" of the rear view mirror (hence the book's title) where no antagonist could reach them (79-80). This set of descriptions ultimately points to a better understanding of a vivid emotional life and an implicit, didactic expansion of the circle of who might ultimately be considered a "victim," while at the same time marking those in that identity category off from those who, quite simply, could never be seen as such.

The book's first section is purportedly written by the main character of the second, who feels guilty about what he qualifies as his less-than-dignified behavior at times, which he has attempted to cleanse in the novel that appears first. As he tells his mother about the book that he has written, "I need the novel to lie in order to rehearse some sort of dignity and decency in myself" (177). And, yet, although in its second register, Etxenike's work affirms a reality of human action that is in a certain sense less clear cut and less typological, frailty and self-doubt do not cloud the novel's moral geography; they ultimately reaffirm it, because what is represented on these pages is painted as even closer to real, lived life. As the "real" mother explains to her less-than-heroic son to assuage his bad feelings,

The guilt is not ours. The guilt belongs to the assassins and their conspirators, and those that protect them one way or another: those that, though they could put the terrorists in their place by making it clear with every word that they are assassins and vile, do not do it, and allow confusion and ambiguity to spread ...

The guilt is not ours. We are the victims, the threatened, the dead, the wounded in [the privation of] everyday happiness, in the foolish things that make happiness (158-59).

In the midst of weakness and imperfection, moral high ground, the rule of law, and clear good versus evil are affirmed in both of the novel's registers, and, perhaps precisely because of its imperfections, in the second one that clarity is even more impactful.

Etzenike's novel is not an isolated example of the relative exclusion of the antagonist's voice from the literary work. One other is Pedro Mari Baglietto's 1999 novel *A Cry for Peace: Posthumous Autobiography of an ETA Victim*, a work written as a stream of consciousness, internal first-person narrative of the main character on the last day of his life, prior to being assassinated. The work is meant to be historical fiction, a re-creation of the experience of Ramón Baglietto, the author's brother, who met with this fate in 1980. Much of the novel deals with the life of the Baglietto family, including their emotional identification with and roots in the Basque Country. Although antagonists are frequently imminent in the thoughts of the protagonist, Ramón's killer "Basilio"⁶ is the only one whose presence is narrated, and it is done twice. The first is in Ramón's retrospective thought about when he caught Basilio as a youth writing "You will die" near Ramón's house. Ramón did not give the incident much importance at the time, jokingly addressing him by saying, "You'll have to kill me very dead, Basilio" as the youth scampered off without saying anything (33).

The second time is when Ramón's body is draped in his car on a mountain pass after a failed escape. The protagonist's narration at this moment is as follows:

I do not know if it is due to the bullets or the violence of the crash, but I am completely unconscious. Nor do I know if I have died. But my attackers do not want to have any doubts. Their Renault 4 stops in back of my car and Basilio gets out carefully. His face is radiant. He seems to remember my words: 'You'll have to kill me very dead!' His hand grips a locally made pistol: a Parabellum 9 millimeter. He walks with firm, confident steps. Finally, his name will be entered into the logbook of the heroes of the homeland. Finally, he will demonstrate that the formative work that the intellectuals of the Basque revolution have invested in him is going to yield its fruit. Basilio and his commando mates have decided that I will not return home tonight. Tonight or any other night. He points the barrel of his pistol coldly at my temple and fires with a gesture of pride (136).

Again, these are the only two moments throughout the novel in which the antagonist other makes a physical appearance.

To return to the work of Raúl Guerra Garrido, that author has observed that he cannot write from the perspective of a terrorist just like he cannot write from the perspective of a woman, and he thus explains his lack of introducing this type of first-person perspective because of the limits of his own capacity for empathy (Cervantes TV). At the same time, however, there is a clear evolution in his work with respect to character inclusion. His 1976 novel, *A Very Unusual Reading of Das Kapital*, for which he won Spain's Nadal prize that year, is marked by the kidnapping of a local industrialist by ETA. The kidnappers are in many ways parodied: for example, the five go by the

names of Abel 1 through Abel 5, in a cross between fratricidal biblical parable and automaton revolutionary caricature, and their applications of Marxist doctrine are presented as misplaced and superficial. Nevertheless, they are characterized by two traits absent in the later Basque novels of Guerra Garrido: 1. the attempted use of logical argument to justify their political position and actions and 2. their very presence. Guerra Garrido's 1989 novel *The Letter*, about the chain of events unleashed by an extortion letter to a non-autochthonous business owner demanding the payment of a "revolutionary tax" to contribute to the project of Basque independence, stands in marked contrast. The author refers to this novel as "a radiography of fear." What is striking in this Kafkaesque treatise with a Brechtian call to civic action (or, observation of the complete *lack* of such action) is not only the lack of in-depth justification, but also the absence of the antagonists despite their omnipresence in the minds and actions of the main characters. On only one occasion is the reader led to believe that the main character has come into contact with the violent elements of the radical Basque nationalist world, but it turns out to be a case of petty blackmail and mistaken identity.

Similarly, in Guerra Garrido's 2007 novel *The Solitude of the Guardian Angel*, the main character, the unnamed bodyguard (again, from outside of the Basque Country) of a retired and apparently harmless university professor who has been threatened by ETA, never comes in contact with the terrorists, to whom he refers (along with their overall human environment) as, quite simply, "the bad guys" (*los malos*). Although this element is again omnipresent, the bodyguard's direct contact with it is extremely limited, and, as the novel progresses, the reader can be less sure of what s/he reads because of the main character's increasingly precarious mental state. On one occasion, the main character witnesses a radical nationalist street protest against the incarceration of certain ETA members; on the main avenue, he sees

housewives, showing a photo on a small stick of one of their sons, apparently political prisoners for having assassinated at least one person. And it is not as though the photos were of the bad guys, but they were of the best killers from among those bad guys, and the mothers crying in grief that our sons are imprisoned in remote extermination prisons, and we can only go to see them once a year on very dangerous, exhausting trips that are also of extermination (Guerra Garrido, *Soledad*, 91).

Shortly thereafter, the protagonist tells of witnessing a woman who, out of hysteria, breaks the social "rule" of walking past in silence and instead engages one of the mothers in a short exchange that proceeds as follows:

"You can go see your son once a year, but I can only see my husband in the cemetery. Do you know who that is in the photo you are carrying?"

"My son."

"No, that's nobody's son. It's my husband's assassin."

"Yeah? Go fuck yourself" (92).

Far later in the book, our unnamed protagonist tells of another direct encounter, his second and last with the camp of the bad guys. The retired professor is to give a talk

at his old university academic department, where he is of course accompanied by his bodyguards. There, he is met by a banner with a noose drawn on it, and the words “For the old professor, fascist, liar, and traitor” (175). When the talk is about to get underway, it is preemptively interrupted by one of the professor’s former colleagues, who states “I have only come to confirm that I agree neither with your conduct nor your ideology and so that you do not interpret my absence as being due to my inability to attend. Good night” (180). As this antagonist leaves, his eyes cross with those of the novel’s protagonist, who thinks to himself “he is without a doubt a first cousin of the bad guys. His gaze is despotic, metallic. He would love to knife me” (181).

In contrast to the (near) complete elimination of such voices noted above, other works offer more extensive depictions of radical Basque nationalist activity and violence. For example, the 2010 novel *Father Fatherland* by Vicente Carrión Arregui traces the evolution of Aitor Irastorza Sagarna from the age of 16 in 1995 until he is 21 in 2000. Much of the novel, especially its earlier part, deals with Aitor in the context of his social circle and family all of whom, with the exception of his mother, are implicated in radical nationalist activity in this political option’s heartland. Perhaps the most important symbol for Aitor is his father, an ETA member who was killed by right-wing Spanish paramilitaries shortly after Aitor was born. Aitor is no different than those in his immediate circle, and is involved in this political world full-throttle, for example, preparing Molotov cocktails at the behest of his cousin Hodei (39-40), and Aitor is caught by the police while attempting to help Hodei use some of these incendiary devices against a local business that refuses to pay the “revolutionary tax” to further the cause of independence (65). With time, however, and under the influence of his girlfriend, his mother, and his father’s diaries (given to him by his mother), Aitor grows to see the abstract concept of the homeland, especially as a fount for misplaced hatred and destruction, as paling in comparison to human relationships as they cross social strata and ideological difference. At a critical juncture in the novel, his father’s diaries lead Aitor to reflect that “[h]e has spent his entire life trying to hold together with patriotic glue those fragments of the child that broke apart after his father’s killing, only to realize now that it was not worth the effort” (193). In a word, he *evolves*, and that evolution is most clear when the main character is held in relief compared to his former cronies. Hodei asks him in a subsequent late-night meeting, in an implicit test of loyalty, to track the movements of the socialist Fernando Buesa, a non-fictional politician whose real death in 2000 serves as a marker near the end of the novel. Although the main character is not yet strong enough to categorically reject the request, in response to it, “Aitor tried to see something in the darkness that surrounded him. Inside and out” (287). He ultimately extricates himself from his previous social caste, with its hatred and penchant for destruction. So, although “Father Fatherland” is marked by a vivid presence of radical Basque nationalist characters, their presence ultimately serves as a foil to the emotional and civic growth of the main character.

Another work, whose very title suggests an empathetic chord, is Verónica Portell’s 2006 collection *And Nevertheless, I Understand You*. More than a set of short stories, this book is really a mosaic surrounding a single event from multiple perspectives over the course of a very short period of time: the (fictional) kidnapping of the (fictional) city councilperson Javier Ortigueira from the town of Sestao. This work is a thinly veiled allusion to Miguel Ángel Blanco, with the difference that Ortigueira is

(remarkably) rescued. Although Portell's work attempts to be empathetic and inclusive, this perspective does not come without limitations. Perhaps emblematic of this is the last portrait, subsequent to Ortigueira's rescue. Called "Nobody Knows" (173-77), it is a love story between an ETA member and a state-based party's City councilwoman (both nameless). In spite of their mutual affection, including his attempts to protect her from ETA, and their tenuous personal truce that mirrors the larger world's vacillation between the absence of hostility and its presence, the fact that he only began observing her as a potential assassination target ultimately seems to remove any apparent symmetry in their relationship and makes the two vastly different ethical registers clear to the reader.

4. Connections and Reflections

One trend regarding these works is the political connections and the experiences of many of the authors involved in such cultural production, with the former often serving as sources of inspiration and/or resulting from the latter. These elements cannot be separated from each other. One ethnographic moment that comes to mind involves an interview with Maite Pagazaurtundua, whose brother was a local policeman killed by ETA and who serves as the President of the Madrid-based Foundation for Victims of Terrorism. When I asked her about her short stories, she told me that her literary production was something completely separate from her civic duties. Nevertheless, with stories about, for example, a man who returns to his Basque hometown after twenty-five years, where he was mayor until he left following a failed attempt on his life, only to reminisce extensively with a friend of his failed assassin (*El viudo* 83-89); and, a woman who decides to choose her lovers from within the ranks of the bodyguards of potential ETA victims so as to minimize the possibility for extended romantic attachment (51-82), I am skeptical about this assertion. Similarly, Raúl Guerra Garrido was a member of the Ermua Forum in protest of Miguel Ángel Blanco's death, as well as being a foundational member of the Spanish UPD party and his family pharmacy was burned to the ground as the result of targeted street violence (an event he recounts in his 2003 essay *Secret Notebook*). Verónica Portell's father was a journalist killed by ETA. Mikel Azurmendi (*Melodías; Tango*), is a university professor who took an extended sabbatical from teaching in response to threats and has received Spain's Medal for the Order of Constitutional Merit for his anti-ETA activities and writings. Pedro Mari Baglietto, whose book chronicles his brother's death at the hands of ETA, is actively involved in government supported primary- and secondary-school victim awareness programs. Anjel Lerxundi was the first cultural figure to speak at the introductory Victims of Terrorism commemoration organized by the Basque Department for Attention to Victims of Terrorism in 2007. Hence, the double entendre of "Writing Victims."

Many of these authors have received prizes and recognition for their literary creations. In addition to those noted, Fernando Aramburu's 2006 collection of short stories about victims and civic disengagement, *The Fish of Bitterness*, won the Mario Vargas Llosa NH Prize for Short Stories, perhaps the most important of such prizes in Spain and Dulce Chacón Prize for Spanish Narrative in 2007, and the Royal Academy of the Spanish Language Prize in 2008; Anjel Lertxundi, whose 2001 novel *Perfect Happiness*, later made into a movie, is about the psychological effects of witnessing an

ETA killing on a girl in both her young and adult lives, has won numerous prizes; Pedro Villora's play *Electra in Oma* (dedicated simply "to the victims"), placing the well-known Greek tragedy in the Oma forest in which Basque artist Agustin Ibarrola's painted trees were attacked three times by ETA supporters, displaying resistance and in the ancient Greek spirit of art as civic education, both won Spain's first ever Beckett Prize in 2005, and in 2007 was a finalist for Spain's National Prize for Dramatic Literature.

So, in closing, in spite of the range in quality, generally speaking, post-terrorist fiction in the Basque Country and Spain provides vivid depictions of the interior lives of its protagonists, has been written by a range of authors including those highly esteemed, with a frequent, strong connection to a certain political vision that has largely led to a distancing from certain character types, most notably including a marked shift from earlier work's revolutionary-oriented characters and now heavily slanted towards victims. Regarding this last characteristic, although the political context in such cases is far from homologous, this brings me to an interesting nexus or point of comparison in Transitional Justice Studies, a field which, interestingly, in recognition of its connections to on-the-ground political realities, appears to have been heading in the opposite direction—shifting its object of interest from those framed as victims to those framed as perpetrators, and how this change has proven practical for conflict resolution (Merry 2011). Looking at a global context having its roots in the Vietnam War and particularly international legal developments beginning in the 1980s, Caroline Eliacheff and Daniel Soulez even argue that the victim has replaced the hero as the fundamental archetype of our times, with ambivalent societal effects, a perspective originally intimated by Pascal Bruckner (123-54). This ambivalence with respect to a societal project that these authors depict is in fact mirrored in the literature that I am describing here—the very important work of bringing the experience of victims to the fore. In spite of a great range in the literary qualities of these works, they frequently manage to wonderfully chronicle rich interior lives of love, loss, displacement, and suffering, in a way that is absent for the most part in the social scientific literature, regardless of its ideological assumptions.⁷ At the same time, they tend to do so from a position of great ideological certainty and one that does not recognize that the fact that they are critical truths in no way implies that they are not partial. I am reminded of the former Spanish Minister of the Interior Jaime Mayor Oreja's controversial statement while in office that "The victims are always right." In her book *Precarious Life*, with respect to war and noting the differential allocation of grief across populations and individuals, Judith Butler underscores the critical importance of the question: "Who counts as human? Whose lives count as lives? And, finally, What *makes for a grievable life?*" (20). The very existence of the literature examined here says at least as much about Basque and Spanish social and political dynamics as the situations it attempts to capture in terms of who is grieved and, ultimately, who is able to claim the limited good of victim status and the moral high ground that accompanies it. In attempting to put this literature into perspective, I am reminded that one charge of this conference was to see if it is possible to shed new light on the phenomenon of "terrorism." If I would restrict myself only to the material of the Basque-theme post-terrorist fictions in striving to answer this question, the answer would seem to be "no"—by and large, it is indeed "business as usual, only *more so.*"

Notes

¹ See the Euskobarometro public opinion surveys from the University of the Basque Country regarding the plummeting support for ETA (www.ehu.es/euskobarometro).

² One relevant development was the August 2010 foundation of the Association of Writers of the Basque Country, an institutionally-funded initiative promoting Basque writers in the Spanish language and in (at least) implicit opposition to a much more longstanding exclusively Basque-language homologue (see “Los escritores vascos;” Larrinaga). This opposition is reminiscent of the institutional and extra-institutional duplication and confrontation characteristic of so many facets of Basque society (Vazquez, 64-66).

³ This was not an isolated comment by Guerra Garrido; he has been making similar statements since at least 1999 and he continued to make such proclamations in 2011; see, for example, Cervantes TV.

⁴ Although the interview occurred immediately prior to the Barajas bombing, which could have proven an impetus for his novel, Guerra Garrido has repeated this assertion subsequent to the bombing (e.g. Cervantes TV).

⁵ Although recognizing the ideological valence of the term “radical nationalist,” I use it as a gloss for those accepting use of political violence as a means to independence.

⁶ “Basilio” is the only person referenced in the book whose real name is *not* used. He is really Candido Azpiazu Beristain, who was released from prison in 2004.

⁷ But, see Aretxaga (147-62 and 231-39) and Zulaika, *Basque Violence* (74-101) as stunning exceptions to this general trend.

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