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Memories of 'Basque Violence' political violence, conflict, and reconciliation in the perspective of cultural narratology: a transdisciplinary and transnational paradigm?

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**Title:** Memories of 'Basque Violence' – political violence, conflict, and reconciliation in the perspective of cultural narratology: a transdisciplinary and transnational paradigm?

**Abstract:** The article analyzes the 'Basque violence' as a case study of the transdisciplinary investigation approach of cultural narratology. The phenomenon of violence, complex in both social and psychological terms, requires symbolization and linguistic-narrative forms, to become a socially and culturally significant reality. Departing of this idea and starting from a reconstruction of the basic theoretical-methodological assumptions of cultural narratology, the article explores images and narratives, which represent the violent past of the Basque conflict. While the debate about the violent past associated with the activity of *Euskadi Ta Askatasuna* (ETA) is full of controversies, there can be observed at the same time a strong presence of the subject of violent past in literary and filmic narratives. The article reconstructs different lines of the historical interpretation of this so-called 'boom of memory', focusing the aesthetic, mediatic and narratological dimensions.

**Wordcount:** 13934

## **Introduction: cultural narratology as transdisciplinary paradigm, Basque violence as case study**

The phenomenon of violence, complex in both social and psychological terms, requires symbolization and linguistic-narrative forms, to become a socially and culturally significant reality. The declaration of the definitive renunciation of violence by *Euskadi Ta Askatasuna* (ETA) in October 2011 fortunately changed and brightened the political scenario of the Basque Country. This event marks an epochal break in the history of the Basque Country and is accompanied by a significant cultural productivity in Spain as in the Basque Country. After the hot and violent phase of the conflict, images and narratives of the conflict's past are being produced. The narratives that deal with the violent past –closely linked to the existence of the violence actor ETA but in no way reducible to its terrorist or political activities– have entered a new phase. New forms, aesthetics, styles, and formats have emerged, departing of a rich and dense history of representation even out of the period before the end of violence. In view of the proliferation of narratives about the violent past and the so-called ‘boom of memory’ (cf. Eser 2019a)<sup>1</sup>, this article wants to create a synthesizing perspective on the narrative structures of these representations, trying to consider their aesthetic, mediatic and rhetorical specificity.

We part of the hypothesis that, wherever realities of social importance are the matter, there is also narration: the cultural praxis of narration is a “panglobal fact of culture” (White 1981: 1). Considering the nexus of violence and narration, we assume that before and after the realization of acts of political violence, there is narration, mediating them symbolically. The violence is always already symbolically and discursively integrated into contexts of meaning, surrounded by discourses. Prefigurative narratives are as relevant just like are reconstructive-explanative ones or justificative-rhetoric ones. Approaches of *cultural narratology* which interweave the study of historical-political forms of knowledge with narratology, media theory as well as cultural studies approaches<sup>2</sup>, seem to be an adequate instrument to structure and orientate the analysis of the representations and narratives above mentioned about the violent past. While and insofar the different disciplinary approaches share a common base of assumptions, insights concerning object and methodology of investigation, one can speak of a *transdisciplinary model of cultural narratology*. In the following we want to outline some characteristics of this transdisciplinary cultural-narratological approach, which combine the analytical tools provided by narratology and cultural analysis to investigate narratives. We coincide with the programmatic claim of Mieke Bal to combine the “narratological analysis of culture” and the “cultural analysis of narratives” (Bal 1999: 39).

Regarding the concrete case study of the cultural narratives and memories of the Basque violent past<sup>3</sup>, the epochal break mentioned above has no structuring influence on the corpus of conflict narratives to analyze. For the intention to give an overview of the different narratives, this break is without importance – but surely not so for future studies, that claim to analyze the changes, differentiation, and transformations of the narratives of violence. These

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<sup>1</sup> A good overview of the various contemporary fields of discourse and narratives of terrorism in literature, film, television, theatre, visual arts, education etc. offers the anthology edited by Rivera and Mateo (2020).

<sup>2</sup> The importance of narrative facts is meanwhile recognized in many disciplines of Social Sciences and Humanities and constitute a popular object of specific disciplinary investigation. Not only in literary and film studies, the former as their ‘cradle’, but also in cultural anthropology, sociology, psychology and history, the analysis of narratives, their structures and aesthetics, is part of the investigation practice.

<sup>3</sup> This essay is an attempt to discuss examples of post-conflict narratives on Basque violence, selected from the rich treasure of contemporary memory-cultural production, within the broad perspective of cultural narratology. In doing so, I will rely also on my own preliminary work on Basque memory discourses.

will have to apply an historically differentiating approach, not at least because the transformation of the violent confrontation in the Basque conflict has opened a new field of dispute: that of the interpretation of the confrontation and its history<sup>4</sup>. The so called “battle on the narration” (“batalla del relato”) is now at the core of the conflict, the “new war” consists of a “war of representation” of the past (Castells Arteché 2013). With the ending of ETA's terror campaign and its dissolution, the dispute over the historical interpretation of the conflict has intensified, taking on a new cultural significance, being carried out in numerous media and forms of cultural representation. This battle of representation and narration is not only realized in the territory of historians, but also on that of artists and creative workers, which play on the field of the imagination and empathy (Rivera/Mateo 2020: 10f.). The inauguration of the *Centro Memorial de las Víctimas del Terrorismo* in the Basque capital Vitoria-Gasteiz in June of 2021 represents an important step in officializing the memory of the violent past and another factor contributing to densify the discourse of the past. The observed “cultural explosion” puts in circulation narratives and cultural imaginaries, which structure the forms of the representation of the past. Their comprehension is of central importance for the historical situatedness and the dynamics in the present. The creative works dedicated to create representations of historical realities through narrative form and giving it perspective and meaning to the violent past, are confronted with the ethical claim to create a “adequate understanding of the message”, which refuses banalization and underestimation of the complexity, like Rivera/Mateo (2020: 10) claim: the questions *how to tell, how to transmit, how to understand* (ibid.) are of matter.

The central investigation object in the field of the Basque studies, which we want to explore in this article, is the particular example of the long-lasting violent conflict in the Basque Country in the 20<sup>th</sup> and 21<sup>st</sup> century. We call the different forms of violence connected to the Basque conflict as “*Basque violence*”, using the term in a simple, descriptive, and comprehensive manner, without suggesting alleged essentially “Basque” properties in that conflict, without negating the differences between the different violent manifestations and without pretending a profound reflection about this concept and its differentiated use<sup>5</sup>. Various narrative genres and media carriers, in which the interpretations and symbolizations of the *Basque violence* are produced and unfold their effectiveness come into play. So the cultural narrations analyzed in this article embrace various types of narratives and ‘texts’ in different medias: literary or programmatic texts as possible prefigurative narratives of the acts

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<sup>4</sup> That doesn't mean that the dispute about the interpretation of the past was not already present in the hot phase of the conflict; the hypothesis is that after the end of the hot conflict, more political and ideological energy is inverted, properly speaking *diverted* in the interpretation of the past and the history of the conflict.

<sup>5</sup> See also the comments on the texts of Joseba Zulaika, who in an important study (1988) uses the term in the title: *Violencia vasca. Metáfora y sacramento*. The manners to situate and understand historically the different types (and their suggested interrelationships) of political violence in the Basque Country with the character of civil war since the 19<sup>th</sup> century (Carlist wars in the 19<sup>th</sup> century, the Spanish Civil War and the violence of Francoist dictatorship, and finally the new situation created by the activity of the guerilla-violence and terrorist campaign realized by the different organizations associated with “ETA”) are already part of the object to study, which proposes this article. At the same time, the use of the generic-inclusive category of “Basque violence” should not blur differences of the realized political violence quantitative and qualitative terms. An equidistant perspective on the violence realized by ETA and the other violence, realized by the Police, Guardia Civil and extreme right-wing groups, is not adequate, if only because of the different numbers of the provoked suffering and deaths. Taking only the death toll into account, the ETA has provoked more than 800 deaths, about the deaths provoked by “the other side” (different repressive actor groups of the Spanish State) there are no clear numbers. One source (*Euskonews*) affirms 72 deaths provoked by the far-right groups, and 169 by Spanish security forces; [https://www.euskonews.eus/0256zbnk/gaia25604\\_01.html](https://www.euskonews.eus/0256zbnk/gaia25604_01.html) The concept “equidistance” has lost of its conceptual sharpness due to its massively political and polemical use. On the “other violence” realized by violent actors opposed to the Basque radical nationalism: see Urkijo (2009).

of violence like as reconstructive narrations, which explore the development, logic and consequences of violence; histori(ographi)cal narratives and intellectual interventions which construct perspectives –with gestures of critique, reconstruction or justification etc.– about the genealogy of political thinking, ideologies and cultural imaginaries in Basque history, of nationalism (e. g. literary heroic defeat narratives or cultural fictions about historical figures like that of the *gudari*, the “Basque soldier”); the ideological grounded (or propagandistically motivated) historical imaginations of political actors; philosophical reflections on the nature of violence and/or Basque conflict; audiovisual narratives, documentary or fictional ones; personal testimonies and autobiographic texts (of perpetrators or victims of violence).

### **Concepts of cultural narratology and their application to narratives on violent past**

There are two basic assumptions of the theories of narrativity, which are central to the investigation of the narrative on conflictive pasts (cf. Nünning 2013: 90 f.): On the one hand, narratives are supposed to enable people to relate their lives to time and to understand them; they provide interpretation and meaning for the exploration of time-bound existence and are a means of dealing with change and contingency and of creating coherence and continuity in time. Secondly, narratives have an inherent explanatory power; they suggest explanatory schemes, be they explicit or implicit. Departing from these assumptions, cultural narratology explores “cultural experiences translated into, and meanings produced by, particular formal narratives practices” (Helms 14, cit. p. Nünning 2004: 356). With respect to the object of this essay –the conflictful and antagonistic representations of the realities of the past of Basque violence– it is precisely to analyze the *different modes of creative-cultural-aesthetic appropriation of the past*, like they are evoked and mediated through and by narratives.

The relation of time, narrative and history (a), the questions of cognitive mapping, mental dimensions and ethical implications (b), and the modes and genres of historical representation resp. fiction (c) are the central conceptual-methodological axes and challenges for a cultural-narratological perspective on the narratives of the Basque conflict.

a) Narratives are a transcendent instrument for modeling and structuring time, the socio-historical time just like the subjective time perception of the individuals. They realize interpretations of past and presence and constitute them as meaningful constellations. Through generalized schemes they produce long lasting and deep effects in social life; the nexus of narrations and processes of institutionalization is insofar of great importance. The narrative text has a linear form; sequential order and the continuity of the presented and combined events are characteristics of its temporal structure. The narratives are at the same time in contact with different times, with the reconstructive imagination of the past and the spaces of past experience and the expectative, or in the language of Reinhart Koselleck, the “space of experience” and “horizon of expectation”, where the historical consciousness is situated in its different temporal orientations. With respect to the discursive construction of visions and versions of the past, the narratives reconstruct –as an active memory– the past from the standpoint of the present and in light of certain future expectations. The temporal logic, which the narrative formulates, combines these different levels of temporality.

With respect to the past of violent conflicts, the narratives of the conflict can evoke imaginations and fictions of futures scenarios of the (post-)conflict-time just like they can articulate genealogies about the origin of the conflict: the decision about where to start the telling of the history of the conflict is decisive as it separates the narrated world from the narratively unstructured prehistory (cf. Koschorke 2011: 39). At the same time the narratives construct relations –especially if they have a social and political content– with the ‘space of

experience', and facets of this "entire heritage of the past (...) whose sedimented traces (...) prepare the ground on which our wishes and fears, our forecasts and plans, in short: our anticipations of the future are based" (Ricoeur 1997: 434 f.). The contingency, inherent to human and social life, is transformed in a series of causalities and reasons, of logics of the progression of time and narrated action. They create 'patterns of formatting'<sup>6</sup>, which help the combatants just like the outsiders to understand the conflict and orientate their actions. The narratives impose their schemes of interpretations and *cognitive mapping* (Koschorke 2011: 38): they organize experiences, historical processes just like subjective memories.

b) The perspective of cultural narratology analyses, how the individual lives and the relations to the world are designed in the 'language' of narration and focus the *cognitive mapping*, which the narratives realize: Jerome Bruner, one of the noted representant of the approach of *narrative psychology* –a branch of psychological approaches which start from the importance of narrativity in the construction of reality (vgl. Bruner 1991)–, states that "we organize our experience and our memory of human happenings mainly in the form of narrative–stories, excuses, myths, reasons for doing and not doing, and so on" (ibid.: 4). Departing from the nexus of narrativity and subjective memories, the narrative psychology- approaches emphasize that narratives structure social and individual experiences and create, in producing coherent stories, cultural and psychological meaning. With respect to the construction of images and narratives of the past, the active and constructive aspect of memory is emphasized (cf. Straub 2010). The representations of the past are not 'natural' reproductions of states or events but results of productive epistemic actions "that are both cognitively and emotionally, or motivationally, saturated" (ibid.: 220). The cultural representations of the past are active *narrative* constructions, "with whose help the pasts, the presents, and the envisaged futures can be shaped, articulated and reflected as a story, history, or biography" (ibid.). The narrative-psychological approach can be coordinated with the properly narratological analysis, specialized in investigating the narrative modes, their mediatic, stylistic characteristics. In its cultural-cognitive sensibilized perspective, the narratological approach can help to explore, "conceptualizing narrative fictions as cognitive forces (...) the ways in which the formal properties (...) reflect, and influence, the unspoken mental assumptions and cultural issues of a given period" (Nünning 2004: 358).

The narratives generally don't evoke abstract contexts, they have more an essentially subjective and experience-laden content. Monika Fludernik (2008: 122) calls this trait the "experientiality" of the narrative text, which evokes experiences, feelings, thoughts, and intentions. It is an essential characteristic of narrations, that they communicate and express this experientiality. They tell and evaluate human experiences in figuring actions, intentions, affections, and feelings. The perspectivization and mediation inherent to the narratives open access to the imaginary and emotional worlds, the values, dispositions, and ways of thinking of the characters. The imagination of human or anthropomorph consciousness is part of the experientiality communicated in narrations. The adscription of agency and consciousness to the characters and, typical in some generic modalities of narration, the focus on the inner living, perception and psychic realities construct multiple reflections about the imagined everyday life experiences, which is central for the constitution of narrativity (cf. Fludernik 2008: 122, 177)<sup>7</sup>. The internal focalization as a narrative mechanism of literary fiction can,

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<sup>6</sup> „Formatierungsvorlagen“; Koschorke 2011: 38.

<sup>7</sup> Yet in the classic and early work on narratology, *Die Logik der Dichtung*, Käte Hamburger affirmed, that only in fictional narration the representation of the inner view of the acting humans of history is possible (cf. Fludernik 2008: 93).

for example, bring to visibility the specificity of individual life experience, details, sensual impressions and emotions, the perception of events 'from the eyes' of those involved. Being verbalized and narrativized, these elements can become objects of the vast stock of cultural memory.

The reference to human, social or individual, action (or to that of anthropomorphic actants) is spatially and temporarily located. It reflects in this way the social contexts and milieux, the socio-historical situation –its narrative condensation in the chronotopos–, in which the narrated action is situated. The chronotopoi and the action realized in them serve – in different ways and intensities– as an indicator of social and historical constellations. Even if the narrations are primarily concerned on the plot and the actions of the individuals, which constitute it, “they enable specific insights into the constellations of the practical world and the psychic structure of subjects, which are to be understood as connections of a general kind” (Straub 1998: 157). They concern “transindividually significant and binding facts” (ibid.), which constitutes an important nexus between the cognitive and social-contextual dimensions of narrations.

As emphasized by different 'cultural' branches of narratology, the narratives give, in combination with the consideration of the social context and the situatedness, therefore important insights in the “ethical implications of narration” (Ricoeur 1990: 193 ff.). Like other forms of thematization of the self and of the world, narrations are not free of moral-normative implications, they communicate values, normative standards, and orientations, reflecting and expressing social mentalities, hierarchies, and power strategies. Narrating the changes of fate and depicting the reactions to it, the behavior and action of the fictional personnel, the narratives are always linked, at least implicitly, to ethical concepts. They refer to visions of a successful life, to ideas of happiness, through which what is experienced and narrated is judged, like Straub emphasizes recurring to Ricoeur (Straub 1998: 156 f.). If the narrative structure is implicitly bounded to ideas of a successful life, to evaluative and ethical considerations, they articulate (at least implicitly) (critical) comments on the (un/just) political order; considering the narrative objective of this essay, narratives on conflicts or violent situations and its responsible actors, this aspect is of much importance.

c) The assumptions of the cultural-narratological approaches shortly mentioned can with respect to the narrative construction of conflicted pasts orientate the analysis of the contrasting images and narrations produced in the cultural, social, and artistic spheres. Telling and rewriting history is in the context of narrating conflictive pasts an important cultural activity. The narratives on the conflictive and violent pasts are controversial and disputed, the aforementioned nexus of narration and institutionalization is of great importance because of the long lasting and deep effects of the narrative schemes in the cultural dynamic of societies. The social life of the narratives expresses itself in the relation with the “social perceptions ready to be activated” and other assets of cultural memory (vgl. Koschorke 2011: 39). The narrative operations vest them with evidence, the signification realized by the narratives is insofar of social and cultural relevance. The cultural, symbolic, and imaginative processing of situations of (past) conflict and violence or possible scenarios of conflict are transmitted in mediatic forms which makes accessible social experience for the public (vgl. Ahrens 2017: 22). Manifested in different mediatic forms, the narratives are catalysators of the social communication and signification. These cultural techniques of media narratives on the past are an important part of the self-reflexivity of the society.

Regarding the social dynamics of fictional representations of history, it should be noted the strong influence that can emanate from them. The fictional narratives on the past

operate on the level of cultural production of collective meaning and can influence as an active force the ways of thinking and representing the past. Fictions play a constitutive role in the process of forming institutions and shaping mentalities, they create attitudes and affects with respect to it (Nünning 2004: 358). The different hybrid forms of factual and fictional genres project imaginations of historical worlds, which can also mark counter-hegemonic contrast points, trying to delegitimize “the ,official‘ historical record that historiography has established“ (ibid.: 361).

The analysis of the mediatic and aesthetic property of the narratives and their genre specificity give important insights in the capacity of intervention of every narrative, its potential to gain popularity and attention situating itself in the tension between the canonical norms and the tendency to mark difference (Bruner 1998: 60 f.). The genre-specific scripts can correspond to hegemonic aesthetical norms, or they can try to subvert and overcome them, attacking the legitimacy of the canonical norms. The specific conventions of the narrative genres –be they of visual or linguistic modality– must be reconstructed in the modality of their narration, their style, rhetoric and aesthetic. As genres they represent specific manners to think about the world or to imagine it (ibid.: 67), they are constitutive for the act of narrative comprehension: genres are “culturally specificized ways to perceive the *conditio humana* and to communicate about it” (ibid.: 68).<sup>8</sup>

With respect to the analysis of narratives about violent pasts, the cultural-narratological approach suggests considering the information, the plot and the inner perspectives of the actors, which describe, symbolize and dramatize the conflict, departing from the following questions<sup>9</sup>: Which self-definitions and hetero-definitions receive the warring factions, or the conflict actors? Where lies the course of the conflict line, which types of legitimations defend the different actors to use their strategies and actions? Which historical explications or reasons are named to present and rationalize political ambitions? Which semantics and narrative logics, which metaphors, motifs, images, which rhetoric and linguistic instruments are created to evoke, present and interpretate the conflict and the violence? How are presented the responsible of violence and their victims, which forms and aesthetics are attributed to the acts of violence, in which images and forms are the opponents of the conflict described? Which modes of justification/critique of violent action are used, how are the consequences of violence presented? How the narratives structure the instances and authorities of the communication of information, which role play the subjective realities communicated by the invented fictional characters?

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<sup>8</sup> Beyond the questions of genre specificity and the ontological status of the transmitted knowledge, a cultural narratological approach on narratives about the past is interested in the *worlds constructed by the narratives*, departing from their aesthetic-mediatic and social-ideological characteristics. The narratives base –are they of ‘fictional’ or ‘factual’ nature– on decisions concerning the selection of the material, the invention of different positions of the voices and/or actors, and the construction of the narrative perspectives. Selectivity, positionality and perspectivity are facets of the narratives, whatever their ontological character (fiction-factual) is. Not any narrative representation of violence is neutral, the related events are always commented, connotated and evaluated, an observation, which one could denote “structure law of representation of violence” (Keppler/Popp/Seel 2015: 13). Narratives serve, in different degrees, as imagination and experimental laboratory, which try to create –beyond the question of the truthful or probability of the narrated worlds– convincing historical images, interpretations, and explications, or also revisions of hegemonic historical narratives. They have the power to shape the cultural evocation and social imagination of the past.

<sup>9</sup> See also: Koschorke 2011: 46 ff. ; and Bandau/Buschmann/von Treskow 2008: 7 f.



### **Cultural Narratives in the Basque post-conflict memory culture**

The narratives of the past are closely linked to the dynamics in the field of memory culture and the scripts established there. In the memory culture, the continuous and thorough representation and reflection of past events manifest the communicative/discursive, visual and narrative character of the past, the related history which encompasses the present and an envisaged future (cf. Straub 2010: 220). This also applies for the case of the memories of the violence of the Basque violence, which are negotiated, represented, and told in different media, narrative genres, plots, and visual cultures. The collective memory of the conflict has in the cultural representations and narratives on the past both its fundament and its medium, through which it gets form, visibility, and materiality. There is a vast variety of symbolic mechanisms, which as types of cultural narratives form part of the “media of cultural memory” (Erll 2017; Erll 2010): visual arts (historical paintings), religious texts, historiographical texts, TV documentaries and film, novels, essays, graphic novels, commemorative rituals, internet, memorials, monuments, and museums. The following statement, realized regarding literary fiction, is also valid concerning the cultural impact of other mediatic forms of memory narratives: they communicate the “illusion of glimpsing the past (...)” and are “—often at the same time—a major medium of critical reflection upon these very processes of representation” (Erll 2010: 391). In general, “(f)ictional media, such as novels and feature films, are characterized by their power to shape the collective imagination of the past” (ibid.: 389). The narratives on the past have, viewing their relation to and impact on the reproduction of cultural memory, a reflexive and productive function, as a medium “that simultaneously builds and observes memory” (ibid.). The mediatic representations shape cultural memory in a manner, that they can have a lasting impact on cultural memory. They allow to accept the narrated experiences and memories of other people or social groups just like an artificial, ‘prosthetic limb’: Alison Landsberg describes the nexus of memory, media and the possible identity effects in the public with the metaphor of “prosthetic memory” (Landsberg 2004), focusing with this corporeal image the corporal, sensual and affective dimension of mediatic memories:

“Prosthetic memory emerges at the interface of a person and a historical narrative of the past (...) In the process the person does not simply apprehend a historical narrative but takes on a more personal, deeply felt memory of a past event through which he or she did not live. The resulting prosthetic memory has the ability to shape the person’s subjectivity and politics” (Landsberg 2004: 2, quoted in Erll 2017: 153).

The memory narratives make historical events tangible and accessible for the public, offering in different intensities and clarity modes of group/collective identification (with one of the conflict parties). The importance for the dynamics of collective memory narratives lies in their capacity even to stage traumatic historical experience of a near past, where the wounds are still gaging, like it is the case in the memory of Basque violence. Here creative phantasy and fictional genres can imagine situations to explore the conflict constellations or to reflect them, also in the mode of thematic (historical, geographical) displacements. The generic narratives of the antifrancoist *guerrilla*, the *maquis*, had been depoliticized and dehistoricized in the Spanish culture to such an extent, that the maquis-narrative even has “become more evocative of the asymmetrical warfare of national terror-groups like the ETA or international networks” (Winter 2012: 20). The feature films *El laberinto del fauno* (2006) de Guillermo de Toro –historically situated in the post-*guerra civil*-context and the warfare of the Francoist troops against the guerrilla-resistance in the mountains, and related to the cinematographic

language of the fantastic genre— can be read as an allusion of the terror produced in the asymmetrical warfare realized by ETA (ibid.). The narratively displaced subject of asymmetric warfare is one possibility to allude imaginatively the Basque violence; more direct and explicit references on the Basque violence are constructed, for example, in genres, which narrativize concrete historical, in part autobiographical experiences.

### **Autobiographic genres: testimonies and new forms of essay writing**

Testimony texts, mostly manifested in autobiographic-factual and biographical narration, are important instruments for the psychological processing and symbolization of experiences made by members of the generation of contemporary witnesses. The experiences reflected and expressed can be those immediately and personally lived or that of observation. In all its facets, testimonial genres are part of the archive of the communicative memory – the long time span of the hot phase of the Basque conflict, and the uninterrupted military activity of ETA between 1968 and 2011, makes it necessary to consider that the conflict ‘produced’ different generations of perpetrators and victims.

An interesting phenomenon of the testimonial-autobiographic texts are the autobiographies of *ex-etarras*, who, in a classical manner of the renegade (“renegado”), confess their earlier life phase associated with ETA and pronounce their ‘culpable’ politic-military entanglement from an ‘adult’ retrospective perspective, renegating their political past (cf. Eser 2017). The autobiographical texts of this type of intellectual, represented for example by Mario Onaindia, Jon Juaristi or Teo Uriarte (cf. Gabilondo 2006), are realized within the narrative standards of contemporary, politically, and historically informed autobiographical text, which tells, taking a self-critic perspective, about a past political activity (Juaristi 2006, Onaindia 2001, Uriarte 2005). In this texts of the earlier generation of ETA-activists, politically involved in the early phase of the ‘antifrancoist ETA’, the autobiographic voice tells about its activities, its perceptions of important historical processes and events (the Burgos process, the assassination of Carrero Blanco, the transition to democracy) and its leaving of ETA in different circumstances. It gives subjective insights in the historical moment and the beginning escalating of violence.

In contrast to those meanwhile ‘historical memories’, the vast and unmanageable corpus of biographic texts concerning the Basque violence includes some newer ones, which are characterized by an essayistic-ludic approach and combine different types of texts and knowledges, decentering and integrating the biographic experience. *El eco de los disparos. Cultura y memoria de la violencia* (2016) by Edurne Portela is as well an essay about the Basque violence and its narrativization in cultural representations as it is also an autobiographic commentary of a person, who grew up in an atmosphere of violence and reflects the not always manifest consequences of this socialization. Portela combines the narration of her personal experience and memories with commentaries about the cultural reflections and fictions on the Basque violence and integrates own fictional short stories. The essay is an experimental mix, which goes beyond the autobiographical genres (like that of Juaristi, Uriarte and Onaindia), although it contains elements of it and expresses of a generational sensibility (cf. Ayerbe Sudupe 2019).

The essay as form and genre has experimented in the Basque-Spanish culture and public sphere, confronted with the violent conflict, new versions, and innovations. In those the personal testimonies are combined with other discourses, with feuilletonistic commentaries of cultural dynamics and own fictional (the case of Portela), or with academic erudition and investigation, which is the case of Jon Juaristi, whose (early) academic and intellectual work is dedicated to different thematic facets of Basque culture and its

connections to (proto-)nationalist ideologies.<sup>10</sup> Departing from skepticism towards nationalist attitudes and applying constructivist methodologies in their analysis, the work of Juaristi is dedicated to deconstruct the imaginaries and ideologies of Basque nationalism, also in Basque visual arts, literature, and historiography (cf. Eser 2011). The critical writing of Juaristi on Basque nationalism has taken on strongly polemical features over time: the academic treatises on Basque art and literature are followed by the polemical essay writing of the intellectual figure Juaristi, who in the context of the escalating Basque conflict and his own political commitment on Spanish patriotic and 'constitutionalist front' combines his critical intellectual interventions with scientific expertise (Juaristi 1997, 1998, 1999). The critical reconstruction of the Basque nationalism in its different facets and on ideological and organizational level (the emergence, development, and differentiation of Basque nationalism) integrates, at the same time, short narrations of his personal experience. His innovative polemical essays –*El bucle melancólico* of 1997 as its masterpiece–, combining personal experience with academic erudition, instrumentalizing the latter for the political-ideological intentions, and, at the same time, unfolding the critical-academic discourse through the integration of subjective narratives of personal experience. The autobiographical element is emerging in the academic texts of Juaristi as an independent entity, enriching them with narrated experientiality. The essays of Juaristi make in general far-reaching claims to explanation (“bucle melancólico”), the methodological design points the text out as highly self-reflexive in its style to tell (hi)stories, recurring on metahistoriographical concepts and forms.

As a third example of innovative essay writing on the Basque conflict we mention the writing of the anthropologist Joseba Zulaika, which also combines academic erudite style, forms of knowledge gained from own research, and the narration of personal experiences. Intrinsically connected with his discipline, anthropology, this nexus is reflected in his first book *Violencia vasca. Metáfora y sacramento* (1988). It contains the results of his investigation realized at local level, in his home village of Itziar, where he investigates two tragic deaths linked to the armed conflict. The work is inextricably linked to his own history and socialization in the village. In the later work *Vieja luna de Bilbao. Crónicas de mi generación* (2014), the writing self likewise conveys reflections on a generational experience. Departing from novelized autobiographic memories, the text explores the political and social realities and the everyday live in Bilbao to explore how the revolutionary epic of violence emerged around the figure of the martyr Txabi Etxebarrieta. Other critical essays of Zulaika revolve around the violence of ETA, combining philosophical reflections with everyday observations. The essayistic work of Zulaika, only mentioned briefly here, is, knowing about the creative and constitutive force of the writing, an important part of the contemporary innovative and multi-faceted essay writing about Basque violence, which incorporates autobiographic genre elements<sup>11</sup>.

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<sup>10</sup> Simplifying we can constare, that the ,early' academic work of Juaristi is focused on a critical investigation of cultural and intellectual dynamics in the Basque country, driven by an antinationalist impulse, is followed by his later investigations, which are dedicated on Spanish culture and literature, interested in a benevolent vision of Spanish patriotism (Juaristi hold the chair of Spanish Literature at the Alcalá de Henares University).

<sup>11</sup> The ludic insertion of the testimonial voice and autobiographic experience gives the essay the character of a reflection medium of generational knowledge. The mentioned essays combine in an innovative manner academic specialized knowledge (anthropology, literary and cultural studies, history, philosophy), with the subjective-autobiographic narrative and blend this narrativized experiences, in some cases, with texts of fictional genres. The classical forms of the autobiographical genre are reformulated in this new, hybrid and multi-generic essays, which additionally to the meta-historiographic form are characterized by an elevated degree of self-reflectivity.

Another aspect of the vast cultural production of autobiographical testimony is realized in the audiovisual medium. The presence of the voice of the eyewitness and its memory and retrospective reflection associated with the violent past and the own activities, can take very different forms of narrativization. One is the fictionalization for which the memories of Onaindia are a classical example. Stories of the manifold and turbulent political live experiences in the late franquism and the transition period find in the television short series *El precio de la libertad* (2011; EITB-2) their audiovisual expression. This television series has in certain manner a pioneer status in the genre of the audiovisual narrativization of biographies, associated with the Basque conflict<sup>12</sup>: yet published at the end of the hot phase of the “armed conflict” and long before the sprouting of audiovisual narrations of political biography in the recent “boom of memory”, further dynamized by the productions of the streaming service providers, the audiovisual narration of the biography of Onaindia was the first of this genre.

A difficult-to-survey number of documentary and docufictional films revolve around individuals and their role in the conflict, their suffering, or their effort to end the violence. The Netflix-production *El fin de ETA* (2016; Justin Webster) stages the two Basque politicians Arnaldo Otegi (*izquierda abertzale*) and Jesus Eguiguren (PSE) as protagonists. Both tell about their contribution in the context of the peace negotiations, that took place over years before the declaration of permanent end to violence. From their perspectives, they report on the problems they had to confront in their own political camp to start and maintain the negotiations.-

The *testimonial discourse* is present in a vast audiovisual production of documentaries, which give insights in the psychic and memorialistic dynamics provoked by and connected to the violent conflict. So, the documentary *Traidores* (2021; Jon Viar), which is about questions of generation, origin and transmission of the violent conflict. The film interviews former *etarras*, who were active in the early, anti-Franco phase of ETA and later made a clear break with their past, been considered since then as ‘traitors’. The documentary focuses the generational question or the dialogue between the generations, putting the dialogue between the director, Jon Viar, and his father, Iñaki Viar, a former ETA member, renegade, and psychoanalyst, in its centre. This father-son relationship serves the young director (1985) as starting point for various interviews with other former and current companions of his father, such as Juaristi, Uriarte or Mikel Azurmendi. The interviewed persons, active in the anti-Franco ETA at an early age, rejected later resolutely this political option and speak in their memories about that, denouncing their activism as a misguided seduction by their parents' generation.

A major part of the post-conflict documentaries is staging the memories and experiences of concrete political person, exploring the social as well as the psychological consequences of the conflict. The testimonies of the victims of terrorist violence is an integral part of the contemporary documentary film, connected to the Basque conflict. Often dedicated to local stories and events, the documentaries reconstruct the personal stories of suffering, related with the Basque violence. The documentary *Trece entre mil* (2005; Iñaki Arteta) sketches a panorama of the suffering that ETA's terrorism has produced and left behind in the families of assassinated victims. The reconstruction of the murdering violent actions are at

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<sup>12</sup> His early death in 2003 led to early social recognition of his biography, from one of the main defendants in the famous Burgos trial to one of the most renowned advocates of rejecting terrorist violence in democracy. A foundation to his honor was established, and his person was stylized to an exemplary political representative, who found the path of political reason amid political turbulence and changing political allegiances.

the centre of the film, which consists basically of visual exploration of the crimes scenes and the personal memories of the affected relatives of the victims.

The category of the victim is central in the Basque present, as it is in other post-conflict societies or post-violence scenarios, also because social movements and forms of protest against ETA terrorism have emerged around its status and function. The ascribed victim status is of great importance not at least for the weight of one's own voice and testimony; at the same time, the definition of what constitutes the victim is not always that simply and clearly drawn, as several debates and disputes in the Basque public show.

### **Legitimate voices of the victims: how to construct archive and memory**

The obvious victims of ETA terrorism are contrasted with the so-called "other victims", persons who suffered illegitimated violence by the state apparatuses and, for example, lost their lives or were subjected to torture practices. The narrative of this other suffering is also present in the Basque memorialistic culture, although provided with polemical debates. The polemics have to do with the so called 'equidistance': basing on a spatial metaphor, this concept describes a third and neutral space, from which the different types of violence and caused suffering can be observed and identified; at the same time the concept suggests dialogues and reconciliation as a possible and adequate solution to solve conflicts between two opposite parties of conflict, which both have realized political violence. It is specially because of these moral assumptions, why the concept of equidistance has been heavily criticized and used as a negative term and reproach accusing a relativization of terrorist violence. The juxtaposition of historical events, their comparison or even a reference to each other in moral terms are operations and views, which entail polemics in the Basque memorialistic culture. Insofar also the question of victim status is highly controversial, although since the end of the violence and in recent years there has been a slight loosening of the rigid demarcations earlier advocated. Similarly controversial is the question of whose voice should be given presence in the concert of memories and perspectives of the conflict, and which should not (cf. Eser 2019a: 7-8).

An example of how narrowly drawn the boundaries of what is (was) considered legitimate can be seen in the debate surrounding the documentary *La pelota vasca* (2003) by Basque director Julio Medem. The film provoked heated disputes, because Medem also wanted to interview representatives of the *izquierda abertzale*. The PP and intellectuals such as Jon Juaristi and Fernando Savater were offended by the participation of the political leader Arnaldo Otegi in the film to such an extent that they called for a boycott of the film because it allegedly offered space for the ETA perspective (Barrenetxea Marañon 2006). The participation of politicians or representatives of the *izquierda abertzale* was and is considered an incompatibility criterion in certain political milieus, because they are seen as ETA members or representants of the terrorist violence. The extent to which this perception and identification can be overcome is certainly a major challenge for the coming period in debates about the memory culture.

The contradictions and challenges one can see, for example –as one example of many others–, in the monumental volume *Memoria de Euskadi* (ed. by Maria Antonio Iglesias 2011), in which 32 people from the political class of the Basque Country have presented their views on the Basque conflict and ETA terrorism. Among these voices, only one had at that moment a (albeit loose) connection with the *izquierda abertzale* - Patxi Zabaleta<sup>13</sup>. The recollection of the voices, that cast perspectives on the memory and history of the Basque

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<sup>13</sup> Zabaleta led at that time the *Aralar* party, which had split from the 'official' *izquierda abertzale* because of its negation to condemn ETA's violence.

Country do not seek a ‘true plurality’ even at the level of selection, although especially the paratexts of the volume declare the plurality of visions as the necessary ethos of the *memories* of the conflict: the subtitle of the book declares the “therapy of the truth – all tell everything” (“La terapia de la verdad: todos lo cuentan todo”), the prolog of Javier Elzo evokes the idea of a “choral symphony” and the preface of Daniel Innerarity is entitled: “The Basque pluralism”. In contrast to these slogans and catchwords is the exclusion of a certain, in itself heterogeneous spectrum of the political landscape of the Basque Country, connected with the violent history. Should it not be indispensable to integrate voices from this political spectrum for gaining a complex and plural image of the memories of the political violence in the Basque Country? The singular “memory” (“memoria”) of the book title is in this sense perhaps unwantedly significant and an answer to this perhaps provocative question. At the same time: is it not understandable and fair that political representatives, linked to a political milieu which doesn’t not condemn the at this time still existing terrorist violence, are not invited to – or not welcomed or not tolerated in– a cultural project in a social context, where much suffering was caused and is still virulent in the present? But what if the political constellation has changed in the meantime and a part of that political spectrum that previously refused to condemn violence has meanwhile practiced self-criticism (how credible the corresponding gestures may have been in all their consequences remains to be seen here for the time being) and declares the rejection of violence as an instrument of the political: how are these voices dealt with in the cultures of memory of post-conflict? Which lines of conflict and strict divides between the political identities still exist, at which points do fractures and new bridges reveal themselves, in the Basque as well in the Spanish memory culture?

The proposal, which formulates the collective work *Memorias del terrorismo en España* (2018), is trying to get an overview of a broad variety of personal experiences connected to the ruins of terrorism (Romo 2018: 19). The anthology attempts to bear witness to different types of terrorism: that of ETA and other radical left groups, that of radical Islamic terrorism and also that of the extreme right and anti-terrorism. The book pretends to represent a plural spectrum of voices, but under the pretext that the participants share an ethical minimum (without explaining in more detail what this consists of), and that they were not perpetrators or advocates of violence (ibid.: 22). Apart from the peculiar effort to deal with very different forms of political violence in a common project (Islamist and Basque terrorism), the boundaries of the selection of the voices considered as legitimated to share their memories are not so clearly drawn here either, even if the status of the victim of the political violence of terrorism is relatively clearly defined through the identification of the different terrorisms as perpetrators.

The pretention and objective to create a pluralistic space of multi-perspective memories is not easy to realize, like these short example and contemporary debates on memory culture show. Lingering violations and rigid political identities make dialogue situations impossible or difficult. A social project dedicated to constructing open and plural memories of the violent past, with the wish and objective to consolidate ‘just memories’, surely must accept the presence of the multiple voices of the different political-ideological sectors, always if they share the conviction and ethical compromise to condemn the political use of physical violence and to prioritize the victims’ perspective. This also implies the recognition of the existence of the different types of victims and forms of suffering. There are still many different and opposite visions of what defines this multi-perspective and the criteria of ‘just memories’.

In recent years, various concepts, linked with the project of an open, democratic and pluralistic remembrance of the violent political past, have emerged. Keywords just like ‘plurality of memory’, ‘self-criticism’, ‘truth of historical facts’, ‘no public forgetting’, ‘democratic values’, ‘just memory’, ‘empathy’, ‘protagonistic role of the victims’ are constitutive of the political vocabulary applied in the memorialistic interventions of the Basque post-conflict scenario. The narratives, which are constructed departing from this consensual vocabulary, can indeed differ greatly. This is already obvious at the level of state institutions, which strive for an officialization of the discourse of memory and affirm the goals of an open, democratic and just memory: on the one hand, *Gogora. Instituto de la Memoria, la Convivencia y los Derechos Humanos*, an institution set up by the Basque regional government, which is dedicated to preserving and passing on the memory of the traumatic experiences, provoked by political violence during the last 100 years of Basque history. On the other, the *Centro Memorial de las Víctimas del Terrorismo*, situated in Vitoria-Gasteiz and financed by the Spanish Ministry of the Interior, has been elaborated in collaboration with the associations of victims of terrorism, *Asociación de las Víctimas del Terrorismo* (AVT). Both official institutions and documentation centers have different modes to tell and explain the history of political violence in the Basque country and apply different historical time frames for their narratives of the violence: *Gogora* marks a broad historical context, in which the political violence is situated, including the historical factors of the Second Spanish Republic, the Civil War and the Francoist Regime (Gogora 2022). The Memorial in Gasteiz-Vitoria, whose objective is to ‘preserve and spread the democratic and ethical values, which the victims of terrorism incorporate’ (Centro Memorial de las Víctimas del Terrorismo n.y.) and to build the historical memory of the victims, sets the beginning of its historical narrative in 1960, the alleged year of the first fatal attack provoked by ETA.

In addition to that attempts to *officialize the memory of the “Basque violence”* as part of an educational state project (on different political scales, the Basque and den Spanish Politics), another remembrance project could be mentioned, to show how encrusted the views of the past still are: that of the Spanish police (*Policia Nacional*). On the homepage of the Spanish police there is visible a small online exhibition “Memorial Victims of Terrorism”, which puts emphasis on the own suffering of the members of this institution. The story of persecution and intimidation of Spanish police by ETA's terror campaign is at the centre of this “institutional memory”, whose narrative is framed by the reclaims and keywords *Truth, justice, memory, dignity (Verdad, justicia, memoria y dignidad)* (Policia Nacional, n. y.). The tone of the narrative, which spans several thematic foci, is triumphalist and belligerent: it evokes the “responsible of the barbarity”, the images of the terror and the “faces of the evil of terrorism”, and presents the end of terrorism as a defeat, provoked by the heroic and exemplary efforts of the police. The simplistic vision of ‘the terrorism’ as the incarnation of the evil permits no complex view of the dynamics of Basque violence; possible own institutional errors or illegal misconduct in the context of the antiterrorist fight against ETA are not mentioned. The collective memory of this concrete institution shows how focused on itself and narrowed in the perception the memory narratives of institutions can be. The narrative presentation of their own experience, the stories of suffering and heroic action create a particular perspective of the institution, of their own community and identity. Although the used frame concepts (“truth, justice, memory, dignity”) originate of the above-mentioned corpus of the new political vocabulary of the post-conflict scenario, the narrative constructed departing from it deviates remarkably from that of the (other) state official narratives.

Similar narrowing of vision can also be observed in the official memory institution of the *izquierda abertzale* (Fernández-Soldevilla 2016: 52-55), the *Euskal Memoria Fundazioa*, which places the emphasis of its memorialistic compromise on the suffering of the members of radical Basque nationalism. In its self-image, the organization is dedicated to the documentation of the attacks against “Euskal Herria”, which suffers “oppression and its negation as people” (Euskal Memoria Fundazioa 2015). This universalist claim, inscribed also in its name (*Euskal Memoria* as “Basque memory”), is in obvious contradiction to its concrete documentation practice, which is one-sided focused on the suffering of individuals and organizations of the Basque Nationalist Liberation Movement (MLNV), i. e. one part of the Basque people and that part which supported the terror campaign for years. The central key words of the publications of the institution are “state terrorism”, “torture”, “political prisoners”, these phenomena are the central objects of its commemoration practice. The ambition to “unite and disseminate memory” is meant to create an “antidote to the official lies. An effective trench in the face of the offensive that seeks to erase our identity and our demands from the streets of our towns and from the pages of textbooks” (ibid.). The bellicose rhetoric and one-dimensional perception of the traumatic consequences of the conflict confirms the persistence of rigid identity patterns which base on narrow-minded narratives of the conflict, in its past and present.

In addition to the state official memory and to the highly ideologized conflict narratives of the (ex-)conflict actors, there are non-governmental memory actors, which take on the task of establishing and institutionalizing commemorative acts, and developing pedagogical concepts, which transmit the memory. A good 10 years after ETA's renunciation of violence and its subsequent dissolution, a broad network of civil society organizations and institutions have emerged to join the already established ones, such as the associations of victims of terrorism, which have yet before played –although partially in a political-instrumentalist manner– an important role in the hot phase of the conflict in making visible, thematizing and scandalizing the suffering provoked by the terrorist violence. *Gogoan – por una memoria digna* is a network of activists dedicated to delegitimizing political violence, recalling the early work of the *Gesto por la Paz de Euskal Herria* –a social movement, which had been active in the Basque Country since 1985. *Gogoan* advocates, on a national level (in the Autonomous Communities Euskadi and Navarra) a *dignified memory* (“*memoria digna*”) based on the delegitimization of violence and the rights of the victims (Gogoan n.d.). The dignity of the memory means the right of the victims and of the society as a whole to know more about the responsibility of the violence acts, following the insight of Reyes Mate, that “memory is the moral reading of the past guided by the search for truth and justice” (ibid.). The confrontation with the violent past and its responsibilities should help to construct a “healing memory”. This is combined in the vision of *Gogoan* with the pedagogical claim of democratic education, to which it recurs on the consensual political vocabulary of the recent memorialistic discourses.

At the local level, numerous initiatives have been founded with the aim of constituting a common, inclusive, shared, and democratic memory of the various experiences of injustice, violence and suffering in the context of the 'Basque conflict'. These initiatives integrate different, opposite political spectrums and document, supported by (forensic) experts, the human rights violations that have occurred at the local level with the ambition to constitute a ‘shared memory’: the association *Argitzu*, produced a 300-page report *Hacia una memoria compartida* about the violence in Andoain, in Hernani was published the report



*Vulneraciones de derechos humanos por motivación política sucedidas en Hernani entre 1960 y 2018* (cf. Eser 2019a: 9 p.)<sup>14</sup>.

### **Fictional media**

The highly acclaimed and award-winning feature film *Maixabel* (2021; Icíar Bollaín) has played out several moral dilemmas and uncomfortable situations, in which individuals faced the challenge of shedding old and cherished identities and taking a step to the other side for the purpose of enabling new perspectives. The film tells the story of a perpetrator-victim reconciliation and the politics of the so-called restitutive encounters ("encuentros reconstitutivos"). The two central characters of the film are Maixabel Lasa and Ibon Etxezarreta: Maixabel's husband, the PSE politician Juan María Jáuregui, was shot dead in 2000 by an ETA commando of which Ibon, the second main character, was a member. Years later, Maixabel, the eponymous protagonist, receives a letter from a political prisoner who has broken away from ETA and who wants to get in touch with the victim of his earlier act of violence. A phase of contact and exchange begins between the two, which the film illuminates in detail. During this contact the perspectives of the two changes. The initiated process of mutual empathy is staged above all in Maixabel's greatness. The film makes the different points of view and the inner convulsions comprehensible, the bad conscience of the perpetrator Ibon and the fears as well as the desire for justice of the victim Maixabel. The focus of the plot is clearly on the victim's perspective and the suffering of the families, but at the same time Maixabel also advocates for the recognition of a broader concept of victimhood that includes the recognition of the suffering caused by the illegitimate use of violence by state apparatuses, an unwelcome assessment, not shared by her own political companions and those of her slain husband – for a long time, advocating this opinion was frowned upon in majority parts of Basque society and politics as a benevolent attitude of understanding towards ETA. The last scene of the film, in which Maixabel appears with Ibon at a commemorative ritual for her murdered husband, shows this clearly: the horrified and loathing looks of the friends and party comrades are shown, but at the same time the tension that weighs on both Ibon and the entire memorial community. Finally, the narrative of the film creates strong images of possible future reconciliation practices, of autocriticism and the healing effects of the exchanged words, from both a psychological and ethical perspective (cf. Eser 2022).

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<sup>14</sup> The political rhetoric of the different memorialistic and pedagogic projects follow determinate political-ethical orientations, although they themselves also are subjected to processes of historical change and variation. That the narratives of the delegitimization of political violence must also include the rejection of the illegitimate use of violence by Police and other state forces, is a viewpoint, which for a long time was frowned upon or even considered an indirect legitimization of ETA. On the other side, the accusation or suspicion of adopting an equidistant perspective is still a source of relativization of the crimes of terrorism. The question, whose suffering and voice is worth to be present and recognized in the public sphere and the political rhetoric continues to provoke polemics. At the same time, the common-sense keywords of the public discourse about the memories of the violent past can fundament very contrasting narratives. To the same signifiers and concepts can be given different meanings. The narrative combination of them, their symbolic realization in the narration of the conflict, in a story with actors and divergent strategies manifests the concrete significations, which those concept produce. The partially strict limitations of political rhetoric and public discourse, the taboos, and moral regulations in the matter of the cultures of memory, delegate to the fictional media an important assignment. The narrative and fictionalized exploration of those limits, the (counterfactual) imagination of counter-experiences and the vivid and poignant narration of the living, experience, the suffering and acting of the involved subjects serve as instruments, that succeed in thinking through new constellations and bringing forth new kinds of sensibilities.

In the fiction of *Maixabel*, the concept of victim is less clear-cut than it first appears – and as associations of the victims of terrorism commonly portray it–, the possibility of the transformation of the subjectivity of perpetrators is also reflected. The aspect of open repentance and self-criticism, is negotiated and acted out in *Maixabel*, is a significant narrative in Basque memory culture that had so far received little presence. The film, which is in any case at odds with the often black-and-white shaded perceptions and representations, has given broad visibility to the short and rich experience of the restitutive encounters, which unfortunately had not received sufficient political support to give it continuity. The aspect of autocriticism and the possible moral-spiritual implications or conditions of it had in the example of the former ETA-leader *Txelis* an interesting precedent: In 2012 Jose Luis Alvarez Santa Cristina (*Txelis*), who studied philosophy and theology after his break with ETA and converted to Christianity, stated publicly remorse and plea for forgiveness. In the following he has in the public spoken about the conditions and possibilities of repentance and asking for forgiveness. The transformation of the terrorist subject, his repentance as well as the search for reconciliation, touch –especially in the case of *Txelis*– to a certain degree spiritual and moral implications and raises fundamental ethical questions about the conditions of the possibility of forgiveness and reconciliation.

Another concrete historical case served in fictional media to explore the aporias, challenges and possibilities of a shared memory of Basque violence: the most famous criminal case in which the Spanish state resorted to extra-legal means in the fight against ETA: the two ETA members Jose Antonio Lasa y Jose Ignacio Zabala were kidnapped in France in 1983, brought to the Spanish Basque country, tortured to death there and later buried on the Spanish Mediterranean coast. The case made waves when it came to light in 1995; in the court cases, some of those involved and responsible were convicted, but the complete responsibility beyond the case could never be clarified entirely. The feature film *Lasa eta Zabala/Lasa y Zabala* (2014; Pablo Malo) puts the events of the case of Lasa and Zabala into the center of its narration with the claim to show the true events of this crime of state violence and its legal processing. The film recounts the most famous criminal case in the narrative genre of a detective film, showing the crimes and the later attempts to solve them in a realistic style that purports to show the story as it happened. The detective investigation and reconstruction of the criminal case at the centre of the film is carried out by the protagonist of the investigating lawyer Iñigo Iruin. The forensics, the hearing of witnesses, and the search for the truth are significant motifs of the narrative. The empathic view of the situation of the relatives of the victims is another important characteristic of the film and reaches its culmination in the portrayal of the family members' suffering during the court proceedings and the perpetrators' account of the course of events. The cinematic narrative moves from the crimes and the investigation to the trials, which end only partially in the victory of truth and justice through the success of the prosecution (these the classical criteria and the plot of the story of a generic crime film).

The narrative of the film, which tackles a sensitive event of the Basque conflict, takes on a modest denunciatory tone: in the last scene of the film, the *voice over* of the protagonist Iruin, who heroically and against all odds pushed for the clarification of the case and its public trial, can be heard saying that many of those convicted finally not served a fair sentence. The narrative of the destiny of the ‘other victims’ highlights a dark spot in the success story of the Spanish transition to democracy (cf. Aizpeolea 2010). The film constructs a different perspective on the history of the conflict; regarding the presentation of the victims in the story told, the film historian Santiago de Pablo criticized that Lasa and Zabala are hardly shown in their function as ETA members; in general the case would be

illuminated in a detached way from the political context of the events due to the lack of corresponding information (cf. de Pablo 2022). Drawing an anecdote from the history of the conflict, the film tends to reproduce the pattern of black-and-white drawing that often characterizes the cinematic representations of conflict, only this time in inverted form, with police officers and criminals as sadistic perpetrator figures and representant of the evil and the ETA members as innocent victims.

The novel *Twist* (2013) by Harkaitz Cano also takes the crime against Lasa and Zabala in the centre of its narrative. The narrative arrangement of the novel is more complicated, the characters involved in the plot (the perpetrators, the victims as well as other characters connected to those two groups) are illuminated in their inner selves, their experience, and psychological states play an important role. (vgl. Vergarachea 2015: 85f.). Diego, a close friend of Soto and Zeberio (the inner-diegetic names for the historical persons Lasa and Zabala) plays a central role in the narrative arrangement of the novel. During the narrated action, it becomes clear that he had betrayed his friends in order to save his own skin and, worse still, had appropriated the writings of one of his friends after his disappearance and published them under his name, thus laying the foundation for his future successful writing career. Diego's psychological life, his remorse, and fantasies are explored in the narrative, also the other characters are also drawn in their psychological living. Of particular interest here is the perpetrator's consciousness portrayed, for example in the figure of Pedro Vargas, a Guardia Civil officer who, victim of perpetrator trauma and plagued by recurring memories, visits a priest at the end of his life to confess his guilt.

The forensic procedure that unfolds in the narrative involves the investigation that Diego undertakes, assisted by the detective character of Sesma, to solve the disappearance of his friends. It ultimately involves not only the reconstruction of the truth of what happened. The search for justice soon turns out to be a deeper existential exploration of one's own salvation and how to deal with one's own entanglement with guilt, how to confront the consequences of the own actions and omissions. This narrated search for truth is illuminated in *Twist* within the framework of the detective genre and the dark novel, supplemented with psychoanalytical procedures. The imagination of the violent past in juridic-forensic terms, the narrated documentation of the crime and its evaluation, the identification and reconstruction of material traces, characteristic to the detective-criminal narrative genre, suggest an "alternative ethical-juridical proposal" (Winter 2017: 51). In the case of *Twist* the exploration concerns the crimes, their juridic-ethical and psychological, that is the dramatic *human*, consequences. Ghost metaphors are recurring motives and serve as popular motifs to depict the dynamics of traumatic memory and its silences. Transnational references to latinamerican experiences of political violence, especially to the Argentine *desaparecidos*, are intertextual references in *Twist* to create the diegetic vision of the Basque violence (cf. Eser 2019b). The characters are complexly designed, they are characterized by a psychological depth. The characters' design rejects insofar the scheme of a moral black and white shading or reproducing stereotypes, which in the literary narratives about the Basque violence are not uncommon<sup>15</sup>.

Cano's novel succeeds in illuminating the central criminal case from the history of Basque violence in a multi-layered and profound way that the film does not achieve with such intensity. There, the characterization does not attain any depth, the inner experience as well

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<sup>15</sup> Critical reviews of the best-selling and successful novel *Patria* by Fernando Aramburu have underlined that the ETA-affiliated character Joxi Mari is portrayed in simplistic and stereotype manner as a dull character, which doesn't capture the complex problem of the affiliation for the terrorist cause (cf. Martínez Arrizabalaga 2019).

as information about the motivation of the characters' actions are hardly made explicit in the filmic narrative. Nevertheless, *Lasa eta Zabala* produces intense images, especially of the violence; terrible shots of torture and the treatment of the victims and the exploration of the suffering of the family members create an iconography that before weren't that visible in the collective cultural memory of the conflict. Both fictionalizations of the Lasa and Zabala-case contain *antagonistic* elements in view of their rhetoric of memory<sup>16</sup>, in their manner to present the historical event. They have this antagonistic style in common with the third fiction discussed here, *Maixabel*. This film places a controversial topic at the centre of the narrative events: the so-called restorative meetings between perpetrators and victims. Its narrative has an *antagonistic* character insofar as the paths taken by the central figures meet with a resistant habit in their respective political camps; also with regard to the collective memorialistic discourse their actions are staged in their pioneering role. The clash of views on the conflict is very present, as is the difficulty of making decisions that lie beyond the dominant opinions.

### **Conclusion: transdisciplinary and trans-medial approach to narratives of Basque violence**

Cultural representation procedures are always subject to ethical-political evaluations, which is a particularly sensitive issue in the case of still hot conflicts of political violence and memory such as that of the Basque case. The orientation to the concept of narrativity enables the investigation of diverse media forms and representations, imaginations and reflections of the violent past. As an *inter- or transdisciplinary key concept*, narrativity builds bridges between different disciplinary approaches and cultural studies paradigms, from history, psychology, philosophy to literature, film, and media studies. These specific disciplinary and theoretic approaches share the common interest for the semantic potential of narrative forms and the cultural functions that narrative strategies fulfill.

The trans-medial and transdisciplinary investigation design orientates the concrete empiric analysis of the cultural narratives of the violence – including also non-fictional and non-artistic forms of narrative into the corpus of investigation. It analyzes the narratives in its realized observation, imagination and narrativization of the conflict. This perspective permits to reconstruct the imaginaries and forms of the cultural unconscious, the rhetoric of memory and the cultural-affective dimensions of the representation of the use of political violence and the suffering it provoked. The transdisciplinary approach includes narratological categories to describe the time structures and the formal characteristics of the narratives (the narrative modes and construction of the voices and narrated actions, the articulated perspectives and the mediatic specificity of the evoked worlds). The context-sensitive interpretation of the narratively evoked worlds considers the cultural forms of knowledge applied in the narration of the conflict, their reflection in the created images of violence and the relationships of the acting of the perpetrators of violence and the suffering of victims. The matters of the (de)legitimization of violence, their problematization and reflection, are crossed to the question of the interpretation, structurization and the signification of time. The broad concept of narrative thus makes an extensive corpus of texts, (moving) images, metaphors, and symbols accessible to a cultural studies perspective. Thanks to its context-sensitive research design, the cultural narratology-approach manages to examine the socially relevant aspects of

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<sup>16</sup> Erll (2010: 390 pp.) made a proposal to distinguish four different modes in the rhetoric of collective memory (she later added a fifth; Erll 2017: 191-211): she distinguishes “four modes of a rhetoric of collective memory”: the experiential, the mythical, the antagonistic, and the reflexive mode.

narratives, both factual and fictional, audiovisual, and textual etc. and to trace the inter-media entanglements and amplifications of their ‘social energy’.

These inter-medial interactions are very tangible in the case of the cultural dynamics of memory, where successful fictions constitute media and interpretative patterns of cultural memory. The narratives can serve as important instrument of self-understanding and identity formation, which wear in their epistemological-informational status often a *generation index*; this is particularly relevant in the case of narrative genres with strong autobiographical content (autobiographical, auto-fictional, determinate types of meta-historiographic texts). Particularly testimonial literature, which expresses the voices of contemporary witnesses and their experiences, but also fictional genres, insofar as they express a generation-typical state of mind or problematic situation, can bear traits of “generational literature” and be transformed in models of a “literature of generations”.

The claims and functions of narratives can be, regarding their rhetorical structure respective to the cultures of memory and historical images, heretical and delegitimizing as well as identity-constitutive and legitimizing. Apart from this function, they can provide insights into life-world realities and sharpen the ability to empathize and adopt foreign perspectives, those of the ‘other side of the conflict’ (the example of *Maixabel*) or underline the terrifying and oppressive effects of collective psychic atmospheres created by terrorism on local scale (for example *Patria*). A literature and film study-informed analysis of narratives recognizes the specific ways in which cultural narratives constitute social meaning and take this into account when analyzing and interpreting the texts; the fictional design of the relations between action, truth and justice can, thanks to their licenses without obligation of truthfulness, constitute *alternative forms of justice* and imagine other courses of history, of resolution or escalation of conflicts, of antagonist and revisionist reading.

Considering the *disputed* character of the versions of the past and the still heightened sensitivity regarding the thematization and visualization of political violence, the ethical, extra-fictional imperatives of the mandates of memory can come into conflict with the ‘freer’ fictional exploration realized by creative cultural representations. The ethical reflection on the above-mentioned challenge how to tell, transmit and understand the narratives of violence has its impact on the discussion of the modalities of representation of perpetrator and victim figures, suggesting to avoid a trivialization of “evil” and treat “the good” with care (Rivera/Mateo 2020: 12-13). These kinds of debates are well known from the history of the fictional representation of nazi-perpetrator-figures, so for example the case of the novel *Les Bienveillantes (The Kindly Ones, 2009)* by Jonathan Littell. The novel consists of fictional memories of an SS officer named Maximilien Aue, which according to some voices of literary criticism manifests a questionable closeness or even empathy with the protagonist. Fictional representation in cinema and literature can, with its affective, expressive, and reflective potential thanks to different narrative strategies, explore realities in its density and intensity, sometimes beyond the clear and simple demarcation line between the “good” and the “bad”, which politico-ethical discourse tries to install. The autonomy of creative and artistic imagination of the conflict, its actors, perpetrators, and victims, can create tensions with the ethical, extra-fictional imperatives of the mandates of memorialistic discourse. Analyzing the rhetoric of stereotyping and simplification is both task and achievement of the culture-narratological analysis, just like it is the investigation of the different genre logics, which characterize the aesthetic representation of the conflictual situations and dynamic.

Finally, what stimulates a cultural-narratological research design are comparative perspectives, which relate the narratives associated with the political violence of the 1960s and 1970s in transnational dimension. The context-oriented cultural narratology approach can

sharpen a comparative investigation perspective about the different national narratives on the political experiences of political violence, combining narratological analysis with broader analysis of the memorialistic discourse and the public visions of the past. The insights and outputs of the cultural narratological methodology, the attention for the expression and creation of cultural values in and through the narratives, for the ethical-political implications, and the specific confrontation with the trauma of the past get even more perceptible and visible –so the openly formulated and concluding hypothesis with which we want to end this essay– in the comparison of different cases, for example that between the Basque and the Argentine cases of political violence<sup>17</sup>. A contrastive examination of the different narrative modes to construct the violent past can help to highlight the national specifics of the uses of different historical-semantic concepts and metaphors (for example the concept of “años de plomo”; cf. Eser 2018), the narrativizing of the plots, versions and figures of the history of violence (the figure of the *desaparecido*; cf. Eser 2019c), the narrative constitution of historical subjectivity –the perspectivity, voices and identity associated to it–, the narratives of reconciliation in the broader context of the juridical-political debates and established norms. A transnationalization of the investigation perspective on violent pasts and their cultures of memory can enable to focus these aspects. The sharpening of the *transdisciplinary profile* of the cultural-narratological approach and its *transnational application* opens promising perspectives both for the methodological-theoretical refinement of the research programme and for generating further insights into the psychological, cultural, and social dynamics of political violence. This makes possible also to relativize and contextualize the case of the Basque violence, situating its dynamics in a broader political-historical context, and perhaps makes possible to better understand it.

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<sup>17</sup> A comparative study on the case of Argentine experience of guerrilla in the 1970s and the self-critical political-intellectual retrospectives on this experience by their own actors, e. g. like realized in the review *Lucha armada*, and the Basque (almost not existing!) critical discourse of ex-*guerrilleros* could be very instructive to understand the different dynamics and motivations connected to both historical cycles of political violence.

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