

Weaponising unresolved pasts:

**The impact of victimhood narratives on societal reconciliation
in Spain and the Basque Country in the aftermath of ETA**

MA Thesis

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Introduction

The thesis will explore the socio-political climate in Spain and the Basque country in the aftermath of the definitive October 2011 ceasefire and the eventual dissolution in May 2018 of the Basque nationalist militant group *Euskadi ta Askatasuna* (ETA), coming after more than half a century of its armed struggle against the Spanish state. Despite the end of physical violence, its legacies nevertheless still appear to echo in the Basque Country and Spain as a whole. These particularly reflect in the highly polarised and vigorously promoted narratives about entangled pasts, with opposed parties effectively utilising these discourses as rhetorical weapons, both in the fields of public discourse and politics. A particular feature standing out in these narratives is the problematic conceptualisation of victimhood which appears at the centre of this perfect storm of narratives. The main research question this thesis will examine is *how* these narratives of victimhood in the Basque case impact prospects for societal reconciliation following the end of ETA. The thesis is thus organised with two sub-questions in mind. Firstly, it shall determine the origins of these antagonised narratives by exploring the complex and intertwining historical legacies of Basque identity politics, Francoism, the increasingly academically questioned transition to democracy as well as the overall historical violence in the Basque case. Secondly, the thesis will then examine the perpetuation and the entrenched and uncompromising nature of these narratives as they continue into the post-2011 era, with the aim of measuring their impact on societal reconciliation in Spain as a whole. The study of the Basque case has been chosen partly due to its recent and unilateral ending – contrary to the Northern Irish case it is often being compared to – making it a unique and an intriguing academic case study on the ending and legacies of ‘old’ separatist political violence. Furthermore, the complex historical burden of the Basque case intertwined with the controversial legacies of the Francoist dictatorship fuelling tense and politically charged narratives on both sides makes the case all the more layered and academically intriguing.

In terms of methodology and structure, the thesis takes a fundamentally historical approach – particularly in chapters I and II – as it is believed that the key to untangling and understanding the impact of these post-ETA-era narratives lies in breaking through the layer of silence prevalent in the Spanish society surrounding the country’s recent history, as well as delving into historical narratives of violent expression of nationalism on Spanish territory.

As MacDonald and Bernardo argue, Spain is the ‘textbook case’ of building a new democratic system without having confronted its past. However, without this necessary reconciliation ‘new cycles of impunity will ensue.’¹ The research is therefore underpinned by the assumption that reconciliation with regards to contentious pasts is both necessary and desirable for coexistence in a modern democratic society. It shall therefore focus on unearthing these legacies of violence and their sources, contextualising them and analysing their present discursive manifestations in-depth in the last chapter.

Chapter I explores the Basque case in all its complexity, delving into key historical issues of relevance to the thesis and providing indispensable contextualisation in order to be able to analyse the conceptualisations of victimhood in the latter phases. The chapter firstly examines the violent manifestation of Basque nationalism at the hands of the armed group ETA as well as the responses from Madrid, addressing the issue of why it took so long for ETA to end and why the armed struggle continued after the fall of Francoism for decades during Spanish democracy. The second section will then introduce the crucial “political conflict” versus “terrorism” narrative duality about the Basque case, subsequently focusing on the period after the guns fell silent and dealing with the violent legacies in the society. The struggles for reconciliation will then be addressed, paying special attention to political narratives closely aligned with the “terrorism versus conflict” dispute as well as drawing a brief comparison with the ending of the ‘sister’ Northern Irish case and its impact on reconciliation in the Basque case.

Chapter II builds up on the framework outlined in the first chapter, utilising this context to shed light on and examine one specific phenomenon – the conceptualisation of *victimhood* and its historical background in the Basque case, complementing this analysis with some insights on its conceptualisation in the Northern Irish case. The first section will focus on the historical background of victimhood narratives before ETA’s end in the Basque Country specifically – necessary for analysing their continuation in the post-ETA era later – whilst drawing heavily on the memory of the Civil War, Francoism and the democratic transition. The second section will briefly analyse the conceptualisation of victimhood and its utilisation

¹ Ross B. MacDonald, and Monica C. Bernardo, “The Politics of Victimhood: Historical Memory and Peace in Spain and the Basque Region,” *Journal of International Affairs* 60, no. 1 (2006): 173.

in the Northern Irish case, with the aim of utilising these insights to draw a framework aiding better comprehension of the post-ETA discourses of victimhood in the Basque case.

In chapter III the findings from the previous chapters will come together in an in-depth discourse analysis of post-2011 primary sources, tracking the progression of narratives of victimhood beyond the era of physical violence. This analysis will interplay with many of the themes explored before such as the “political conflict” and “terrorism” discourses, Francoism and the ‘unfinished business’ of democratic transition as well as the ‘double standards’ in the treatment of Francoism’s versus ETA’s victims and perpetrators. The two selected opposed victimhood conceptualisations analysed are the “Spanish nationalist narrative” representing the ETA victims’ entities highly aligned with Spanish conservative forces and the “*Abertzale* narrative” representing the non-mainstream Basque Nationalist Left with separatist aims. The chapter analyses the composition, sources, language and reasons for the perpetuation of these narratives in the post-ETA era, with a focus on victimhood. After analysing the two sides of these ‘speech acts,’ the chapter will close with exploring concrete political measures as real-world manifestations of these rhetorical exercises and their contribution to further entrenching the adversarial narratives in turn. It will be concluded that the perpetuation of entrenched victimhood narratives and competitive victimhood between the two main opposed sides examined detrimentally impacts progress towards reconciliation whilst emphasising the need for a victim-centric approach and inclusive conceptualisation of victimhood to overcome this stalemate.

Literature Review

This section will provide an overview of the literature concerning two main areas directly relevant to the premise of the thesis – the prospects for reconciliation in the Basque Country, specifically focusing on transitional justice; and the role of the concept of victimhood in conflict situations and reconciliation – both concretely in the Basque case and generally. Both of these topics have so far largely been on the fringe of academic interest with regards to the Basque country and the Basque case, with the majority of literature focusing on the history of the violence, ETA’s terrorist campaign, the reasons for its beginning and ending, Basque nationalism and the role of Francoism. However, the aspects central to the premise of this thesis – i.e. the prospects for reconciliation after ETA’s

unilateral end and the role conceptualisations of victimhood play in it – both remain largely academically unexplored. Even though this literature review will discuss these concepts separately, the thesis will nevertheless use them jointly as a focus point for its research.

Reconciliation in Spain and the Basque Country

When reviewing literature concerning reconciliation, it is firstly vital to take into account the historical roots relevant even today, specifically the history of the lack of transitional justice mechanisms in modern Spanish history, notably during the transition from Franco's dictatorship to democracy in the late 1970s. Literature on the legacies of Francoism in Spain frequently contains a common critique of the absence of transitional justice in Spain. Escudero critiques the notion of a 'transition without transitional justice,' arguing the legacy of this unresolved past puts a question mark over whether the transition has ended at all.² Similarly, Golob adds the pressures of contemporary 'transitional justice culture' imply Spain cannot avoid them indefinitely,³ with Porcar Orihuela and Payero López agreeing that transitional justice mechanisms are overdue in Spain.⁴ This increasingly common critique thus suggests that given the lack of amenability to initiate transitional justice mechanisms in Spain even in a regime transition, launching it in the Basque case may face significant difficulties.

However, the question as to whether transitional justice mechanisms are as suitable for the Basque case as they perhaps would have been to the democratic transition has been discussed by very few authors to date, which could be attributed to the fairly recent dissolution of ETA as well as the unclear implications of its sudden unilateral end. There are few works that discuss transitional justice and the Basque case together, nevertheless these works are thorough and consider the complexities and nuances of the case. Bengoetxea discusses the tensions between the desire for 'transitional' versus 'traditional' justice mechanisms in the post-ETA era, concluding there is a need for a combination of both whilst

² Rafael Escudero, "Road to Impunity: The Absence of Transitional Justice Programs in Spain," *Human Rights Quarterly* 36, no. 1 (2014): 132, 136, 146.

³ Stephanie R. Golob, "Volver: The Return of/to Transitional Justice Politics in Spain," *Journal of Spanish Cultural Studies* 9, no. 2 (2008): 137.

⁴ Juan Luis Porcar Orihuela, "Políticas de memoria en España," *Barataria: Revista Castellano-Manchega de Ciencias Sociales* 20 (2015): 66.

Lucia Payero López, "Justicia de transición en España: Claves para aprobar una asignatura pendiente," *Revista de Paz y Conflictos* 9, no. 1 (2016): 230.

critiquing the insufficient transitional justice measures taken to date.⁵ MacDonald and Bernardo take a similarly complex view regarding transitional justice in the Basque case, taking into account the complex historical legacies of Francoism as well as the role of the subtext of historical narratives.⁶ Some authors examine the applicability of transitional or restorative justice methods more generally, taking the Basque case as a case study to test their theory. Berastegi compares the Basque post-conflict transition with the Northern Irish one, concluding that when it comes to tackling violent legacies transitional justice mechanisms are equally applicable and beneficial in settled democracies as well as during the paradigmatic transitions they were originally designed for.⁷ Similarly, Zernova generally examines restorative justice practices' applicability to transitional societies, specifically emphasising the relevance of the political dimension with the Basque case in mind.⁸

These accounts' recommendations for reconciliation display clear convergence. In the conclusions of her renowned complex book analysing the history of ETA's armed struggle Whitfield emphasises the necessity for a historically-minded civil society-driven dialogue-based approach rooted in a human rights framework without stigmatising dialogue with any actors.⁹ Durkin underlines the importance of this historical approach by emphasising the need to tackle the underlying 'subcultures' of violence that have grown around it and continue to be perpetuated, with effort needed on both sides of the divide,¹⁰ further affirming that legacies of violence continue to permeate the Spanish and Basque societies despite the end to physical violence. Lastly, a key complex study involving many participants from various sides of the Basque conflict by Mínguez-Alcaide testing a systemic conflict transformation approach went on to re-affirm in practice the necessity of the participation of all stakeholders, adopting a human rights framework as a common basis for establishing peace and the need for transformation of governmental policies regarding the conflict.¹¹

⁵ Joxerramon Bengoetxea, "Transitional Justice versus Traditional Justice: The Basque Case," *Journal on Ethnopolitics and Minority Issues in Europe* 12, no. 2 (2013): 30-58.

⁶ MacDonald and Bernardo, "Politics of Victimhood," 190-191.

⁷ Amaia Alvarez Berastegi, "Transitional Justice in Settled Democracies: Northern Ireland and the Basque Country in Comparative Perspective," *Critical Studies on Terrorism* 10, no. 3 (2017): 542-561.

⁸ Margarita Zernova, "Restorative Justice in the Basque Peace Process: Some Experiments and Their Lessons," *Contemporary Justice Review* 20, no. 3 (2017): 363-391.

⁹ Teresa Whitfield, *Endgame for ETA: Elusive Peace in the Basque Country* (London: Hurst & Company, 2014), 305-320.

¹⁰ Stuart A. Durkin, "Advancing a Peace Culture in Euskadi Will Require a More Open Confrontation with Conflict Culture," *International Journal of Iberian Studies* 24, no. 1 (2011): 51-59.

¹¹ Xavier Mínguez-Alcaide, "Un proceso de diálogo multiactor para la paz en el País Vasco," *Covergencia: Revista de Ciencias Sociales* 73 (2017): 37-60.

The literature on reconciliation in the Basque country thus predominantly emphasises aspects of the human rights framework – as discussed by Bengoetxea earlier – and a historically conscious dialogue with complex and intertwined narratives in mind.

Victimhood in conflict and reconciliation

This section will review literature addressing the concept of victimhood, firstly concretely in the Basque case and secondly more generally when it comes to conflict scenarios. The theme of victimhood in the Basque case has been very sporadically written about, with only a few authors having focused on certain aspects of it. Whitfield mentions victims and their centrality to a Basque peace process, yet warns they should not be granted a veto over policy decisions.¹² MacDonald and Bernardo expand on that idea by focusing on the “politics of victimhood” in the Basque case and the potential detrimental effects politicisation of victims can have on such a peace process.¹³ Varona takes a different approach by focusing on the cultural practices of victimhood in the Basque case and how these intertwine with the conflicting historical narratives.¹⁴ Etxeberria takes an ethical viewpoint, examining the challenges and the lack of, as he claims, recognition of victims of ETA’s terrorism.¹⁵ His account very much echoes Spanish conservative academics such as Alonso who belong to the fervent defenders of the rights of victims of – especially ETA’s – terrorism in Spain whilst omitting and effectively dismissing victimhood claims on the other side.¹⁶ The key theme that permeates most of the aforementioned works problematises the ‘double standards’ of awarding victimhood to some whilst denying it to others, as pointed out by Landa,¹⁷ MacDonald and Bernardo¹⁸ as well as Varona.¹⁹ The authors who studied victimhood in the Basque case thus clearly emphasise the central issue of competing and complex claims to victimhood.

¹² Whitfield, *Endgame*, 309-311.

¹³ MacDonald and Bernardo, “Politics of Victimhood.”

¹⁴ Gema Varona, “Basque Country Competing Memories at the Local, Regional and State Levels,” in *Cultural Practices of Victimhood*, eds. Hoondert, Martin, et al., 120-141 (Milton: Routledge, 2018).

¹⁵ Xabier Etxeberria, “Ética del reconocimiento y víctimas del terrorismo,” *Isegoría: Revista de Filosofía Moral y Política* 46 (2012): 1130-2097.

¹⁶ Rogelio Alonso, “¿Qué memoria del terrorismo etarra estamos construyendo?” *Cuadernos del Pensamiento Político* 50 (2016): 69-80.

¹⁷ Jon-Mirena Landa, “Human Rights and Politically-Motivated Violence in the Basque Country,” *Journal on Ethnopolitics and Minority Issues in Europe* 12, no. 2 (2013): 7-29.

¹⁸ MacDonald and Bernardo, “Politics of Victimhood,” 176-177.

¹⁹ Varona, “Basque Country,” 121.

Whilst very little has been written about victimhood in the Basque case, the concept has been addressed marginally better in general literature concerning victimhood in conflict, predominantly in socio-psychological works. These accounts lay out a basic theoretical framework for studying victimhood. Firstly, some authors crucially emphasise that victimhood is much more than a passive status awarded to those who have had harm done to them. Both Hoondert and Jacoby argue that, contrary to common assumptions, victims have an agency of their own to make a *choice* to use the experience of being victimised through harm to construct an identity of victimhood. As such, victimhood therefore comes with political influence, they argue, with Jacoby even proposing a political theory of victimhood.²⁰ Secondly, in her book Enns analyses perhaps the most controversial aspect – the fluidity of victimhood and the process of victims easily becoming perpetrators, blurring the lines between guilt and innocence and thus demonstrating the sheer difficulty of defining victimhood.²¹ Other authors then examine specific conceptual pieces of victimhood in detail, yet none provide a complex framework of victimhood as such. Noor et al. analyse “competitive (i.e. exclusivist) victimhood,” concluding mainly that intergroup rivalry over claims to victimhood obstructs reconciliation.²² Similarly, Bar-Tal et al. zoom in onto self-perceived “collective victimhood” as a major theme in conflict societies, similarly concluding its pursuit tends to perpetuate conflicts rather than solve them.²³

²⁰ Martin Hoondert et al., “Introduction,” in *Cultural Practices of Victimhood*, eds. Hoondert, Martin, et al., 1-16 (Milton: Routledge, 2018).

Tami Amanda Jacoby, “A Theory of Victimhood: Politics, Conflict and the Construction of Victim-based Identity,” *Millennium: Journal of International Studies* 43, no. 2 (2015): 511-530.

²¹ Diane Enns, *The Violence of Victimhood* (University Park: Pennsylvania State University Press, 2012).

²² Masi Noor et al., “When Suffering Begets Suffering: The Psychology of Competitive Victimhood Between Adversarial Groups in Violent Conflicts,” *Personality and Social Psychology Review* 16, no. 4 (2012): 351-374.

²³ Daniel Bar-Tal et al., “A Sense of Self-Perceived Collective Victimhood in Intractable Conflicts,” *International Review of the Red Cross* 91, no. 874 (2009): 229-258.

I. The Basque Case in Context: Nationalism, Narratives of Violence, and Peace?

I.I. *Euskadi ta Askatasuna*: Violent manifestation of Basque nationalism

Basque nationalism centres around its creation of the memory and a historical narrative of the Basque nation, defining it *against* Spain in a 'reductive narrative of binary opposites' whilst emphasising the 'unjust situation of the Basque nation' and tapping into the narrative of a historical Spanish-Basque conflict going all the way back to the 19th century Carlist Wars.²⁴ This narrative thus reinforces the 'Basque sense of difference,' with its core being the struggle of the Basques to 'defend [their] political sovereignty and cultural heritage against State-imposed uniformity.'²⁵ The trigger for this sensitive nationalist narrative came with the Civil War victory of Francisco Franco in April 1939 which began decades of dictatorship, ending the first official Basque regional government that emerged under the Second Republic.²⁶ Repressive cultural policies targeted all regional nationalisms as well as other – mainly left-wing – ideologies across Spain. However, Basque nationalists managed to turn this repression into what Molina calls an 'ethno-national experience' due to the significant linguistic persecution,²⁷ which the Basques thus naturally subjectively felt the most with to the distinctiveness of their language *Euskara* and its inherent links to Basque nationalism.²⁸ In response to this cultural and political repression, in 1959 ETA was founded as a counter-Franco force,²⁹ actually having started as a study group at Bilbao's university which aimed to prevent the extermination of *Euskara* and the Basque identity. ETA's first violent actions, as Rooney points out, thus 'reflected the cultural concerns of its leaders' and were of a highly symbolic value, attacking symbols of the regime – with the first ever attack attempting to derail a train carrying Civil War veterans en-route to a pro-regime rally in

²⁴ Diego Muro, "The Politics of War Memory in Radical Basque Nationalism," *Ethnic and Racial Studies* 32, no. 4 (2009): 670, 659.

²⁵ Fernando Molina, "Lies of Our Fathers: Memory and Politics in the Basque Country Under the Franco Dictatorship, 1936-68," *Journal of Contemporary History* 49, no. 2 (2013): 297.

²⁶ André Lecours, *Basque Nationalism and the Spanish State* (Reno: University of Nevada Press, 2007), 23.

²⁷ Molina, "Lies of Our Fathers," 305-307.

²⁸ Muro, "War Memory," 668.

²⁹ Begoña Aretxaga, "Madness and the Politically Real: Reflections on Violence in Postdictatorial Spain," in *Postcolonial Disorders*, eds. Mary-Jo Good and Jo DelVecchio, 44-45 (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2008).

1961, naturally inviting a brutal response of arrests and torture from the regime.³⁰

Therefore, the emergence of ETA and its activity during Francoism needs to be viewed against the backdrop of Basque nationalism and its cultural aspects.

Given this internal logic of ETA's purpose, it would seem rational that it would cease its violent activity once the democratic transition had taken place and the Basque Country got its own autonomous status within Spain. Instead, the post-Franco era turned out to be the bloodiest period in ETA's history which was met by a ruthless counter-terrorism campaign by the State.³¹ The explanation lies in the split of the Basque society, where unlike during Francoism, most Basques no longer supported radical nationalists or their violence, yet ETA escalated its activity during the first decade of democracy based on the rationale that the dictatorship continues under the guise of democracy. This escalation was met with intense counter-terrorism measures by the Spanish government. State terrorism tactics were also briefly resorted to in the so-called 'Dirty War'³² where parts of the *Partido Socialista Obrero Español* (PSOE) governments between 1983 and 1987 secretly used the *Grupos Antiterroristas de Liberación* (GAL) death squads for around sixty extra-judicial assassinations of ETA leaders and associates. With the State effectively inheriting the security apparatus unreformed from the dictatorship, revealing the GAL assassinations in the late 1980s had an enormous impact in the Basque country, effectively affirming ETA's post-Franco thesis of the democracy being but a 'façade' covering up an unchanged regime as well as reinforcing the "political conflict" idea of two violences.³³ Towards the 1990s a further sharp division among Basque nationalists resulted in a societal rupture and an escalation of indiscriminate violence among the local communities involving a lot of radicalised youth such as *Kale Borroka*, with the majority of the Basque population alienated by what they saw as senseless violence.³⁴ Series of negotiations and ceasefires took place³⁵ and violence revived multiple times with indiscriminate targeting including civilians, especially politicians and any individuals opposed to a particular strand of radical Basque

³⁰ Nicola Rooney, "Violent Nationalism in Catholic Communities: The Provisional IRA and ETA," *Studies in Ethnicity and Nationalism* 7, no. 3 (2007): 66.

³¹ Whitfield, *Endgame*, 5.

³² Aretxaga, "Reflections on Violence," 44-45.

³³ Paddy Woodworth, *Dirty War, Clean Hands: ETA, the GAL and Spanish Democracy* (New Haven: Yale University Press: 2002), 408, 412.

³⁴ Aretxaga, "Reflections," 46-50.

³⁵ Joseba Zulaika and Imanol Murua, "How Terrorism Ends – And Does Not End: The Basque Case," *Critical Studies on Terrorism* 10, no. 2 (2017): 340.

nationalism.³⁶ At this point, ETA had however lost the support of the majority of the Basque people whilst managing to maintain sharp discord and state of latent violence within the Basque society, periodically flaring up.³⁷ As such, the post-Franco situation could therefore appear to vindicate the notion of senseless violence – with the exception of the state terrorism of the GAL which had the contrary effect – as the utilisation terrorist tactics appeared largely irrational in a democratic country and against the wishes of the majority of the Basque population.

I.II. When the violence causes silence: Barriers to reconciliation

The clash of narratives

It is now vital to point out there is little agreement among key actors on a basic starting point – what do we even refer to the Basque case as a case of? Whilst commonly referred to as “the Basque conflict,” for many there has in fact only even been “Basque terrorism.”³⁸ This contention between the “political conflict” narrative – referred to as such by most of the Basque Nationalist Left (*izquierda abertzale*) as well as the international actors and mediators involved in what they saw as attempts at conflict resolution – and the “terrorism” narrative – pushed through the by Spanish state and conservative politicians – has been recognised as a fundamental issue in many scholarly analyses.³⁹ This lack of basic agreement on what the Basque case represents thus appears as a fundamental obstacle to devising the measures to tackle it, given one side talks about ‘resolving the Basque conflict’ whilst another of ‘defeating ETA’s terrorism,’⁴⁰ as such questioning the very premise of the necessity for reconciliation. These narratives, though emergent before the end of ETA, will nevertheless heavily echo throughout the remainder of the thesis focusing on the post-ETA era, as they represent a fundamental obstacle to reconciliation. To quote Whitfield,

³⁶ Aretxaga, “Reflections,” 48.

³⁷ Anthony T. Spencer and Stephen M. Croucher, “Basque Nationalism and the Spiral of Silence: An Analysis of Public Perceptions of ETA in Spain and France,” *The International Communication Gazette* 70, no.2 (2008): 140.

³⁸ Whitfield, *Endgame*, 10-14.

³⁹ For example: Berastegi, “Transitional Justice,” 546.
Zulaika and Murua, “Terrorism,” 354.

⁴⁰ Whitfield, *Endgame*, 4.

'language itself has become part of the battlefield'⁴¹ and rhetorical labels thus come to matter substantially.

The "Spanish nationalist view" of "terrorism" is based on denying any political agency to ETA, and thus by extension rejecting any political negotiations, arguing that especially ETA's actions over the last few decades are just a case of pure senseless "terrorism."⁴² Proponents of this view – mainly some conservative sections of Spanish academia, society and the conservative *Partido Popular* (PP) – not only attempt to push through this narrative, but perhaps even more ferociously centre around discrediting the existence of the "political conflict" discourse. The Madrid-based political scientist Rogelio Alonso, a vocal defender of the "Spanish nationalist view," argues that the "political conflict" narrative presents a 'historical manipulation' in order to 'justify ETA's terrorism' as just a part of 'an imaginary conflict between the Basque people and the Spanish state' with the objective of 'imposing ETA's totalitarian political project.'⁴³ Similarly, Begoña García de Quevedo Ruiz maintains that the Basque nationalists abuse the narrative of the Basque-Spanish 'pseudo-conflict' which has been 'amplified by ETA's violence' to promote an exclusionary concept of the nation even after the Basques have long been given autonomy after the Spanish democratic transition.⁴⁴ Some more 'moderate' "Spanish nationalist" scholars, such as Fernando Reinares, instead choose the approach of leaving out the discussion of "political conflict" altogether, focusing on blaming Basque nationalism as the crux of ETA's emergence having only produced 'exclusion, intolerance and eventually violence.'⁴⁵

In contrast, the "political conflict" narrative is based on the idea of a Spanish-Basque historical struggle and the development of Basque nationalism to which the initial violence on the part of ETA was later introduced as a 'romantic' component accompanying the 'conflict' idea.⁴⁶ Even after the dissolution of ETA, for all non-violent Basque nationalist

⁴¹ Ibid., 17.

⁴² Whitfield, *Endgame*, 9.

⁴³ Alonso, "¿Qué memoria?" 69-71; (all quotations from Spanish-language sources – own translation henceforth).

⁴⁴ Begoña García de Quevedo Ruiz, "De la cuestión al conflicto vasco," *Cuadernos de Pensamiento Político* 37 (2013): 41-54.

⁴⁵ Fernando Reinares, *Patriotas de la muerte: Por qué han militado en ETA y cuándo abandonan* (Madrid: Taurus, 2011), 223-226.

⁴⁶ Molina, "Lies of Our Fathers," 297-298.

parties this case undeniably remains a “political conflict.”⁴⁷ The “conflict” narrative is, however, much more widely spread across different academic and non-academic spheres. Many scholars from the Basque Country, such as Eduardo Ruiz Vieytez, clearly advocate the conflict interpretation, with Vieytez elaborating on the dual nature of the conflict – a Spanish-Basque one over sovereignty and identity, and a civic one among Basques over the use of violence in pursuit of nationalist goals.⁴⁸ Notably, however, across the vast amount of international scholarship the reference to the “Basque conflict” is commonly being used as a matter of fact. Utilising the example of Martín-Peña and Opatow’s article, the most common view in international academia is that of presenting ETA as a ‘group utilising terrorist violence to achieve political ends’ amidst a ‘politically motivated violent conflict,’ usually referring to finding solutions to resolve it. Therefore, the international academic consensus overwhelmingly recognises the utilisation of terrorism as a means by ETA yet characterises the Basque case as one of conflict in need of resolution. Similarly, the international community has been promoting the idea of conflict resolution and mediation, thus implicitly reinforcing the “conflict” narrative – which was naturally met by a strong resistance by the Zapatero government at the point of its active opposition to any mediation efforts.⁴⁹

After ETA: Rest in peace?

Though ETA declared a ceasefire and eventually fully disarmed, this has in many ways been a bitter-sweet and problematic and divisive ending at best. ETA was effectively pushed towards ceasing its activity by many of its own, as for many Basque nationalists it became more of a liability than an asset in their political struggle for independence.⁵⁰ Many new Basque parties of the *izquierda abertzale* – most significantly *Sortu* and subsequently the new coalition *Euskal Herria Bildu* – explicitly committed to pursuing their independentist goals via democratic politics and rejecting violence, with *Bildu* having received 24% of the vote in the 2012 regional elections ending up just second behind the moderate Basque

⁴⁷ Julen Zabalo and Mikel Saratxo, “ETA Ceasefire: Armed Struggle vs. Political Practice in Basque Nationalism,” *Ethnicities* 15, no. 3 (2015): 375.

⁴⁸ Eduardo Ruiz Vieytez, “Introduction – New Perspectives for the Basque Country in a Post-Conflict Scenario.” *Journal on Ethnopolitics and Minority Issues in Europe* 12, no. 2 (2013): 1-2.

⁴⁹ Zulaika and Murua, “Terrorism,” 348.

⁵⁰ Zabalo and Saratxo, “ETA Ceasefire,” 377.

Nationalist Party (PNV).⁵¹ Effectively, as Zulaika put it, ETA was ‘defeated by the will of its own political base’ which demanded ETA quit whilst simultaneously affirming the legitimacy of its cause by voting for the Nationalist Left and many parties with links to ETA. The Basque electorate thus became locked in a paradox which suggested voting for *izquierda abertzale* meant affirming the political – not terrorist – nature of their struggle whilst simultaneously ‘demanding from them not to practice terrorism in their name.’⁵² These events nevertheless united the Nationalist Left in its commitment to political means of struggle, determined to turn the end of armed struggle in the Basque country into their own political success.

Yet the real paradox of ETA’s end lies in the fact that no actual “peace process” nor negotiations or mediation took place, as all steps have been taken unilaterally by ETA with no concessions from the Spanish government.⁵³ As Duhart points out, there has been ‘no political settlement’ yet there nevertheless is ‘a kind of “peace,” a product of ETA’s semi-unilateral disengagement.’⁵⁴ Therefore, paradoxically, though the State claims to have won the ‘war on terror,’ the “terrorists” appeared victorious in winning the peace,’ thus giving way to diverse kinds of narratives with none able to claim total success or defeat amidst a situation where their lines remain rather blurred.⁵⁵ This inherent ambiguity in ETA’s demise and the process that led to it thus, as Whitfield argues, ‘exposed the deep divisions that still scarred Spanish and Basque society’⁵⁶ which manifest themselves directly through the “clash of narratives” about “conflict” versus “terrorism.”

Yet even with ETA out of the equation these narratives’ inherent political power endured long after the actual violence that inspired them had ceased, as they became a part of a battle fought in the political realm to serve broader interests beyond ending the violence. The “political conflict” discourse naturally remains at the heart of the *izquierda abertzale*’s views, as until independence is achieved the conflict continues – though through non-violent political means. The “terrorism” narrative, however, continued to be nourished by

⁵¹ Ludger Mees, “Nationalist Politics at Crossroads,” in *Contesting Spain? The Dynamics of Nationalist Movements in Catalonia and the Basque Country*, edited by Richard Gillespie and Caroline Gray, 52-53 (London: Routledge, 2015).

⁵² Zulaika and Murua “Terrorism,” 346-350.

⁵³ *Ibid.*, 352-353.

⁵⁴ Philippe Eugène Duhart, “Between Ballots and Bullets: Armed Struggle and Peacemaking in Northern Ireland and the Basque Country” (PhD Thesis, University of California, 2017), 192.

⁵⁵ Zulaika and Murua “Terrorism,” 354, 340.

⁵⁶ Whitfield, *Endgame*, 297.

the new conservative PP government of Mariano Rajoy throughout the 2011 to 2018 period examined in this thesis. For them ETA's terrorism had not effectively ended nor did the government wish for it to end. Rajoy's government therefore continued what could be called "counter-terrorist" measures, such as keeping hundreds of ETA-linked prisoners in jails spread across the country as a part of the 'dispersion policy' initiated in 1989 as a pressuring punitive measure, rejecting mediation efforts on grounds of no negotiations with "terrorists" and even arresting lawyers and mediators involved in the process of ETA's disarmament in 2010.⁵⁷ The prisoner issue specifically represents one of the key issues on the road to reconciliation.⁵⁸ Yet instead, a series of judicial measures were taken throughout the ceasefire that 'appeared to be deliberately sabotaging the peace process,' with an increased rate of prosecutions on the grounds of terrorism during this period of violence de-escalation.⁵⁹ Simultaneously the government fought the political battle – echoed by conservative mainstream Spanish media such as *ABC* – by rejecting the Nationalist Left's efforts advocating for reconciliation.⁶⁰ As Whitfield points out, at the prospect of ETA's end a 'collective vertigo affected the Spanish right,' favouring status quo due to the 'deeply institutionalised belief' that ETA at a low intensity was less of a threat to the Spanish state than the Basques demanding independence by non-violent means.⁶¹

The Basque case is frequently being compared to its "sister" conflict in literature on separatist terrorism – the Northern Irish Troubles and the paramilitary group IRA,⁶² with both having emerged in opposition to a state they perceived to be 'undemocratic, illegitimate and hostile to their national identity.'⁶³ Despite being commonly classified as the more intractable of the two, it was paradoxically the Northern Irish conflict that culminated in a peace process and a political resolution.⁶⁴ Moreover, both militant groups bear similarity in terms of their strategy, target selection and popular support, with the influence of the majority of the population's wishes ultimately being key to them giving up the armed

⁵⁷ Zulaika and Murua "Terrorism," 354.

⁵⁸ Mínguez-Alcaide, "Proceso de diálogo," 55.

⁵⁹ Whitfield, *Endgame*, 167.

⁶⁰ Zulaika and Murua "Terrorism," 354.

⁶¹ Whitfield, *Endgame*, 214.

⁶² For example: Michael Keating, "Northern Ireland and the Basque Country," in *Northern Ireland and the Divided World: Post-Agreement Northern Ireland in Comparative Perspective*, ed. John McGarry, 181-208 (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2011).

Ignacio Sánchez-Cuenca, "The Dynamics of Nationalist Terrorism: ETA and the IRA," *Terrorism and Political Violence* 19, no. 3 (2007): 289-306.

⁶³ Rooney, "Violent Nationalism," 64.

⁶⁴ Duhart, "Armed Struggle," 4, 184.

struggle.⁶⁵ What is more, the 1990s peace initiatives in both countries have been closely modelled on each other.⁶⁶ However, whilst the Irish peace process succeeded – significantly due to the IRA’s willingness to accept a deal that was not overall necessarily beneficial for it in order to make the 1998 Belfast Agreement possible – Basque nationalists attempted to utilise this ‘Irish model’ whilst not taking these lessons of significant compromise on one’s political aims into account.⁶⁷ Instead, the key take-away from the Irish peace process by the *izquierda abertzale* was effectively the re-enforcement of the “political conflict” narrative by asserting the need for negotiations.⁶⁸ Furthermore, whilst in Northern Ireland policies for dealing with the troubling past have been devised within the framework of the peace talks – albeit lacking practical implementation as of yet – in the Basque case the Rajoy government effectively refuses any involvement in transitional justice mechanisms, with this task having been left to civil society initiatives and the Basque regional government.⁶⁹ As such, this deadlock does not leave much room for reconciliation, as the acceptance of the “terrorism” narrative by definition contradicts the “political conflict” narrative. Despite the fact the violence has come to an end, *peace* does not necessarily mean *reconciliation*, and therefore, as Whitfield noted in 2014, ‘the resolution of the ‘Basque problem’ still remained ‘a distant prospect.’⁷⁰

⁶⁵ Sánchez-Cuenca, “Nationalist Terrorism,” 303.

⁶⁶ Keating, “Northern Ireland,” 181.

⁶⁷ Rogelio Alonso, “Pathways Out of Terrorism in Northern Ireland and the Basque Country: The Misrepresentation of the Irish Model,” *Terrorism and Political Violence* 16, no. 4 (2004): 697-699.

⁶⁸ Alvarez Berastegi, “Transitional Justice,” 546.

⁶⁹ *Ibid.*, 555, 548.

⁷⁰ Whitfield, *Endgame*, 298.

II. Conceptualisation of victimhood in the Basque Country and Northern Ireland

II.I. Historical narratives of victimhood in the Basque case

Just like in the proverbial saying about Rome, in the Basque case all roads seem to lead to the concept of victimhood. Victimhood narratives intertwine and transform throughout the history of both the Basque conflict and the Franco and Civil War years. Upon closer examination victimhood lies at the heart of perpetuating cycles of violence, which also breed further entrenchment of polarised narratives and thus logically impede reconciliation. This has been fittingly summarised by MacDonald and Bernardo who claim that in cases where the past has not been reconciled with – such as the one of Spain – ‘in each new political context those previously victimised use the past and their analysis of it to argue for their legitimacy as victims while at the same time justifying actions which do violence to others, in turn creating more victims and more deeply entrenched victim communities.’ Victims therefore turn into new perpetrators whilst simultaneously creating exclusionary narratives making victimhood ‘mutually exclusive’ by denying it to the other.⁷¹ Particularly in the Basque case, the history of victimhood narratives and the disputes about the ‘right’ to claim victimhood go into substantial depth.

Amnesia and amnistía? Francoist past haunting the present

The roots of the Basque narrative of victimhood as a nation ‘occupied’ by Spain go way beyond the late 19th century. Yet radical Basque nationalists often ‘trace their victimisation to the oppressive policies of Franco,’ pushing through the argument of the current Spanish state simply ‘continu[ing] long-standing policies of state repression.’⁷² This narrative has, however, been exacerbated by the so-called ‘pact of forgetting’ during the democratic transition, adopting amnesty legislation actively pardoning perpetrators of many crimes under Franco as well as actively encouraging amnesia about the past and the ‘silencing of public memory.’⁷³ As Escudero points out, ‘silencing and forgetting’ constituted a ‘part of

⁷¹ MacDonald and Bernardo, “Politics of Victimhood,” 174, 179, 177.

⁷² *Ibid.*, 179.

⁷³ Alison Ribeiro de Menezes, *Embodying Memory in Contemporary Spain* (New York: Palgrave MacMillan, 2014), 11-17.

Spain's process of democratisation.⁷⁴ This deliberate 'collective amnesia' was based on the fear of going back to the 'chaos' and the divisions echoing those of the Civil War.⁷⁵ Yet this policy has, however, become a double-edged sword, as it entailed dodging transitional justice processes altogether, leading to a lack of a clear break with the Francoist past.⁷⁶ Whilst achieving a relatively successful transition to democracy, the silent legacies of the previous regime remained strong. Fundamental structures of Francoist power – the monarchy, the military, state administrative structures – effectively remained untouched, and moreover, many former Franco government members continued in politics, mostly in the newly emergent *Alianza Popular*, later renamed PP.⁷⁷ The smoothness of the transition, as Aguilar argues, has nevertheless been mistaken for reconciliation as the new 'myth' of a 'civilised' democratic consolidation took root.⁷⁸ On top of this 'unfinished business' of reconciliation, the GAL death squads revelations split the public opinion and shed a light on how subtle yet significant the impacts of the failure to address Francoist past may be – as Woodworth points out the paradox of large sections of Spanish society 'only recently liberated from a dictatorship which had systematically used torture, murder and terror against democrats, came to justify the use of terror, murder and torture in the name of democracy.'⁷⁹ Therefore, the price for an orderly transition, as Merino argues, were the undealt with legacies of Francoism which nevertheless 'endure[d] in the Spanish psyche.'⁸⁰

Secondly, the controversial legacy of the transition's amnesty came back into relevance with debating the prospect of forgiveness and amnesty for ETA's crimes, where a logical double-standard appeared to emerge. Spain came under international scrutiny as it faced the paradox of having fully amnestied the killers and torturers of Franco's regime whilst largely ignoring proper recognition of GAL victims by arguing the past should be put behind us, yet at the same the Rajoy government having continued a stance against any forgiveness or

⁷⁴ Escudero, "Road to Impunity," 132.

⁷⁵ Katherine O. Stafford, *Narrating War in Peace: The Spanish Civil War in the Transition and Today* (New York: Palgrave MacMillan, 2015), 114.

⁷⁶ Ribeiro de Menezes, *Embodying Memory*, 14-15.

⁷⁷ Bengoetxea, "Transitional Justice," 43.

Stafford, *Narrating War*, 14.

⁷⁸ Paloma Aguilar and Carsten Humlebaek, "Collective Memory and National Identity in the Spanish Democracy: The Legacies of Francoism and the Civil War," *History & Memory* 14, no. 1/2 (2002): 152-154.

⁷⁹ Woodworth, *Dirty War*, 11-12.

⁸⁰ Eloy E. Merino, "Tracing the Past: An Introduction," in Eloy E. Merino and H. Rosi Song, eds., *Traces of Contamination: Unearthing the Francoist Legacy in Contemporary Spanish Discourse* (Lewisburg: Bucknell University Press, 2005), 12.

even partial amnesty for ETA's crimes even after its effective demise.⁸¹ This extreme view has especially been advocated by supporters of the "terrorism" narrative such as Francisco Llera, who expressed his outrage claiming ETA already had practically been 'guaranteed impunity and forgetting of its past of blood and terror because it appears nobody will make it answer for its actions.'⁸² However, this statement outlines precisely the approach taken to deal with the members of the Franco regime responsible for equally heinous crimes. Moreover, this stance is effectively reflected in Spanish legislation which makes a clear distinction between victims of the dictatorship and victims of terrorism by addressing their needs by two separate laws, thus further reinforcing the "terrorism" narrative.⁸³ Therefore, this double-standard approach where reconciliation by forgetting is advocated once yet punishment and justice in another case of similar nature have thus naturally served as further ammunition to reinforcing the Basque nationalist argument and grievances as well as further affirming the Basque claim to victimhood.

Constructing Basque victimhood: Martyrdom and politics of memory

The key basis for Basque victimhood is based on the strength of 'war memory' in the Basque Country. Starting with the Carlist Wars, the 'romanticised' narrative of wars for national liberation and emancipation was created. However, the prime role in this narrative is played by the memory of the aforementioned Civil War, which in the Basque Country is largely viewed through the nationalist lens as having suffered a 'bloody war which did not concern them.' It emphasises the destruction in the Basque country – with Guernica being the prime example – claiming this as 'yet another example of the Spanish state aggression.' The thought process outlined here was labelled by Eric Hobsbawm as 'politics of memory,' i.e. selective treatment of historical facts to suit a narrative of perpetual Basque-Spanish struggle.⁸⁴ What is more, by presenting this as a part of a perpetual nationalist struggle, the key part of this narrative is also the 'victimist representation' of the Basque nation as 'the true loser of the Civil War,' reinforcing the 'collective experience of defeat' in the 'epic resistance against the Spanish invader.' This claim to Basque victimhood promoted by Basque nationalists for their own political aims has thus been substantially propped up by

⁸¹ Whitfield, *Endgame*, 310.

⁸² Alonso, "¿Qué memoria?" 75.

⁸³ Alvarez Berastegi, "Transitional Justice," 552.

⁸⁴ Muro, "War Memory," 665-670.

their interpretation of the Civil War.⁸⁵ By extension, this 'collective memory of a repressive state' has underpinned the questioning of the legitimacy of the Spanish state in the Basque Country, continuing well into the democratic transition.⁸⁶ As such, the reluctant Basque attitude in the transition based on these memories cast the largest doubt on the 'success' of Spanish democratisation. The 'new' regime and the lack of a clear break with its past failed to inspire Basque confidence, leading to a nationalist boycott of the referendum and high abstention levels in the Basque Country.⁸⁷ This impression certainly was not aided by Spanish policies of outlawing certain Basque political parties and banning civil society entities.⁸⁸ The Basque 'politics of memory' thus ensured the continuation of the Basque victimhood claims, justifying the defiant attitude towards the Spanish state as a whole.

This defiance and sense of resistance however echo directly in the second aspect of Basque victimhood which was (ab)used for directly justifying ETA's violence. ETA was founded on the reconstructed notion of extreme Basque nationalism where its fighters were seen as a 'continuation of Basque nationalist Civil War soldiers' effectively 'fighting to avenge the national defeat' of the war, as Molina argued.⁸⁹ The 'memory of martyrdom and heroic victimisation' of the Civil War nationalists thus served to give ETA's violent campaign a veil of a 'moral justification' for a fight against a continuous 'obvious injustice' perpetuated on the Basque people. In extreme nationalist circles the 'cult of the fallen soldier' and the glorification of an *etarra's* death and its elevation to a 'sacred, idealistic act' of 'martyrdom' made ETA's fighters as well as prisoners into symbols of the political struggle.⁹⁰ As such, ETA was therefore seen as continuing the 'war between Basques and Spaniards' that "began" in 1936,⁹¹ shielding themselves with righteousness given to their cause by the claim to Basque victimhood. Having examined historical Basque victimhood and its convergence with extreme forms of violent nationalism's expression it becomes clear how deeply rooted the

⁸⁵ Molina, "Lies of Our Fathers," 312-316.

⁸⁶ Jan Mansvelt Beck, *Territory and Terror: Conflicting Nationalisms in the Basque Country* (London: Routledge, 2005), 229-230.

⁸⁷ Paloma Aguilar, "The Memory of the Civil War in the Transition to Democracy: The Peculiarity of the Basque Case," *West European Politics* 21, no. 4 (1998): 6-13.

⁸⁸ MacDonald and Bernardo, "Politics of Victimhood," 184.

⁸⁹ Molina, "Lies of Our Fathers," 315.

⁹⁰ Muro, "War Memory," 666, 672-674.

⁹¹ Aguilar, "Memory of the Civil War," 22.

Basque grievances are, with these historical legacies strongly echoing in the post-ETA era discourse.

II.II. Comparative lessons: Victimhood in Northern Ireland

Given the relative abundance of literature regarding the treatment of the past and victimhood in Northern Ireland, many of its lessons may result fittingly applicable to the contemporary utilisation of the concept in the Basque case post-ETA and can thus provide us with an applicable conceptual framework for analysis. As has been pointed out by Baumann, despite the efforts of Northern Irish politicians to 'leave the past behind (...) the past remains an open wound' of the peace process.⁹² Similarly, many scholars point out the existence of 'competing and complementary' narratives of claims to victimhood⁹³ and the difficulty of establishing who the 'true victims' and perpetrators are, with narratives ranging from everyone being a victim of the Troubles by extension to everyone being considered complicit to some degree.⁹⁴ The literature on Northern Ireland thus provides a useful conceptual basis for studying victimhood in similar cases. There is a presence of "collective victimhood" based on being a victim solely by identification with a victimised group regardless of being personally harmed. Secondly, the intertwined ideas of "inclusive" and "competitive victimhood" are key to our analysis. "Inclusive" victimhood can be seen in either a "universal" manner (i.e. inclusion of all types of suffering without distinction) or a "selective" manner (i.e. inclusion of victim groups based on certain conditions). Building up on this selectivity, "competitive victimhood" takes it a step further by creating an explicit "exclusivity" to victimhood, arguing that one's ingroup suffered more and therefore has the more legitimate or complete claim to it.⁹⁵ Yet this "exclusivity" can simultaneously help a group avoid their share of responsibility by claiming victimhood or seeking to impose a hierarchy of victimhood by refusing moral equivalence of all victims.⁹⁶ For instance, these "cultures of victimhood" have been utilised as a reference point by both sides of the

⁹² Marcel M. Baumann, "Contested Victimhood in the Northern Irish Peace Process," *Peace Review: A Journal of Social Justice* 22, no. 2 (2010): 172.

⁹³ Carmel Joyce and Orla Lynch, "The Construction and Mobilization of Collective Victimhood by Political Ex-Prisoners in Northern Ireland," *Studies in Conflict and Terrorism* 41, no. 7 (2018): 507.

⁹⁴ Neil Ferguson et al. "Who Are the Victims? Victimhood Experiences in Postagreement Northern Ireland," *Political Psychology* 31, no. 6 (2010): 858.

⁹⁵ Christopher J. Cohrs et al. "The Two-Sided Role of Inclusive Victimhood for Intergroup Reconciliation: Evidence from Northern Ireland," *Peace and Conflict: Journal of Peace Psychology* 21, no. 4 (2015): 634-635, 640, 645.

⁹⁶ *Ibid.*, 634-635.

Northern Irish conflict to present themselves as deserving of sympathy and thus justifying their resort to violence.⁹⁷

However, as Morrissey outlined, mainstream victimhood narratives in Northern Ireland have proven that a general consensus on the “universal inclusive victimhood” conceptualisation can earn cross-party support even amongst groups as divided as the Loyalists and the Republicans.⁹⁸ Though differences between these groups still remain and the support for other selective and hierarchical victimhood narratives has by no means withered,⁹⁹ the possibility of at least minimal consensus in a case as formerly deadlocked as the Northern Irish one can be seen as a potential way forward in reconciliation. Yet as discussed, the extension of these victimhood hierarchies creates the controversy around whether ‘perpetrators’ can also simultaneously have a legitimate claim to victimhood. As Joyce and Lynch argue, ‘the line between victim and perpetrator is rarely clear’ and groups often simultaneously work up their “collective victimhood” narratives when their involvement in the conflict is discussed.¹⁰⁰ Morrissey argues perpetrators often mobilise victimhood narratives as a form of escaping their guilt and responsibility, arguing against “universalist” definitions where everyone is a victim and therefore nobody is guilty.¹⁰¹ This view, however, limits the options for reconciliation and reduces the picture to a clear victim-perpetrator narrative, which is simply not accurate in conflicts as entangled as Northern Ireland. However, it is also imperative not reduce perpetrators to that term only, as very often many have become the victims of their own conditions and environment that has driven them to violent expressions of their ideology.¹⁰²

The way out of this conceptual trap therefore seems to be, as Baumann suggests, abandoning a hierarchy of victims and moving beyond the ‘conflict about who has the legitimate ownership of victimhood.’ The necessary step in the process towards reconciliation is the recognition of victimhood and therefore suffering without attributing

⁹⁷ Mike Morrissey, *Northern Ireland After the Good Friday Agreement: Victims, Grievance and Blame* (London: Pluto Press, 2002), 4-5.

⁹⁸ *Ibid.*

⁹⁹ John D. Brewer and Bernadette C. Hayes, “Victimhood and Attitudes towards Dealing with the Legacy of a Violent Past: Northern Ireland as a Case Study,” *The British Journal of Politics and International Relations* 17 (2015): 521.

¹⁰⁰ Joyce and Lynch, “Collective Victimhood,” 507, 513.

¹⁰¹ Morrissey, *Northern Ireland*, 5.

¹⁰² Joyce and Lynch, “Collective Victimhood,” 508.

any hierarchy as well as 'seek[ing] an empathetic understanding' of motivations towards political violence, which Baumann argues is the 'essential requirement (...) for the success of conflict transformation.'¹⁰³ This recognition can sometimes also involve controversial practical measures such as the release of politically motivated prisoners – as has been done in Northern Ireland – many of whom have committed to the promotion of restorative justice back in their communities,¹⁰⁴ which though controversial appears to have played its part in the progress towards conflict resolution. Conclusions from the Northern Irish peace process analyses thus often ended up arguing for a victim-centric approach as a key towards genuine reconciliation. As Brewer and Hayes assert, if victims are ignored 'the sense of injustice and grievance (...) will continue to act as a destabilising and regressive force within society.'¹⁰⁵ The Northern Irish case thus provides us with a useful conceptual framework to similarly analyse victimhood in the Basque case.

¹⁰³ Baumann, "Contested Victimhood," 174-176.

¹⁰⁴ Joyce and Lynch, "Collective Victimhood," 509.

¹⁰⁵ Brewer and Hayes, "Victimhood," 527.

III. Narratives of victimhood in the post-ETA era

The chapter will conduct an in-depth primary source analysis to explore these narratives and the respective themes within them, followed by a synthesis of common and clashing themes of these narratives – which heavily align with the aforementioned “conflict” versus “terrorism” viewpoints. It shall be argued that both speech acts and complementary political acts serve as impediments to conciliatory efforts in the post-ETA era. Victimhood and reconciliation are fundamentally intertwined because as MacDonald and Bernardo point out, both of these sides claiming to represent “the victims” engage in ‘an intensely politicised public debate’ where the notion of victimhood has been made into a political tool to perpetuate one’s narrative. The brief discussion of concrete political measures underpinned by these narratives will then provide fundamental contextualisation, yet it is only intended as a complementary section for the analysis of narratives, not a standalone discussion.

The primary sources utilised have been chosen based on two main criteria. Firstly, their purpose is to directly appeal to target groups within the public and thus shape public opinion in those societal groups and further reinforce selected beliefs. Secondly, ‘extreme’ and effectively ‘fringe’ discourses on both sides have deliberately been chosen – i.e. the ETA victims’ associations with links to the PP on the “Spanish nationalist” side, and radical Basque nationalist parties and a victims association advocating on behalf of Basque ‘political prisoners’ on the “*Abertzale*” side. There are mainstream moderate voices on both sides of the aisle – on the Basque side most notably the moderate PNV, the largest Basque party with independentist aims yet more willing to work with the central government and often at odds with radical nationalists as well as with ETA, and on the Spanish side the left-wing PSOE which is, generally speaking, seen as more amenable to attempts to achieve reconciliation through negotiation. Yet these have deliberately been omitted from this analysis due to their increased willingness to reach compromises, as compared to the selected ‘extreme’ voices. However, the deep polarisation in the post-ETA era has been largely fuelled by seemingly irreconcilable narratives which manifest themselves and resonate with particular audiences on both sides. Albeit being minority views, their narratives and relative intransigence create a substantial barrier to the progress of the peace process.

The primary sources analysed are publicly and readily available materials found on the stakeholders' official websites, taking predominantly the form of short and concise texts, e.g. press releases, news coverage, stakeholder issued magazine articles or opinion pieces on current topics, with some longer sources being more detailed reports on issues of importance to the actors. Most of the material is written in a short, accessible, rather superficial and readable form, with the presumed aim of clearly conveying its message to the reader. The sources on both sides often contain repeated 'catchphrases' or even replicate the phrasing of whole sentences across different texts, all presumably meant to reinforce the impact of their message through repetition. Given where these texts are found, the primary audiences appear to be the members or sympathisers of given stakeholders, though general public is by no means excluded provided the message resonates with it. This reflects in the lack of variety of viewpoints published, with uniformity of content found on both sides, publishing predominantly selected views further advancing the overall message of a given actor. Unsurprisingly, these texts are therefore authored by either members or leaders of these entities themselves, sometimes giving space to members of an 'allied' entity or other public figures of stature – e.g. journalists, writers, military members or jurists – who share the stakeholder's opinion. This trait is particularly characteristic of the "Spanish nationalist narrative." As such, the sources examined are therefore designed to pay lip service to their publishers, with no intention of encouraging debate or finding room for compromise, instead aimed to further reinforce and consolidate their readers' opinions. Due to this clear uniformity, the chapter therefore chooses a comparative analytical approach presenting and juxtaposing a synthesis of each "narrative" in order to demonstrate the irreconcilability and entrenchment of these narratives and their distinct 'worlds' in sharp contrast.

III.I. Speech acts

The “Spanish nationalist narrative”

This section primarily aims to analyse what can be dubbed the “Spanish nationalist” victimhood narrative due to its links with the right-wing conservative *Partido Popular (PP)* and Spanish nationalism. This narrative is perhaps the ‘younger’ one of the two, emergent in the context of ETA’s attacks and its victims, with the Basques traditionally claiming victimhood from the ‘older’ “Spanish-Basque conflict.” The section will therefore explore the rhetoric of the various Spanish terrorism victims’ entities as they have effectively become political actors. Their influence has also been rather strong, given their leading role in continuously lobbying Spanish governments on many issues including the opposition to any negotiations or concession to ETA, for instance significantly undermining the Zapatero government’s initial efforts to negotiate with ETA and constraining Rajoy’s government’s flexibility on the issue of *Abertzale* prisoners.¹⁰⁶ The first entity, *Asociación Víctimas del Terrorismo (AVT)* boasting around 4,500 members is the principal association representing ETA’s victims, founded in 1981 to ‘assist the victims of terrorism in a moment when they suffered the consequences of institutional disregard,’ proclaiming its successes in political lobbying for ‘important political and legal measures’ as well as its public debate impact of ‘awakening of a great sensitivity towards those who have suffered from terrorist violence’ of ETA as well as other terrorist entities such as GRAPO or Al-Qaeda.¹⁰⁷ It has been in an effective ‘alliance’ with the PP which has resulted in a mutually-reinforcing legitimacy increase among key voter bases as well as served a significant source of financial support for the AVT.¹⁰⁸ Similarly, the *Fundación Víctimas del Terrorismo (FVT)* is a non-profit foundation established in 2001 following 9/11 with the proclaimed aim to ‘promote and spread democratic values’ whilst aiding the ‘understanding of the situation of the group of victims of terrorism in Spain.’¹⁰⁹ Both are based in Madrid and a portion of their funding comes from the Spanish government, with the rest given by other private and sometimes public entities. Though both entities claim to focus on *all* terrorism victims in Spain, i.e. including jihadism, as can be inferred from the body of the post-2011 material analysed, especially

¹⁰⁶ Zulaika and Murua, “Terrorism,” 353.

¹⁰⁷ “Who We Are,” *Asociación Víctimas del Terrorismo*.
<http://avt.org/en/>

¹⁰⁸ MacDonald and Bernardo, “Politics of Victimhood,” 178.

¹⁰⁹ “Quiénes somos,” *Fundación Víctimas del Terrorismo*.
<http://fundacionvt.org/quienes-somos/>

the AVT has been disproportionately focusing on ETA's victims, including in the era after the last ceasefire when its rhetoric against the disbanding of the group or the re-insertion of its members into society intensified in many ways. However, their views are essentially identical, differing only in tone at times – i.e. the AVT's rhetoric coming across as more aggressive and assaulting – and as such shall therefore be analysed together.

The analysis of a vast amount of these victim-focused entities' (VEs hereafter) public statements and documents has yielded a number of common themes, which however boil down to one key argument: fighting the "political conflict" narrative which they fear ETA – though effectively non-existent anymore – is going to impose. The VEs consistently maintain throughout that any concession or action towards de-escalation from ETA is just a part of a 'propagandist campaign' and a 'strategy to manipulate history and impose its narrative' meant to 'erase the criminal past of the terrorist organisation,' which they claim ETA wants to 'sell to the international community' with the objective of forcing Spain to concede to its demands.¹¹⁰ Ordóñez, the chairwoman of another victims' association COVITE as writing for FVT, fiercely criticises the PNV and the Basque regional government for promoting the "political conflict" discourse and thus contributing to the 'erasure of terrorist violence.'¹¹¹ For the VEs there is only a single claim to victimhood – that of ETA's victims. The language used to promote these claims is deliberately strong and designed to elicit an emotional reaction from the audience, utilising the logic that any attempts at "reconciliation" (in line with a "political conflict" narrative) represent a denigration of the victims. This language used to drive this point home appears consistent, recurring and can be traced in statements across many years, utilising phrases such as "propagandist campaign," "alleged/false/invented historical conflict," "manipulation/erasure of history," and ETA being referred to exclusively as a "terrorist" and "criminal" organisation with its nationalist agenda labelled a "totalitarian project." With this in mind, the components of the VEs' argument as well as the tools utilised to reinforce its presence and validity shall now be discussed in detail.

¹¹⁰ For example: "ETA justifica su actividad terrorista una vez más," *Asociación Víctimas del Terrorismo (AVT)*, April 20, 2018.

<http://avt.org/prensa/eta-justifica-su-actividad-terrorista-una-vez-ms/1429>

¹¹¹ Consuelo Ordóñez, "Peligrosas contradicciones," *Fundación Víctimas del Terrorismo (FVT)*, March 2017. http://fundacionvt.org/wp-content/uploads/2017/03/Peligrosas_contradicciones.pdf

Firstly, let us zoom onto the VA's "competitive" conceptualisation of victimhood, central to its narrative. The VEs promote a hierarchy of victimhood where the claim to it is exclusively reserved to ETA victims, with the argument that acknowledging any other victims (e.g. of the GAL) constitutes a disparagement to these 'real' victims and would by extension promote the notion of "political conflict" and 'two parties in need of reconciliation' – which both of the VEs vehemently reject. This view manifests itself in the VEs' clear opposition to any 'reconciliation efforts' – such as a planned encounter between ETA and GAL victims in 2015 which the Congress of Deputies gave a green light to but the AVT condemned as 'yet another blow to the victims of terrorism' venerating 'discourse of those who want to compare the victims and executioners.'¹¹² The VEs' key stance is therefore a resolute denial of any claim victimhood by 'the other,' with their argument effectively echoing the Northern Irish case of one's side having suffered more and therefore possessing the only legitimate claim. The VEs fiercely argue against the Basque prisoners being presented as victims, claiming 'they could not prevail as executioners and now they pretend to prevail making themselves into victims.'¹¹³ VEs radically advocate against equating the suffering of ETA victims and those who 'constituted the murderous organisation itself'¹¹⁴ and the 'homage to murderers' as 'heroes' by their communities.¹¹⁵ The issue of who has the claim to victimhood in the Basque case therefore constitutes a primary concern of the VEs, as their exclusivist view of victimhood is closely linked to the logic of the "terrorism" narrative, propped up by the fervent denial of the existence of "political conflict."

The struggle to maintain this vision of victimhood and the "terrorism" narrative alive is therefore closely linked to the worry about the spreading of the "conflict" narrative – which the VEs interpret as 'a falsification of history with the aim of diminishing the criminal and political responsibilities' of ETA,¹¹⁶ consistently sounding the alarms claiming that those who

¹¹² "El Presidente del Congreso hace oídos sordos ante la queja de la AVT por el encuentro entre víctimas de ETA y los GAL," AVT, May 4, 2015.

<http://avt.org/prensa/el-presidente-del-congreso-hace-odos-sordos-ante-la-queja-de-la-avt-por-el-encuentro-entre-victimas-de-eta-y-los-gal-/1197>

¹¹³ Luis Carrasco, "Aquí no ha pasado nada," AVT, February 07, 2017.

<http://avt.org/prensa/aqu-no-ha-pasado-nada/1336>

¹¹⁴ "Comunicado asociaciones y fundaciones víctimas del terrorismo," FVT, April 20, 2018.

http://fundacionvt.org/wp-content/uploads/2018/04/comunicado_victimas.pdf

¹¹⁵ Alfonso Sánchez, "ETA ya no mata. ¿Y ahora qué?" FVT, December 2016.

<http://fundacionvt.org/wp-content/uploads/pdfs/revista/2016/diciembre/noticia4.pdf>

¹¹⁶ Mari Mar Blanco, "En defensa de un relato veraz," FVT, December 2016.

<http://fundacionvt.org/wp-content/uploads/pdfs/revista/2016/diciembre/editorial.pdf>

wish to ‘erase history’ are ‘obtaining small victories.’¹¹⁷ This concern about the triumph of their own narrative thus manifests itself in the open calls to action to ‘promote a narrative that avoids moral equivalence of ambiguities’ and clearly distinguishes ‘victims and executioners’ in order act against any attempts to ‘falsify history’¹¹⁸ – i.e. one ‘centred around the victims’ of ETA’s violence. Even though ETA’s campaign has ended, they argue, it is imperative to resist the ‘temptation to turn the page and forget about the past’¹¹⁹ – ironically alluding to what had been done in the democratic Transition in the name of reconciliation, a double standard the VEs nevertheless do not appear to mind, despite some of their members also having been victims of Francoism. The promotion of the “terrorism” narrative nevertheless constitutes another central theme in the VEs’ discourse – one which has very much translated into practice. The VEs have been repeatedly speaking out against ETA’s ceasefire and disarmament calling it an attempt to disavow its true responsibility, ‘achieve impunity’ and ‘justify the use of violence’ by ‘utilising an alleged historical conflict’ to impose its own vision, all under the ‘disguise of political negotiation.’ By extension the VEs thus also oppose non-violent expressions of Basque independentism, calling them ‘fanatical and anti-democratic political projects.’¹²⁰ What is more, the VEs exerted constant pressure on the Rajoy government to ‘neutralise [ETA’s] propagandist campaign,’ with the AVT even criticising its ally government for letting ETA dissolve itself instead of actively defeating it, arguing the VEs had a ‘right to see ETA defeated.’¹²¹ Similarly, the AVT criticised Rajoy in 2015 for ‘forgetting his promises’ to the victims of terrorism who ‘feel deeply betrayed’ by his actions of acknowledging, to a certain degree, the need for reconciliation.¹²² This simultaneous pressure and collaboration – apart from concrete

¹¹⁷ Manuel Marlasca, “Contra el blanqueo de la historia,” *AVT*, November 2, 2016.

<http://avt.org/prensa/contra-el-blanqueo-de-la-historia/1299>

¹¹⁸ “Comunicado asociaciones,” *FVT*.

¹¹⁹ Blanco, “En defensa,” *FVT*.

¹²⁰ “10 reclamaciones de las víctimas del terrorismo para una política antiterrorista eficaz,” *AVT*, November 3, 2016.

<http://avt.org/prensa/10-reclamaciones-de-las-vctimas-del-terrorismo-para-una-politica-antiterrorista-eficaz/1303>

¹²¹ “ETA sigue humillando a las víctimas, esta vez por boca de un terrorista huido,” *AVT*, May 3, 2018.

<http://avt.org/prensa/eta-sigue-humillando-a-las-vctimas-esta-vez-por-boca-de-un-terrorista-huido/1430>

“Reivindicaciones de la AVT a Mariano Rajoy,” *AVT*, May 10, 2018.

<http://avt.org/prensa/reivindicaciones-de-la-avt-a-mariano-rajoy/1433>

¹²² “10 razones por las que las víctimas del terrorismo saldrán a la calle el próximo 24 de enero para denunciar las traiciones del Gobierno de Mariano Rajoy,” *AVT*, January 7, 2015.

<http://avt.org/prensa/10-razones-por-las-que-las-vctimas-del-terrorismo-saldrn-a-la-calle-el-prximo-24-de-enero-para-denunciar-las-traiciones-del-gobierno-de-mariano-rajoy/1162>

policies which will be discussed later – has thus brought the VEs a fundamental victory in aiding to shape tools of future public discourse on the matter.

The most effective way to promote the “terrorism” narrative is likely through tangible impact on the educational system. In 2017 the FVT has collaborated with the Rajoy government on compiling a secondary school (ESO) teaching material – first of multiple to come – on the subject of terrorism which has been added to secondary school curricula by a 2014 law. The material is available online to teachers and students for recommended use in geography and history classes at the 4th grade ESO level. The ESO document has been hailed by the FVT as ‘the truthful narrative in the classrooms’ which it praises for its victim-centric focus. As the FVT emphasises, teaching about terrorism has to be done ‘through the lens of the victims’ to counter the narratives ‘propagated by the terrorists.’ The FVT moreover praises that it has ‘highlighted ETA due to the scale of its criminal activity’ as well as the fact the material talks about VEs and their emergence.¹²³ As such, the FVT therefore leaves no doubt the ESO material has been compiled with advancing the “terrorism” narrative in mind.

The first look at the ESO teaching material confirms the official claim of clearly emphasising the victims as ‘the most tragical consequence of violence’ and devoting large space to victim testimonials and researching their fates, putting oneself into their shoes throughout.¹²⁴ As such the material generally appears quite neutral, if concise. However, its deeper analysis and comparison against broader context draw attention not only to what was emphasised, but also what was *de*-emphasised or omitted altogether from the account presented. Firstly, this material effectively downplays and simplifies the role of the Francoist dictatorship in ETA’s emergence. Briefly mentioning the dictatorship, it nevertheless argues ETA’s emergence ‘was not an inevitable consequence of the existence of a dictatorship’ as terrorism was a phenomenon all across Europe, devoting space to ‘extremist ideologies’ that defended the use of violence, as it emphasises, ‘in democracies as well as in dictatorships.’¹²⁵ This account therefore implicitly dismisses the role of Francoist repression

¹²³ “El verdadero relato en las aulas,” *FVT*, December 2017, 12-14.

<http://fundacionvt.org/wp-content/uploads/2017/12/noticia2.pdf>

¹²⁴ “El terrorismo en España,” Proyecto Educativo “Memoria y Prevención del Terrorismo,” Unidad didáctica no. 1., *Centro Memorial de las Víctimas del Terrorismo* (2018): 5.

http://www.memorialvt.com/wp-content/uploads/2018/04/terrorismo_en_espan%CC%83a_ALUMNADO.pdf

¹²⁵ *Ibid.*, 11-13.

in stimulating the emergence of ETA, but moreover it also fails to explain the wider historical sources of Basque grievances that stipulated its emergence. Secondly, the material emphasises the ‘need for reconciliation’ in the democratic transition when everybody was amnestied, yet pointing out the ‘terrorists refused to stop killing,’ even going as far as partly blaming the 1981 coup d’etat on ETA as ‘one of its main pretexts were the continued attacks by ETA.’¹²⁶ This view is eerily consistent with the “Spanish nationalist view” discussed earlier, which essentially argues the transition and the democracy made all grievances ‘magically’ disappear with no need for any objections anymore. Yet as has been discussed previously, forgetting does not necessarily lead to reconciliation or resolution.

Thirdly, though acknowledging the GAL and their utilisation of the ‘same methods’ to defeat the terrorists, it was dismissed as highly illegal and ‘extra-institutional’ – yet at the very least its acknowledgement is a positive point. However, when it comes to the defeat of ETA it is presented as one effectively done at the hands of the state authorities by debilitating the organisation into irrelevance, with no mention of ETA’s unilateral ceasefire and disarmament.¹²⁷ The material naturally does not forget to mention the VEs’ work towards ‘justice, the truth, dignity and memory.’¹²⁸ Though not appearing so on the first look, an in-depth analysis suggests this material results slightly problematic for the following reason – whilst doing justice to the victims of ETA and rightfully condemning political violence, it unfortunately simultaneously also does justice to a restricted narrative of “terrorism only,” thus contributing to impeding reconciliation, as its impartiality is put in doubt by omitting important context or glancing past certain historical sections that do not suit the narrative it seeks to promote. In the long term, by failing to include context and other narratives, this educational material may thus serve towards hampering reconciliation due to perpetuating a lack of historical comprehension of complex issues. It does, however, certainly serve as a powerful tool for the “terrorism” narrative as it opens a space for the VEs space to promote their discourse in the classrooms. Nevertheless, it does so at the price of suppressing any other narrative, as such being susceptible to facilitating the very thing the VEs warn against – “erasing history.” As Ribeiro de Menezes argues, different narratives help ‘explore divergent perspectives without imposing closure’ and contesting narratives are necessary to ‘prevent the usurpation of the past’ by a single narrative which, by definition, will always

¹²⁶ Ibid., 18-19.

¹²⁷ Ibid., 24.

¹²⁸ Ibid., 26.

omit and emphasise certain facts.¹²⁹ Despite their urgent rhetoric about the “terrorists erasing the past,” the “Spanish nationalist view” nevertheless clearly remains firmly present, partly funded by the government and making its way into cooperating classrooms.

To conclude, it therefore becomes obvious that for the VEs ETA’s terrorism is by no means over. As they themselves claim in 2018, despite ETA no longer existing, for them the “end of ETA” remains ‘far from reality.’¹³⁰ The VEs’ aggressive stance against any mention of the “political conflict” discourse or any concessions in that direction has vast implications not only for victim acknowledgement on both sides – thus promoting the VEs’ exclusivist “competitive” conceptualisation of victimhood – but also for rejecting any legitimacy to non-violent political expressions of Basque independentism. Due to this uncompromising vision of the radical “Spanish nationalist view” which sees the Basque case purely through a ‘victory/defeat’ lens implementation of transitional justice mechanisms or reconciliation may therefore prove difficult. As Jacoby points out, VEs could then potentially ‘remain trapped in the final stage of victimhood indefinitely’ as presently they appear either ‘unable or unwilling to move beyond [their victim status].’¹³¹

The “*Abertzale* narrative”

The second section will analyse the “*Abertzale* view” representing the extreme sides of the Basque Nationalist Left. Primary sources from two ‘fringe’ political movements will therefore be utilised – *Sortu* and *Bildu*. *Sortu* is a new Nationalist Left political party emergent after ETA’s ceasefire declaration in 2011, expressly rejecting its violence, yet having been declared illegal by the Spanish Supreme Court before it could even register as a political party due to its alleged ties to ETA’s political wing *Batasuna* which later dissolved in 2013. *EH Bildu* is a coalition of Nationalist Left parties, including *Sortu*, formed as a response to that very Supreme Court decision. It obtained 25% of the vote in the Basque Country’s 2011 municipal elections, making it the second largest party in the Basque Country after the PNV, whilst managing to stand in the election despite the hurdles imposed by the Zapatero government.¹³² The primary sources from these *abertzale* movements will be

¹²⁹ Ribeiro de Menezes, *Embodying Memory*, 20.

¹³⁰ Blanco, “En defensa,” *FVT*.

¹³¹ Jacoby, “Theory of Victimhood,” 528.

¹³² Zabalo and Saratxo, “ETA Ceasefire,” 376.

complemented by those from the Basque “victims association” – *Exerat* – representing the rights of Basque ‘political prisoners’ and their families. This association has been strongly allied with *Batasuna* which helped it secure funding for families to visit their incarcerated relatives who have been placed in jails across Spain due to the ‘dispersion policy.’¹³³ Lastly, the analysis will be complemented by ETA’s last statements before its disarmament and eventual dissolution. The narrative of the Basque nationalists represents the ‘older’ victimhood claim linked with the “political conflict” discourse, presenting the Basques as victims of a long string of historical repression by the Spanish state. As such, the ‘new’ victimhood of Basque “political prisoners” after ETA’s dissolution thus merely constitutes the most recent expression of that ‘historical’ claim to victimhood, nevertheless one that has been significantly present in the post-2011 Basque nationalist side’s discourse.

When examining the language utilised in these sources, many recurring themes can be found, similarly to the “Spanish nationalist” discourse. One can be summarised by a quote from a 2014 *Bildu* document, which claims the Spanish state is following “a strategy of vengeance, a strategy of war” against the Basques.¹³⁴ The theme of Spanish post-2011 policies being driven by “vengeance” is very common throughout these sources, complemented by a related claim that this is done with the aim of “boycotting” or “sabotaging peace.” By extension the common language of “conflict resolution,” with the emphasis on the word *conflict*, thus shines through. This corresponds with the key theme of the “*Abertzale* view” – the affirmation of the existence of conflict, and therefore *two* sides to blame as well as victims’ present on *both* sides, which therefore implies a push for reconciliation and negotiations after the end of violence. Whilst the “Spanish view” focused on discrediting the “political conflict” narrative as a way of promoting the “terrorism” one and shifting the blame for damage to victims fully onto the Basque nationalists, the “*Abertzale* view” seeks to present itself in an ‘inclusive’ way. It thus affirms the “conflict” and blames the Spanish side for blocking the recognition of the need for reconciliation as well as that of Basque victims, past and present. Therefore, key points of contention thus become visible between the two.

¹³³ MacDonald and Bernardo, “Politics of Victimhood,” 176.

¹³⁴ *Revista EH Bildu*, no. 17, December 18, 2014, 2.
<https://ehbildu.eus/es/noticias/revista/5746-numero-17>

Firstly, the recognition of the existence of a ‘political and historical conflict’ lies at the heart of all parties’ claims – be it *Bildu*, *Sortu* or ETA. More importantly, all emphasise the need for its resolution and reconciliation.¹³⁵ They advocate for reconciliation in order to move past the ‘wounds that impede coexistence, peace and normalisation’¹³⁶ whilst condemning the ‘battle of narratives’, instead calling for the establishment of an ‘inclusive narrative.’¹³⁷ As an extension, *Sortu* and *Bildu* therefore recognise and commend ETA’s unilateral disarmament, calling it a display of ‘political responsibility’ whilst simultaneously criticising the Rajoy government for refusing to act in the same conciliatory manner towards achieving peace – hence effectively putting ETA on a moral pedestal above the government.¹³⁸ They go as far as openly accusing the Spanish government of intending to ‘perpetuate the conflict’ with the acts of ‘boycotting’ and ‘sabotaging’ any initiative towards peace, calling them ‘enemies of peace’ and ‘masters of war.’¹³⁹

It is being claimed the Rajoy government simply does not wish a ‘just, logical and rational solution to the conflict,’ instead perpetuating a ‘dirty game’ that enables it to pursue its ‘vengeance’ and ‘avoid a peace scenario.’¹⁴⁰ What the Spanish state sees as “counter-terrorism” the *abertzale* forces see as a strategy of vengeance designed to simultaneously maintain a low-intensity conflict to avoid a strictly political confrontation where ‘the state

¹³⁵ “Bakerako euskal konponbidea: 68 acciones para un escenario de paz y normalización política,” *EH Bildu*, 2017.

<https://ehbildu.eus/dokumentuak/bakerako-euskal-konponbidea-es.pdf>

“Esta operación deja al descubierto, definitivamente, la voluntad de ETA y el sabotaje del Estado,” *Sortu*, December 17, 2016.

<http://sortu.eus/es/noticias/resolucion-del-conflicto/2059-esta-operacion-deja-al-descubierto-definitivamente-la-voluntad-de-eta-y-el-sabotaje-del-estado>

“Comunicado de ETA: declaración sobre el daño causado,” *El Correo*, April 21, 2018.

<https://www.elcorreo.com/politica/comunicado-eta-declaracion-dano-causado-texto-integro-20180420083418-nt.html>

¹³⁶ “Debemos consensuar y poner en marcha mecanismos que impulsen la búsqueda de la verdad,” *Sortu*, September 18, 2015.

<http://sortu.eus/es/noticias/resolucion-del-conflicto/1567-debemos-consensuar-y-poner-en-marcha-mecanismos-que-impulsen-la-busqueda-de-la-verdad>

¹³⁷ “Bakerako euskal,” *Bildu*.

¹³⁸ “El compromiso de ETA por la resolución es una realidad patente,” *Sortu*, October 1, 2015.

<http://sortu.eus/es/noticias/resolucion-del-conflicto/1584-el-compromiso-de-eta-por-la-resolucion-es-una-realidad-patente>

“Bakerako euskal,” *Bildu*.

¹³⁹ “El Estado niega derechos recogidos en su propia legislación con el miserable objetivo de perpetuar el conflicto,” *Sortu*, October 29, 2015.

<http://sortu.eus/es/noticias/resolucion-del-conflicto/1611-el-estado-niega-derechos-recogidos-en-su-propia-legislacion-con-el-miserable-objetivo-de-perpetuar-el-conflicto>

“Esta operación,” *Sortu*.

¹⁴⁰ *Revista EH Bildu*, 18.

“Hay que volver a lamentar que entre ley y justicia haya diferencias insalvables,” *Etixerat*, October 25, 2018.

<http://www.etxerat.eus/index.php/es/noticias/1956-hay-que-volver-a-lamentar-que-entre-ley-y-justicia-haya-diferencias-insalvables>

knows it stands to lose a lot.¹⁴¹ Moreover, another key feature is the inherent distrust in the impartiality of the Spanish judiciary, claiming it serves ‘at command of a government’ to help ‘boycott conflict resolution,’ with *Exterat* pointing out that there are ‘irreconcilable differences between law and justice.’¹⁴² Moreover, these present accusations fit within a wider narrative of Spanish systematic oppression of the Basques continuing into the present. For instance, torture is frequently brought up as a historical ‘systematic’ weapon of the state against Basque nationalism,¹⁴³ prompting a hostile attitude towards the Spanish police and military, effectively calling their presence a ‘military occupation’ of the Basque Country.¹⁴⁴ This rhetoric both implicitly and explicitly echoes the deep memory of Francoism discussed previously, with the state being labelled a ‘corrupt and totalitarian project’ with a ‘totalitarian attitude’ and ‘double morality.’¹⁴⁵ The *abertzale* forces therefore, despite condemning the ‘battle of narratives,’ inevitably pursue a narrative of their own as well – taking a moral high ground above the “oppressive state” that “impedes peace” whilst positioning themselves as the active vanguard of Basque civil society¹⁴⁶ and agents of reconciliation and peace.

The Basque nationalist forces however, also utilise the concept of victimhood to a large extent, with their key claim focusing on the lack of recognition for Basque victims of the “conflict,” both past and present. Firstly, they push for recognition of victim status of those killed by the GAL forces, criticising the fact that victim rights have been repeatedly denied to them. Moreover, as they emphasise, GAL victims too are victims of *terrorism*, just of that perpetrated by the state. As such, they also transform the line of argument used by the Spanish VEs for their own purposes, claiming that GAL victims of state terrorism are being

¹⁴¹ “El compromiso de ETA,” *Sortu*.

¹⁴² “El Estado niega,” *Sortu*.

“Hay que volver,” *Etterat*.

¹⁴³ “40 años torturando con total impunidad,” *Sortu*, February 4, 2016.

<http://sortu.eus/es/noticias/resolucion-del-conflicto/1708-40-anos-torturando-con-total-impunidad>

¹⁴⁴ “Sortu exige la libertad de todos los encarcelados por esta razzia franquista,” *Sortu*, November 16, 2016.

<http://sortu.eus/es/noticias/resolucion-del-conflicto/2001-sortu-exige-la-libertad-de-todos-los-encarcelados-por-esta-razzia-franquista>

¹⁴⁵ “Denunciamos a la Guardia Civil que, pistola en mano, ha amenazado a familiares de presos,” *Sortu*, September 11, 2016.

<http://sortu.eus/es/noticias/resolucion-del-conflicto/1913-denunciamos-a-la-guardia-civil-que-pistola-en-mano-ha-amenazado-a-familiares-de-presos>

“Hace 30 años las alcantarillas del Estado asesinaron sin que hoy sus víctimas tengan ningún tipo de derecho reconocido,” *Sortu*, July 15, 2015.

<http://sortu.eus/es/noticias/resolucion-del-conflicto/1518-hace-30-anos-las-alcantarillas-del-estado-asesinaron-sin-que-hoy-sus-victimas-tengan-ningun-tipo-de-derecho-reconocido>

¹⁴⁶ “Esta operación,” *Sortu*.

Revista EH Bildu, 3.

disrespected and ignored by the state that persecuted them. This again echoes the ethical issue regarding whether perpetrators can simultaneously be victims, with *Sortu* arguing these two are not simply mutually exclusive.¹⁴⁷ The *izquierda abertzale* thus accuses the government of using ‘ideological criteria’ to classify who deserves a victim status, and arguing that by denying the GAL victims equal legal rights to other victims, the government by extension justifies that extra-judicial violence against them.¹⁴⁸ Moreover, *Etixerat* has advocated on behalf of the victims of the prisoner ‘dispersion policies,’ concretely those who suffer by family separation as well as the sixteen deceased who died mostly in traffic accidents across Spain when visiting their imprisoned relatives.¹⁴⁹ Nevertheless, unlike the “Spanish nationalist narrative,” the “*abertzale*” one allows for “inclusive victimhood.” It does not advocate for duality of victimhood yet instead acknowledges the right to recognition and reparations for all victims on both sides without difference,¹⁵⁰ as it claims inclusive victimhood is key for reconciliation and coexistence.¹⁵¹ Surprisingly, alongside its disarmament in 2018 even ETA itself recognised its culpability and apologised to its victims.¹⁵² This victimhood inclusivity is logically in line with the “conflict” narrative, as by definition victims then have to be on both sides, as opposed to the “terrorism” narrative which only allows for one side’s legitimate victimhood. Nevertheless, this rhetorical clash and its depth present significant obstacles to finding common ground.

III.II. Political acts

It is of utmost importance to point out that victimhood narratives go beyond being purely rhetorical acts, as they also affect real-world policy issues. These issues were naturally the most visible during the process towards ETA’s disarmament, for instance the widely

¹⁴⁷ “Hace 30 años,” *Sortu*.

¹⁴⁸ “Marginando a las víctimas de la violencia del Estado, el PP está realizando apología de la misma,” *Sortu*, March 10, 2014.

<http://sortu.eus/es/noticias/resolucion-del-conflicto/962-marginando-a-las-victimas-de-la-violencia-del-estado-el-pp-esta-realizando-apologia-de-la-misma>

¹⁴⁹ “Pasos hacia la memoria,” *Etixerat*, 6.

http://www.etixerat.eus/descargas/informes/dossier/pasos_memoria_es.pdf

¹⁵⁰ “El Estado español está tratando de reventar las opciones de paz,” *Sortu*, November 17, 2016.

<http://sortu.eus/es/noticias/resolucion-del-conflicto/2005-el-estado-espanol-esta-tratando-de-reventar-las-opciones-de-paz>

¹⁵¹ “Exigimos hoy en Gasteiz la memoria y el reconocimiento a las víctimas de la dispersión,” *Etixerat*, November 10, 2018.

<http://www.etixerat.eus/index.php/es/noticias/1988-exigimos-hoy-en-gasteiz-la-memoria-y-el-reconocimiento-a-las-victimas-de-la-dispersion>

¹⁵² “Comunicado de ETA.”

criticised 2010 prosecution of mediators, including lawyers, at the height of negotiations with ETA, and those of Nationalist Left leaders actively working towards ETA's disarmament.¹⁵³ However, many key political issues remain fuelled by these narratives and their advocates. Two substantial examples will be highlighted in this section – the issues of Basque prisoners and freedom of speech.

The prisoner issue remains the most contentious issue where the examined clashing narratives manifest themselves visibly. Spanish VEs have some strong words of opposition against any concessions to or releases of 'murderous terrorists.'¹⁵⁴ They actively fight against any 'attempts to empty the cells,' whether it comes to 'releases of allegedly ill prisoners,' those 'allegedly repentant' or even reductions of their sentences, arguing ETA victims should have a primary say in their fates.¹⁵⁵ In contrast, *Sortu* stands in 'solidarity' with the prisoners, asking for their 'immediate release' on the conditions that the Basque society itself decides whilst also accusing the Rajoy government of having continually detained many Basque civil society members 'not suspected of collaboration with ETA but rather of collaborating and implicating themselves in attempts to achieve peace.'¹⁵⁶ This sharp divide extends to the stance towards the governmental 'dispersion policy.' Whilst the AVT actively advocates for the maintenance of this policy,¹⁵⁷ *Sortu* and *Bildu* emphasise the emotional and physical consequences of these measures on the prisoners' relatives. They call for an immediate end to what they view as senseless, unnecessary and 'arbitrarily punishing' policy, framing it as a fundamental human rights issue also serving to further obstruct peace.¹⁵⁸ *Etxerat* labels it a 'political measure with the sole objective of extortion,' as all other reasons for it have become irrelevant post-ETA.¹⁵⁹ As can thus be seen, this widely-discussed subject has remained the key point of contention at the political level of

¹⁵³ Zulaika and Murua, "Terrorism," 344-345.

¹⁵⁴ "El Gobierno de Mariano Rajoy recorta las subvenciones a la AVT," AVT, November 4, 2014.

<http://avt.org/prensa/el-gobierno-de-mariano-rajoy-recorta-las-subvenciones-a-la-avt/1149>

¹⁵⁵ "¿Se ha hecho verdadera justicia a las víctimas del terrorismo? Decálogo de tareas pendientes para una verdadera justicia con las víctimas," AVT, October 6, 2014.

<http://avt.org/prensa/se-ha-hecho-verdadera-justicia-a-las-vctimas-del-terrorismo-declogo-de-tareas-pendientes-para-una-verdadera-justicia-con-las-vctimas/1141>

¹⁵⁶ "Esta operación," *Sortu*.

"El Estado español," *Sortu*.

¹⁵⁷ "Reivindicaciones de la AVT," AVT.

¹⁵⁸ "Es el momento de utilizar todos los recursos jurídicos a nuestro alcance para conseguir acabar con la actual política penitenciaria," *Sortu*, January 27, 2017.

<http://sortu.eus/es/noticias/resolucion-del-conflicto/2131-es-el-momento-de-utilizar-todos-los-recursos-juridicos-a-nuestro-alcance-para-conseguir-acabar-con-la-actual-politica-penitenciaria>

Revista EH Bildu, 2-3.

¹⁵⁹ "Pasos hacia la memoria," *Etxerat*, 8.

the irreconcilable ‘battle of narratives,’ although a change in this penitentiary policy appears to be on the horizon with the new Sánchez government in power.

Secondly, these rhetorical clashes translate into debates on freedom of speech in Spain. The VEs are known for lobbying against any participation of what they see as ETA-linked movements in many events – which for them appears to be the whole of *izquierda abertzale* despite their clear rejection of violence. For instance, the AVT successfully appealed to prevent the chairman of *Sortu* from speaking at a Basque government-sponsored summer school at Madrid’s Complutense University on post-ETA coexistence in the Basque Country.¹⁶⁰ These attempts however go beyond engagement in the academic and public sphere, targeting the grounds for free artistic expression as well. For instance, the AVT lobbying to stop a Zaragoza concert of a music band from Navarra they accused of having ‘pro-ETA lyrics,’¹⁶¹ asking the left-wing party *Podemos* to call off a performance by a band whose lyrics represent a ‘total humiliation of ETA’s victims’¹⁶² or even suing Madrid’s mayor for allowing a carnival marionette displaying a sign referring to ETA.¹⁶³ The Spanish judiciary – often accused by *abertzale* entities of bias – has also recently come into the spotlight with a high-profile case of a Catalan rapper who got awarded a three-and-a-half-year sentence for ‘pro-ETA’ lyrics and insulting the Spanish monarchy.¹⁶⁴ These acts are naturally met with fierce resistance from the Nationalist Left as many left-wing Spaniards, with claims such as that from *Sortu* arguing Spain engages in ‘ideological persecution of the dissidence’ and proclaiming ‘freedom of speech does not exist’ in the country.¹⁶⁵ This second issue thus demonstrates that the clash of narratives prompts debates about the democratic legitimacy of the Spanish government and its institutions. Despite the official end of ETA, the spectre of

¹⁶⁰ “El presidente de la AVT consigue que Hasier Arraiz no intervenga en los Cursos de Verano de la Complutense,” *AVT*, June 30, 2016.

<http://avt.org/prensa/el-presidente-de-la-avt-consigue-que-hasier-arraiz-no-intervenga-en-los-cursos-de-verano-de-la-complutense/1272>

¹⁶¹ “La AVT pide al alcalde de Zaragoza la suspensión del concierto del grupo proetarra Berri Txarrak,” *AVT*, September 11, 2015.

<http://avt.org/prensa/la-avt-pide-al-alcalde-de-zaragoza-la-suspension-del-concierto-del-grupo-proetarra-berri-txarrak/1218>

¹⁶² “Nueva humillación a las víctimas del terrorismo en el cierre de campaña de Unidos Podemos,” *AVT*, June 24, 2016.

<http://avt.org/prensa/nueva-humillacin-a-las-vctimas-del-terrorismo-en-el-cierre-de-campaa-de-unidos-podemos/1271>

¹⁶³ “La AVT se querella contra Manuela Carmena, Celia Mayer y los titiriteros,” *AVT*, February 8, 2016.

<http://avt.org/prensa/la-avt-se-querella-contra-manuela-carmena-celia-mayer-y-los-titiriteros/1240>

¹⁶⁴ “Spanish rapper on the run after ‘terror lyrics’ prison sentence,” *BBC*, May 25, 2018.

<https://www.bbc.com/news/blogs-trending-44253045>

¹⁶⁵ “En el Estado español no existe la libertad de expresión,” *Sortu*, February 16, 2016.

<http://sortu.eus/es/noticias/resolucion-del-conflicto/1722-en-el-estado-espanol-no-existe-la-libertad-de-expresion>

unresolved pasts thus continues to feed into highly polarising narratives that detrimentally affect and permeate both political and societal spheres of public life in Spain. With the Rajoy government replaced with Sánchez's PSOE government as well as the recent increased centrist support for *Bildu* in the Basque Country, possibility of change of course may however be on the horizon.

Conclusion

This in-depth analysis of the Basque case has revealed numerous fissures between "Spanish nationalist" and the Basque "*abertzale*" forces with regards to many intertwined historical issues. However, it can be argued that given the complexity of historical, social and political circumstances, the perpetuation of diametrically opposed narratives of victimhood through both rhetorical and political acts in the post-2011 era after ETA's effective demise has become a key impeding factor in attempts towards societal reconciliation in Spain. The thesis thus argues that reconciliation would have to directly involve and address polarised conceptualisations of victimhood on both sides whilst striving towards achieving at least minimal consensus on inclusive victimhood conceptualisations. Furthermore, it needs to be taken into account these victimhood claims remain deeply intertwined with the long-standing narratives of "political conflict" and "terrorism." "*Abertzale*" victimhood claims have deep historical roots, basing themselves in a narrative of a historical Basque-Spanish conflict perceived as long-term systematic oppression, as such therefore demanding recognition of this victimhood whilst remaining open to potential avenues towards reconciliation – yet the long-running Basque grievances unlikely to be relinquished need to be kept in mind as a potential obstacle. "Spanish nationalist" victimhood, in contrast, is relatively new yet what it lacks in age it makes up in vigour. Its claims have especially intensified in the post-ETA era and the uncompromising and exclusionary nature of both of the VEs' narratives promotes a hierarchy of victimhood, propped up by the "terrorism" narrative which logically only allows for one side to claim its victims. As such, "Spanish nationalist victimhood" appears to offer less space for manoeuvre when it comes to reaching a compromise on proceeding towards reconciliation. It is furthermore of vital importance to realise that these two narratives mutually reinforce each other the more they are pursued. Many common features include accusing each other of aiming to 'erase

history,' neglecting and forgetting the other side's victims and calling each other 'totalitarian' with the aim to undermine the legitimacy of the other actor. This mutual adversity thus implies further impediments for reconciliation.

The thesis' analysis centring on narratives of victimhood builds up on the scarce literature covering the potential avenues for reconciliation in the Basque case. Namely, the implications arising from this thesis' coincide with the conclusions of Mínguez-Alcaide's comprehensive practical study where he emphasises the need for inclusive conceptualisation of victimhood and memory whilst recognising its versatility, instead of making 'partisan use' of each memory. Given the existence of different 'subjective narratives,' he views this as a necessary step in order to at least 'enable minimal agreement' as a stepping stone towards reconciliation.¹⁶⁶ This thesis similarly concludes that in-depth comprehension of differing narratives and their sources is necessary for building reconciliation and launching a dialogue, which will likely not be possible without giving up a degree of dogmatism on both narratives' sides. These could be tackled via transitional justice mechanisms, as recommended by multiple scholars, however the thesis agrees with Bengoetxea's viewpoint that a combination of transitional and traditional justice mechanisms will be needed to cover the specific range of this case's needs. Moreover, there is certainly a lesson to be learned from the historical treatment of the memory of Francoism and the Transition – that forgetting, contrary to what has been claimed, does *not* lead to reconciliation. Instead, it just postpones the manifestation of grievances to a later date, giving them time to accumulate and grow, further exacerbating – not mitigating – the original tensions as they merge with newly arisen issues.

However, the key point this thesis builds up on is the need for a victim-centric approach, suggested in some of the aforementioned academic literature yet mostly unelaborated on. The thesis takes a complex look at how memories of unresolved pasts perpetuate violent legacies, bringing together different phenomena which it argues all converge in entrenched conceptualisations of victimhood, presenting it as a central concept of key importance for breaking this deadlock. The thesis undertakes an in-depth study on the concept of victimhood in the Basque case and the narratives underpinning is on a scale not conducted before whilst utilising a conceptual framework drawn from literature on Northern Ireland.

¹⁶⁶ Mínguez-Alcaide, "Proceso de diálogo," 52.

The Northern Irish case, though frequently contrasted to the Basque one, has never had a comparative study on victimhood conceptualisations done, which this thesis claims ought to be a promising unexplored avenue for research on reconciliation in Northern Ireland. By focusing on extreme and incompatible claims of victimhood, the thesis then reveals the sources of the current deadlock in the Basque case. As inclusive victimhood is emphasised as a central concept holding the key to unlocking reconciliation, the thesis invites more academic attention to this phenomenon, particularly in Spain where the complexity of memory – namely the legacies of Francoism – create many obstacles to launching dialogue in the Basque case. As Ribeiro de Menezes states, ‘forgiveness’ – a key part of reconciliation – ‘becomes an unburdening of victimhood as much as it is a release from guilt.’ However, as she rightly concludes, ‘Spanish memory debates still have some way to run.’¹⁶⁷ This then not only includes all the intertwined forms of memories of violence people across the Spanish territories have accumulated throughout its modern history but also the victimhood claims constructed based on those memories.

¹⁶⁷ Ribeiro de Menezes, *Embodying Memory*, 142.

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