

eman ta zabal zazu



Universidad  
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**Gora Rebeldiak!**  
**A History of Radical Basque Nationalist–Irish Republican Relations**

**Tesis Doctoral presentada por**  
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*for Ma & Da*

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*As is often said (and as I now understand myself), doing a PhD can be an extremely challenging and lonely journey at the best of times — definitely a commitment not to be entered into lightly. Undertaking to begin one at the age of 31, in a foreign land, without friends, and without access to a grant (on account of my age) made this prospect extra daunting. Suffice to say, I have relied very heavily on those closest to me for emotional and moral support. In Bilbo and Vitoria-Gasteiz, I have met some wonderful people who have become lifelong friends. Along with friends in Dublin, they have lent me their ears when I have needed to vent my frustrations, or simply reminded me that there are far more important things in life than a PhD. Needless to say, my family in Ireland, and especially my parents, Don and Helen, have supported and encouraged me from day one, as I knew they would. Meanwhile, my Basque “suegros” José Ignacio and Palmira have gone out of their way to help me and their daughter Aiala in every way possible.*

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*A quick note on language and place names:*

*While the main body of this dissertation is written in English, a number of primary source excerpts and interview quotations in Spanish are also dispersed throughout. All other primary source material originally written in Basque, Irish and French has been translated into English. All translations are those of the author unless otherwise stated.*

*Where missing from primary and secondary sources, I have added the Gaelic Irish síneadh fada (accented character, e.g., á, é, í) to mentions of “Sinn Féin” and other Irish words for consistency. Similarly, I have added and occasionally omitted (now obsolete) “acentos” from Spanish sources. Alternative spellings and versions of first names and surnames are provided for figures who feature prominently in this study when they are first introduced.*

*The broad geographical scope of this study offers a wide-ranging array of place names in the Spanish, Basque, French, English and, Irish languages. This presents a number of sensitive political issues for the author to weigh up. For instance, the use of certain versions of place names at the expense of others is often a conscious political choice (e.g., Derry [or Doire] instead of Londonderry, and vice versa). Commonly used territorial references may also be interpreted differently by each reader or have contested political connotations (e.g., Ulster, Euskal Herria).*

*In order to bring some cohesion to these issues, as a general rule of thumb, all town and provincial place names, when first introduced, will be referred to in as pluralistic a way as is reasonably practicable and possible. For all subsequent mentions, English place names will be used for those that fall within the Irish/British geographical sphere of this study, and Basque place names used for those within the Basque/Spanish/French equivalent. For convenience, English will be used for all recognised political entities greater than provincial level (e.g., Spain, Basque Country, Ireland), well-known geographical features (e.g., Iberian Peninsula), relevant historical entities (e.g., Kingdom of Navarre), and all other political entities that are mentioned (e.g., Catalonia).*

## Glossary of acronyms

AEK	(Alfabetatze eta Euskalduntze Koordinakundea)
AGA	(Archivo General de la Administración)
AHE	(Archivo Histórico de Euskadi)
ANC	(African National Congress)
ANV	(Acción Nacionalista Vasca)
ANV-AA	(Archivo del Nacionalismo Vasco-Abertzaletasunaren Agiritegia)
ARB	(Armée Républicaine Bretonne/Armée Révolutionnaire Bretonne)
ASK	(Abertzale Sozialista Komiteak)
ASU	(Active Service Unit)
BAC	(Basque Autonomous Community)
BBB	(Bizkai Buru Batzar)
BDA	(Basic Democratic Agreement)
BIA	(Basque Izquierda Abertzale)
BSC	(Basque Solidarity Committee)
CGV	(Consejo General Vasco)
CLMC	(Combined Loyalist Military Command)
CNV	(Comunión Nacionalista Vasco)
CPI	(Communist Party of Ireland)
DSD	(Downing Street Declaration)
DUP	(Democratic Unionist Party)
EA	(Eusko Alkartasuna)
EAS	(Euskal Alderdi Sozialialista)
EBB	(Euskadi Buru Batzar)
ECHR	(European Court of Human Rights)
EE	(Euskadiko Ezkerra)
EEC	(European Economic Community)
EG	(Euzko Gaztedi)
EGI	(Euzko Gaztedi Indarra)
EHAS	(Euskal Herriko Alderdi Sozialista)
EIA	(Euskal Iraultzarako Alderdia)
EKAB	(Euskal Komunista Abertzaleen Batasuna)
EMK	(Euskadiko Mugimendu Komunista)
ESB	(Euskal Sozialista Biltzarrea)
ETA	(Euskadi 'ta Askatasuna)
EU	(European Union)
FAB	(Foreign Affairs Bureau)
FARC	(Fuerzas Armadas Revolucionarias de Colombia)
FCO	(Foreign and Commonwealth Office)
FLB	(Front de Libération de la Bretagne)
FLN	(Front de Libération Nationale)
FLNC	(Fronte di Liberazione Naziunale Corsu)
FSS	(Fundación Sancho el Sabio)
GAL	(Grupos Antiterroristas de Liberación)
GFA	(Good Friday Agreement)
GPO	(General Post Office)
GUE/NGL	(European United Left/Nordic Green Left)
GV	(Gobierno Vasco)
HAS	(Herriko Alderdi Sozialista)

HASI	(Herri Alderdi Sozialista Iraultzalea)
HB	(Herri Batasuna)
HMG	(Her Majesty's Government)
IICD	(Independent International Commission on Decommissioning)
IITC	(Irish-Iberian Trading Company)
IMA	(Irish Military Archives)
INLA	(Irish National Liberation Army)
IPP	(Irish Parliamentary Party)
IRA	(Irish Republican Army)
IRB	(Irish Republican Brotherhood)
IRM	(Irish Republican Movement)
IRPB	(Irish Republican Publicity Bureau)
IRSP	(Irish Republican Socialist Party)
KAS	(Koordinadora Abertzale Sozialista)
LAB	(Langile Abertzaleen Batzordeak)
LAIA	(Langile Abertzale Iraultzaileen Alderdia)
LBF	(Lazkaoko Beneditarren Fundazioa)
LLB	(Linenhall Library, Belfast)
MC	(Movimiento Comunista)
MEP	(Member of the European Parliament)
MLA	(Member of the Legislative Assembly)
MLNV	(Movimiento de Liberación Nacional Vasco)
MP	(Member of Parliament)
NA	(National Archives)
NAI	(National Archives of Ireland)
NIA	(Northern Ireland Assembly)
NICRA	(Northern Ireland Civil Rights Association)
NLF	["Official"] (National Liberation Front)
NLI	(National Library of Ireland)
OAS	(Organisation Armée Secrète)
OC	(Officer Commanding)
OIRA	("Official" Irish Republican Army)
OSF	("Official" Sinn Féin)
ÓSF	(Ógra Shinn Féin)
OUT	(Organizacão Unitária de Trabalhadores)
PCE	(Partido Comunista España)
PIRA	("Provisional" Irish Republican Army)
PLO	(Palestinian Liberation Organization)
PNV	(Partido Nacionalista Vasco)
POW	(Prisoner of War)
PP	(Partido Popular)
PSE	(Partido Socialista de Euskadi)
PSE-EE	(Partido Socialista de Euskadi-Euskadiko Ezkerra)
PSF	("Provisional" Sinn Féin)
PSNI	(Police Service of Northern Ireland)
PSOE	(Partido Socialista Obrero Español)
PTV	(Pueblo Trabajador Vasco)
RAF	(Red Army Faction)
RIC	(Royal Irish Constabulary)
RUC	(Royal Ulster Constabulary)

SAS	(Special Air Service)
SDLP	(Social Democratic and Labour Party)
STV	(Solidaridad de Trabajadores Vascos)
TD	(Teachta Dála)
UCD	(University College Dublin)
UCDA	(University College Dublin Archives)
UdeCD	(Unión de Centro Democrático)
UDA	(Ulster Defence Association)
UDB	(Unvaniezh Demokratel Breizh)
UDR	(Ulster Defence Regiment)
UFF	(Ulster Freedom Fighters)
UK	(United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland)
UN	(United Nations)
UPG	(Unión de Povo Galego)
UPN	(Unión del Pueblo Navarro)
UPV/EHU	(Universidad del País Vasco/Euskal Herriko Unibertsitatea)
US/USA	(United States/United States of America)
USFA	(Under-Secretary of Foreign Affairs)
USSR	(Union of Soviet Socialist Republics)
UUP	(Ulster Unionist Party)
UVF	(Ulster Volunteer Force)
VNA	(violent non-state actor)

## Glossary of interviewees

### **Bertie Ahern**

Taoiseach of Ireland (1997–2008). Irish government signatory to the Belfast “Good Friday” Agreement (1998). Involved in Basque peace initiatives.

### **Joseba Álvarez**

Senior political figure in the Basque *izquierda abertzale* over the past three decades. Member of the Basque Parliament (2001–2005).

### **José Félix Azurmendi**

Director of *Egin* from 1980 to 1986.

### **Pernando Barrena**

Senior political figure in the Basque *izquierda abertzale* over the past three decades. Member of the European Parliament (2019–Present). Member of the Parliament of Navarre (1999–2003).

### **Richard Behal\***

IRA volunteer in the 1960s. Headed up the international affairs of Provisional Sinn Féin, c.1973 to c.1983.

*\*Interview conducted by phone.*

### **Diarmuid Breatnach**

Former coordinator of Dublin-based, Basque Solidarity Committee.

### **Matt Carthy**

Sinn Féin TD (2020–Present). Sinn Féin MEP (2014–2020). National Organiser of Sinn Féin Youth/Ógra Shinn Féin (1998–2000).

### **Michael Culbert**

Former IRA volunteer. Director of Coiste na hIarmchí (a republican ex-prisoner committee).

### **Bairbre de Brún**

Member of the European Parliament (2004–2012). Member of the Northern Ireland Legislative Assembly (1998–2004). Heavily involved in Sinn Féin’s international, language and women’s departments.

### **Gorka Elejabarrieta Díaz**

EH Bildu Senator for Gipuzkoa (2019–Present). Involved in the international affairs of the Basque *izquierda abertzale* since 2002.

### **Gorka Espiau**

Former senior member of Elkarri. Former adviser to the Basque Government on Peace and Reconciliation.

### **Rufi Etxeberria**

Senior political figure in the Basque *izquierda abertzale* over the past three decades. Member of the Gipuzkoan Provincial Parliament (1987–1991). Negotiator for Batasuna during the Loiola talks of 2006 and the Geneva talks of 2007.

### **Eugenio Etxebeste**

Former head of ETA’s political apparatus. Interlocutor with the Spanish government during the Algiers talks of the late 1980s.

### **Iker Gallastegi**

Active in EG/EGI c.1952 to c.1962. Son of prominent radical Basque nationalist Eli Gallastegi. *Iker Gallastegi has subsequently passed away. RIP.*

**Denis Haughey**

Former MLA for Mid-Ulster (1998–2003). Founding member of the Social Democratic and Labour Party. Former head of the SDLP’s international relations.

**Juan José Ibarretxe**

Basque Lehendakari (1999–2009). Deputy Lehendakari (1995–1999).

**Roy Johnston**

Senior figure in Sinn Féin and the IRA in the 1960s.

**Karmelo Landa**

Senior political figure in the Basque *izquierda abertzale* over the past three decades. Herri Batasuna MEP (1990–1994). Member of the Basque Parliament (1994–1998).

**Damian Lawlor**

National Organiser of Ógra Shinn Féin (2000–2002).

**Julen Madariaga**

“Historic” founding member of Ekin (c.1952) and ETA (c.1959). Co-founded the political party Aralar in 2001.

**Alex Maskey**

Prominent Irish republican. Member of the Northern Ireland Legislative Assembly (2003–Present). Lord Mayor of Belfast (2002–2003).

**Gerry McAlinden**

Political activist involved in the “Official” republican movement in the 1970s.

**José María “Txema” Montero**

Former member of Herri Batasuna and Member of the European Parliament (1987–1990)

**Danny Morrison**

Prominent Irish republican. Director of Publicity for Sinn Féin (1979–1990) and Editor of *Republican News* (1975–1979) and *An Phoblacht/Republican News* (1979–1982). Member of the Northern Ireland Parliament Assembly (1982–1986).

**Eoin Ó Broin**

Sinn Féin TD (2011–Present). Belfast City Councillor (2001–2004). National Organiser of Sinn Féin Youth (1997–1998).

**Javier Olaverri Zazpe**

Former senior figure in Euskal Iraultzarako Alderdia. Elected to the Basque Parliament in 1980, 1984 and 1986.

**Eoin Ó Murchú**

Prominently involved in “Official” Sinn Féin in the early 1970s. Founding member in 1972 of the Officials’ “International Secretariat”.

**Josetxo Otegi Arrugaeta**

Formerly involved in the international relations of Basque *izquierda abertzale* youth groups.

**José Ramón Peñagarikano**

Formerly involved in the international relations of Euskal Iraultzarako Alderdia in the late 1970s and early 1980s.

### **Jonathan Powell**

Former British diplomat and Downing Street Chief of Staff (1997–2007). Involved in Irish and Basque peace initiatives.

### **Pat Rice**

Sinn Féin Councillor for Lisburn (1985–1997). Involved in Sinn Féin’s international department from 1985 to 1999.

### **Paul Rios**

Former coordinator of Lokarri. Former spokesperson for Elkarri.

### **Iñaki Ruiz de Pinedo**

Member of the Spanish Congress of Deputies (2019–Present). Member of the Basque Parliament (1980–1994).

### **Iñaki Soto**

Director of the Basque daily newspaper, *GARA*.

### **Alexander Ugalde Zubiri**

Former member of HASI’s Executive Committee and Herri Batasuna’s Comites de Relaciones Exteriores.

### **Eduardo “Teo” Uriarte**

Former ETA member and “Burgos Process” prisoner. Elected to the Basque Parliament for Euskadiko Ezkerra in 1980 and 1984.

### **Arturo “Beñat” Villanueva**

Formerly involved in the international relations of Basque izquierda abertzale youth groups.

### **Séanna “Breathnach” Walsh**

Former IRA volunteer. Belfast City Councillor (2102–Present).

### **Paddy Woodworth**

Author of two books on the Basque Country. Former member of “Official” Sinn Féin and the Workers’ Party.

### **(Former An Garda Síochána Assistant Commissioner)**

#### *Anonymous interviewees:*

The following is a list of grassroots radical Basque nationalist-Irish republican nexus “nodes” interviewed by the author. “Basque” and “Irish” identities are provided to orientate the reader to the case background of each individual. For more details, see section 1.3. Analytical and methodological considerations.

“A” (Basque), “B” (Irish), “C” (Irish), “D” (Irish), “E” (Basque), “F” (Irish), “G” (Basque), “H” (Basque), “I” (Basque), “J” (Basque), “K” (Irish), “L” (Basque), “M” (Basque), “N” (Basque), “O” (Basque), “P” (Basque), “Q” (Basque), “R” (Basque), “S” (Basque), “T” (Basque), “U” (Basque), “V” (Irish), “W” (Basque), “X” (Basque), “Y” (Basque).







“Celebrating a centenary of Basque-Irish friendship”  
Arnaldo Otegi in Dublin. 2016  
(arnaldotegi.eus/GARA)

## CHAPTER ONE

### 1.0. Introduction

“We are proud of our historical brother and sisterhood with our gallant Irish republican comrades, and we will strengthen and deepen those ties of solidarity between our peoples in the times ahead. Our task is to stand shoulder to shoulder in our struggles to build republics fitting for our people. Cairde (Friends), our day will come when a united Irish republic and a free united Basque republic stand shoulder to shoulder among the nations in the earth and a more just and equal world. And until that day comes, we will work together tirelessly and with a smile. As in the words of Bobby Sands: our revenge will be the laughter of our children”. Arnaldo Otegi (Dublin, April 2016).<sup>1</sup>

With a shout of “Up The Rebels! Gora Rebeldiak!”, Arnaldo Otegi, Secretary General of the Basque pro-independence party Sortu (Arise), closed his speech at the 2016 Sinn Féin Árd Fheis (High Assembly) with fist in air to thunderous applause. Flanked by Sinn Féin’s Alex Maskey, who interspersed the Basque leader’s bilingual Spanish/Euskara (Basque) address with its English translation, Otegi’s ten-minute oration managed to evoke, as the above quote illustrates, the past, present and future “ties of solidarity” across the “historical brother and sisterhood” of the Basque *izquierda abertzale* and Irish republican traditions.<sup>2</sup>

While “solidarity” was the watchword used by Otegi at the Árd Fheis to frame the modern constitution of this relationship, the roots of this nexus may be traced back to the

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<sup>1</sup> “Intervención de Arnaldo Otegi en el Árd Fheis del Sinn Féin, su convención anual”, <http://www.arnaldotegi.eus/?p=2359&lang=es> (last accessed 17 January 2018).

<sup>2</sup> Analysts often use the terms “*izquierda abertzale*” (patriotic left), “Movimiento de Liberación Nacional Vasco” (MLNV) (Basque National Liberation Movement) and “radical Basque nationalism” interchangeably to denote the organisations that have historically coalesced around the Basque militant group Euzkadi [later Euskadi] ‘ta Askatasuna (ETA) (Basque Homeland and Freedom). See: Rafael Leonisio: “Basque Patriotic Left: Fifty Years of Political and Terrorist Acronyms”, *RIPS (Revista de Investigaciones Políticas y Sociológicas)*, vol. 14, no. 1, 2015, pp. 83–104. I usually use the term “Basque *izquierda abertzale*” (BIA) as it best encapsulates the ETA-centricity of this movement during the principal timeframe of this study: from the founding of the ETA-antecedent group Ekin in 1952 to ETA’s definitive ceasefire in 2011. I use the term “radical Basque nationalism” when referring to the preceding manifestations and political lines of this movement prior to 1952 (*aberrianismo*, *Jagi-Jagi*) and when referring to the entire pre- and post-1952 historical phases of radical Basque nationalist political culture. The principal timeframe (1952–2011) is encompassed within a *long durée* secondary timeframe that will be dealt with in chapter two. My use of the adjective “radical” throughout is simply employed as a means of differentiating between comparative “radical” and “moderate” positions. The Irish republican movement (IRM) is a broad term that has historically been used to refer to the Irish Republican Army (IRA), the island-wide political party Sinn Féin (We Ourselves), and a number of related advocacy groups and organisations (prisoners’ groups, youth organisations, women’s organisations, etc). Notwithstanding its tagline “The Republican Party”, Fianna Fáil (Warriors of Destiny) has never been considered as part of the Irish republican movement.

immediate aftermath of the Irish 1916 Rising when a branch of radical Basque nationalists drew inspiration from the Irish rebels' actions. No doubt conscious of this legacy, Otegi had earlier in the day attended and laid a wreath at an event "celebrating a centenary of Basque-Irish friendship" at Arbour Hill cemetery in Dublin (Baile Átha Cliath), where fourteen of the executed 1916 leaders lie buried. Statements of mutual solidarity and historical references accepted, this study aims to broach, and hopefully address, more complex questions regarding the emergence, evolution, and function of this nexus and its implications with respect to both political cultures.<sup>3</sup>

In the absence of an existing comprehensive study that deals with these issues, we may ask the following primary question: what is/has been the essential constitution of the radical Basque nationalist-Irish republican relationship? In other words, if one deconstructs the axiom of solidarity that Otegi and others within both traditions regularly speak of: how and why does this relationship exist? How and why *has* it *historically* existed? In order to break down the somewhat sweeping nature of this inquiry, three interlinked, cumulative, and mostly verifiable core questions will be posed. The first of these may be considered as exploratory, the second explanatory, and the third correlative in nature: (1) *What* are the historical facts of the relationship between radical Basque nationalism and Irish republicanism? (2) *How* and *why* has this nexus developed in the manner that it has across a number of time periods, actors, and transnational "strands" (political, military, youth movements, etc.)? And (3): *Has* this nexus had any tangible impact (and if so, *how?*) on the historical development of each movement and wider associated conflict?

Back in Dublin, Sinn Féin President Gerry Adams took the opportunity of his own Árd Fheis address to welcome Otegi as both a personal friend and a voice for peace after a period of "wrongful imprisonment". These words referenced the Sortu leader's 2011 conviction on charges of attempting to reorganise the proscribed political party Batasuna (Unity).

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<sup>3</sup> For Otegi's visit to Arbour Hill, see: "'Up The Rebels!' Basque leader Otegi's historic address in Dublin", <http://www.anphoblacht.com/contents/25946> (last accessed 31 January 2018). For the impact of the 1916 Rising on the Basque political context, see: José María Lorenzo Espinosa: "Influencia del nacionalismo irlandés en el nacionalismo vasco, 1916–1936", *XI Congreso de Estudios Vascos. Nuevas formulaciones culturales: Euskal Herria y Europa*, Donostia, Eusko Ikaskuntza, 1992, pp. 239–247; Kyle McCreanor: *Ireland and the Basque Country: Nationalisms in Contact, 1895–1939*, Concordia University (MA Thesis), 2019; Xosé M. Núñez Seixas: "Ecos de Pascua, mitos rebeldes: el nacionalismo vasco e Irlanda (1890–1939)", *Historia Contemporánea*, no. 55, 2017, pp. 447–482; Cameron Watson: *Basque Nationalism and Political Violence: The Ideological and Intellectual Roots of ETA*, Reno, University of Nevada Press, 2007, pp. 118–123.

In October of that same year, while Otegi was incarcerated, Adams had travelled to Donostia (San Sebastián) to partake in an “International Conference to Promote the Resolution of the Conflict in the Basque Country”. At the conclusion of the conference, a number of international political figures, Adams included, published a statement calling on the Basque paramilitary group Euskadi ‘ta Askatasuna (ETA) “to make a public declaration of the definitive cessation of all armed action and to request talks with the governments of Spain and France to address exclusively the consequences of the conflict”.<sup>4</sup>

Four days later, on 21 October 2011, a trio of hooded ETA militants responded positively to the international group’s invitation, and in doing so, marked the end of an armed campaign for Basque independence that had cost well over eight hundred lives. Reflecting on the Irish peace process and his personal role in recent Basque peace initiatives, Adams remarked: “violence usually occurs when people believe there is no alternative. Transforming a situation from conflict to peace requires creating an alternative”. For the Sinn Féin narrative around the Irish peace process, the Belfast “Good Friday” Agreement (GFA) of 1998 constituted the above “alternative” arrangement by which republicans could *thenceforth* pursue a united Ireland by exclusively peaceful means.<sup>5</sup>

In the absence of a comparable overarching multiparty/multistate agreement in the Basque context, several scholars have recently focused on explications of ETA’s largely unilateral process towards a cessation of its “armed struggle”. Mindful of this, and in seeking to build on the core questions that form the backbone of this research, a secondary

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<sup>4</sup> “Árd Fheis Presidential Speech by Sinn Féin President Gerry Adams TD”, <http://www.sinnfein.ie/contents/39626>. In 2018, the European Court of Human Rights found that Spain had breached Otegi’s right to an impartial trial. “El Tribunal de Estrasburgo dictamina que Otegi no tuvo un juicio justo en el caso de la reconstrucción de Batasuna”, *El Diario*, 06.11.2018. “Declaration of the International Conference to promote the resolution of the conflict in the Basque Country”, [http://www.eldh.eu/fileadmin/user\\_upload/ejdm/publications/2012/InternationalDeclarationBasqueENG.pdf](http://www.eldh.eu/fileadmin/user_upload/ejdm/publications/2012/InternationalDeclarationBasqueENG.pdf) (sites last accessed 19 January 2018).

<sup>5</sup> For instance, in 2011 the historic IRA and Sinn Féin leader Martin McGuinness remarked: “The IRA forced the British government to the negotiating table... They were a revolutionary force who, when an opportunity to advance the struggle for Irish unity through peaceful means was established, removed themselves from the political equation”. Cited in: Richard English: *Does Terrorism Work? A History*, Oxford, Oxford University Press, 2016, p. 111. There is a great deal of discrepancy regarding the precise number of ETA’s mortal victims. See: “La violenta historia de ETA, en cifras”, *El País*, 08.04.2017. AROVITE (Archivo online sobre la Violencia Terrorista en Euskadi) puts the total number (including all those attributed to various branches of ETA and associated groups) at 843. “Victimas mortales de ETA, 1968–2010”, <https://www.arovite.com/es/portfolio-items/victimas-mortales-de-eta-1968-2010/>. Victims of Spanish state forces and far-right militant groups will be referred to in later chapters. For Adams’ quote, see: “Gerry Adams: Basque peace move an essential step”, <https://edition.cnn.com/2011/10/21/opinion/adams-basque-peace/index.html>. (sites last accessed 02 February 2020).



aim of this study is to gauge if (and if so, how?) the Basque *izquierda abertzale*–Irish republican nexus may have lent itself to creating an “alternative” disposition from which a prevailing conflictive situation in the Basque Country has been transformed, akin to Northern Ireland, to one of relative peace.<sup>6</sup>

### Historiographical overview

“It is what is already done by the intelligent undergraduate who, when recommended to read a work by that great scholar Jones of St. Jude’s, goes round to a friend at St. Jude’s to ask what sort of chap Jones is, and what bees he has in his bonnet. When you read a work of history, always listen out for the buzzing. If you can detect none, either you are tone deaf or your historian is a dull dog”.<sup>7</sup>

The past, let alone the fuzzy notion of a *true* objective past, cannot be visited or verified. As such, it is impossible to know.<sup>8</sup> For historians, the challenge is therefore to assess what fragments of the past remain, and to analyse, interpret and contextualise, all the while being mindful of the subtle inclinations that ultimately render objectivity impossible. If a notionally true standard of objectivity in historiography is unattainable and the historian only ever able to work with fragments of the past, (how) can an “objective max” account of the past be constructed?

Fundamental to this endeavour is the historian’s ability and willingness to check against his or her own subtle prejudices during the process of historical investigation: how the historical “facts of the past” are chosen, arranged, embedded and others dismissed.<sup>9</sup> A second factor—and one which is particularly salient to this present study—centres on the immediate context in which the historical investigation is carried out. In this respect, any historical inquiry dealing with the recent Basque and Northern Irish conflicts is arguably conditioned by the absence of an agreed political resolution in each case, and the temporal proximity of the thousands of victims that have been directly and indirectly affected by violence. In such circumstances, when often diametrically opposed narratives associated with the recent contentious past are woven into the present fabric of

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<sup>6</sup> For example, see: Rafael Leonisio, Fernando Molina, Diego Muro (eds.): *ETA’s Terrorist Campaign. From Violence to Politics, 1968–2015*, London and New York, Routledge, 2016; Ludger Mees: *The Basque Contention*, London and New York, Routledge, 2019; Imanol Murua: *Ending ETA’s Armed Campaign. How and why the Basque armed group abandoned violence*, London and New York, Routledge, 2017; Teresa Whitfield: *Endgame for ETA. Elusive Peace in the Basque Country*, London, Hurst & Company, 2014; Julen Zabalo, Mikel Saratxo: “ETA ceasefire: Armed struggle vs. political practice in Basque nationalism”, *Ethnicities*, vol. 15, 3, 2015, pp. 362–384.

<sup>7</sup> Edward Hallett Carr: *What is History?* (2<sup>nd</sup> ed.), London, Penguin, 1987, p. 23.

<sup>8</sup> David Lowenthal: *The Past is a Foreign Country*, Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, 1985. Cited in: Cameron Watson: *Modern Basque History: Eighteenth Century to the Present*, Reno, University of Nevada Press, 2003, p. 9.

<sup>9</sup> Carr: *What is History?* (2<sup>nd</sup> ed.), pp. 10–13.

a society (most clearly evidenced in competing political party and media discourse), historians may end up acting as conscious or unwitting protagonists in these daily battles — “buzzing bees”, to use Carr’s analogy.

A disciplined and dispassionate approach in which all political viewpoints are addressed from a strict historiographical position is therefore required. In my opinion, this necessitates an approach from the historian which attempts to explicate the perspectives, worldview, ideas, internal reasoning, political interpretations and historical understandings *of the subject actors* under investigation within a holistic historical context, rather than an *a priori* political, personal, hostile, moral, or value-led approach to certain political cultures (in this case: radical Basque nationalism and Irish republicanism). As Richard English, a historian of Irish nationalism from a Northern Irish Protestant/English background, notes: “[...] one’s arguments, however stringent they may seem, should be based on an honest attempt to understand that which one politically does not sympathise [...]”.<sup>10</sup> In my opinion, not to do so fundamentally undermines the purpose of historical investigation: a furthering of the knowledge and understanding of that which is being investigated.

Given that I have outlined what I feel to be some of the pitfalls associated with this type of study, and underscored the demand on the investigator to go against the grain of his or her normative judgements, it seems appropriate to disclose to the reader my own position regarding the core political contentions at the heart of this study. I am in favour of a united Ireland, and ideally in the form of a democratic socialist republic. In this sense, I share the long-term objectives of the Irish republican movement. I do not, however, consider the IRA’s armed campaign of the “Troubles” to have been a justifiable or “necessary” means to those ends. Regarding the Basque case, I am of the view that the Basque people should be entitled to a collective and democratic right to self-determination. I hold similar views regarding ETA’s armed campaign to that of the IRA’s.

While the armed campaigns of the IRA and ETA have dominated the contemporary political histories of both territories, conflictive cases such as the Basque and Irish have been noted for their shifting temporality of causes, meaning that initial aggravating factors have tended to feed into new paradigms of grievances and frictions over time.<sup>11</sup> Some of

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<sup>10</sup> Richard English: *Armed Struggle: The History of the IRA*, London, Pan Books, 2004, p. 383; Richard English: “History and Irish nationalism”, *Irish Historical Studies*, vol. 37, no. 147, May 2011, pp. 447–460 (quote on p. 459).

<sup>11</sup> Institute of Political Science, Louvain-Europe: *Peace Processes in Community Conflicts: From Understanding the Roots of Conflicts to Conflict Resolution. Deliverable 2. Second Draft. Community*

the broad historical fluctuations of these cases will be outlined in the following short sections. Extending until the first documented manifestations of a radical Basque nationalist–Irish republican nexus (c.1916–c.1923), it is intended that these modest overviews will provide a basic historical depth to the provenance and evolution of the contentious issues and cleavages that have come to dominate, as Carr puts it, the “unending dialogue between the past and the present” in the Basque Country and Ireland.<sup>12</sup>

### Historical overview of the Basque case

“We don’t base our pro-independence will on ethnicity, identity and so on, although it’s very strong. We are in a process of changing that very clearly now. We say here [that] there is a collective feeling, and it is up to us to decide our future through a collective decision regardless of our individual origins, ideas or whatever; that’s what unites us. [...] We don’t base our will for independence on history, what we were 500 years ago. We want to know our history, but it cannot chain us”.<sup>13</sup>

The Basque Country is located in the southwest of Europe where the Iberian Peninsula and the main European continental landmass meet at the confluence of the Cantabrian Sea and the northward sweep of the Bay of Biscay. Straddled across the western Pyrenees

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*Conflicts in Europe: A Review of the Literature – Mapping Conflict Dimensions*. Available at: [https://cdn.uclouvain.be/public/Exports%20reddot/spri/documents/Deliverable\\_1\\_PEACE-COM.pdf](https://cdn.uclouvain.be/public/Exports%20reddot/spri/documents/Deliverable_1_PEACE-COM.pdf) (last accessed 24 April 2018).

<sup>12</sup> Carr: *What is History?* (2<sup>nd</sup> ed.), p. 30. For the purpose of this study, the Irish “case” (or occasionally the Irish “context”) refers to the overarching political issues that have dominated the modern history of Ireland and relations between the islands of Ireland and Britain: Irish sovereignty; Irish self-determination; Irish partition/Irish unity; Irish nationalism; Ulster unionism; Northern Ireland; Britain’s presence and role in Ireland, etc. In British political parlance, these issues have been historically referred to as the “Irish Question”. The “Troubles” (or “Northern Ireland conflict”) refers to the period of political violence that mainly took place in Northern Ireland, c.1968–c.1998. The Basque “case” (or occasionally the Basque “contention” or Basque “context”) refers to the overarching political issues of Basque sovereignty; Basque self-determination; possible Basque independence from Spain (and France), as well as other possible politico-administrative relationships (federalism, further autonomy, less autonomy, etc). The Basque conflict refers to the period of political violence that mainly took place in the Basque Country, c.1968–c. 2011. While in the Irish case an agreement was reached in 1998 that brought the “Troubles” to an end and set out agreed mechanisms regarding possible future relations on the island of Ireland, it also recognised that Northern Ireland is fundamentally contested. For Irish nationalists (and republicans in particular) the GFA was, and *is*, seen in the main as a “transitional” arrangement towards an ultimate resolution of the Irish case, which for the aforesaid is a united Ireland. As such, for one “side” of the political divide, the main political contention is still unresolved. For a number of divergent and thought-provoking academic analyses of the GFA and its implications, see: John McGarry (ed.): *Northern Ireland and the Divided World: Post-Agreement Northern Ireland in Comparative Perspective*, Oxford, Oxford University Press, 2001. In the Basque context, where there is no comparable agreed political framework, the leading Basque political contentions (referred to above) remain outstanding. For a historical overview of these Basque contentions, including their continuity post-ETA. See: Mees: *The Basque Contention*. Given that sections 2.2 and 2.3 of chapter two will cover radical Basque nationalist–Irish republican relations from 1916 to 1945 and the associated contemporary contexts of each case, c.1916–c.1923 has been chosen as the historical endpoint for the case overviews that follow.

<sup>13</sup> Author interview with Arturo “Beñat” Villanueva (Ziburu, 2017).



and unfolding south towards the River Ebro and north to the River Aturri (Adour), it consists of seven historical provinces. Four of these provinces, Gipuzkoa (Guipúzcoa), Bizkaia (Vizcaya), Araba (Álava) and Nafarroa Garaia (Navarra), sometimes collectively referred to as Hegoalde (“southern side”) in the Basque language, form part of the Spanish state. The remaining three, Lapurdi (Labourd), Zuberoa (Soule) and Nafarroa Beherea (Basse-Navarre), sometimes referred to as Iparralde (“northern side”), form part of the French state.<sup>14</sup> The earliest-known collective name for these seven provinces, Euskal Herria, “Land of the Basque Speakers”, reflects, in toponymic terms, the Basques’ most distinctive trait: their language, Euskara.

As Europe’s only surviving non-Indo-European language, Euskara is intimately bound up in Basque identity.<sup>15</sup> How the Basque language has survived into the twenty-first century as a relatively small linguistic island surrounded by a sea of Romance languages is both indicative of a fierce will to preserve Basque cultural identity, and testimony to Euskal Herria’s largely inaccessible terrain to would-be invaders throughout prehistoric and modern European history. Indeed, despite Phoenician, Celtic, Greek, Carthaginian, Roman, Vandal, Visigoth and Moorish incursions and settlements of Iberia over the course of millennia —bringing an array of cultures, traditions, languages, as well as political, legal and social norms— the Basques, to a large extent, have never been entirely politically or military subjugated, nor culturally or linguistically submerged.<sup>16</sup>

As the political dominance of the last of these groups, the Moors, slowly receded southwards during the first centuries of the *Reconquista*, several Christian kingdoms in the northern half of the peninsula emerged in the ensuing vacuum. Under the reign of

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<sup>14</sup> Within the Spanish state, Gipuzkoa, Bizkaia and Araba make up the Basque Autonomous Community (BAC). Nafarroa Garaia constitutes the “Foral” Community of Navarre. The three Basque provinces within the French state form part of the Department of Pyrénées Atlantiques, and as such, do not constitute a congruous legal entity. In recent years, incremental moves towards the development of a specific Basque sub-division of Pyrénées Atlantiques have been made in certain areas.

<sup>15</sup> Robert P. Clark: *The Basques: The Franco Years and Beyond*, Reno, University of Nevada Press, 1979, p. 7. Clark states that: “Language must serve as the most overt distinguishing feature of Basque ethnicity”. For an overview of the changing political connotations regarding the use of “Euskal Herria”, see: Ludger Mees: “A Nation in Search of a Name: Cultural Realities, Political Projects, and Terminological Struggles in the Basque Country” in Pello Salaburu, Xabier Alberdi (eds.): *The Challenge of a Bilingual Society in the Basque Country*, Reno, University of Nevada Press, 2012, pp. 11–32.

<sup>16</sup> In the view of the late Italian geneticist Luigi Luca Cavalli-Sforza, “[...] it seems reasonable to infer that a common culture has maintained Basque language, and the common language has probably helped preserve important aspects of the original culture. It is likely that the strength of family ties in Basque society are responsible. Probably national pride is also a strongly transmitted, highly conserved, value; and substantial satisfaction with Basque social life must have helped maintain it, and with it the language. Also, common culture and language have certainly affected the genetic population structure of the Basques, limiting exogamy, and thus helping to maintain at least to some extent Basque genetic identity”. See: Luigi Luca Cavalli-Sforza: “The Basque population and ancient migrations in Europe”, *MUNIBE (Antropología y Arqueología)*, no. 6, 1988, pp. 129–137 (quote on p. 136).

Sancho Garcés III (c.992–1035), one of these kingdoms, Pamplona (later the Kingdom of Navarre), expanded its territory and influence across northern Iberia, from Galicia to Catalonia, and into modern southwest France, thereby encompassing the seven provinces of Euskal Herria. Whether viewed as a historic “Basque” antecedent to modern Euskal Herria, or as a *post hoc* anachronism, the medieval Kingdom of Navarre has often figured in the debate over modern Nafarroa’s contested status as an integral part of Euskal Herria.<sup>17</sup>

In the wake of Sancho’s death, his territory was divided among his sons. This set in motion the incremental fragmentation of the kingdom and the gradual absorption of its Basque-speaking territories into the emerging dominant kingdom on the peninsula: Castile. Araba and Gipuzkoa were subsequently incorporated into Castile in 1200, Bizkaia in 1370, and Nafarroa (Garaia) in 1512.<sup>18</sup> By the time of Nafarroa’s absorption, the Kingdom of Spain had already been forged through an alliance of the Castile-León and Aragon-Catalonia crowns in 1469. Spain quickly became a major imperial power, conquering large swathes of the Americas and beyond. Meanwhile, long-standing disputes with the Kingdom of France over influence in Nafarroa were finally resolved in 1659 in the form of an agreed international border, which thereafter definitively split Euskal Herria —and Nafarroa itself— into Spanish and French orbits.

Under the Spanish and French medieval kingdoms, the Basque territories retained their political autonomy in the form of local and provincial assemblies, which decreed by laws known in Euskara as *foruak* (“fueros” in Spanish/”fors” in French). In reciprocation for the maintenance of these local rights, as well as the apparent bestowing of certain “noble privileges”, the Basque provincial territories paid tribute to the Spanish and French monarchs, respectively.<sup>19</sup>

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<sup>17</sup> The *Reconquista* refers to the gradual weakening of Muslim-dominated control of the Iberian Peninsula, the arguable climax of which occurred in 1492 with the fall of Granada. For some Basque nationalists, resistance to invasion and cultural assimilation signifies Basque independence and difference from the rest of Spain. Conversely, for some Spanish nationalists, the fact that the Basque language and culture is pre-Indo European and has managed to maintain its “purity”, means that not only should the Basques be considered Spanish, but the Basques are in fact the “original” Spanish. This “Vasco-Iberist” school of thought considers Euskara as “the last vestiges of a language spoken in most, if not all, parts of the Iberian Peninsula before the Roman conquest”. See: Roger Collins: *The Basques*, Oxford, Blackwell, 1987, p. 9.

<sup>18</sup> The incorporation of the Basque territories individually and collectively into Castile/Spain tends to be perceived and interpreted along a continuum from subjugation to free association according to political affiliation. See: Paddy Woodworth: *The Basque Country: A Cultural History*, Oxford, Signal Books, 2007, p. 216.

<sup>19</sup> According to M.K. Flynn, Basque *foruak* first appeared in oral form in the eighth century and were incrementally codified from the eleventh century onwards. See: M.K. Flynn: *Ideology, Mobilisation and the Nation: the Rise of Irish, Basque and Carlist Nationalist Movements in the Nineteenth and Early*

In broader socio-economic terms, the medieval Basque period was characterised by the prominence of largely self-sufficient farming homesteads known as “baserri” spread across the interior. At the same time, along the coast, a string of commercial ports and a burgeoning merchant class was built on the back of Basque fishing forays deep into the Atlantic Ocean. Adjoined to the expanding Spanish Empire in the Americas, many of this merchant class would become increasingly “castilianized” via the prevalent use of the Spanish language for trade and communications with the so-called “New World”.<sup>20</sup>

Akin to other European territories, the French Revolution of 1789 and the *Age of Modernity* that it heralded, had profound impacts in the Basque Country.<sup>21</sup> In Iparralde, what Jacob describes as a “highly participatory Basque political culture”, was effectively crushed by the state. A new political culture was instead built around the trappings of French citizenship. Meanwhile, in Hegoalde, the Spanish response to the invasion of Napoleonic France, and the imposition of the puppet monarch Joseph Bonaparte, was the drafting of the liberal Constitution of Cádiz (1812). The liberal trajectory towards a *modern* Spanish nation-state, as embodied in the contents of the 1812 constitution, would similarly, by its very nature, pose an existential threat to the bespoke political and economic arrangements of the Basque provinces within the Spanish kingdom. As Watson

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*Twentieth Centuries*, Oxford, Macmillan Press, 2000, pp. 109–110. The contentious issue of Basque “noble privilege” is firmly intertwined within the often-disputed realm of Basque/Spanish identity and political agency. It is worth liberally quoting Totoricagüena’s succinct breakdown of this knotty issue in her study of the Basque diaspora: “Diaspora interviewees repeated the idea that the Basques were not subjects of Castile but rather citizens of a land that had accepted the king of Castile as its sovereign. This is a crucial distinction to today’s Basques because it meant that, historically, Basque loyalties went first to their own villages and provinces, then second to the king of Castile, contingent upon the monarch’s continued respect for local autonomy and tradition as written into the local *fueros* (*foruak*). Nationalists stress this ‘independence,’ as do the diaspora populations when describing their own history. Spanish nationalists claim that the *fueros* were privileges granted by the monarchy, and therefore rescindable, whereas Basque nationalists argue that these rights were not granted by the king but were based upon Basque legal traditions dating back to earlier times”. Gloria Pilar Totoricagüena: *Identity, Culture, and Politics in the Basque Diaspora*, Reno, University of Nevada Press, 2004, p. 29.

<sup>20</sup> Clark: *The Basques: The Franco Years and Beyond*, p. 22; Watson: *Basque Nationalism and Political Violence*, pp. 31–32. For a study of the baserri and its place at the heart of traditional Basque society, see: Joseba Zulaika: *Basque Violence: Metaphor and Sacrament*, Reno, University of Nevada Press, 1988, pp. 105–136.

<sup>21</sup> The *Age of Modernity* broadly refers to the constellation of major changes to the political, economic, social and cultural strands of European society that would come to prominence in the early- and mid-nineteenth century (e.g., the nation state, citizenship, industrialisation, urbanisation, international market capitalism). The *Age of Modernity* is generally considered by Euro-centric historians and social scientists to have succeeded the previous *Ancien Régime*. According to the nationalist theorist Benedict Anderson, late eighteenth and early nineteenth-century independence movements in the Americas also provided key elements of *political* modernity: “Out of the American welter came these imagined realities: nation-states, republican institutions, common citizenships, popular sovereignty, national flags and emblems, etc., and the liquidation of their conceptual opposites: dynastic empires, monarchical institutions, absolutisms, subjecthoods, inherited nobilities, serfdoms, ghettos, and so forth”. Thus, for Anderson, the nation-state “model” of the nineteenth century was essentially “a complex composite of French and American elements”. See: Benedict Anderson: *Imagined Communities* (revised ed.), London, Verso, 2006, p. 81.

notes, on both sides of the border, “the very foundation of modernity implied denying a *specifically* Basque cultural or political identity”.<sup>22</sup>

When “liberal” and “traditionalist” cleavages of *modern* Spain collided during the Carlist Wars of 1833–1840, 1846–1849 and 1872–1876, Hegoalde experienced the most bitter warfare and significant political repercussions. Following three successive “liberal” victories, Basque *foruak* were undermined, rescinded, and finally abolished in 1876. While most Basques (and Navarrese) had supported the “traditionalist” cause of Don Carlos and the defence of political and economic Basque-Navarrese particularism, the industrial, merchant, and professional classes in Hegoalde had tended to side with the “liberals”. A “concierto económico” (economic accord), which permitted the Basque provinces and Nafarroa Garaia to retain significant powers in the collection and spending of local taxes, helped the victorious liberals to maintain the support of these latter sectors.<sup>23</sup>

Coupled with the presence of Spanish state military on Basque soil and the inherent centralising tendencies of the nineteenth-century Spanish nation-state (most notably evidenced in a national education system), the consequences of the Carlist Wars undoubtedly represented a major sea change in the hitherto Basque–Spanish framework. Not only did the erosion of the *foruak* objectively redefine the administrative and legal status quo of the Basque political realms, but it also arguably, by extension, undermined long-standing implicit—if not necessarily explicit—conceptions of Basque provincial sovereignty. As Agirreazkuenaga notes, the thorny issue of reconciling the historical rights of the Basque provinces to the Spanish liberal constitution would become known as the “Basque Question”.<sup>24</sup>

With global industry and commerce gathering apace across Europe in the latter half of the nineteenth century, vast numbers of Spanish migrants were enticed to the iron ore-rich province of Bizkaia and its rapidly industrialising and urbanising environs. As Bilbao (Bilbao) became a major hub of banking and industry, a volatile melting pot of liberal, conservative and socialist organisations, parties and factions, sought for political,

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<sup>22</sup> James E. Jacob: *Hills of Conflict: Basque Nationalism in France*, Reno, University of Nevada Press, p. 37; Watson: *Modern Basque History*, p. 59. My stress on “*specifically*”.

<sup>23</sup> While the immediate context of the First Carlist War was a dispute over succession to the crown of Ferdinand VII, the Carlist Wars cut across many social, economic, political and class interests. In Hegoalde, “traditional” Carlist supporters of the pretender Don Carlos, who rejected many aspects of liberalism and modernity, tended to favour a return to the absolute monarchy of the *Ancien Régime* and the protection of Basque regional laws and customs. Mees: *The Basque Contention*, p. 32, pp. 38–46.

<sup>24</sup> Joseba Agirreazkuenaga: *The Making of the Basque Question: Experiencing Self-Government, 1793–1877*, Reno, Centre for Basque Studies, 2011, p. 12.

economic and social hegemony in the city.<sup>25</sup> It was in this context that a young Bizkaian by the name of Sabino Arana Goiri founded the first branch of the Partido Nacionalista Vasco (PNV) (Basque Nationalist Party) in 1895.<sup>26</sup>

More akin to a social movement than a political party, Arana's PNV articulated its societal vision in response to what it perceived as increasing threats to the indigenous Basque race, language, distinctive Christian sense of morality, and loss of traditional political expression as embodied in the *foruak*.<sup>27</sup> In little over two decades, the PNV would become a significant political force in Hegoalde, achieving electoral majorities in its Bizkaian heartland and mounting its first political challenge to Madrid over the issue of Basque political autonomy.<sup>28</sup>

Historians and commentators have theorised on both the strength and weakness of the Spanish nation-state building project, the collapse of the Spanish Empire, the inadequacies of the Spanish Restoration Period (1874–1931), and the surge of inward migration to the Basque Country, as defining factors in the emergence and success of Arana's party in Hegoalde. Conversely, the concurrent and relatively successful nineteenth-century French nation-state project, which sought to turn “peasants into Frenchmen” as Eugen Weber famously termed it, meant that as Basque nationalism developed south of the Pyrenees in the early decades of the twentieth century, it gained comparatively little traction in Iparralde.<sup>29</sup>

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<sup>25</sup> Watson: *Basque Nationalism and Political Violence*, p. 48, pp. 66–67.

<sup>26</sup> Euzko Alderdi Jeltzalea (EAJ) in Euskara.

<sup>27</sup> According to Mees: “the PNV brought the masses into politics by creating the figure of party members with equal rights, who voted and appointed their local, regional, and national leadership according to a strictly democratic mechanism from the bottom to the top. In the orbit of the party, a broad network of organizations, groups, and initiatives was set up. It included unions for the industrial workers, employees, peasants, or fishermen; a women's organization; a very powerful youth organization; another one for mountaineering; groups for the learning and performing of Basque music, traditional dances, theatre, or language”. See: Ludger Mees: “Politics, Economy, or Culture? The Rise and Development of Basque Nationalism in the Light of Social Movement Theory”, *Theory and Society*, vol. 33, no. 3/4, (June–August 2004), pp. 311–331 (quote on p. 323). For the PNV's early *raison d'être*, see: Javier Corcuera Atienza: *The Origins, Ideology, and Organization of Basque Nationalism, 1876–1903*, Reno, University of Nevada Press, 2006; Santiago de Pablo: *La Patria Soñada. Historia del nacionalismo vasco desde su origen hasta la actualidad*, Madrid, Biblioteca Nueva, 2015, pp. 24–36; Antonio Elorza: *Un pueblo escogido: génesis, definición y desarrollo del nacionalismo vasco*, Barcelona, Crítica, 2001, pp. 139–190. For studies of Sabino Arana Goiri and his political outlook, see: José Luis de la Granja Sainz: *Ángel o demonio: Sabino Arana*, Madrid, Tecnos, 2015; William A. Douglass: “Sabino's Sin: Racism and the Founding of Basque Nationalism” in Daniele Conversi (ed.): *Ethnonationalism in the Contemporary World: Walker Connor and the Study of Nationalism*, London and New York, Routledge, 2002, pp. 95–112. “Jeltzales”, from the PNV motto JEL (Jaungoikoa eta Lagi-zaña — God and the Old Laws), is often used as a collective term for members and supporters of the party and its political ideology.

<sup>28</sup> Mees: *The Basque Contention*, pp. 63–67.

<sup>29</sup> Collins: *The Basques*, p. 277; Marianne Heiberg: *The Making of the Basque Nation*, Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, 1989, p. 6; Jon Juaristi: *El Bucle Melancólico. Historias de nacionalistas vascos*. Madrid, Espasa Calpe, 1997, p. 33; Ludger Mees: “Ethnogenesis in the Pyrenees: The



## Historical overview of the Irish case

“We must sink the distinctions of blood as well as sect. The Milesian, the Dane, the Norman, the Welshman, the Scotsman and the Saxon, naturalized here, must combine regardless of their blood — the Strongbowian must sit with the Ulster Scot and him whose ancestors came from Tyre or Spain must confide in and work with Cromwellian and the Williamite. [...] If a union of all Irish-born men ever be accomplished, Ireland will have the greatest and most varied materials for an illustrious nationality and for a tolerant and flexible character in literature, manners, religion and life of any nation on earth”.<sup>30</sup>

Ireland, or Éire in Gaeilge (Irish Gaelic), is an island located to the northwest of the European continental landmass, and to the west of Britain, in the North Atlantic Ocean. Uninhabited, or at least with no surviving evidence of human habitation until about 10,500 BC, various archaeological and genetic-led studies point to groups of settlers arriving from central Europe, Britain and Iberia between 6000 BC to 2000 BC.<sup>31</sup> Across the bronze and early iron ages, Celtic traders and settlers assimilated into the maelstrom of what would become a distinct “Gaelic” culture, social hierarchy, basis of law and written language by the fifth century AD.<sup>32</sup>

Christianised from the fifth and sixth centuries onwards, Gaelic Ireland functioned, in socio-political terms, around a hierarchical system of stakeholders and decision-makers: from Bó-Aire (“chieftain of a cow”), to local, and regional kings, who sought hegemony for the title of Árd-Rí na hÉireann (High King of Ireland). Late eighth-century Viking raids and the subsequent development of permanent settlements were followed by the first incursions in 1169 of Anglo-Norman lords and their armies from Britain. These military campaigns would mark a watershed for the coming involvement of the English crown’s affairs in Ireland. Within a decade, large swathes of the island had —at least

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Contentious Making of a National Identity in the Basque Country (1643–2017)”, *European History Quarterly*, vol. 48, 3, pp. 462–489; Mees: *The Basque Contention*, pp. 12–24; Watson: *Basque Nationalism and Political Violence*, p. 26; Eugen Weber: *Peasants into Frenchmen: The Modernization of Rural France, 1870–1914*, California, Stanford University Press, 1976. The experience of two World Wars also did much to copper-fasten French identity in the three Basque provinces of Iparralde in the first half of the twentieth century. See: Watson: *Modern Basque History*, pp. 222–237.

<sup>30</sup> T.W. Rolleston (ed.): *Prose Writings of Thomas Davis*, London, Walter Scott, 1889, p. 281. Cited in: Robert Kee: *The Green Flag. A History of Irish Nationalism*, London, Penguin, 2000, pp. 196–197. Thomas Davis (1814–1845) was a prominent Irish nationalist who co-founded the influential nineteenth-century Irish nationalist newspaper, *The Nation*.

<sup>31</sup> Marion Dowd, Ruth F. Carden: “First evidence of a Late Upper Palaeolithic human presence in Ireland”, *Quaternary Science Reviews*, vol. 139, 2016, pp. 158–163; G.F. Mitchell: “Prehistoric Ireland” in T.W. Moody, F.X. Martin (eds.): *The Course of Irish History* (5<sup>th</sup> ed.), Cork, Mercier Press, 2011, pp. 27–37.

<sup>32</sup> Mitchell: “Prehistoric Ireland”. The Gaels (usually associated with Ireland and Scotland) are generally considered to be a branch of the Celts — an Indo-European ethnolinguistic group of Europe. For a useful overview of the Celts, see: Frank Delaney: *The Celts*, London, Harper Collins, 1993.

theoretically— fallen under Henry II’s “Angevin Empire” . Henry bestowed a “Lordship of Ireland” upon his son John in 1177.<sup>33</sup>

Notwithstanding the initial military successes of the Anglo-Norman campaigns in Ireland, the relative scope and strength of the Lordship was subject to constant fluctuation over the following centuries, as Gaelic Irish chieftains, the increasingly Gaelicised Anglo-Norman lords (who became known as “Old English”), and the English crown itself, vied for power and influence. By the beginning of the sixteenth century, direct crown control, English law, and the English language, only held powerful sway in parts of Munster (Mumhan) and a large fortified geographical area around Dublin and its surrounding environs known as “The Pale”.<sup>34</sup>

Commencing with the first Protestant King of England, Henry VIII (1491–1547), a succession of Tudor monarchs (Henry VIII, Edward VI, Mary I, Elizabeth I) took a more systematic approach to anglicising Ireland and bringing it firmly under English control. Initiatives pursued by Henry VIII, such as “surrender and regrant”, the legal establishment of the Anglican “Church of Ireland”, and the replacement of the Lordship with a “Kingdom of Ireland”, all had significant lasting impacts beyond his reign.<sup>35</sup> However, it was a policy “to plant” colonisers, implemented by Henry’s successors to varying degrees, that would prove far more profound. In its broadest terms, “The Plantations” involved “the colonisation of Irish land by settlers planted [...] from England and Scotland”. It was envisaged that these colonisers would remain loyal to the crown and provide, through their Protestant faith, a model of civility for the “barbarous” Irish to emulate.<sup>36</sup>

The latter sixteenth-century plantations of modern-day Offaly (Uíbh Fhailí) and Laois (Laoise), the northern counties of Antrim (Aontroim) and Down (An Dúin), and the southern province of Munster, proved only mildly successful. The public and commercial

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<sup>33</sup> For a comprehensive study of Gaelic Ireland, see: Dáibhí Ó Cróinín: *Early Medieval Ireland, 400–1200*, London, Longman, 1995. The Angevin Empire is a *post hoc* term used by historians in reference to the British, Irish and continental European lands held by the Angevin kings of England.

<sup>34</sup> Colm Lennon: *Sixteenth Century Ireland: The Incomplete Conquest* (2<sup>nd</sup> ed.), New Gill, Dublin, 2005, pp. 10–19.

<sup>35</sup> For a comprehensive account of the Tudor impact on Ireland, see: Steven G. Ellis: *Ireland in the Age of the Tudors, 1447–1603: English Expansion and the end of Gaelic Rule*, London, Longman, 1998. On the surrender and regrant scheme, Ellis states that its essential aim: “was to incorporate the Gaelic lordships by consent into a new, fully anglicized kingdom of Ireland comprising the whole island. To this end the Gaelic chiefs had to be induced to hold their lands of the king and the king to forgo many of his ancient but unrealizable feudal claims (a concession he had refused in 1520) in return for full recognition of his sovereignty”. Ellis: *Ireland in the Age of the Tudors*, p. 150.

<sup>36</sup> Richard English: *Irish Freedom*, London, Macmillan, 2007, p. 58.

plantation of Ulster (Ulaidh), however, carried out under the first Stuart monarch, James VI and I, in the early seventeenth century, was far more comprehensive. Crucially, the Ulster plantation occurred in the aftermath of the defeat and exile from the province of the most powerful Gaelic families of the province (Nine Years' War, 1594–1603).<sup>37</sup>

In the wake of the Ulster plantation, the northern province was beset with deep-seated social, religious, and political turmoil. These divisions were compounded, island-wide, by a triumvirate of overlapping wars mid-century (Ulster Rebellion, Irish Confederate Wars, Cromwellian Conquest, 1641–1653), which were followed by the Williamite Wars (1688–1691) of the late-seventeenth century. Punitive confiscations of Gaelic/Catholic land usually followed these conflicts.

By 1703, Gaelic/Catholic ownership of land across the island had been reduced to just 14%. Moreover, a raft of penal laws prohibiting or placing restrictions on Catholic religious worship, and access to public office, were introduced in step with William III and Mary II's "Glorious Revolution".<sup>38</sup> Such measures, allied with the flight of James II's followers ("Jacobites") to the European continent under the terms of the Treaty of Limerick (1691), meant that an Anglo-Scots "Protestant Ascendancy", holding political, religious, military and economic power across Ireland, was firmly established by the turn of the eighteenth century.<sup>39</sup>

It would be a full century before resistance to British rule manifested itself in a significant and organised way. When this occurred, it came in the shape of "The Society of the United Irishmen": a notionally plural and inclusive political organisation that sought to overcome sectarian divisions.<sup>40</sup> After a frustrated campaign for parliamentary

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<sup>37</sup> The Nine Years' War was a rebellion led by the Ulster Earls, O'Neill, and O'Donnell, against increasing direct English rule and influence in their heartlands. In the wake of the Ulstermen's defeat, the O'Neill and O'Donnell families left Ireland in 1607 in what became known as "The Flight of the Earls".

<sup>38</sup> The Irish Confederate Wars loosely spanned from the beginning of the 1641 Ulster Rebellion to the end of the Cromwellian Conquest of Ireland in 1653. During the Cromwellian Conquest, between 20% to 40% of the estimated 1.5 million population of Ireland perished. See: John Dorney: "From Catastrophe to Baby Boom – Population Change in Early Modern Ireland 1641–1741", available at [http://www.theirishstory.com/2014/01/22/from-catastrophe-to-baby-boom-population-change-in-early-modern-ireland-1641-1741/#.XLW54aRS\\_IU](http://www.theirishstory.com/2014/01/22/from-catastrophe-to-baby-boom-population-change-in-early-modern-ireland-1641-1741/#.XLW54aRS_IU) (last accessed 16 April 2019). By 1778, the percentage of Catholic land ownership had fallen further from 14% to 5%. See: Thomas Bartlett: *The fall and rise of the Irish nation - The Catholic question 1690–1830*, Dublin, Gill & Macmillan, 1992, p. 22. For an overview of the Penal Laws, see: Jonathan Bardon: *A History of Ireland in 250 Episodes*, Dublin, Gill and MacMillan, 2008, pp. 236–240. The Williamite Wars centred on rival claims to the English-Scottish (British) and Irish crowns held by the Catholic King James and the Dutch Protestant, Prince William. William's victory over James at the Battle of the Boyne in 1690 was a significant moment in Britain's "Glorious Revolution", and the European-wide, War of the Grand Alliance (1689–1697).

<sup>39</sup> Ian McBride: *Eighteenth Century Ireland: The Isle of Slaves*, Dublin, Gill and MacMillan, 2009, pp. 194–202.

<sup>40</sup> In the words of the historian, Kevin Whelan: "The United Irishmen audaciously expanded the doctrinaire whig [British Liberals] version of liberty to include Catholics. They thus secularised liberty,



reform, Theobald Wolfe Tone, a rare Dublin-born Anglican among the mainly Ulster Presbyterian leadership cadre of the society, led a rebellion against English rule in 1798. With the support of Revolutionary France, Tone sought to establish an “Irish Republic”.<sup>41</sup> Despite the rebels’ defeat and Tone’s subsequent martyrdom, a fundamental Irish *republican* principle had been established: that as long as England/Britain laid claim to any part of Ireland, Irishmen had a right to take up arms. Britain’s response was to pull her neighbour closer to London. The 1800 Act of Union (legally operative from 1801) fused *both* the British and Irish kingdoms, and parliaments, into single entities.

For most of the nineteenth century, the Irish body politic existed in a sort of “quasi-colonial” state.<sup>42</sup> Organised constitutional expressions of Irish nationalism coalesced around attempts to, firstly: repeal the 1800 Act, and when this failed, push for an Irish “Home Rule” parliament. Demand for Irish political autonomy often dovetailed with overlapping sister campaigns that sought to overturn institutionalised discrimination of Catholics (“Catholic Emancipation”) and the implementation of land reform (“The Land War”). Eclipsing all of these, however, in terms of societal impact, was the Great Famine, or An Gorta Mór (The Great Hunger), circa 1845–1852. From an estimated Irish population of 8.5 million people in 1845, it is generally accepted by historians that approximately one million people died from starvation and disease, while another million emigrated.<sup>43</sup>

As Ireland’s population continued to plummet post-famine, Gaeilge —mainly spoken by the rural underclass— was severely weakened.<sup>44</sup> Partly in reaction to this rapid cultural decline, a movement of “Gaelic Revival” emerged at the end of the nineteenth century in

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freeing it of the sectarian exclusions of the English Revolution. In this startling rupture, the United Irishmen broke with the sedimented antipopery of the English whigs, and thereby shattered the sectarian moulds of the Irish eighteenth century”. See: Kevin Whelan: “The other within: Ireland, Britain and the Act of Union” in Dáire Keogh, Kevin Whelan (eds.): *Acts of Union: The causes, contexts, and consequences of the Act of Union*, Dublin, Four Courts Press, 2001, pp. 13–33.

<sup>41</sup> Tone’s political philosophy may be summed up in his own words: “To subvert the tyranny of our execrable government, to break the connection with England, the never-failing source of all our political evils, and to assert the independence of my country — these were my objectives. To unite the whole people of Ireland, to abolish the memory of all past dissensions, and to substitute the common name of Irishman in place of the denominations of Protestant, Catholic and Dissenter — these were my means. Cited in: Robert W. White: *Out of the Ashes: An Oral History of the Provisional Irish Republican Movement*, Dublin, Merrion Press, 2017, pp. 14–15.

<sup>42</sup> English: *Irish Freedom*, p. 131.

<sup>43</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 162.

<sup>44</sup> It is estimated that between 3.35 and 4 million native Irish speakers made up the 8.5 million population in 1845. By 1851, as many as 1.5 million native Irish speakers had died or emigrated. Figures cited in: Erick Falc’her-Poyroux: “The Great Famine in Ireland: A Linguistic and Cultural Disruption” in Yann Bévant (ed.): *La Grande Famine en Irlande, 1845–1850*, Rennes, Presses Universitaires de Rennes, 2014, pp. 225–242.

language, literature and sports. Meanwhile, in the political realm, moderate constitutionalist (Home Rule) and more radical (republican) wings of Irish nationalism/republicanism continued to pursue their respective campaigns and objectives.<sup>45</sup>

Jarring with this image of gathering nationalist momentum, the majority of adherents to the Anglican Church of Ireland, strongest numerically, economically and politically in the northeast of Ulster, and buttressed by the British state's nineteenth-century accommodation of Presbyterian grievances, continued to see their long-term political, economic and social interests intimately bound up in Westminster and the continuing expansion of the British Empire.<sup>46</sup> Given this reality, Irish nationalist demands for a Dublin-based Home Rule parliament *fin de siècle*, as advocated and pursued by the Irish Parliamentary Party (IPP), were met by an increasingly resistant, and Ulster-centric, Irish/British "unionism".

When a majority of MPs passed a third Home Rule bill in the House of Commons in 1912 (to come into legal effect after an expected two-year delay in the House of Lords), Ulster unionism, in alliance with leading members of the British Conservative Party, resolutely faced down Home Rule with the threat of armed resistance. The bill was subsequently shelved in 1914 with the outbreak of World War I.<sup>47</sup>

The IPP's Home Rule campaign never recovered its lost momentum. Instead, its political premise was fatally undermined by the impact of the 1916 Rising and the spectre of Irish conscription to the British army, among other factors. Within this heady context, a surge of popular support for Sinn Féin and its programme for the withdrawal of Irish representatives from Westminster resulted in a resounding electoral victory for the party

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<sup>45</sup> The "Gaelic Revival" saw the founding and exponential growth of various cultural, sport and language organisations such as the Gaelic Athletic Association (1884) and Gaelic League (1893). In the latter half of the nineteenth century, most Irish nationalists were represented by the Home Rule movement and its successor, the Irish Parliamentary Parliament, which agitated politically at Westminster for a degree of Irish political autonomy within the UK and British Empire. Republicans (or "Fenians"), who usually operated in secret underground oath-bound societies such as the Irish Republican Brotherhood (IRB), advocated for Irish independence by any means necessary. For a far more comprehensive and nuanced treatment of the various strands of Irish nationalism between 1850 and 1900, see: English: *Irish Freedom*, pp. 172–231.

<sup>46</sup> Eoin Ó Broin: *Sinn Féin and the Politics of Left Republicanism*, London, Irish Academic Press, 2009, pp. 60–61.

<sup>47</sup> For a history of this episode, see: Timothy Bowman: *Carson's Army: the Ulster Volunteers Force, 1910–22*, Manchester, Manchester University Press, 2007.

in December 1918. A revolutionary government of the “Irish Republic” was established the following month in Dublin.<sup>48</sup>

The same day that the inaugural Dáil Éireann (Irish Assembly) convened on 21 January 1919, the first shots were fired in what would become known as the Irish War of Independence (1919–1921). This war, between the revolutionary government and the British state, provided the backdrop to the unilateral partitioning of Ireland by the Westminster parliament in 1920 (Government of Ireland Act, 1920). A 6-county, 2/3<sup>rd</sup> Protestant-majority territory in the northeast, to be called Northern Ireland, and a 26-county, overwhelmingly Catholic semi-independent Saorstát Éireann (Irish Free State) of “Dominion” status, were agreed by representatives of the British government and the Irish Republic in London, December 1921.

For most Irish nationalists and republicans, the terms of the Anglo-Irish Treaty, signed under the British Prime Minister David Lloyd George’s threat of “immediate and terrible war”, fell far short of the republic that had been established through the First Dáil in 1919. Nevertheless, the treaty was approved through a succession of marginal majorities: the negotiators in London (3 to 2), the Dáil cabinet (4 to 3) and the Dáil itself (64 to 57).<sup>49</sup> Following the Irish Civil War (1922–1923), which was fought precisely over this issue, Saorstát Éireann, and its 1937 successor, Éire (Ireland), was eventually accepted by every *major* political party of the “southern” state — notwithstanding the long-term aspiration and constitutional claim for full 32-county Irish sovereignty and unity.

Conversely, for most unionist interpretations of the Irish Revolutionary Period (1912–1923), Irish republicans had violently seceded from, and destroyed, both the unity of Ireland, and the United Kingdom of Great Britain and Ireland. Thus, in order to preserve their interests in the face of a numerically superior and ostensibly hostile Catholic majority, their leaders had seen no choice but for the newly established Parliament of

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<sup>48</sup> There were, of course, other many contributing factors to this transformation. These included, for instance, the failure of the “Irish Convention” (1917–1918) — an assembly which had been set up to resolve the Home Rule impasse —, and the emerging spectre of a Home Rule settlement on a partitioned basis. For a comprehensive resource that deals with the interdependence of these, and other aspects of the Irish Revolutionary Period, see: John Crowley, Donal Ó Drisceoil, Mike Murphy, John Borgonovo (eds.): *Atlas of the Irish Revolution*, Cork, Cork University Press, 2017. Another excellent resource in this regard is a stand-alone *History Ireland* supplement, published in October 2017. See: John Gibney, Tommy Graham, Georgina Laragy (eds.): “1916–18: Changed utterly. Ireland after the Rising”, *History Ireland*, Oct. 2017.

<sup>49</sup> Brendan O’Leary: “IRA: Irish Republican Army (Óglaigh na hÉireann)” in Marianne Heiberg, Brendan O’Leary, John Tirman (eds.): *Terror, Insurgency, and the State. Ending Protracted Conflicts*, Philadelphia, University of Pennsylvania Press, 2007, pp. 189–228.

Northern Ireland (1921) to opt out of Saorstát Éireann and remain within the now-truncated United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland (UK).<sup>50</sup>

### 1.1. Literature review

“I suppose it was kind of obvious, kind of normal, that two groups like that, two struggles like that, would start a relationship and collaboration that has kept until today”.<sup>51</sup>

Nationalist movements, seeing themselves as actors in a world of nations, look to external models in order to advance their own national projects.<sup>52</sup> Moreover, activities in the international realm (contacts, propaganda, collaboration, etc.) and discursive “solidarity” between “oppressed nations” can lend extra legitimacy to a nationalist cause.<sup>53</sup> It is, therefore, on the surface level, both “kind of obvious” and “kind of normal” that Irish republicanism and radical Basque nationalism could, and indeed would, develop a transnational relationship.

That nationalist movements tend to gravitate towards each other, however, does not explain the emergence and evolution of a transnational nexus in and of itself, as this would ultimately and retrospectively assume such a formation as a sort of historical “given” or *fait accompli*. Moreover, a key element of this study is to reject notions of historical inevitability regarding the emergence and evolution of radical Basque nationalist and Irish republican relations, and to focus instead on the contingencies of this process.

In beginning to address the core questions of this topic, we therefore first need to review the existing academic literature that presently underpins our historical understanding of radical Basque nationalist-Irish republican relations: i.e., what is known of its genesis, development and the apparent contours of its relevancy and implications to each individual case. This will assist in the construction of working conceptual and analytical frameworks. The body of literature for review may be loosely categorised in the following way:

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<sup>50</sup> For an in-depth study of Ulster unionism/Protestantism, see: Susan McKay: *Northern Protestants: An Unsettled People* (2<sup>nd</sup> ed.), Belfast, Blackstaff Press, 2005. Twenty-four hours after the coming into existence of Saorstát Éireann (06 December 1922), Northern Ireland, as expected, officially opted out of Saorstát Éireann under the provisions of the Anglo-Irish Treaty.

<sup>51</sup> Author interview with “A”.

<sup>52</sup> Daniele Conversi: “Domino Effect or International Developments? The Influences of International Events and Political Ideologies on Catalan and Basque Nationalism”, *West European Politics*, vol. 16, no.3, 1993, pp. 245–270; John McGarry: “The Comparable Northern Ireland” in McGarry (ed.): *Northern Ireland and the Divided World*, pp. 1–33.

<sup>53</sup> Xosé M. Núñez Seixas: “Relaciones exteriores del nacionalismo vasco (1895–1960)” in Santiago de Pablo (ed.): *Los Nacionalistas. Historia del nacionalismo vasco, 1876–1960*, Vitoria-Gasteiz, Fundación Sancho El Sabio, 1995, pp. 381–417.

- Research that focuses on *radical Basque nationalist-Irish republican relations* or includes (elements of) this nexus as part of a wider issue.
- *Comparative-led research* (or research with a comparative element) that focuses on either (a.) Irish republicanism and radical Basque nationalism as comparative movements; (b.) individual comparative issues related to Irish republicanism and radical Basque nationalism (e.g., prisoners, youth movements); or (c.) broader comparative issues related to each adjoining conflict (e.g., state responses).
- *Case-specific research* that documents and analyses the ideological, strategic, and political trajectories of Irish republicanism and (radical) Basque nationalism as separate historical phenomena.

### **Irish republican-radical Basque nationalist nexus literature**

“It began with my father, Eli Gallastegi”.<sup>54</sup>

In the view of the Scottish historian Cameron Watson, Ireland has been an underappreciated reference point in comprehending the historical evolution of Basque nationalism.<sup>55</sup> If this was true in 1992, what of the current Irish “papel” in the Basque historiographical canon?

In Xosé Manoel Núñez Seixas’ “Ecos de Pascua, mitos rebeldes: el nacionalismo vasco e Irlanda (1890–1939)”, the Galician explores the germination of a Basque-Irish transnational affinity in the late nineteenth century, before detailing the emergence of a *radical* Basque nationalist-Irish republican paradigm in the aftermath of the 1916 Rising.<sup>56</sup> For Núñez Seixas, this Basque-Irish modality, heavily lopsided towards an Irish-to-Basque dynamic and centred on a heroic emancipatory interpretation of the Rising, partially served to crystallise the political ideology of an emerging radical Basque nationalist approach (“*aberrianismo*”) up until the outbreak of the Spanish Civil War in 1936.<sup>57</sup> Núñez Seixas’ research dovetails with a short text by José María Lorenzo

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<sup>54</sup> Author interview with Iker Gallastegi (Getxo, 2017). “Gallastegi” sometimes spelled as “Gallastegui”.

<sup>55</sup> Cameron Watson: *Basque nationalism during the dictatorship Primo de Rivera, 1923–1930*, University of Nevada, (MA Thesis), 1992, pp. 102–103. See also: Cameron Watson: *Sacred Earth, Symbolic Blood. A Cultural History of Basque Political Violence from Arana to ETA*, University of Nevada, (PhD Dissertation), 1996, p. 303, pp. 333–335; Watson: *Basque Nationalism and Political Violence*, p. 23.

<sup>56</sup> Núñez Seixas: “Ecos de Pascua”. See also: Xosé M. Núñez Seixas: “El espejo irlandés y los ibéricos”, *Cuadernos de Alzate: revista vasca de la cultura y las ideas*, no. 18, 1998, pp. 169–190; “El mito del nacionalismo irlandés y su influencia en los nacionalismos gallego, vasco y catalán (1880–1936)”, *Spagna Contemporanea*, no. 2, 1992, pp. 25–58.

<sup>57</sup> Núñez Seixas: “Ecos de Pascua”. “*Aberrianismo*” was the radical political line that emerged from within the *Comunión Nacionalista Vasco* (the PNV was renamed CNV in 1916) via the publication *Aberrri* and made definitive with the 1921 split in the party. *Aberrianismo*, at its base, essentially

Espinosa, who focuses on the aberriano's utilisation of the Irish rebels' actions as a model *par excellence*.<sup>58</sup> Both Núñez Seixas and Lorenzo Espinosa identify the chief promulgator for radical Irish approaches to the Basque context as the above mentioned, Eli Gallastegi (*Gudari*).<sup>59</sup>

Integrating these texts with Watson's own treatment of the impact of the Easter Rising on Basque nationalism, we can speak of and conceptualise the beginning of a transnational nexus between radical Basque nationalism and Irish republicanism in the wake of the 1916 Rising — albeit it one that seemingly orbited only a handful of figures and mainly existed in base propaganda terms. A recently published master's thesis by the Canadian researcher Kyle McCreanor has sought to, and succeeded in, delving deeper into the specifics of these post-1916 connections. Another recent text, written by the Catalan researcher Pere Soler Paríció and focused on Ireland and the Spanish Civil War, also provides additional insights into Basque-Irish relations from this period.<sup>60</sup>

Synergising the work of Núñez Seixas, Lorenzo Espinosa, Watson, McCreanor, Soler Paríció, and Alexander Ugalde Zubiri, who has documented pre-World War II Basque “acciones exteriores”, a second determination is that by the beginning of the Spanish Civil War in 1936, the last “echoes” of the Irish Revolutionary Period, and Ireland more generally as a transnational reference in the Basque political context, had all but faded away. This “Irish mirror”, Núñez Seixas suggests, would not re-emerge again until the 1960s. In this respect, we may provisionally, and broadly, conceptualise distinct *early* (radical Basque nationalist-Irish republican) and *late* (Basque izquierda abertzale-Irish republican movement) pre- and post-World War II nexus phases, respectively.<sup>61</sup>

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advocated the original political theology of the PNV founder, Sabino Arana Goiri. In contrast, the moderate “autonomista” line sought to reach a pragmatic agreement with Madrid regarding the provision of (at least) an autonomous Basque statute. For an in-depth discussion on the emergence and evolution of the distinctive political lines of Basque nationalism, see: José Luis de la Granja Sainz: *El Nacionalismo Vasco: Un Siglo de Historia*, Madrid, Tecnos, 1995, pp. 13–21.

<sup>58</sup> Lorenzo Espinosa: “Influencia del nacionalismo irlandés en el nacionalismo vasco, 1916–1936”.

<sup>59</sup> Lorenzo Espinosa has also published a biography on Eli Gallastegi. See: José María Lorenzo Espinosa: *Gudari. Una pasión útil. Eli Gallastegi (1892–1974)*, Tafalla, Txalaparta, 1992. Eli Gallastegi was highly influenced by the Irish Revolutionary Period (1912–1923). See chapter two.

<sup>60</sup> McCreanor: *Ireland and the Basque Country: Nationalisms in Contact, 1895–1939*; Pere Soler Paríció: *Irlanda y la guerra civil Española. Nuevas perspectivas de estudio*, Bilbao, Servicio Editorial de la UPV/EHU, 2019; Pere Soler Paríció: *Irlanda y la guerra civil Española. Nuevas perspectivas de estudio*, Universitat de Barcelona (PhD Dissertation), 2013; Watson: *Basque Nationalism and Political Violence*, pp. 118–123.

<sup>61</sup> Núñez Seixas: “Ecos de Pascua”. For Ugalde Zubiri's research in this area, see: Alexander Ugalde Zubiri: *La Acción Exterior del Nacionalismo Vasco (1890–1939): Historia, Pensamiento y Relaciones Internacionales*, Bilbao, Oñati, 1996. Hereafter BIA and IRM will usually be used in place of the Basque izquierda abertzale and the Irish republican movement, respectively.



The (re-)emergence of a *latter* twentieth-century radical Basque nationalist-Irish republican relationship has been the focus of only a handful of academic texts. In the article, “Comrades in Arms. Sinn Féin and Basque Separatism”, Agnès Maillot sets out to address the political and military “relationships between the two movements, Sinn Féin and the IRA on the one hand and Batasuna and ETA on the other”.<sup>62</sup> Sourcing the majority of her information from newspapers and interviews with (then) figures from the international departments of the two political parties, the result of Maillot’s inquiry is a broad outline of the rhetoric utilised by Sinn Féin and Batasuna in framing their mutual affiliation, alongside a synopsis of some of the qualitative differences in both cases and how they are perceived subjectively by the main actors involved (BIA, IRM, Spanish government, British government, etc.). In addressing Sinn Féin’s continued support for ETA-linked Batasuna in the post-GFA era —a stance of supposed little benefit to the republican party— Maillot accounts for Sinn Féin solidarity as one born out of a reluctance to be seen to have turned its back on its own radical roots and ideals.

While Maillot posits a broad rationale of radical Basque nationalist-Irish republican relations and the type of discourse framing that underpins this phenomenon, Pascal Pragnère’s “Exporter la guerre – importer la paix. Dimensions transnationales de deux conflits nationalistes. Irlande du Nord, Pays Basque” focuses more on the function of these links.<sup>63</sup> For Pragnère, BIA-IRM relations may be best understood as a means to legitimise struggle and transcend state-imposed isolation and criminalisation. Most significantly for the objectives of this study, the French historian also introduces the supposition of a common ritualised and shared BIA-IRM “culture” among grassroots BIA and IRM activists — 14 of whom he interviewed as part of his research. Pragnère also views these transnational bonds as being instrumental in reinforcing each movement’s domestic political ideology and cohesion.

In a similar vein to Pragnère’s text is an intriguing article by Bill Rolston. Rolston looks at the history of the Irish republican movement’s external relations, including with radical Basque nationalists, through the motif of political art (murals) on the streets of

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<sup>62</sup> Agnès Maillot: “Comrades in Arms. Sinn Féin and Basque Separatism”, *Nordic Irish Studies*, vol. 4, 2005, pp. 1–12. In Maillot’s *New Sinn Féin: Irish Republicanism in the Twenty-first Century*, the author includes a section on Sinn Féin’s international policies which more or less covers the same ground as the “Comrades in Arms” article. See: Agnès Maillot: *New Sinn Féin: Irish Republicanism in the Twenty-first Century*, London and New York, Routledge, 2005, pp. 134–137.

<sup>63</sup> Pascal Pragnère: “Exporter la guerre – importer la paix. Dimensions transnationales de deux conflits nationalistes. Irlande du Nord, Pays Basque” in Catherine Maignant (ed.): *La France et l’Irlande: destins croisés 16e-21e siècles*, Lille, CECILLE – Université Lille, 2012, pp. 195–210.

Belfast (Béal Feirste) and Derry (Doire/Londonderry). In doing so, Rolston touches on a debate regarding the extent to which Irish republican external relations have been guided by principled “solidarity”, or opportunity — an issue that will inform our subsequent analysis.<sup>64</sup>

Another text that scaffolds one of the core questions of this present study (that of the reciprocal impact of the BIA-IRM nexus) is a 1993 article by Daniele Conversi, in which the Italian gauges the “demonstrative weight” of Irish republicanism, and other external cases, to the Basque and Catalan nationalist movements. Conversi concludes that the demonstrative effects transmitted across the geographical boundaries of nationalist movements are ultimately subordinate to the cleavages of opportunity that arise within domestic political contexts.<sup>65</sup>

In Núñez Seixas’ contribution “Irlanda” to a 2012 dictionary on symbols of Basque nationalism, we find the only existing historical analysis that encompasses both the earlier *and* latter twentieth-century phases of this connection.<sup>66</sup> In synch with the same author’s “Ecos de Pascua”, Núñez Seixas illustrates how the influence of the early twentieth-century Irish case was to weaken considerably in the lead up to the Spanish Civil War, only to become pronounced again with the emergence of a loose confluence of armed conflicts across both territories in the late 1960s.

In this new scenario, the respective stances adopted by radical and moderate Basque nationalists towards the “Troubles”, and in particular the role played by the IRA in that conflict were, in the view of the Galician, to repeat the same supportive and critical positions that were evident in the earlier period. Indeed, according to Núñez Seixas, radical Basque nationalists were to effectively equate the Irish Catholic populace in Northern Ireland with the Basque *izquierda abertzale*’s own concept of the *Pueblo Trabajador Vasco* (PTV) (“Basque Working People”).<sup>67</sup>

Finally, the author indicates that a significant qualitative change in Basque nationalism’s perception of Ireland and its referential weight as a “símbolo del

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<sup>64</sup> Bill Rolston: “‘The Brothers on the Walls’: International Solidarity and Irish Political Murals”, *Journal of Black Studies*, vol. 39, 3, 2009, pp. 446–470. On the Falls Road, Belfast, there is an “International Wall” of prominent figures, images, and symbols from various “struggles” around the world. The famous “You Are Now Entering Free Derry” gable wall in Derry has also been used on occasion to highlight international issues.

<sup>65</sup> Conversi: “Domino Effect or International Developments?”

<sup>66</sup> Xosé M. Núñez Seixas: “Irlanda” in Santiago de Pablo, José Luis de la Granja Sainz, Ludger Mees, Jesús Casquete (eds.): *Diccionario ilustrado de símbolos del nacionalismo vasco*, Madrid, Tecnos, 2012, pp. 547–562.

<sup>67</sup> For a discussion of the PTV, see chapter three.



nacionalismo vasco” occurred in the 1990s when the Northern Irish peace process became a significant comparative reference in the cockpit of Basque-Spanish politics. This phenomenon would become popularly referred to across Basque-Spanish academia, media, and political discourse as the “Irish mirror”.

It is to this comparative aspect of radical Basque nationalism, Irish republicanism, and their broader case contexts, that we now turn.

### **Irish republican-radical Basque nationalist comparative literature**

“There was no Crossmaglen in the Basque Country... the British Army couldn’t even use the road. The roads were so controlled by the IRA that they had to empty the bins by helicopter”.<sup>68</sup>

Surveying the similarities in timescale, state actors, non-state actors and qualitative experiences in the recent histories of the Basque Country and Northern Ireland, we can assert a truism of sorts by acknowledging that the sheer abundance of comparative academic research that straddles both cases is in itself an indication that they (and their leading protagonists) are suitably comparable.

Three broad factors may be said to have lent both cases to reciprocal analogy and comparison. First, ETA’s mainly propaganda-led war against the Spanish state went “hot” in 1968 when the group’s first mortal victim, José Pardines, and martyr, Javier (*Txabi*) Etxebarrieta, were killed in related incidents in the space of a few hours. Around the same time, the start of the “Troubles” in Northern Ireland commenced circa 1966–1969.<sup>69</sup>

Second, the ideological approaches of both ETA and the IRA have been similarly grounded in the view that the Spain/France and the UK and are foreign and illegitimate occupying powers of the Basque Country and (Northern) Ireland, respectively. This sets them apart from many of the other prominent armed groups that emerged in the West

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<sup>68</sup> Author interview with Danny Morrison (Belfast, 2017). Crossmaglen (Crois Mhic Lionnain) is a small rural village in south Armagh (Ard Mhaca), just north of the border in Ireland. The village and its surrounding environs were (in)famously labelled as “Bandit Country” by a British Secretary of State for Northern Ireland, Merlyn Rees, during the 1970s. The area was perhaps the most dangerous for the British Army throughout the “Troubles”. In the view of the journalist Toby Harnden, who wrote a book on the area: “For republicans, Crossmaglen is their stronghold, the capital of the *de facto* independent Republic of South Armagh”. Toby Harnden: *Bandit Country & South Armagh*, London, Hodder & Stoughton, 1999, p. 13.

<sup>69</sup> See: Jesús Casquete: “Etxebarrieta, Txabi” in De Pablo *et al.* (eds.): *Diccionario ilustrado de símbolos del nacionalismo vasco*, pp. 270–281; Gaizka Fernández Soldevilla, Florencio Domínguez Iribarren (coords.): *Pardines. cuando ETA empezó a matar*, Madrid, Tecnos, 2018. There is no consensus as to which incident marks the beginning of the “Troubles”, although most scholars suggest either October 1968 or August 1969. The Ulster University-based CAIN Conflict Archive on the Internet provides the best independent source for statistics, chronologies, and incidents of the “Troubles”. See: <http://cain.ulst.ac.uk/> (last accessed 02 February 2018).

during the so-called “third wave” of international terrorism in the late 1960s and 1970s. Other contemporary, left-wing revolutionary organisations, such as Red Army Faction (West Germany), Brigade Rosse (Italy), the Angry Brigade (UK) and the Weather Underground (USA) did not have primary territorial goals, but instead sought to bring about revolution in the prevailing political, social and economic order. Meanwhile, neither the Front de Libération de la Bretagne (FLB) nor the Fronte di Liberazione Naziunale Corsu (FLNC) may be considered to have had as great an impact on their respective contexts as ETA and the IRA.<sup>70</sup>

Third, the contexts in which both movements have mainly operated since the early 1980s have been largely congruent: the United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland, and the Kingdom of Spain, are both economically-developed, multinational, monarchical, representative parliamentary democracies in western Europe. Until very recently, both were also members of the European Union (EU).<sup>71</sup>

If these are the macro factors that have tended to scaffold the drawing of analogies between both cases and their main actors in academia, a voluminous body of comparative literature straddling specific case issues has subsequently emerged: from motivational drivers behind membership of the IRA and ETA, to the organisational and decision-making structures of the IRM and BIA;<sup>72</sup> from state responses and their effects, to the mechanics of state/non-state negotiations;<sup>73</sup> from analyses of the armed campaigns of

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<sup>70</sup> For the “four waves” theory, see: David Rapoport: “The Four Waves of Terrorism” in Audrey Kurth Cronin, James M. Ludes (eds.): *Attacking Terrorism. Elements of a Grand Strategy*, Washington D.C., Georgetown University Press, 2004, pp. 46–73.

<sup>71</sup> For general comparisons of the two cases, see: Michael Keating: “Northern Ireland and the Basque Country” in McGarry (ed.): *Northern Ireland and the Divided World*, pp. 181–208; Edward Moxon-Browne: “La política étnica: Estudio comparativo de los Católicos norteamericanos y los vascos españoles”, *Estudios Políticos*, no. 63, 1989, pp. 83–105.

<sup>72</sup> Rogelio Alonso: “Individual motivations for joining terrorist organizations: a comparative qualitative study on members of ETA and IRA” in Jeffrey Ivan Victoroff (ed.): *Tangled Roots: Social and Psychological Factors in the Genesis of Terrorism*, Amsterdam, IOS Press, 2006, pp. 187–202; Cynthia L. Irvin: *Militant Nationalism. Between Movement and Party in Ireland and the Basque Country*, Minneapolis, Minnesota University Press, 1999; Raúl López Romo, Gaizka Fernández Soldevilla: “Dueda de sangre. La visión del pasado de ETA y el IRA”, *APORTES. Revista de Historia Contemporánea*, vol. 33, no. 97, 2018, pp. 267–294; Peter Waldmann: “The Radical Community: A Comparative Analysis of the Social Background of ETA, IRA, and Hezbollah” in Victoroff (ed.): *Tangled Roots*, pp. 133–146.

<sup>73</sup> Amaia Álvarez: *Transitional justice in settled democracies: Northern Ireland the Basque Country in comparative perspective*, University of the Basque Country (PhD Dissertation), 2017; Javier Argomaniz: “Comparing the experiences of victims of ETA and paramilitaries in Northern Ireland” in Leonisio, et al. (eds.): *ETA’s Terrorist Campaign. From Violence to Politics, 1968–2015*, pp. 125–142; John Bew, Martyn Frampton, Iñigo Gurruchaga: *Talking to Terrorists: Making Peace in Northern Ireland and the Basque Country*, London, Hurst & Company, 2009; Angela Bourne: *Democratic Dilemmas: Why democracies ban political parties*, London and New York, Routledge, 2018; Peter Anthony Ercegovac: *Competing National Ideologies. Cyclical Responses: The Mobilization of the Irish, Basque and Croat National Movements to Rebellion Against the State*, University of Sydney (PhD Dissertation), 1999;

ETA and the IRA, to state-sponsored “death squads”;<sup>74</sup> from the fluctuations and implications of national identity change (or lack thereof), to the impacts of the EU and globalisation on each case;<sup>75</sup> from the initial mobilisations of Basque and Irish nationalism, to debates surrounding Basque and Irish self-determination and democracy.<sup>76</sup> Finally, in more recent years, the respective trajectories of the Irish and Basque peace processes has also been the major focus of comparative research.<sup>77</sup>

While these comparative-led studies (and studies which contain a comparative element) are invaluable sources for framing the historical evolutions of radical Basque nationalism and Irish republicanism, as well as providing rich pickings for researchers looking at these movements and cases from a comparative perspective, they are less fruitful regarding the *transnational* focus of this study. In short, this category of literature sheds little light on the intra-workings of the BIA-IRM nexus itself apart from the occasional assertion of the existence of *a* relationship. Indeed, it is curious to note that

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Cynthia L. Irvin: “Negotiating End Games; A Comparative Analysis of the IRA and ETA” in Sean Byrne, Cynthia L. Irvin (eds.): *Reconcilable Differences: Turning Points in Ethnopolitical Conflict*, Connecticut, Kumarian Press, 2000, pp. 190–212; Antonio Vercher: *Antiterrorismo en el Ulster y en el País Vasco*, Barcelona, PPU, 1991; Michael von Tangen Page: *Prisons, Peace and Terrorism. Penal Policy in the Reduction of Political Violence in Northern Ireland, Italy and the Spanish Basque Country, 1968–97*, New York, Macmillan Palgrave, 1998; Whitfield: *Endgame for ETA*.

<sup>74</sup> Rogelio Alonso: “Confronting terrorism in Northern Ireland and the Basque Country: challenges for democracy and legitimacy” in Martin Crenshaw (ed.): *The Consequences of Counterterrorism*, New York, 2010, pp. 213–254; Ignacio Sánchez-Cuenca: “The Dynamics Of Nationalist Terrorism: ETA and the IRA”, *Terrorism and Political Violence*, vol. 19, 3, 2007, pp. 289–306; Paddy Woodworth: *Dirty War, Clean Hands. ETA, the GAL and Spanish Democracy*, New Haven, Yale University Press, 2001, p. 410.

<sup>75</sup> Angela Bourne: “European Integration and Conflict Resolution in the Basque Country, Northern Ireland and Cyprus”, *Perspectives on European Politics and Society*, vol. 4, 3, 2003; Pascal Pragnère: *National identities in conflict and peace process. A comparative analysis of Northern Ireland and the Basque Country, 1968–2011*, University College Dublin (PhD Dissertation), 2013.

<sup>76</sup> Flynn: *Ideology, Mobilisation and the Nation*; Juaristi: *El Bucle Melancólico*, pp. 65–67; Iñigo Gurruchaga: *El modelo irlandés: historia secreta de un proceso de paz*, Madrid, Península, 1998; Gorka Idoiga: “The Peace Processes in the Basque Country and Northern Ireland (1994–2006): a Comparative Approach”, *ICIP Working Papers*: 2010/03; Jonathan Powell: *Talking to Terrorists. How to End Armed Conflicts*, London, Vintage, 2014.

<sup>77</sup> Rogelio Alonso: “Pathways Out of Terrorism in Northern Ireland and the Basque Country: The Misrepresentation of the Irish Model”, *Terrorism and Political Violence*, 16, 4, 2004, pp. 695–713; Antoni Batista: *Diario Privado De La Guerra Vasca*, Barcelona, Plaza and Janes, 1999; Philippe Duhart: *Between Ballots and Bullets: Armed Struggle and Peacemaking in Northern Ireland and the Basque Country*, University of California Los Angeles (PhD Dissertation) 2017; Idoiga: *The Peace Processes in the Basque Country and Northern Ireland (1994–2006)*; Stephanie Kerr: *Violence, de-escalation and Nationalism: Northern Ireland and the Basque Country compared*, University of Ottawa (PhD Dissertation), 2016; Francisco Letamendia: “Globalisation, Change in Nation-States and Peace Processes in Violent National Conflicts”, Paper presented at the 19<sup>th</sup> IPSA World Congress, Durban, South Africa, 2003; Ludger Mees: “Between votes and bullets. Conflicting ethnic identities in the Basque Country”, *Ethnic and Racial Studies*, vol. 24, 5, 2010, pp. 798–827; Powell: *Talking to Terrorists*. In addition to the above comparative literature that spans the Basque and Irish cases, there are many more texts that could be included. For reasons of space, it is impossible to reference them all. Several more of these studies will be cited throughout and noted in the sample bibliography.

perhaps the most frequently cited source regarding the existence of a BIA-IRM nexus is a comparative work that does *not* address the transnational nexus at all, apart from the characterisation of the connection between Sinn Féin and Herri Batasuna (Popular Unity) in the preamble as “deep and strong”.<sup>78</sup>

Notwithstanding this general overview, what is certainly relevant from this body of literature is the demonstrable presence of a myriad of analogies, comparisons, parallels, and contrasts that have been drawn between both cases, and in particular, the BIA and IRM. This discourse is not only evident in academia, but as shall be expanded upon later, has also emanated from the media, the relevant states involved (UK, Spain, Ireland), and the movements themselves.

How this allegorical factor has been historically understood, harnessed, framed, and utilised within the orbits of each movement and across the radical Basque nationalist-Irish republican nexus itself, is of considerable significance to the objectives of this study.

### **Basque and Irish historiographical canons**

“The Basques share with the Celts the privilege of indulging in unrivalled extravagance on the subject of themselves”.<sup>79</sup>

In relation to the third category of this literature review, we shall begin by gauging the presence of the BIA-IRM nexus and each associated political context within the Irish and Basque historiographical canons, respectively.

Regarding the Irish literature, a trawl through the key *long dureé* texts indicates that neither radical Basque nationalist-Irish republican relations, nor any potential associated Basque relevance or perceived importance in respect to the Irish case, have been to the forefront of the thoughts of those who have sat down to write some of the most comprehensive and authoritative histories of Irish nationalism and republicanism.<sup>80</sup>

Only two of the leading studies on the republican movement from the “Troubles” era make a notable reference to a Basque element. The investigative journalist Ed Moloney suggests that republican contacts in the early 1970s with “Basques, Corsicans, and

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<sup>78</sup> Irvin: *Militant Nationalism*, x.

<sup>79</sup> The Spanish-Basque writer Miguel de Unamuno, quoting the nineteenth-century French philologist, Jean Jacques Ampère. Cited in: Mark Kurlansky: *The Basque History of the World*, London, Vintage Books, 2000, p. 18.

<sup>80</sup> For example, see: English: *Irish Freedom*; Padraig O'Malley: *The Uncivil Wars*, Belfast, Blackstaff Press, 1983; Henry Patterson: *The Politics of Illusion. A Political History of the IRA* (2<sup>nd</sup> ed.), London, Serif, 1997; M.L.R. Smith: *Fighting for Ireland. The Military Strategy of the Irish Republican Movement*, London and New York, Routledge, 1995.

Bretons” helped to facilitate “the mutual acquisition of weaponry and military expertise”.<sup>81</sup> On the other end of the republican military-political spectrum, Martyn Frampton in “The Long March: The Political Strategy of Sinn Féin: 1981-2007” critiques Sinn Féin’s enthusiastic support for Basque peace initiatives in the late 1990s and 2000s.<sup>82</sup>

Apart from these exceptions, the Basque case and its relevance has barely warranted a footnote in Irish republican historiography, quite literally in the case of one of the most cited books on the IRA, written by Tim Pat Coogan. In “The IRA”, Coogan refers to a 1974 *Der Spiegel* interview with an ETA *etarra* in which the militant claimed that the Basque organisation maintained “good relations” with the IRA. Coogan then alludes to reports, without any supporting evidence, that IRA training and experience may have contributed to the assassination of Spanish Prime Minister “Carrero Blanqui” [sic] and “the Spanish holiday resort bombings of 1978”.<sup>83</sup> While Coogan’s assertions may well be true, this reference is nonetheless emblematic of a somewhat fuzzy and unsubstantiated engagement from Irish historians regarding a potentially intriguing, yet negligibly significant, BIA-IRM nexus.

Taking a similar broad sweep of the equivalent literature in the Basque context, a different picture emerges. In the first instance, and in synch with the aforementioned research conducted by Núñez Seixas, Lorenzo Espinosa, Watson, Soler Parício, McCreanor, and Ugalde Zubiri, there is general acknowledgement among the prominent *long dureé* historians and social scientists of Basque nationalism, such as De Pablo, De la Granja Sainz, Elorza, Letamendia and Mees, that the Irish Revolutionary Period had a not insignificant impact on the contemporary Basque political landscape.<sup>84</sup> In addition to “echoes” of the Rising emanating southwards from Dublin across the Bay of Biscay, the visit to Bilbo in 1922 of a Spanish-speaking “Sinn Féiner” Ambrose Martin has been credited in multiple texts as the organisational spur for the establishment of the Emakume Abertzale Batza (EAB) (Basque Association of Patriotic Women).<sup>85</sup>

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<sup>81</sup> Ed Moloney: *A Secret History of the IRA* (2<sup>nd</sup> ed.), London, Penguin, 2007, pp. 8–9. See chapter five.

<sup>82</sup> Martyn Frampton: *The Long March: The Political Strategy of Sinn Féin: 1981–2007*, New York, Palgrave Macmillan, 2009, pp. 146–147, pp. 171–172. See chapter six.

<sup>83</sup> Tim Pat Coogan: *The IRA*, London, Harper Collins, 1995, p. 436.

<sup>84</sup> De la Granja Sainz: *El Nacionalismo Vasco*, p. 17; De Pablo: *La Patria Soñada*, pp. 132–133; Elorza: *Un Pueblo Escogido*, pp. 344–346; Francisco Letamendia Belzunce (*Ortzi*): *Euskadi. Pueblo y Nación* (vol. I), San Sebastian, Linorsa. Kriselu, 1990, p. 188; Mees: *The Basque Contention*, pp. 65–66.

<sup>85</sup> For example, see: Leyre Arrieta Alberdi: “Emakume” in De Pablo *et al.* (eds.): *Diccionario ilustrado de símbolos del nacionalismo vasco*, pp. 203–216; Juaristi: *El Bucle Melancólico*, p. 236; Núñez Seixas: “El espejo irlandés y los ibéricos”.



Other scholars who have sought to delve deep into the gesticulation of a radical and violent form of Basque nationalism have suggested that its gestation and ostensible cult of victimhood draws partially from the well of Irish republicanism.<sup>86</sup> Equally, several former ETA militants have cited the Irish case, among others, as being an important international reference during the group's formative years.<sup>87</sup> Finally, a further qualitative difference between the Basque and Irish nationalist historical canons —and by extension, the substantive difference in reciprocal relevance and importance attached to each case— is the previously mentioned impact of the “Irish mirror” on Basque-Spanish politics in the 1990s.<sup>88</sup>

Taking the above into account, what is readily apparent from this short appraisal of cross-case transnational reach, is that, for more than a century, Irish republicanism and Ireland more generally, has impinged on the collective Basque nationalist psyche far more significantly than is the reverse. And while this is an unremarkable and discernible observation to anyone with a decent knowledge of both cases, in an analytical sense it is the basic point of departure for approaching how: (a.) each movement views the other and its associated case; (b.) gauging what “solidarity” means and/or entails across radical Basque nationalist-Irish republican relations; and (c.) providing the structural framework for the (real or imagined) allegorical perceptions, parallels, comparisons and contrasts that have tended to traverse the IRM-BIA nexus.

Notwithstanding the valuable knowledge accrued across the three categories of research discussed throughout this literature review, it is evident that while important works by Núñez Seixas, Lorenzo Espinosa, Watson, Soler Parício, McCreanor, and Ugalde Zubiri have gone a long way to documenting the earlier phase of (radical) Basque nationalist-Irish republican relations (c.1895–c.1939), we only possess a limited understanding of its latter incarnation in the post-World War II era.<sup>89</sup> What does exist, clearly does not address, *at source*, the constitution and trajectory of the latter BIA-IRM relationship (*exploratory*); does not examine how and why it has developed in the manner

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<sup>86</sup> Gaizka Fernández Soldevilla: *La voluntad del gudari. Génesis y metástasis de la violencia de ETA*, Madrid, Tecnos, 2016, pp. 67–68; Juaristi: *El Bucle Melancólico*, pp. 17–19, pp. 207–211.

<sup>87</sup> Author interview with Julen Madariaga (Sare, 2016); Patxo Unzueta: *Los nietos de la ira: Nacionalismo y violencia en el País Vasco*, Madrid, El País, 1988, pp. 162–167.

<sup>88</sup> Ludger Mees: *Nationalism, Violence and Democracy. The Basque Clash of Identities*, New York, Palgrave Macmillan, 2003, pp. 128–142; Núñez Seixas: “Irlanda”.

<sup>89</sup> In the following section (1.2.), there is further discussion of literature pertaining to the broad patterns and historiography of Basque nationalist and Irish republican transnational relations. While this does not form part of the Literature Review *stricto sensu*, it builds on some of the related research that has been discussed in this section (1.1).

that it has (*explanatory*); nor does it comprehensively assess its implications and resonance to the BIA, the IRM, and their wider contemporary cases (*correlative*).

Thus far, we have outlined a broad historical overview of radical Basque nationalist-Irish republican relations, earmarked the guiding questions and lines of inquiry to be pursued, and identified some relevant suppositions and gaps in the existing literature. We must now discuss some of the conceptual and theoretical considerations in the social sciences that will help to scaffold a sound analytical framework for this study.

## 1.2. Conceptual and theoretical considerations

“I don’t think anyone is suggesting the IRA and ETA never had any contacts”.<sup>90</sup>

It is important at this stage to define in conceptual terms that which is the primary focus of this research: *The radical Basque nationalist-Irish republican nexus is a multistrand transnational relationship set across two nationalist social movements (BIA and IRM) that have historically been led by military components (ETA and the IRA). Operating in separate political markets, the IRM and BIA pursue the primary objective of a united Ireland and a unified and independent Euskal Herria, respectively.*<sup>91</sup>

In regard to the specific focus of this study, the terms “nexus”, “relation”, and other largely synonymous words (“link”, “connection”, etc.), should be understood as: *the formal, informal, public and private strands of discourse, contacts, personal relations, expressions of solidarity, political or military intersections of individuals, groups and resources (information, training, arms, political expertise, etc.), between radical Basque nationalism and Irish republicanism.*

In determining an adjective to describe this nexus, “transnational” would appear more appropriate than “international” given that international relations usually involve more than two actors and have traditionally been understood to occur between states. Furthermore, a recently published collection of essays by Nuñez Seixas has placed the

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<sup>90</sup> Author interview with Pat Rice (Belfast, 2017).

<sup>91</sup> While it is true that the Irish republican movement and Basque izquierda abertzale also advocate for socialist Irish and Basque states, in this author’s opinion, these objectives are secondary to their primary nationalist goals. Every major study on ETA and the izquierda abertzale suggests that ETA maintained final decision-making power within the wider movement until—at the *very earliest*—the aftermath of the failed Loiola (Loyola) talks in 2006. Some security analysts maintain that the IRA Army Council still holds effective control over Sinn Féin, although this is fervently denied by the latter. For example, see: “IRA’s ‘Army Council’ still exists and influences Sinn Féin strategy – Report”, *The Guardian*, 20.10.2015.

historical Basque-Irish case within the broader “transnational turn” that has come to prominence in academia over the past two decades.<sup>92</sup>

To this author’s knowledge, there is no existing case study in any relevant discipline of the social sciences (history, political science, social movement studies, etc.) in the English or Spanish languages that match these exact criteria: that of a transnational, militant-led and nationalist, social movement nexus. Despite this absence, there are two identifiable bodies of research that should assist in grounding and articulating a sound analytical and methodological approach (1.3.). These bodies of research are:

- Transnational social movement/militant nexuses
- Historical method approaches to transnational nexuses

### **Transnational social movement/militant nexuses**

In her comparative study of the BIA and IRM, published in 1999, Cynthia L. Irvin presented both movements in the following way:

“Defying any neat organizational characterization, these movements reflect the intersection of three distinct forms of political action: participation in democratic, institutional, political processes; participation in extra-institutional forms of nonviolent direct action that may or may not be illegal; and participation in illegal acts of violent direct action. They are agents of both violent and nonviolent political protest and of parliamentary politics. Employing each of the three basic types of collective action—violence, disruption, and convention—they are truly multiform movements [...]”.<sup>93</sup>

As these words indicate, and as is evident throughout her investigation, Irvin’s approach was to probe (and subsequently compare) the inner workings of the Basque izquierda abertzale and Irish republican movement in their most holistic (social

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<sup>92</sup> The use of “transnational” rather than “international” does not negate the evident proto-state like qualities and actions of the BIA and IRM at specific points in time. See: Ely Karmon: *Coalitions Between Terrorist Organisations: Revolutionaries, Nationalists and Islamists*, Leiden, Matinus Nijhoff, 2005, p. 26, p. 44. From all of the militant non-state actors dealt with in this study, Karmon’s deems the Palestinian Liberation Organization (PLO) to be the only non-state actor to have reached “Non-State Nation” status. Xosé M. Núñez Seixas: *Patriotas Transnacionales: ensayos sobre nacionalismos y transferencias culturales en la Europa del siglo XX*, Madrid, Cátedra, 2019. The “transnational turn” is essentially premised on the idea that a better understanding may emerge of certain phenomena in the social sciences when dealt with across traditional political boundaries. Micol Seigel provides a useful working definition: “Perhaps the core of transnational history is the challenge it poses to the hermeneutic preeminence of nations. Without losing sight of the ‘potent forces’ nations have become, it understands them as ‘fragile, constructed, imagined.’ Transnational history treats the nation as one among a range of social phenomena to be studied, rather than the frame of the study itself”. See: Micol Seigel: “Beyond Compare: Comparative Method after the Transnational Turn”, *Radical History Review*, Issue 91 (Winter 2005), pp. 62–90 (quote on p. 63).

<sup>93</sup> Irvin: *Militant Nationalism*, p. 4.



movement) form. This present study intends to do something similar in regard to the historical transnational relationship *between* both political cultures.

What Irvin's outline also indicates is that the historical use of violence ("illegal acts of violent direct action") by the IRA and ETA has been but one leg of a triumvirate of action inherent to the wider social milieus of Irish republicanism and radical Basque nationalism. The weight of this "leg", however, should not be underestimated.

Throughout the principal period of this study, and especially in the 1970s and 1980s, both the IRA and ETA may be said to have engaged in violent acts of "terrorism". Perhaps the most emotive, loaded, and divisive term in academia, for many years there has been an ongoing debate among social scientists in relation to what actually constitutes "terrorism", "terrorist" acts, and the appropriateness of using these terms at all. From a multitude of possible definitions, my own conception of terrorism would essentially align with the most-recent definition provided by the distinguished American scholar and historian John Philip Jenkins to the "Britannica Encyclopaedia":

"Terrorism: the calculated use of violence to create a general climate of fear in a population and thereby to bring about a particular political objective. Terrorism has been practiced by political organizations with both rightist and leftist objectives, by nationalistic and religious groups, by revolutionaries, and [...] by state institutions such as armies, intelligence services, and police".<sup>94</sup>

While I use the term "terrorism" (or "terrorist") to describe certain violent acts carried out by militant actors, state actors and groups in this study (as per the above definition), I am mindful of the common and often deliberate misattribution of this term in political discourse and the accompanying prejudicial and pejorative connotations (instant stigmatisation and delegitimization) that go with such labelling. Indeed, non-violent dissent, which is absolutely essential to a healthy democracy, is often labelled by state actors as "terrorist" in nature in order to disparage the ideas and actions of certain social movements.<sup>95</sup> Additionally, in many states, including those which are central to this

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<sup>94</sup> See: <https://www.britannica.com/topic/terrorism>; <https://www.baylor.edu/history/index.php?id=87862> (sites last accessed 29 February 2020). I have slightly modified Jenkins' definition by removing the word "even" from the final phrase of the second sentence. Jenkins' original version reads "[...] by revolutionaries, and even by state institutions [...]".

<sup>95</sup> Powell: *Talking to Terrorists*, p. 10. Among the many examples that could be cited here, see: "TD Noel Coonan likens water protestors to ISIS", *Irish Times*, 20.11.2014, available at <https://www.irishtimes.com/news/politics/td-noel-coonan-likens-water-protesters-to-isis-1.2009183>; "El PP de Leganés acusa de 'terroristas y tráfico de drogas' a Podemos", available at [https://www.elplural.com/politica/el-pp-de-leganes-acusa-de-terroristas-y-trafico-de-drogas-a-podemos\\_79617102](https://www.elplural.com/politica/el-pp-de-leganes-acusa-de-terroristas-y-trafico-de-drogas-a-podemos_79617102); "Greenpeace included with neo-Nazis on UK counter-terror list", *The Guardian*, 17.01.2020; "Why Trump's plan to label antifa a terrorist group is little more than 'political theatre'", *Independent*, 07.08.2019, available at [31](https://www.independent.co.uk/news/world/americas/us-</a></p></div><div data-bbox=)

study, entire (minority) ethnic groups have, at times, been suspected and smeared as essentially “terrorist” or pathologically violent.<sup>96</sup> All the while, states (or militant groups aided by state elements) that engage in acts of terrorism (as per the Jenkins’ definition, both inside and outside their own borders) rarely, if ever, suffer the same stigma. On the contrary, as the scholar Richard Jackson notes, there is a comparatively “deep and pervasive silence on state terrorism” within academic literature.<sup>97</sup>

For these reasons, and others, various scholars have chosen to use the broader concept of “political violence” in their works and/or advocated for the complete abandonment of the use of the term “terrorism” and the paradigm of “terrorism studies” in academia. A succinct counterview is offered by Richard English in his book, “Does Terrorism Work? A History”. While English recognises some of the problems associated with the term (and includes state actors in his own conceptualisation), he favours the continued use of the term on the basis that: rather than motivating an abandonment of its use in academia, the complex and competing views around this issue should ensure that scholars are more honest and clear in their own grasp and definition of the phenomenon. This is a view that I would also largely subscribe to.<sup>98</sup>

Given the IRA and ETA’s use of terrorism, and the fact that both paramilitary groups have historically been to the forefront of their respective social movements, it is naturally difficult to equivocate the Basque *izquierda abertzale* or Irish republican movement with “classic” social movements such as those which coalesce around issues of the

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politics/trump-antifa-terror-group-white-supremacy-violent-white-supremacists-a9035106.html; “China calls EU rights prize-winning Uighur ‘a terrorist’”, available at <https://www.france24.com/en/20191219-china-calls-eu-rights-prize-winning-uighur-a-terrorist> (sites last accessed 05 March 2020).

<sup>96</sup> For example, see: Mary J. Hickman, Lyn Thomas, Sara Silvestri, Henri Nickels: “‘Suspect communities?’ Counter-terrorism, the press, and the impact on Irish and Muslim communities in Britain”. A Report for Policy Makers and the General Public. London Metropolitan University, July 2011; Cameron Watson: “Imagining ETA” in William A. Douglas, Carmelo Urza, Linda White, Joseba Zulaika (eds.): *Basque Politics and Nationalism on the Eve of the Millennium*, Reno, Basque Studies Program, 1999, pp. 99–114.

<sup>97</sup> Richard Jackson: “The Ghosts of State Terror: Knowledge, Politics and Terrorism Studies”, *Critical Studies on Terrorism*, Vol. 1, Issue 3, 2008, pp. 377–392.

<sup>98</sup> For a coherent argument put forward by scholars who advocate the complete abandonment of the use of the term “terrorism” in academia, see: Dominic Bryan, Liam Kelly, Sarah Templer: “The failed paradigm of ‘terrorism’”, *Behavioural Sciences of Terrorism and Political Aggression*, vol. 3, no. 2, May 2011, pp. 80–96. For the thoughts of Richard English on this matter, see: English: *Does Terrorism Work?*, pp. 9–13. For references to “political violence” in this study, I borrow the definition of Bosi, Ó Dochartaigh, and Pisoiu: “Political violence involves a heterogeneous repertoire of actions aimed at inflicting physical, psychological and symbolic damage on individuals and/or property with the intention of influencing various audiences in order to effect or resist political, social, and/or cultural change”. See: Lorenzo Bosi, Niall Ó Dochartaigh, Daniella PISOIU: “Contextualising Political Violence” in Lorenzo Bosi, Niall Ó Dochartaigh, Daniella PISOIU (eds.): *Political Violence in Context. Time, Space and Milieu*, Colchester, ECPR Press, 2015, pp. 1–12.

environment, structural inequality and gender/sexuality, etc. By extension, it would appear, at first glance, challenging to transpose the theoretical patterns of *transnational* behaviour among “classic” social movements, to the origin, development, and workings of a relationship such as that which has existed between radical Basque nationalism and Irish republicanism. A more *militant*-oriented framework is therefore required.

Firstly, however, what of the current body of research on “classic” transnational social movement behaviour? From the existing body of research, it may be surmised that social movements not only engage in transnational exchanges of strategies and tactics but are also largely amenable to transnational coalition. Some of the determining factors in this regard would appear to be the existence of congruent organisational ideologies and identities with potential partners, shared social ties, and shared political threats and opportunities.<sup>99</sup> Taking this as our starting point, a more militant, or “terrorist”-oriented discussion of the literature follows accordingly.

Since terrorist attacks of 11 September 2001 by al-Qaida on the United States of America, there has been a massive increase of output in the field of “terrorism studies”. Notwithstanding this development, little attention has been paid to the sub-field of transnational militant nexuses.<sup>100</sup> Moreover, within the relatively shallow pool of research that exists, the often-wider social movement context from which a group emerges tends to be dwarfed. In this way, most researchers have tended to approach transnational links

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<sup>99</sup> See: Joe Bandy, Jackie Smith: “Cooperation and Conflict in Transnational Protest” in Joe Bandy, Jackie Smith (eds.): *Coalitions Across Borders: Transnational Protest and the Neoliberal Order*, Oxford, Rowman & Littlefield Promotions, 2005, pp. 1–17; Margaret E. Keck, Katherine Sikkink: “Transnational advocacy networks in the movement society” in David S. Meyer, Sydney G. Tarrow: *The Social Movement Society: Contentious Politics For A New Century*, Lanham, Rowman & Littlefield Promotions, 1997, pp. 217–238; Holly J. McCammon, Nella Van Dyke: “Applying Qualitative Comparative Analysis to Empirical Studies of Social Movement Coalition Formation” in Holly J. McCammon, Nella Van Dyke (eds.): *Strategic Alliances: Coalition Building and Social Movements*, Minneapolis, University of Minnesota Press, 2010, pp. 292–315. Social movement scholars have tended to focus on the militant components of the BIA and IRM for explications of violence, and how the use of this violence correlates with the wider movement and community milieu. For example, see: Begoña Aretxaga: *Shattering Silence: Women, Nationalism, and Political Subjectivity in Northern Ireland*, Chichester, Princeton University Press, 1997; Donatella Della Porta: *Clandestine Political Violence*, New York, Cambridge University Press, 2013; Stefan Malthaner, Peter Waldman: “The Radical Milieu: Conceptualizing the Supportive Social Environment of Terrorist Groups”, *Studies in Conflict & Terrorism*, vol. 37, 12, 2014, pp. 979–998.

<sup>100</sup> Kanisha D. Bond: *Power, Identity, Credibility & Cooperation: Examining the Development of Cooperative Arrangements among Violent Non-State Actors*, Pennsylvania State University (PhD Dissertation), 2010, iii; Karmon: *Coalitions Between Terrorist Organisations*, p. 3. Hereafter, these attacks will be simply referred to as ‘9/11’.

solely from an overtly militant-focused and policy-led basis — as security “problems” to be “solved”.<sup>101</sup>

Historians have criticised the study of transnational militant networks in the post-9/11 period as lacking in historical context.<sup>102</sup> Equally problematic from a historian’s perspective is the use of quantitative-heavy (yet historically- and contextually-light) large N-data sets and game theory as a means to predict and explain militant transnational nexus behaviour and consequences.<sup>103</sup> Despite the obvious differences in approach between such, admittedly, political science-led investigations, and the more qualitative historical method approach to this study, there is still much to borrow from the former. What then is potentially applicable from the field of transnational militant nexuses to this study? Our considerations shall briefly cover the typology of transnational militant nexuses; how they are formed; how they are sustained, and some of their related consequences.

In the first major post-9/11 work in this field, “Coalitions Between Terrorist Organisations: Revolutionaries, Nationalists and Islamists”, the Israeli scholar Ely Karmon defined the phenomenon of non-state “coalition” as “ideological, material and operational cooperation between two or more terrorist organizations directed against a common enemy which may be a state targeted by one of the member organizations or a rival ideological bloc”. Calculating a threshold for identifying coalitions, Karmon put forward three variables of cooperation: ideological, logistical, and operational. Building on Karmon’s research, the American scholars Horowitz and Potter supposed transnational militant “alliances” as requiring “meaningful interaction”, dismissing “mere verbal support or ideological affinity”. In his study of militant South American dyads, Kanisha D. Bond defined transnational violent non-state actor (VNA) “cooperative arrangements” as “a formal or informal arrangement that has been collectively decided upon by the cooperating parties and governs the management or execution of some level of resource sharing, strategic coordination and/or tactical collaboration”.<sup>104</sup>

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<sup>101</sup> For example, see: Tricia Bacon: *Strange Bedfellows or Brothers-In-Arms: Why Terrorist Groups Ally*, Georgetown University (PhD Dissertation), 2013; Michael C. Horowitz, Philip B.K. Potter: “Allying to Kill; Terrorist Intergroup Cooperation and the Consequences for Lethality”, *Journal of Conflict Resolution*, vol. 58, no. 2, 2014, pp. 199–215; Karmon: *Coalitions Between Terrorist Organisations*.

<sup>102</sup> For example, see: English: *Does Terrorism Work?*, p. 18; Robert Gerwarth, Heinz-Gerhart Haupt: “Internationalising Historical Research on Terrorist Movements”, *European Review of History*, vol. 14, 3, 2007, pp. 275–281.

<sup>103</sup> Navin A. Bapat, Kanisha D. Bond: “Alliances Between Militant Groups”, *British Journal of Political Science*, vol. 2, 4, Oct. 2012, pp. 793–824; Bond: *Power, Identity, Credibility & Cooperation*; Horowitz; Potter: “Allying to Kill”.

<sup>104</sup> Bond: *Power, Identity, Credibility & Cooperation*, p. 4; Horowitz; Potter: “Allying to Kill” (quote on p. 201); Karmon: *Coalitions Between Terrorist Organisations*, p. 7, p. 31.

Whether understood in terms of “coalition”, “alliance” or “cooperative arrangements”, the working hypotheses of these nexus typologies are all essentially deduced from the theoretical underpinnings of international relations.<sup>105</sup> In this sense, militant transnational nexuses have usually been premised on the state-like basis of competitive “survival” when faced with “threat”, with the important caveat that, as non-state actors, they are found wanting in comparison to states in terms of credibility, trustworthiness and institutional norms and mechanisms that offer protection during nexus disputes.<sup>106</sup> Moreover, while alliances may help groups gain access to training, arms, safe havens, tactical and technological information, a price is paid by way of an increased threat to security in the form of potential leaks, betrayals and the attention of counter-terrorist state initiatives. As Bond neatly surmises: “what renders state actors distrustful of VNAs also reduces trust among VNAs themselves, thus increasing the likelihood that they will operate alone”. Consequently, manifestations of collaboration among non-state militant groups are rare.<sup>107</sup>

This being the case, how do transnational militant nexuses usually come about? “Shared ideology” or “shared solidarity” is the explanation that has tended to fill this gap, not only within academia, but also from the groups themselves.<sup>108</sup> While this supposes an underlining *de facto* rationale, Tricia Bacon’s 2014 dissertation on militant “dyads” and “hubs” criticises the shared solidarity/shared ideology thesis as “post hoc assumption”. For Bacon, while shared ideology may indeed act as an identity feature that guides and constrains partner selection, alliance formation comes down to more instrumental “organizational learning and adaptation needs concerns”. Once such an “alliance” has been formed, sustainment relies on an ongoing “need fit between partners” and the “partners’ ability to forge a shared identity”.<sup>109</sup> In other words, the hard-headed practical

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<sup>105</sup> Bond: *Power, Identity, Credibility & Cooperation*, pp. 4–19; Karmon: *Coalitions Between Terrorist Organisations*, pp. 14–24.

<sup>106</sup> Bapat; Bond: “Alliances Between Militant Groups”; Bond: *Power, Identity, Credibility & Cooperation*, p. 12, p. 21, p. 63, p. 118; Erica Chenoweth: “Democratic Competition and Terrorist Activity”, *The Journal of Politics*, vol. 72, 1, 2010, pp. 16–30; Karmon: *Coalitions Between Terrorist Organisations*, pp. 24–31.

<sup>107</sup> Victor Asal, Karl R. Rethmeyer: “The Nature of the Beast: Organizational Structures and the Lethality of Terrorist Attacks”, *The Journal of Politics*, vol. 70, 2, 2008, pp. 437–449; Bacon: *Strange Bedfellows or Brothers-In-Arms*, pp. 9–10; Bond: *Power, Identity, Credibility & Cooperation*, p. 23.

<sup>108</sup> Tricia Bacon: “Alliance Hubs: Focal Points in the International Terrorist Landscape”, *Perspectives on Terrorism*, vol. 8, no. 4, 2014, pp. 4–26; Bacon: *Strange Bedfellows or Brothers-In-Arms*, p. 31.

<sup>109</sup> Bacon: *Strange Bedfellows or Brothers-In-Arms*, p. 26. Bacon continues: “The processes by which these frequently cited variables produce and sustain alliances are rarely articulated. What constitutes shared ideologies or enemies is frequently applied in an elastic way, fitted to explain the presence or absence of a partnership on a case-by-case basis with little consistency or predictive accuracy. It remains

needs of an organisation, which in Bacon's view initially drives "alliances", must ultimately be complemented by a sense of shared ideology/identity if the alliance is to be sustained over a more extended period of time.

Does nexus sustainment lead to institutionalisation? In the view of Bond, the implications of ideological affiliations between nexus partners can cut both ways, either incentivising the institutionalisation of a working relationship or precipitating a more informal arrangement. Finally of note, Horowitz and Potter have demonstrated causal patterns of imitation behavioural pathways across transnational alliances. This is a phenomenon that has been suggested in regard to the military strand between ETA and the IRA.<sup>110</sup>

Bearing in mind the working definition of radical Basque nationalist-Irish republican relations outlined previously, we find the closest theoretical framework in approach to this study in the research of Tricia Bacon — notwithstanding her narrower focus on militant groups as opposed to the wider social movement/historical context in which they are enmeshed. Bacon's research on what she refers to as "distant dyads", defined as "cross-case transnational nexuses between non-competitor, non-adversarial groups", clearly chimes with an *a priori* understanding of the BIA-IRM nexus.<sup>111</sup> In her view, these distant dyads, unlike the vast bulk of transnational "coalitions", "alliances" or "cooperative arrangements":

"[...] merit separate examination because these groups do not operate in a zero-sum competition *vis à vis* one another. Instead, there is a positive-sum dynamic as one group can benefit from —or, at a minimum, is not harmed by— a distant ally's gains without the same exploitation fears that govern 'a zero-sum relationship'".<sup>112</sup>

### **Historical method approaches to transnational nexuses**

"The Republican Movement has shown that it is not just an insular inward-looking movement, but that it is spreading its wings world-wide in an effort to achieve justice and freedom for the Irish people. It has shown that it is aware that international support can shorten the struggle for freedom [...]"<sup>113</sup>

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unclear how common enemies and threats should be weighed or what level of ideological compatibility is necessary for organizations to ally"; Bacon: "Alliance Hubs".

<sup>110</sup> John C. Baker, Peter Chalk, Kim Cragin, Brian A. Jackson, John Parachini, Horacio R. Trujillo: *Aptitude for Destruction. Case Studies of Organizational Learning in Five Terrorist Groups*, vol. 2, RAND, 2005, p. 192; Bond: *Power, Identity, Credibility & Cooperation*, pp. 121–128; Horowitz; Potter: "Allying to Kill".

<sup>111</sup> Bacon: *Strange Bedfellows or Brothers-In-Arms*, pp. 20–21. Bacon distinguishes between dyads (for example: IRA-FARC) and hubs (for example: al-Qaida). See: Bacon: "Alliance Hubs".

<sup>112</sup> Bacon: *Strange Bedfellows or Brothers-In-Arms* (quote on p. 25).

<sup>113</sup> 1972 quote from Sinn Féin's Seán Ó Brádaigh. Cited in "The IRA and Overseas Revolutionaries". The IRA Overseas. FCO 87/1869. [British] National Archives (NA).



As external recognition is essential for the long-term viability of a state, states tend to embed themselves in the international order through one, or a combination of, reciprocal diplomatic relations, supranational regional relations, and international organisations. Similarly, sub-nationalist movements also seek to externalise and internationalise in order to ensure their survival and pursue their objectives.<sup>114</sup> It would appear that this process can take at least three different forms: the utilisation of a diaspora for propaganda and resource purposes (transnationalism), the establishment of relations with sympathetic third states, or the networking and building up of relations with other external movements.

While it is largely the third of these categories that brackets this study, it is worth briefly considering the broader external approaches of Irish republicanism and Basque nationalism in order to better place the specific focus of this study in a sound historical context.

Given that “modernist” scholars of nationalism tend to consider the *Age of Modernity* as heralding the prominence of nationalism and the model of the nation-state as major guiding ideological concepts,<sup>115</sup> in this author’s view, any discussion of external Irish and Basque nationalist initiatives prior to this historical departure is highly problematic. Across the following two short sections, modest overviews of Irish republican and Basque nationalist external initiatives, from the advent of this “modern” period to World War II, will be dealt with. A third part pertaining to the separate transnational relations of the Irish republican movement and the Basque *izquierda abertzale* in the contemporary post-World War II era, will complete section 1.2.

### **Overview of Irish republican external relations, c.1791–c.1945**

It is generally accepted that the tenets of Irish republicanism, formulated in the late eighteenth century, were heavily influenced by the republican ideals and events of the American War of Independence (1775–1783) and the French Revolution (1789–c.1799). Indeed, the “Founding Father” of Irish republicanism, Theobald Wolfe Tone, not only fled to the new American republic in the mid-1790s, but he also sought and received

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<sup>114</sup> Michael Keating: “Regions and international affairs: Motives, opportunities and strategies”, *Regional & Federal Studies*, vol. 9, 1, 1999, pp. 1–16.

<sup>115</sup> Umut Ozkirimli: *Theories of Nationalism: A Critical Introduction* (2<sup>nd</sup> ed.), Basingstoke, Palgrave Macmillan, 2010, p. 72.



expeditionary forces from France prior to, and during, the failed United Irishmen Rebellion of 1798.<sup>116</sup>

Throughout the nineteenth century, Irish republicans continued to look towards European revolutionary initiatives and the United States for political inspiration and material support. In 1848, “Young Ireland”, a movement of similar ilk to its various namesakes on the continent, led a short-lived uprising in July. John O’Mahony, a veteran of the 1848 Rising went on to form a US-based republican movement (Fenian Brotherhood) from the great swathes of Irish emigrants who made America their home in the wake of the Great Hunger. Meanwhile, back in Ireland, another 1848 veteran, James Stephens, founded a sister organisation to the Fenians: the secret oath-bound Irish Republican Brotherhood (IRB). Superseded by Clan na Gael (Family of Gaels), the American based “Fenians” provided support for the IRB in the form of propaganda, funding, and military assistance over the following decades. This culminated in the “Clan” partly financing the 1916 Rising.<sup>117</sup>

By 1916, Germany had replaced Revolutionary France as Britain’s greatest foe in European imperial geopolitics. By extension, this meant that Germany was now perhaps the most likely external benefactor to Irish republicanism. On 21 April 1916, a plot to import munitions ended in the forced scuttling of the German steamer *Libau*, posing as the Norwegian (and neutral) *Aud*, off the southwest coast of Ireland.<sup>118</sup> Despite this setback, three days later, when Pádraig Pearse read out the “Proclamation of the Irish Republic” on the first morning of the Easter Rising, both Irish-America (“exiled children in America”) and Imperial Germany (“gallant allies in Europe”) were referenced in the rebels’ declaration. Aside from these direct transnational links, republicans often invoked the likes of India, Egypt, and the Soviet Union when propagandising, debating, and

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<sup>116</sup> English: *Irish Freedom*, pp. 94–98; Richard Kearney: *Postnationalist Ireland. Politics, Culture, Philosophy*, London and New York, Routledge, 1997, pp. 25–35; Ó Broin: *Sinn Féin and the Politics of Left Republicanism*, pp. 22–27.

<sup>117</sup> Brian Hanley: *The IRA. A Documentary History 1916–2005*, Dublin, Gill & Mamillan, 2010, pp. 3–4. For a short overview of violent attacks by Irish republicans in the late nineteenth century, see: Niall Whelehan: “The dynamiters: Irish nationalism and political violence in the wider world, 1867–1900”, *History Ireland*, vol. 21, Issue 1, Jan./Feb. 2013. On Irish republican initiatives in the USA prior to 1916, see: Robert Schmuhl: *Ireland’s Exiled Children: America and the Easter Rising*, New York, Oxford University Press, 2016.

<sup>118</sup> “The German-American role in fight for Irish freedom”, *Irish Times*, 09.12.2016, available at: <https://www.irishtimes.com/culture/books/the-german-american-role-in-fight-for-irish-freedom-1.2899491> (last accessed 16 February 2019).

defining the scope of the Irish nation and the republican ideal throughout the broader Irish Revolutionary Period.<sup>119</sup>

Following the establishment of the revolutionary Irish Republic in January 1919, *ad hoc* diplomatic missions were scattered across Europe, the Americas and Asia. The outbreak of the civil war effectively split the Ministry of Foreign Affairs between pro- and anti-Treaty sides. Victory for pro-treaty forces naturally led to a significant divergence in external activities between the new, semi-independent Dominion of Saorstát Éireann, and the defeated republicans (anti-Treaty/anti-Treaty Sinn Féin). While Saorstát Éireann and its successor, Éire (1937), incrementally developed its external organs, becoming independent of Britain and the last vestiges of her Empire and monarchy by 1949, the IRA (and the by-now rump Sinn Féin party) continued to advocate for the “true” Irish Republic of the First and Second Dáil Éireann domestically and internationally.<sup>120</sup>

Researchers have demonstrated the existence of republican contacts and relations with a number of foreign states and national movements during the interwar period — often through the auspices of the Soviet Comintern.<sup>121</sup> These transnational nexuses, however, were seldom of the material kind. Rather, at their core, lay the heroic mythology surrounding the 1916 Rising and its capacity to flame the imagination and aspirational ideals of other nationalist movements around the world.<sup>122</sup> As we shall see in chapter two, this flame also took hold among a young cohort of radical Basque nationalists.

When Spanish right-wing “Nationalist” forces launched a military uprising against the Second Republic in 1936, hundreds of Irish republicans became directly involved in the ensuing civil war. At least 200 (first-generation) Irishmen joined the International

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<sup>119</sup> Jason Knirck: “Irish Revolution and World History: Nation, Race, and Civilization in the Rhetoric of the *Irish Revolutionary Generation*”, *Éire-Ireland*, vol. 52, nos. 3 & 4, Fall/Winter 2017, pp. 157–189.

<sup>120</sup> For 10 volumes (and counting) of primary source material on the Irish state’s external initiatives since 1919, see: Royal Irish Academy (multiple eds): *Irish Documents on Foreign Policy*, vols. I–X. For a comprehensive overview of Irish foreign relations with Europe from the first republican “diplomats” to the Irish government officially declaring the state a republic in 1948, see: Dermot Keogh: *Ireland and Europe, 1919–1948*, Dublin, Gill and MacMillan, 1988.

<sup>121</sup> Hanley: *The IRA. A Documentary History 1916–2005*, p. 77; Eunan O’Halpin: “The Geopolitics of Republican Diplomacy in the twentieth century” in Maurice J. Bric, John Coakley (eds.): *From political violence to negotiated settlement. The winding path to peace in twentieth-century Ireland*, University College Dublin Press, 2004, pp. 81–98.

<sup>122</sup> For a handful of relevant studies on Irish republican transnational relations that cover the post-Irish Revolutionary Period, see: Aidan Beatty: “Zionism and Irish Nationalism: Ideology and Identity on the Borders of Europe”, *Journal of Imperial and Commonwealth History*, vol.45, no.2, 2017, pp. 315–338; Coogan: *The IRA*, pp. 191–201; Fearghal McGarry: “‘A land beyond the wave’: Transnational Perspectives on Easter 1916” in Niall Whelehan (ed.): *Transnational perspectives on modern Irish history*, New York, Routledge, 2015, pp. 165–188; Kate O’Malley: *Ireland, India and Empire: Indo-Irish Radical Connections, 1919–64*, Manchester, Manchester University Press, 2008.

Brigades, including current and former members of the IRA, as well as “Republican Congress” and Communist Party of Ireland (CPI) activists. More than triple the same number fought alongside Franco’s forces in two Irish Brigades.<sup>123</sup>

Although the Irish government strictly abided by the international policy of non-intervention, it is undeniable that the majority of Irish society, fiercely anti-communist Catholic Church, and one could argue, Éamon de Valera’s government itself (albeit far more implicitly), supported the “Nationalist” rebellion against the Spanish Republic.<sup>124</sup>

As one brutal war ended in 1939, another of far wider and graver proportions began the same year, which would again see Irish republicans making common cause with Germany against their mutual foe: Britain. From as early as 1936, German Abwehr officials maintained and developed a subterfuge network of contacts with elements of the IRA. The most (in)famous development in this arrangement occurred in 1940 when IRA Chief of Staff Seán Russell arrived in Berlin to undergo three months of explosives training. Meanwhile, the IRA carried out a bombing campaign across England in 1939 and early 1940, resulting in seven fatalities and scores more injured. Russell later died on his return to Ireland on board a German U-boat in what remains one of the most controversial chapters in Irish republican history.<sup>125</sup>

### **Overview of Basque nationalist external relations, c.1895–c.1953**

Given that the main ideological principles and political organisation of Basque nationalism were only established by Sabino Arana Goiri in the late nineteenth century, it is difficult to identify a coherent approach to what could be termed “Basque nationalist external relations” prior to this period.<sup>126</sup> Once established in 1895, however, a diffuse range of Basque nationalist external initiatives with (and influences from) the outside world ran parallel to the domestic development of the PNV. As well the expansion of PNV-oriented Basque diasporic centres abroad, leading members of the *jeltzales* analysed contemporary anti-colonial and anti-imperial agitation in Ireland, Morocco, Philippines,

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<sup>123</sup> Mervyn O’Driscoll, Dermot Keogh: “Ireland’s military engagement in Spain and Hispano-Irish military cooperation in the twentieth and twenty first centuries” in Hugh O’Donnell (coord.): *Presencia irlandesa en la milicia Española. The Irish Presence in the Spanish Military – 16<sup>th</sup> to 20<sup>th</sup> Centuries. International Review Of Military History*, no. 92, Madrid, 2014, pp. 135–194. Republican Congress was a leftist republican organisation founded in 1934.

<sup>124</sup> See chapter two.

<sup>125</sup> Brian Hanley: ““Oh here’s to Adolph Hitler”?...The IRA and the Nazis”, *History Ireland*, vol. 13, 3, May/June, 2005.

<sup>126</sup> For some antecedent international activities by Basque “prenalionalistas”, see: Ugalde Zubiri: *La acción exterior del nacionalismo vasco*, pp. 51–66.

Poland, and Cuba, among others. These twin developments, complemented by incremental coverage of Basque issues in the international press, meant that by the time World War I broke out in 1914, Basque nationalists had already established a bridgehead of sorts in the realm of international relations.<sup>127</sup>

With the international order entering a period of extreme flux, Basque nationalist initiatives intensified accordingly. Indeed, throughout the latter- and immediate post-war years, PNV representatives commonly attended international conferences at which the burning issues of the day (cultural and political rights, sovereignty, self-determination, etc.) were discussed and debated.

The forging of a trilateral pact on 11 September 1923 between abertiano Basque nationalists and fraternal Iberian sub-nationalists in Catalonia and Galicia precipitated the imposition of a Spanish military dictatorship under Miguel Primo de Rivera. This coup heralded the first of two major Basque nationalist exiles over the coming decades. In exile, Basque nationalists continued to organise and agitate internationally throughout the 1920s, albeit with a lower profile and intensity to their Catalan peers.<sup>128</sup>

The fall of Primo de Rivera in 1930 and the establishment of the Second Spanish Republic a year later, led to a brief period of reconciliation between moderate and radical factions of Basque nationalism. A clear breach, however, once again emerged between a majority that would accept an autonomous Basque entity within the republic and those who sought outright independence from Spain.<sup>129</sup> The moderates eventually prevailed in the struggle for control, becoming stakeholders in the 1936 Popular Front government. They would oversee the final push for a Basque autonomy.

When a Basque autonomous government finally became a reality in October 1936, its inauguration took place in the teeth of the Spanish Civil War, with rebel forces encroaching on Bizkaia, having already secured Araba, Nafarroa Garaia and most of Gipuzkoa. It is with a certain irony that, as the nascent autonomous government struggled to hold its receding territory, it began to increasingly resemble and act as an independent

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<sup>127</sup> Ibid., pp. 67–206.

<sup>128</sup> José Luis De la Granja Sainz: “Las Alianzas Políticas Entre Los Nacionalismos Periféricos En La España Del Siglo XX”, *Studia Historica. Historia Contemporánea*, vol. 18, 2000, pp. 149–175; Xosé M. Núñez Seixas: “¿Protodiplomacia exterior o ilusiones ópticas? el nacionalismo vasco, el contexto internacional y el Congreso de Nacionalidades Europeas (1914–1937)”, *Vasconia: Cuadernos de historia - geografía*, no. 23, 1995, pp. 243–275; “Unholy Alliances? Nationalist Exiles, Minorities and Anti-Fascism and Interwar Europe”, *Contemporary European History*, vol. 25, no. 4, 2016, pp. 597–617.

<sup>129</sup> Santiago de Pablo, Ludger Mees: *El Péndulo Patriótico. Historia del Partido Nacionalista Vasco, 1895-2005*, Barcelona, Crítica, 2005, pp. 146–149.

state — including in the realm of international relations.<sup>130</sup> The Basque government was eventually forced into exile in June 1937.

Following the defeat of the Spanish Republic in 1939, the Basque autonomous government, under Lehendakari (President) José Antonio Aguirre's lead, took the strategic decision to resolutely stand by the deposed republic's sovereign legitimacy. In tandem with intense diplomatic lobbying against Francisco Franco's regime, the Basque government placed its hopes in the idea that, in the event of an allied victory, *El Caudillo* and his regime would eventually suffer the same fate as the other major western European dictatorships (Hitler's Germany and Mussolini's Italy).<sup>131</sup> When this did not come to pass, and *worse*, the emerging cold war *realpolitik* facilitated the gradual normalisation of relations between the West and Francoist Spain, it became apparent that the “great gamble” of Basque external relations had failed.<sup>132</sup>

### **Transnational relations of the Basque *izquierda abertzale* and Irish republican movement**

Focusing briefly on the existing literature pertaining to the external relations of the Irish republican movement (and the “Official” republican movement from 1970), and the Basque *izquierda abertzale*, we find lineages with the historical trajectories outlined above. For instance, Jack Holland details the USA's continued importance to Irish republicans' diplomatic efforts well into the “Troubles” era. Meanwhile, Colonel Muammar Gaddafi's Libya, a contemporary adversary to the UK in the 1970s and 1980s, emerged as a significant source of military and financial means for the IRA.<sup>133</sup>

There were also new departures that reflected the changed post-war circumstances. As both “Provisional” and “Official” republican movements began to internationalise their campaigns during the 1970s, they were increasingly linked to a multitude of anti-imperialist and anti-colonial “Liberation Movements”, including ETA, along the way.<sup>134</sup>

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<sup>130</sup> Alexander Ugalde Zubiri: “The International Relations of Basque Nationalism and the First Basque Autonomous Government (1890–1939) in Francisco Aldecoa, Michael Keating (eds.): *Paradiplomacy in Action. The Foreign Relations of Subnational Governments*, London, Routledge, 1999, pp. 170–184.

<sup>131</sup> Mees: *The Basque Contention*, pp. 87–94.

<sup>132</sup> Ludger Mees: “Transnational nationalism: the Basque exile in Barcelona-Paris-New York (1936–1946)” in Xabier Irujo, Mari José Olaziregi: *The International Legacy of Lehendakari José A. Aguirre's Government*, Reno, Center For Basque Studies, 2017, pp 159–182 (quote on p. 179). See also: Mees: *Nationalism, Violence and Democracy*, p. 22.

<sup>133</sup> Jack Holland: *The American Connection: US guns, money and influence in Northern Ireland*, New York, Poolbeg, 1987; Moloney: *A Secret History of the IRA* (2<sup>nd</sup> ed.), pp. 3–34; Brendan O'Brien: *The Long War. The IRA & Sinn Féin* (3<sup>rd</sup> ed.), Dublin, O'Brien Press, 1999, pp. 256–257. The Irish republican movement (IRA and Sinn Féin) split into “Provisional” and “Official” factions across December 1969 and January 1970. See chapters three and four.

<sup>134</sup> See chapter four.

Echoing the aforementioned research of Tricia Bacon, the historian Michael McKinley rejects the assumption that broad anti-imperialist, leftist and nationalist trends pulled many of these ostensibly like-minded groups together. Conversely, McKinley views these relations as emanating from more specific purposeful motivation.<sup>135</sup>

A specific motivational factor is precisely what the political scientist Adrian Guelke observes in Sinn Féin's external approach under Gerry Adams' leadership of the party. Guelke argues that, with Adams at the helm (from 1983), Sinn Féin sought to deliberately court associations with the African National Congress (ANC) and the PLO in the hope that this would "help to lend political meaning to the Provisional IRA's actions". In this way, the republican movement "might gain a fraction of the international legitimacy attached to the cause of the ANC and, to a lesser degree, that of the Palestinians".

Martyn Frampton's account of republican external policy from the same period highlights the delicate balancing act at play between Sinn Féin's stated "solidarity" with radical left-wing nationalist groups and its more pragmatic "diplomacy" with the United States.<sup>136</sup>

Sinn Féin's diplomatic manoeuvres across the Atlantic (in addition to other Irish actors) ultimately paid dividends in the 1990s when the post-Cold War administration of Bill Clinton helped to facilitate the Good Friday Agreement of 1998. Since then, it has been suggested that the republican movement's engagement in the USA has pivoted from the traditional appeal to Irish-America for assistance in the war 'back home', to more business-like relations with Irish- and corporate-America.<sup>137</sup>

Notwithstanding this shift, significant scrutiny was brought to bear on Sinn Féin in America during the early 2000s as a result of a case involving three Irish republicans who were alleged to have provided explosives training to Fuerzas Armadas Revolucionarias de Colombia (FARC). Given the post-9/11 climate, the "Colombia 3" scandal tempered the party's new-found respectability in US corridors of power.<sup>138</sup>

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<sup>135</sup> Michael McKinley: "Of 'Alien Influences': Accounting and Discounting for the International Contacts of the Provisional Irish Republican Army", *Conflict Quarterly*, vol. 11, no. 3, 1991, pp. 7–35.

<sup>136</sup> Martyn Frampton: "'Squaring the circle': the foreign policy of Sinn Féin, 1983–1989", *Irish Political Studies*, vol. 19, 2, 2004, pp. 43–63; Adrian Guelke: "The Peace Process in South Africa, Israel and Northern Ireland: A Farewell to Arms?", *Irish Studies in International Affairs*, vol. 5, 1994, pp. 93–106.

<sup>137</sup> Brian Hanley: "The Politics of NORAID", *Irish Political Studies*, 19, 1, 2004, pp. 1–17; "Sinn Féin's evolving funding stream from Irish-America", *Irish Times*, 05.03.2015, available at: <https://www.irishtimes.com/news/politics/sinn-f%C3%A9in-s-evolving-funding-stream-from-irish-america-1.2125866> (last accessed 03 March 2019).

<sup>138</sup> See: "Hearing before the Committee on International Relations House of Representatives. One Hundred Seventh Congress. Second Session. April 24, 2002, Serial No. 107–87", P14,913, Linenhall Library, Belfast (LLB). John F. Murphy Jr.: "The IRA and the FARC in Colombia", *International Journal of Intelligence*



While there is little existing research on Irish republican external and transnational initiatives covering the principal time period of this study (1952–2011), there is comparatively even less written on the external relations and initiatives of the Basque *izquierda abertzale*. Indeed, apart from the attention paid to relations between Sinn Féin and Herri Batasuna in the 1990s during the “Irish mirror” period, the overwhelming focus of post-World War II Basque transnational nexuses has been centred on the Basque government in exile and the paradiplomatic efforts of the (usually PNV-controlled) Basque Autonomous Community, established in 1980.<sup>139</sup>

Outside this dominant line of research, there exists a handful of relevant texts to this investigation. Florencio Domínguez Iribarren has written in depth on some of ETA’s international connections in the Americas, Catalonia and beyond.<sup>140</sup> Meanwhile, Gaizka Fernández Soldevilla’s “De *Aberri* a ETA, pasando por Venezuela. Rupturas y continuidades en el nacionalismo vasco radical (1921–1977)” provides a detailed cross-generational and cross-continental study of radical Basque nationalist contacts.<sup>141</sup>

From a completely different angle, Jesus Valencia’s “La Ternura de Los Pueblos” offers a useful understanding from a radical Basque nationalist perspective of the relevance and importance of various international contexts such as Nicaragua, Palestine and Cuba, as well as the stateless European nations of Galicia, Catalonia, Brittany and Corsica, to the Basque case.<sup>142</sup>

Finally, in the wake of the “Irish mirror”, a new era of “internationalisation” may be said to have opened up in the Basque case.<sup>143</sup> This saw a number of international figures, non-governmental organisations and the European Parliament engage in efforts to bring about a cessation of political violence and/or comprehensive political settlement in the Basque Country. As of yet, there is no definitive text on this most recent phase of radical

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*and CounterIntelligence*, vol. 18, 2005, pp. 76–88. O’Halpin: “The Geopolitics of Republican Diplomacy in the twentieth century”. For more on the “Colombia 3”, see chapter six.

<sup>139</sup> For example, see: Leyre Arrieta Alberdi: *Estación Europa: La política europeísta del PNV en el exilio (1945–1977)*, Madrid, Tecnos, 2007; Andre Lecours: *La acción exterior del País Vasco. 1980–2003*, Oñati, IVAP, 2004.

<sup>140</sup> Florencio Domínguez Iribarren: *ETA en Cataluña: desde Terra Lliure hasta Carod-Rovira*, Madrid, Temas de Hoy, 2005; Florencio Domínguez Iribarren: *Josu Ternera: Una Vida En ETA*, Madrid, La Esfera de los libros, 2006; Florencio Domínguez Iribarren: *La agonía de ETA*, Madrid, La Esfera de los Libros, 2012; Florencio Domínguez Iribarren: *Las Conexiones de ETA en América*, Barcelona, RBA, 2010.

<sup>141</sup> Gaizka Fernández Soldevilla: “De *Aberri* a ETA, pasando por Venezuela. Rupturas y continuidades en el nacionalismo vasco radical (1921–1977)”, *Bulletin d’Histoire Contemporaine de l’Espagne*, no. 51, pp. 219–264.

<sup>142</sup> Jesús Valencia López de Dicastillo: *La Ternura de Los Pueblos. Euskal Herria Internacionalista*, Navarra, Txalaparta, 2011.

<sup>143</sup> Mees: *The Basque Contention*, pp. 234–242.



Basque nationalist external initiatives; however, authoritative works by Imanol Murua and Teresa Whitfield on the cessation of ETA's armed campaign, account for many of the international details.<sup>144</sup>

### 1.3. Analytical and methodological considerations

We will now attempt to harness the previous two major sections (1.1. Literature review, 1.2. Conceptual and theoretical considerations) and establish a solid analytical and methodological framework from which the core questions of this study may be at least partially addressed. It is timely, therefore, to return to the primary question from our introduction: What is/has been the essential constitution of the Basque izquierda abertzale-Irish republican nexus? How and why does this relationship exist? How and why has it historically existed?

Based on what has been hitherto discussed in this chapter, it is possible to discern the existence of a radical Basque nationalist-Irish republican movement and case correlation that has been heavily referenced across academic and media discourse. Moreover, for the movements involved, the expressed foundational basis for this relationship has tended to be framed by a mutually shared bond of “solidarity” — indicated on the first page of this study via the words of Arnaldo Otegi. While there is no existing study that critically investigates this premise directly, the handful of historians who have approached each of the respective movement's external initiatives have, by association, taken a highly sceptical view of this thesis.

For instance, in accounting for the haphazard nature of Irish republican external affairs in the twentieth century, the historian Eunan O'Halpin argues that it is opportunism “rather than a shared sense of suffering amongst oppressed, or attachment to some vaguely transnational political ideology” that has driven republican initiatives since the Irish Revolutionary Period. As referred to previously, Guelke also observes a significant degree of opportunism in Sinn Féin's relations with the ANC and PLO.<sup>145</sup>

Meanwhile, on the Basque side of this debate, Rogelio Alonso and Florencio Domínguez Iribarren have characterised the BIA's external initiatives as being primarily motivated by a desire to undermine the democratic credentials of the Spanish state, and conversely, to halt a delegitimizing trajectory of ETA's armed campaign. Critical of

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<sup>144</sup> Murua: *Ending ETA's Armed Campaign*; Whitfield: *Endgame for ETA*.

<sup>145</sup> O'Halpin: “The Geopolitics of Republican Diplomacy in the twentieth century”. Guelke: “The Peace Process in South Africa, Israel and Northern Ireland: A Farewell to Arms?”

outside mediation in the Basque case, the authors suggest that ETA deceived several otherwise well-meaning figures into becoming unwitting exponents for the organisation's cause.<sup>146</sup>

Notwithstanding the above critical studies, which essentially represent BIA and IRM external initiatives as instrumentally motivated, the phenomenon of *expressed* Basque-Irish “solidarity” (deep, genuine, tactical, calculated or disingenuous as it may be) is nevertheless a *real* occurrence in and of itself — in that it exists independent of qualification or critical assessment. Conversi has referred to this type of transnational manifestation as “empathic solidarity”.<sup>147</sup>

Solidarity, however, is not an ideology. Whether motivated by instrumental choice, altruism or even personal benefit, solidarity does not, and cannot, just exist *ex nihilo*. Ergo, there needs to be a rationale that pivots and motivates feelings, emotions, expressions, and actions of “solidarity” to individuals, groups, and their causes — and not necessarily to others. As the social movement theorist Sydney Tarrow notes: social movements tend to mobilise emotions, not in a vacuum, but in relation to significant others, including movement allies.<sup>148</sup>

With the above in mind, how can we analyse and break down what factors inform and shape “empathic solidarity” across radical Basque nationalist-Irish republican relations? What specific factors scaffold this construction? A sense of similar histories and suffering? Shared left-wing ideology? Demands for self-determination? The existence of an armed component in each movement? Geopolitical proximity? etc. Investigating these underpinnings of “solidarity”, via interviews and questionnaires, should complement some of the observations referred to in 1.1 and 1.2 regarding the genesis, development, and maintenance of this relationship.

As outlined in the first few pages of this study, addressing “the essential constitution of the radical Basque nationalist-Irish republican nexus?” (*How and why does it exist/has it historically existed?*) demands a breakdown into more manageable questions suitable

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<sup>146</sup> Rogelio Alonso, Florencio Domínguez Iribarren: “The IRA and ETA: The International Connections of Ethno-Nationalist Terrorism in Europe” in Jaideep Saikia, Ekaterina Stepanova (eds.): *Terrorism: Patterns of Internationalization*, New Delhi, Sage, 2009, pp. 3–17. See also. Alonso: “Pathways Out of Terrorism in Northern Ireland and the Basque Country”; Alonso: “The International Dimension of ETA’s Terrorism and the Internationalization of the Conflict in the Basque Country”, *Democracy and Security*, vol. 7, 2, 2011, pp. 184–204.

<sup>147</sup> Conversi: “Domino Effect or International Developments?”.

<sup>148</sup> Sydney Tarrow: *Power and Movement. Social Movements and Contentious Politics* (3<sup>rd</sup> ed.), New York, Cambridge University Press, 2011, p. 155.

for historical investigation. For this reason, the following three guiding questions were posed in the introduction — the first (*exploratory*) question being:

- *What* are the historical facts of the relationship between radical Basque nationalism and Irish republicanism?

By accounting for the “nuts and bolts” (contacts, events, discourse, actions) of radical Basque nationalist-Irish republican relations as comprehensively as the available resources allow, it is hoped that a foundation for subsequent analysis shall be established. This will require primary historical research across multiple nexus “strands”: political, military, youth movement, cultural, European, women, prisoner, international solidarity, historical memory, etc. This information can be subsequently embedded into the wider stand-alone historiographies on radical Basque nationalism and Irish republicanism. Using this embedded approach, we may broach and analyse the second (*explanatory*) guiding question from a contextually rich position:

- *How* and *why* has this nexus developed in the manner that it has across a number of time periods, actors, and transnational strands?

If a radical Basque nationalist-Irish republican relationship, manifested in the form of a collective of nexus strands and underscored by an understanding of empathic “solidarity” serves as a *de facto* dependent variable for this research, then it follows that the multiple (internal and external) phenomena that have affected and shaped this relationship may be considered as independent variables. What have been the independent variables that have shaped and impinged upon this development? Considering the sheer scope of potential micro (e.g., individual relationships), meso (e.g., party policy) and macro (e.g., geopolitics) influences that could have a bearing on a transnational nexus of this kind, it would be premature to speculate on these greatly in advance.

That said, in addition to some of the potential factors highlighted in sections 1.1 and 1.2 (shared nexus culture, nexus malleability, movement credibility, movement ideology, movement organisational learning and adaptation needs), other possible variables noted by analysts include: global and regional factors, levels of trust based on a group’s interaction, personal relationships and reputation, and identity and power characteristics.<sup>149</sup>

- *Has* this nexus had any tangible impact (and if so, *how?*) with respect to the historical development of each movement and wider associated conflict?

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<sup>149</sup> Bacon: *Strange Bedfellows or Brothers-In-Arms*, pp. 59–62; Bond: *Power, Identity, Credibility & Cooperation*, pp. 44–47; Karmon: *Coalitions Between Terrorist Organisations*, pp. 29–31.

The final (*correlative*) guiding question is without doubt the most speculative and verifiably difficult to ascertain. Based on existing academic research, we have already noted *a priori* a distinct asymmetry in the reciprocal transnational impact of (radical and moderate) Basque nationalism and Irish republicanism.

Other correlative aspects that have been raised in the literature include the utilisation of radical Basque nationalist-Irish republican relations as leverage towards specific movement needs, transnational demonstrative effects, and movement imitation behavioural patterns. One correlative issue of particular interest is to gauge if the cumulative weight of radical Basque nationalist-Irish republican relations may have been a factor in the process that culminated in ETA's definitive ceasefire of 2011.

### **Methodological overview**

The methodological approach to this study centres on research practices implemented across similar studies in terms of the scope and actors involved. Qualitative and quantitative data shall be generated using the following primary research methods.

First, semi-structured interviews shall be conducted with selected protagonists deemed close to the subject matter. Second, discourse analysis shall be conducted of all relevant primary literature that has emanated from the organisational components of radical Basque nationalism and Irish republicanism. Third, questionnaires shall be issued to "grassroots" activists in order to gather data and perceptions of the fraternal movement and associated conflict and case.

These primary research methods have been chosen as they assist in constructing an understanding of the subject matter from multiple angles and sources. Questionnaires and interviews, in particular, provide opportunities for participants to articulate their perception and understanding of radical Basque nationalist-Irish republican relations at close quarters, as well as the role they may or may not have played in the historical trajectory of this nexus.

Texts by Robert W. White (interviews), José Manuel Mata López (discourse analysis) and Cynthia L. Irvin (questionnaires) stand out among the existing literature in terms of guiding the methodological approach of this study.<sup>150</sup> All three academics not only provide excellent templates in their respective methodological areas of expertise, but their cited works (below) also explicitly focus on the IRM and/or BIA as objects of study.

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<sup>150</sup> Irvin: *Militant Nationalism*; José Manuel Mata López: *El nacionalismo vasco radical. Discurso, organización y expresiones*, Bilbao, Servicio Editorial UPV/EHU, 1993; White: *Out of the Ashes*.

In addition to these primary research sources, relevant state archives in Spain, Ireland and Britain shall be consulted (subject to access) in order to glean diplomatic information on radical Basque nationalist-Irish republican relations. This should also assist in gauging state reactions to this relationship.

It is expected that conducting primary research on this topic will present a number of significant difficulties. First, there are significant gaps in the existing literature regarding the historical “facts” (individuals involved, events, meetings, etc.) of this relationship. This is especially the case in relation to the post-war *latter* (BIA-IRM) phase. Furthermore, as far as this author is aware, there exists no comprehensive/authoritative study on either contemporary Irish republican transnational relations or radical Basque nationalist transnational relations, respectively. This absence will probably necessitate the undertaking of additional primary historical research that is not related *stricto sensu* to the subject matter.

Second, the BIA and IRM (and their constituent components) are, by their very nature, opaque. At times working clandestinely, under proscription, subject to frequent raiding, or the constant attention of police and intelligence services, movements of this nature tend not to maintain detailed records or archives. As such, gathering relevant information on their inner workings, let alone aspects of a transnational relationship poses significant difficulties.

Third, gaining consent to conduct interviews and to issue questionnaires is not necessarily guaranteed. In addition to understandable privacy and security concerns that individuals may have in contributing to this research, the sensitive nature of discussing or revealing information or views pertaining to an ostensible trusted transnational “ally” will also undoubtedly limit the scope of forthcoming information, opinion and subsequent analysis.

Fourth, significant gaps in the primary source material are to be expected. Irish and British national state archives have strict 30- (in the process of being reduced to 20-) year embargoes on their documentation.<sup>151</sup> This automatically precludes the last two to three decades of potentially intriguing Irish and British primary state material from consideration. In Spain, as a result of the “pacto de silencio” that accompanied the

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<sup>151</sup> “National Archives (Amendment) Act 2018”, available at <https://www.oireachtas.ie/en/bills/bill/2017/110/>; “20-year rule”, available at <http://www.nationalarchives.gov.uk/about/our-role/plans-policies-performance-and-projects/our-projects/20-year-rule/> (sites last accessed 02 March 2019).

dismantlement of Franco's regime, access to relevant state and diplomatic material in Madrid is expected to be extremely problematic.

## **Interviews**

Purposive sampling based on initial research shall be conducted for semi-structured interviews with an expected "snowball effect" presumably resulting in additional interview opportunities. A conceptual demarcation is to be made between, on the one hand: individuals who typically disseminate information (current or former political representatives, editors, journalists, spokespeople, etc.), and those on the other hand who do not typically have access to influencing discourse across their respective movement. This will be done in order to open up the possibility of divergent analyses between what could be termed: discourse "disseminators", and discourse "receptors". In addition to the communication of qualitative experiences, the semi-structured interviews will also serve to illuminate the transnational network of "nodes" (social actors) and "brokers" (key actors who control information flow and resources) across the nexus of radical Basque nationalist-Irish republican relations.

Following the example of Robert W. White, questions for interviewees will be non-directive and open-ended. And while interviewees will be subsequently probed to clarify potential factual errors, the general approach is not to challenge or debate the respondent's view or opinions on the subject at hand. White's approach is similar to that of the German sociologist Fritz Schütze. Specifically aimed at "hot" issues, Schütze recognises that although interviewee accounts of events are often selective, biased and communicated strategically in order to avoid true relevance structures, "the lexicon of a social group constitutes its perspective of the world".<sup>152</sup> This, in my view, is the desired outcome of conducting such interviews.

## **Questionnaires**

Two sets of questionnaires will be issued in order to gather quantitative data on attitudes to, and perceptions of, the fraternal movement. Both questionnaires are largely based on those issued to BIA and IRM activists by Cynthia L. Irvin in her aforementioned comparative study. A central aim of the questionnaires will be to partially break down the

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<sup>152</sup> White: *Out of the Ashes*, pp. 398–400. Schütze's approach is presented in English by Martin Bauer. See: Martin Bauer: *The Narrative Interview. Comments on a technique for qualitative data collection*, London School of Economics. Methodology Institute. Papers in Social Research Methods, Qualitative Series, no. 1. Oct. 1996.

factors which generate empathic “solidarity” between radical Basque nationalist and Irish republican actors. In light of the conceptual demarcation made between discourse “disseminators” and “receptors”, questionnaires will be targeted at individual “grassroots” receptors only in order to observe how the BIA-IRM nexus is absorbed “from the ground up”. Disseminator perceptions are already evident in public and media discourse. For the first set of questionnaires, there are three profile criteria:

- Participants must be discourse receptors.
- Basque participants must self-identify with the *Movimiento de Liberación Nacional Vasco (MLNV)*. Irish participants must self-identify as an “Irish republican”.<sup>153</sup>
- Participants must have spent a period of time in the “fraternal” territory (the Basque Country or Ireland). A minimum time limit will be arbitrarily set at one week.

These individuals will be referred to in social movement parlance as “nodes”.

The second questionnaire will be issued to current grassroots members of Sinn Féin and components of the *izquierda abertzale* who have had no direct connection with the kindred case, and accordingly, do not fully comply with the above criteria. These will be referred to as “non-nodes”. The rationale behind the second questionnaire is twofold:

- To increase the sample size regarding perceptions of the fraternal transnational movement and conflict.
- To observe any significant difference that may exist between those within radical Basque nationalism and Irish republicanism who have spent time in the fraternal country (“nodes”), and those who have not had the same experience (“non-nodes”).

### **Discourse analysis**

Output of BIA and IRM discourse shall be analysed in order to broadly indicate the presumably fluctuating basis of radical Basque nationalist-Irish republican relations and to detect changes of tone and emphasis over time concerning the salience of the kindred movement and case. Analysis will be conducted of all the major radical Basque nationalist and Irish republican periodicals (*e.g., United Irishman, An Phoblacht/Republican News, EGIN, GARA, Punto y Hora en Euskal Herria*), the main body of internal and external documentation produced by the military vanguards of each movement, and a number of more marginal sector-specific publications. Former and current editors of the main

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<sup>153</sup> Given the grassroots focus of the questionnaires, it is felt that MLNV is a more appropriate descriptive term in this specific instance on account of its broader interpretation and connotations. For more on the MLNV, see chapter five. Here, “Irish republican” excludes “dissident” and Fianna Fáil strands of Irish republicanism.



propaganda organs of the BIA and IRM will be approached for interview. Using the above-cited works of Robert W. White and José Manuel Mata Lopez as templates, significant extracts of written discourse and interview quotations will be dispersed liberally throughout the text.

### **Chapter outline**

This study adheres to a mainly chronological approach in order to reflect and best illustrate the projected changeable constitution in radical Basque nationalist-Irish republican relations. Building on the existing primary research conducted by Nuñez Seixas, Lorenzo Espinosa, Soler Parício, McCreanor, Watson and Ugalde Zubiri on early (pre-World War II) radical Basque nationalist-Irish republican relations, chapter two (parts I & II) will re-examine this phenomenon from a deeper *long dureé* historical perspective, and with a sharper focus on the stated objectives of this study. Chapters three and four will look at the genesis and trajectory of the latter BIA-IRM nexus (with a slight emphasis on supposed military links) up until the early 1980s and the coming to prominence of a dual military-political strategy in both movements. Chapter five will account for the advancement of relations between radical Basque nationalism and Irish republicanism from the early eighties onwards, with a keen focus on the development of the political relationship between Sinn Féin and Herri Batasuna. Chapter six will explore the evolution of the BIA-IRM nexus in the aftermath of the Good Friday Agreement, and the internationalisation of the Basque conflict up until ETA's definitive ceasefire in 2011. Finally, chapter seven will discuss the research findings and conclusions.



## CHAPTER TWO (Part I)

### 2.0. Introduction

“Moliuncius was the first king of Britain. Belynus and Brennius were his sons. Gurguncius, son of Belynus, became king of Britain in 356 BC. The Danes had been withholding an agreed tribute, and Gurguncius mounted an expedition to Denmark to give the Danes a reason to reinstate payments. Having whipped them into submission, Gurguncius was on his way back to Britain, when he encountered a fleet of 30 ships full of men and women beside the Orkney Isles. The chief Captain, Bartholomew, told the king that they were Basques exiled from Spain and had been sailing a long time in search of some prince who would give them a dwelling place, and they would become his subjects and hold the land of him. Bartholomew beseeched the king to have compassion on them and grant them a place to inhabit, so they need not continue to live on their ships. The king with the advice of his barons granted unto them a void and vast country, which was and is the farthest isle of all isles toward the west, the which isle as sayeth the English Chronicle was then named Ireland [...]”.<sup>1</sup>

Taken from Irish storyteller Richard Marsh’s “Spanish and Basque Legends”, the above modernised and adapted tale first came to light in the ninth-century English medieval text: “*Historia Brittonum*”. Depending on the version that one may encounter, “Bartholomew”, the wayward Captain of the exiled and stranded fleet, is usually portrayed as of Spanish or Basque origin. And while it is certain that he and his crew did not discover the “void and vast” island of Ireland in the fourth century BC, Bartholomew’s odyssey, as with most myths, holds a certain ring of truth to it.<sup>2</sup>

As was briefly mentioned in chapter one, several contemporary archaeologists and geneticists consider northern Iberia, and more specifically the Basque Country, as a plausible—even probable—point of departure for the first inhabitants of the island of Ireland. A two-part documentary named “Blood of the Irish”, shown at primetime on the Irish state’s national broadcasting service in 2009, even briefly made this hypothesis topical.<sup>3</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> Richard Marsh: *Spanish and Basque Legends*, Dublin, Legendary Books, 2010, pp. 14–15.

<sup>2</sup> Nennius: “History of the Britons” in John Allen Giles (ed.): *Six old English chronicles, of which two are now translated from the monkish Latin originals: Ethelwerd’s Chronicle. Asser’s Life of Alfred. Geoffrey of Monmouth’s British history. Gildas, Nennius, and Richard of Cirencester*, London, Bell & Daldy, 1848, pp. 383–416.

<sup>3</sup> E.W. Hill, M.A. Jobling, D.G. Bradley: “Y-chromosome variation and Irish origins”, *Nature*, 404 (6776), 23 March 2000, pp. 351–352; “DNA Blueprint of the Irish revealed”, *Irish Independent*, 11.09.2010; “Genetic studies show our closest relatives are found in Galicia and the Basque region”, *Irish*

While modern science may be said to have lent a measure of credence to the theory of the first settlers of Ireland coming from Basque-centric northern Iberian stock, and by extension, given a symbolic nod to Bartholomew, another Irish/Basque medieval tale is of relevance here:

In summary, a young Irish prince named Lémor, exiled from his native country, reaches landfall in Busturia in the Basque province of Bizkaia. On realising he has landed in Iberia, Lémor proclaims: “The Land of our ancestors. Our people came to Ireland from here”. The young exiled prince is quickly corrected by a local Basque *etxeko-jau*n (clan chief): “*Through* here”. The chief goes on to elaborate:

“[...] the Celts came from across the Mediterranean to dominate this peninsula called Iberia, which includes our country, Euskal Herria. After a few centuries, they were pushed by the Phoenicians into Galicia in the northwest, and most of them emigrated from there to Ireland. That was not so long ago —a little over a thousand years— and the same blood flows in our veins”.<sup>4</sup>

Lémor subsequently ingratiates himself to the local Basque leader Lekobide, going on to lead his army in battle against a horde of Leonesean and Asturian warriors. In the wake of glorious victory, the young Irish prince becomes the first Lord of Bizkaia, known as Jaun Zuria: the golden-haired Lord, and in Basque political parlance, an important early mythological reference for Basque nationalism.<sup>5</sup>

While there are several versions of the “Lord Of Bizkaia” in Basque mythology, what stands out to an Irish reader in Lémor’s adventure are the narrative crossovers with the highly influential Irish medieval text “Lebor Gabála Éirenn” (The Book of the Taking of Ireland). Compiled into a single body of prose as early as the eleventh century, “Lebor Gabála Éirenn” provides an epic pseudohistory of six purported invasions of Ireland. In the recounting of the final (and definitive) of these supposed invasions —that of the “Milesians” (*Míl Espáine*, an Irish translation of the Latin “Miles Hispaniae”/“Soldiers of Spain”)— the general thrust of their supposed journey essentially follows the same route that is helpfully recalled by the *etxeko-jau*n in conversation with Lémor:

From auspicious biblical beginnings as descendants of Adam, the Milesians, it is told, migrated westward from Egypt across Europe via Crete and Sicily before arriving in

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*Times*, 16.02.2009; John Gibney: “TV Eye: Blood of the Irish”, *History Ireland*, vol. 17, 2, March/April 2009.

<sup>4</sup> Marsh: *Spanish and Basque Legends*, p. 47. My use of italics for “*Through*”. The figure of Lémor is sometimes referred to as “Lenor”, depending on the source.

<sup>5</sup> For the utilisation of the first Lord of Bizkaia (Jaun Zuria) in Basque nationalism, see: José Luis de la Granja Sainz: “Batallas de Arrigorriaga y Munguía” in De Pablo *et al.* (eds.): *Diccionario ilustrado de símbolos del nacionalismo vasco*, pp. 187–202.

Iberia and travelling along its northern coastline to Galicia. From Brigatta (modern day A Coruña), the Milesians then sailed northwards to Ireland, where they began a period of warfare against the Tuatha dé Danann (the fifth group of invaders). After Milesian victory, the adversaries came to an understanding whereby Ireland would be split between the physical world, to be inhabited by the Milesians, and the realm of the “otherworld”, which would be left to the fairy-like Tuatha dé Danann.<sup>6</sup>

As the final pre-historical group of settlers to Ireland, the story of the Milesians seeped deep into popular folkloric consciousness, providing the foundational myth of the “Gaels” (the Irish branch of Celts), and consequently, the overarching pre-historical narrative of Irish history and the origins of the Irish people for centuries.<sup>7</sup> In Iberia, the character of Breogán, the supposed grandfather to the first of the Milesian invaders, has also served as a central figure in the shaping of Galician national identity since the early nineteenth century. To this day, he is celebrated in the official Galician anthem “Os Pinos”. A statue of the Celtic chief stands close to the Tower of Hercules in A Coruña, where Breogán’s son Íth first spotted Ireland to the north.<sup>8</sup>

While the Iberian-Irish connections illustrated in the above medieval pseudohistories are by their very nature suppositious, their perseverance throughout centuries of Iberian-Irish relations has nonetheless harboured real historical consequences, as shall be discussed in the following section. Moreover, they have also provided the foundational basis for a wider transnational Iberian-Irish historical *association* with its own internal Irish-Basque dynamic. In the context of the immediate focus of this investigation —that of modern radical Basque nationalist-Irish republican relations— it is appropriate, even necessary, to modestly track the trajectory and dynamics of this *association* through the parameters of an Irish-Spanish-Basque (and also occasionally English/British) historical

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<sup>6</sup> R.A. Stewart Macalister (ed.): *Lebor Gabála Éirenn*, Dublin, Educational Company of Ireland, 1938.

<sup>7</sup> According to the scholar Manuel Alberro, the credibility of the Milesian story “has been gradually deteriorating. Initially considered a legitimate chapter of Irish history, it is presently rejected as ‘pseudo-history’”. See: Manuel Alberro: “Milesians and Alans in the Northwest of the Iberian Peninsula and the Mythical Invasion of Ireland”, *Proceedings of the Harvard Celtic Colloquium*, 23, 2003, pp. 1–20 (quote on p. 1). Another scholar, Clíodhna Ní Lionáin, refers to *Lebor Gabála Éirenn* as a: “pseudo-historical narrative which incorporates an Irish origin myth within a biblical framework [...]”. See: Clíodhna Ní Lionáin “Lebor Gabála Éirenn: The Use and Appropriation of an Irish Origin Legend in Identity Construction at Home and Abroad”, *Archaeological Review from Cambridge*, 27, 2, 2012, pp. 33–50 (quote on p. 34). Incidentally, an alternative version of Bartholomew’s (Parthólon) landing in Ireland — the second of the six purported invasions— also features in *Lebor Gabála Éirenn*.

<sup>8</sup> Kerry Ann McKeivitt: “Mythologizing Identity and History: A Look at the Celtic Past of Galicia”, *Journal of Interdisciplinary Celtic Studies*, vol. vi, pp. 651–673; “Símbolos de Galicia. O himno”, <https://www.xunta.gal/o-himno-de-galicia>; “Escultura de Breogán”, <https://grupocoruna.es/escultura-de-breogan> (sites last accessed 05 May 2019).

context. In doing so, the *long dureé* cultural, social, and political factors that have underpinned this historical *association* may later be regarded or discounted as factors in the modern nexus that is the focus of this study.

## 2.1. The “Soldiers of Spain” march on...

“[...] the Pepil of Irlande come fryste out of Bascles *and* out of Bayon, that longyth now to Gascoyne, Wherof the kynges of Englande ben lordys. And thus ye may wel vndyrstonde that, both by olde right and by new, the kynges owen well to haue the lorchipp of Irland”.<sup>9</sup>

A year after his ascent to the English throne in 1154, the Angevin King Henry II was purportedly given authority to conquer Ireland by way of a letter penned by the English Pope, Adrian IV. The apparent stipulation for Adrian’s permission: that the king bring into line an increasingly autonomous Irish church that had diverged from Rome’s authority. The historicity of the letter (commonly referred to as the “Laudabiliter”), its alleged contents, and claims regarding its possible falsification have been keenly debated by historians ever since.<sup>10</sup>

Incidentally, the “Angevin Empire” also included the Basque territories of Gascony that fell under the sovereignty of Eleanor of Aquitaine — Henry’s wife. As the above extract from Anglo-Norman lord Giraldus Cambrensis’ “Expugnatio Hibernica” (Conquest of Ireland) exemplifies, the ostensible Basque origins of the Irish people had a certain political expediency that could be, and indeed *was*, exploited and leveraged to his king’s political benefit. Written within a decade of the first Anglo-Norman landings in Ireland, Cambrensis’ hypothesis reasons that given the Irish had originated from “Bascles” and “Bayone”, the validity of the king’s mandate over both these territories and Ireland was effectively one and the same. While this may well have been the first attempt to utilise the supposed Iberian/Basque origins of the Irish people as a means to a political end, it would not be the last.<sup>11</sup>

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<sup>9</sup> Frederick J. Furnivall (ed.): *The English Conquest of Ireland, A.D. 1166–1185, Mainly From the ‘Expugnatio Hibernica’ of Giraldus Cambrensis*, London, Kegan Paul, Trench, Trubner & Co., 1896, p. 137. This extract is taken from a fifteenth-century version of *Expugnatio Hibernica*. Italics for “*and*” in the fifteenth-century source. A modern adapted version would read something akin to: “[...] the people of Ireland come first out of Basque [Country] *and* out of Bayonne, which belong now to Gascony, where the kings of England have been lords. And thus, you may well understand that, both by old right and by new, the kings own well to have the Lordship of Ireland”.

<sup>10</sup> Ó Cróinín: *Early Medieval Ireland, 400–1200*, p. 58.

<sup>11</sup> It has been suggested that during the Middle Ages, the Basques had a low reputation in England, similar to that of the Irish. John Gillingham: *Richard the Lionheart*, London, Times Books, 1978, p. 50, as cited in Andrew Hadfield: “Briton and Scythian: Tudor Representations of Irish Origins”, *Irish Historical Studies*, vol. 28, no. 112, 1993, pp. 390–408 (footnote 37). Cambrensis’ writings also justified

As was briefly discussed in the case histories presented in chapter one, the political, social, religious, and cultural structures of Gaelic Ireland came under increasing pressure in the centuries following the establishment of the Lordship of Ireland in 1177. At roughly the same time in northern Iberia, the Basque territories at the heart of the once-powerful Kingdom of Navarre were to become gradually subsumed piecemeal into the expanding Kingdom of Castile, and ultimately, its *de facto* succeeding entity: the Kingdom of Spain. By the late sixteenth century, the strategic interests of two of these actors in their respective contexts had converged. Faced with advancing Tudor control of Ireland, the leaders of the two most prominent Gaelic Irish families in Ulster, Hugh O'Neill and Hugh Roe O'Donnell, sought to arrange an alliance with the stridently Catholic Kingdom of Spain against their common, and by this stage, Protestant-led enemy: England.

Having initiated a rebellion against encroaching English meddling in their affairs in 1593, O'Neill and O'Donnell wrote to Spain's King Felipe II two years later in search of Spanish military support. Leaning on the Milesian myth and O'Donnell's supposed ancestry from Cantabrian kings, the two men pledged fidelity to the Spanish crown in return for the Spanish king's assistance.<sup>12</sup> Felipe II, whose kingdom was at war with England, had previous experience himself with Ireland and the Milesian myth. Bestowed the title of King of Ireland during his brief marriage to Queen Mary I of England nearly half a century earlier, he later received ingratiatory reports in 1574 from an Ireland-exploring Basque Captain of his navy, Diego Ortiz de Urizar. According to Ortiz de Urizar's reports from the "Green Isle":

"[The Irish] say their kingdom belongs to Your Majesty for it is of Spanish origin, the first founders being part from Galicia, part from Vizcaya. I replied I understood it to be so".<sup>13</sup>

Despite responding positively to the O'Donnell-O'Neill joint proposal, Felipe was less forthcoming in acting on their request. It was under the stewardship of his successor, Felipe III, that a decision was made to dispatch Spanish troops to help the Ulster leaders. Approximately 3,400 Spanish troops under the command of Don Juan de Aguila

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the conquest on the basis of Papal consent and his portrayal of the Irish as a "filthy people, wallowing in vice". See: English: *Irish Freedom*, pp. 41–42.

<sup>12</sup> Kee: *The Green Flag*, pp. 9–15; "Ireland and Spain", *History Ireland*, vol. 9, 3, Autumn 2001, available at <https://www.historyireland.com/volume-9/ireland-spain/> (last accessed 08 July 2019).

<sup>13</sup> Cited in: Juan E. Tazón, Urbano Viñuela Angulo: "'Caliban's' choice in the 'Irish Tempest'" in *Proceedings of the II Conference of SEDERI*, 1992, pp. 321–329. The source given by the authors is: Archivo General de Simancas, Estado, Legajo 828.



subsequently landed at the southern port town of Kinsale (Cionn tSáile) in September 1601.

The ensuing military confrontation with English-led crown forces would prove to be disastrous for the *ad hoc* Gaelic Irish rebel-Spanish alliance. Having been forced south to come to the assistance of the Spanish from their northern Ulster heartlands, the Irish militia, lacking a cohesive tactical plan, came undone during an ambitious attack against the forces of the Lord Deputy of Ireland, Mountjoy. In the wake of Irish-Spanish defeat and the *armada* homeward bound, O'Donnell made one more ultimately futile attempt to raise a Spanish maritime force, before he was poisoned in Valladolid in 1602 by a spy to the English crown. Two years later, England and Spain signed the Treaty of London, and in doing so, theoretically ended any further hopes of Spanish military intervention in Ireland for the immediate future.<sup>14</sup>

In the aftermath of Kinsale, Hugh Roe's successor, Rory O'Donnell, along with O'Neill, left Ireland in 1607 with up to a hundred followers and family members for the European continent in an episode that would become known in Irish history as "The Flight of the Earls". Having landed in France, the two Gaelic Irish leaders made their way to the Vatican, where they were presented "como originarios de los reinos de Galicia, Asturias y Cantabria" and provided long-term accommodation by Felipe of Spain.<sup>15</sup>

While several plots and rumours of the men's return to Ireland as part of an alliance with the Spanish kept English officials preoccupied over the following years, nothing of this sort ever materialised. Already overstretched militarily at home and abroad, the Spanish, for their part, were reluctant to wage war with England again. O'Donnell and O'Neill would never return to their homeland. Both men died within a decade of their arrival in Rome and were interned side by side.<sup>16</sup>

Partially making up for the shortfall of manpower in the Spanish army, thousands of O'Donnell and O'Neill's fellow countrymen were welcomed into the "overextended and

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<sup>14</sup> Lennon: *Sixteenth Century Ireland: The Incomplete Conquest* (2<sup>nd</sup> ed.), pp. 300–301. One ancient Irish annal notes that upon his arrival in A Coruña, O'Donnell was "contento de haber desembarcado en dicho lugar, porque parecía ser buena señal el haber llegado en el sitio desde cuyos ancestros habían tenido poder y marchado hacia Irlanda". John O'Donovan (ed.): *Annals of the Kingdom of Ireland*, vol. vi, Dublin, University Press, 1856, p. 2293. Cited in: Óscar Recio Morales: *España y la pérdida de Ulster*, Madrid, Ediciones del Laberinto S. L, 2003, pp. 23–24 (footnote 11).

<sup>15</sup> Cited in: Recio Morales: *España y la pérdida de Ulster*, pp. 22–23.

<sup>16</sup> In 1627, overtures to the Spanish monarchy regarding another attempted invasion of Ireland were made by Owen Roe O'Neill. O'Neill's proposals centred on the idea that the Spanish monarchy would provide protection over a hypothetical Irish "Republic". See: Eduardo de Mesa: *The Irish in the Spanish Armies in the Seventeenth Century*, Suffolk, The Boydell Press, 2014, p. 75; Tomás Ó Fiaich: "Republicanism and Separatism in the Seventeenth Century", *The Republic*, issue 2, Spring/Summer 2001, pp. 25–37.

demographically exhausted” Spanish military ranks throughout the early seventeenth century. Many of these soldiers ended up fighting for the Spanish kingdom in the Netherlands and during the Portuguese and Catalan revolts of the mid-seventeenth century. A large contingent of the Irish Catholic clergy also left their homeland for Spain throughout the late sixteenth and seventeenth century. In Spain, they administered a small network of Irish colleges, often capitalising on the Milesian myth in order to extract financial assistance from the Spanish authorities.<sup>17</sup>

With land confiscations and penal laws heralding another exodus to the continent for many prominent Gaelic/Catholic families and clergy at the turn of the eighteenth century, one of the locations that this new flock of “Wild Geese” émigrés migrated to was Bizkaia. In a few years short, an Irish community of some significance was established along the banks of the river Nervion.<sup>18</sup>

### **Basque Milesians**

In the early sixteenth century, Basque merchants imported hides and leather from southern and western Irish ports in exchange for iron, wine, saffron and other commodities.<sup>19</sup> Two centuries later, many of the “Wild Geese” that emigrated to Bizkaia brought the same level of skill and expertise in the working of leather (tanning), quickly becoming market leaders in the local industry. Alongside this competitive edge in tanning, the by-now 700-year-old Milesian myth would also be of occasional assistance to the Irish community (and prospective Irish settlers) in appealing to the local Basque authorities and the Spanish crown for the betterment of their legal, social and economic rights.<sup>20</sup>

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<sup>17</sup> Igor Pérez Tostado: *Irish Influence at the Court of Spain in the Seventeenth Century*, Dublin, Four Courts Press, 2008, p. 15, pp. 27–30; Beatriz Alonso Acero: “El siglo XVII” in Hugh O’Donnell (coord.): *Presencia irlandesa en la milicia Española. The Irish Presence in the Spanish Military – 16<sup>th</sup> to 20<sup>th</sup> Centuries. International Review Of Military History*, no. 92, Madrid, 2014, pp. 43–82; Ní Lionáin: “Lebor Gabála Érenn”.

<sup>18</sup> For a comprehensive study of this community, see: Amaia Bilbao Acedos: *The Irish Community in the Basque Country c. 1700–1800*, Dublin, Geography Publications, 2003. Many “Wild Geese” followed in the footsteps of the previous generation and joined the Spanish army. By 1709, there were three Irish regiments in the Spanish army: “Irlanda”, “Hibernia” and “Ultonia”. See: Declan M. Downey: “Beneath the Harp and Burgundian Cross: Irish Regiments in the Spanish Bourbon Army, 1700–1818” in O’Donnell (coord.): *Presencia irlandesa en la milicia Española*, pp. 83–105.

<sup>19</sup> Michael M. Barkham: “The Spanish Basque Irish Fishery & Trade in the Sixteenth Century”, *History Ireland*, vol. 9, 3, 2001.

<sup>20</sup> Bilbao Acedos: *The Irish Community in the Basque Country c. 1700–1800*, p. 11, pp. 37–49, p. 82; Ní Lionáin: “Lebor Gabála Érenn”; Samuel Fannin: “Documents of Irish interest in Archivo de la Diputación Foral de Bizkaia (Bilbao)”, *Archivum Hibernicum*, vol. 64, 2011, pp. 170–193.

This pattern was not solely restricted to Bizkaia. Indeed, right across the Spanish kingdom, pockets of Irish émigrés continued to utilise the Milesian myth throughout the eighteenth century. This culminated in its *de facto* legal recognition in 1792 when an Irish Milesian “lobby”, backed by powerful merchant interests in Cadiz, secured a royal edict from Carlos IV to the effect that:

“[...] the Irish established in these dominions shall keep and maintain the privileges which they have, by which they are made equal to native Spaniards, and that the formalities of the oath, to which all other nations have been forced to submit, shall not be exacted from the Irish, seeing that by the mere fact of their settling in Spain the Irish are accounted Spaniards and enjoy the same rights”.<sup>21</sup>

If the purported Iberian origins of the Irish people had proven significant enough to be essentially codified in Spanish law by the end of the eighteenth century, an ongoing parallel awareness of the Milesian hypothesis in both Ireland and Britain may also be evidenced from the same period via the contemporary accounts of various anglophone travellers. Moreover, these testimonies frequently centred on a *Basque*-specific slant to the Iberian-Irish origin myth. Why was this so? The answer to this question probably lies in the fact that the tradition of English writing on Ireland continued to be defined by the work of Giraldus Cambrensis well into the seventeenth century.<sup>22</sup> As the reader will recall, Cambrensis was the Anglo-Norman “historian” who first promulgated a Basque-Irish connection in the interests of the Angevin King Henry II.

In “An Introduction to the Natural History and Physical Geography of Spain” (1775), the Cork (Corcaigh)-born naturalist and former resident of Bilbo, William (Guillermo) Bowles, states:

“[...] las costumbres y usos de los Vizcayanos e Irlandeses tienen tanta conformidad entre sí, que dan mucho peso a la opinión que hace descender las dos naciones de un mismo origen”.<sup>23</sup>

John Talbot Dillon, an MP in the eighteenth-century Parliament of Ireland and a frequent traveller across Europe, also compared aspects of the Irish and Basque peoples and their supposed shared origins in a contemporary account. Here it is worth quoting liberally from Dillon’s text given that he touches on many of the Irish-Iberian historical dynamics that have been covered, thus far, in this chapter:

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<sup>21</sup> Fannin: “Documents of Irish interest in Archivo de la Diputación Foral de Bizkaia (Bilbao)”. Quote cited in: “Irish Connections with Spain”. Visit of Spanish Prime Minister. Sr. D. Felipe González. 2014/32/1376. National Archives of Ireland (NAI).

<sup>22</sup> Hadfield: “Briton and Scythian: Tudor Representations of Irish Origins”.

<sup>23</sup> Guillermo Bowles: *Introducción a la historia natural y a la geografía física de España* (2nd ed.), Madrid, Imprenta Real, 1782, pp. 324–325.

“The manners of the Biscayners, and the ancient Irish, are so familiar on many occasions, as to encourage the notion of [the Irish] being descended from [Biscay]. Both men and women are extremely fond of pilgrimages, repairing from great distances to the churches of their patrons, or tutelary saints, singing and dancing, till they almost drop down with fatigue [...]. The *Guizonos* of Biscay, and the *Boulamkeighs* of Ireland are nearly alike: at all these assemblies, they knock out one another’s brains, on the most trivial provocation, without malice or rancour, and without using a knife or a dagger. In both countries the common people are passionate, easily provoked if their family is slighted, or their descent called in question. [...] In Ireland the poor eat out of one dish with their fingers, and sit in their smoaky [sic] cabins without chimnies [sic], as well as the Biscayners. [...] the poor Biscayner, though haughty, is laborious and active, an example worthy to be imitated by the Irish. So many concurring circumstances support the idea of their [sic] having been one originally one [sic] people. It cannot be denied, but that the old Irish, whether from similitudes of customs, religion, and traditional notions, or whatever else may be the cause, have always been attached to the Spaniards, who on their side, perhaps from political views, have treated them with reciprocal affection, granting them many privileges, and stiling [sic] them even *Oriundos* in their laws, as a colony descended from Spain; yet with all these advantages, if we except those gallant soldiers who have distinguished themselves in the field wherever they have served, few Irish have made a conspicuous figure in Spain, or have left great wealth to their families. The king of Spain has no other title over these free people, than that, of Lord of Biscay, as the Kings of England formerly held over Ireland [...]”.<sup>24</sup>

Similar Basque-Irish commonalities in dress and appearance were witnessed by an English barrister in law Michael J. Quin in “A Visit to Spain” (1823).<sup>25</sup> A little over a decade later, American naval officer and author Alexander Slidell-Mackenzie noted many Basque similarities to the Irish and Scottish “Gael” whilst ambling about Vitoria-Gasteiz on market day:

“[...] the early Irish or Milesians derive their origins from Spain; circumstances, in connexion with the striking identities to which we have alluded, which not only show the common Celtic origin of the Navarrese, the Vascongades, the Highland Scotch, and the Irish, but likewise render it probable that the latter had their immediate origin in the former”.<sup>26</sup>

Finally, Edward Bell Stephens in “The Basque Provinces” (1837) observed that the Bizkaians:

“[...] differ so much in one material respect from the Irish, that I can scarcely believe the latter have any fair claim to a common origin, (although it is politely conceded by the Biscayans, and natives of Ireland are by virtue of their birth-right free of the corporations of Bilbao, being entitled to trade, settle and open shop in that capital,—a privilege they do not enjoy in the *soi-distant* liberal metropolis of

<sup>24</sup> John Talbot Dillon: *Travels through Spain*, London, G. Robinson, 1780, pp. 167–169.

<sup>25</sup> Michael J. Quin: *A Visit to Spain*, London, Hurst, Robinson & Co., 1823, pp. 41–42.

<sup>26</sup> Alexander Slidell-McKenzie: *Spain Revisited*, London, Richard Bentley. New Burlington Street, 1836, pp. 265–267.

England), viz. their remarkable sobriety, notwithstanding the abundance of wine and aguardiente in the country”.<sup>27</sup>

While it is outside the scope of this study to delve into an extensive analysis of these (and quite likely other extant and relevant) texts, these late eighteenth/early nineteenth century dispatches, pockmarked by a Basque-centric orbit to the Milesian origin myth, demonstrate a continued awareness of this hypothesis, at the very least, among the educated and professional classes.<sup>28</sup>

The above extracts from Slidell-Mackenzie and Stephens were both written during the First Carlist War (1833–1840). This conflict, as referred to earlier, was perhaps at its fiercest in Hegoalde, where the cause of Don Carlos had broad support among the Basque and Navarrese population. In Britain, party-political opinion divided between the Liberal “Whigs” and the “Tory” Conservatives. Under the former, the British government sent an Auxiliary Legion of approximately 10,000 men, including four dedicated Irish regiments, to fight on the side of Queen Isabella II. Criticising the liberal intervention, a leading Conservative from the House of Lords, Henry Howard Molyneux, likened the Basque position vis-à-vis Spain to the Scottish and Irish within the UK. Using this transnational analogy, Molyneux accused the “Whigs” of hypocrisy in siding with the enemies of “common law” against its strongest proponents: the Basques.<sup>29</sup>

Interestingly, at precisely the same time, a handful of Basque representatives from the Bizkaian Provincial Council were making reciprocal analogies to the UK (and the status of Ireland and Scotland) in appealing directly to Isabella for the maintenance of Basque foral rights in the 1837 Spanish Constitution. In the view of Agirreazkuenaga, this departure signalled a new Basque tactic in arguing for the retention of the *foruak* by appealing to “Basque singularity, defined as a nationality”, alongside comparisons (of Spain) with other European kingdoms “and in particular to the United Kingdom”:

“Successions, marriages, and wars from states that are said to have a composite order and to which class Navarre and the Basque Provinces belong with respect to Castile, in the same way as Scotland, Ireland, and Hannover with respect to England [...] in the British Empire. The superiority acquired through English arms in the civil wars and wars of succession that have occurred in different periods in Ireland

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<sup>27</sup> Edward Bell Stephens: *The Basque Provinces*, London, Whittaker & Co., 1837, p. 152.

<sup>28</sup> Santiago Leoné and Jeremy MacClancy have pointed out that what travellers to the Basque Country “find and see is also conditioned by all the previous knowledge they have brought along with them. Up to a certain degree, then, we could say that what the travellers find and see is what they have chosen to find and see”. See: Santiago Leoné, Jeremy MacClancy: “Introduction: Sighting Euskal Herria” in Santiago Leoné, Jeremy MacClancy (eds.): *Imagining the Basques: Foreign Views on the Basque Country*, Donostia, Eusko Ikaskuntza, 2008, pp. 9–15 (quote on p. 9).

<sup>29</sup> Agirreazkuenaga: *The Making of the Basque Question*, pp. 167–169.

and Scotland has never been used to deprive their courageous inhabitants of their nationality and particular legislation [...]. The constitution formed in Cádiz restored and expanded the old and forgotten fueros of the crown of Castile and Aragón, while at the same time it stripped the Basques of their nationality and fundamental laws and reduced their social possessions”.<sup>30</sup>

Notwithstanding these first exhibits of Basque-Irish *political* analogies in the *Age of Modernity*, it is worth bearing in mind at this juncture that the *long dureé* Basque-Irish “connection” up to this point must be understood in the first regard—and as the evidence in this section (2.1.) has demonstrated— primarily in terms of an overarching folkloric origin-led *association* grounded in the broader often-overlapping British/Irish-Spanish/Basque historical contexts. And while, as we have seen, there existed utilisations of politically-edged allusions and allegorical connotations pertaining to this association as far back as the late 12<sup>th</sup> century, it would be anachronistic to conflate such associations to any connection between Irish and Basque political *nationalism* at this stage. Indeed, the latter of these two phenomena would not be articulated into a coherent ideology and organisational movement until the tail end of the nineteenth century. Moreover, as Rubio has suggested, any expressed Basque “singularity” or “nationality” prior to the first organised political party expression of Basque nationalism (PNV) tended to be compatible within the framework of an inclusive Basque-Spanish “double patriotism”.<sup>31</sup>

These important caveats aside, the introduction of a limited transnational exchange of information (in print) regarding contemporary *political* issues in Ireland and the Basque provinces specifically around claims for political autonomy (loss of Basque *foruak*, claims for Irish Home Rule) in the decades leading up to the founding of the PNV would indeed begin to alter the prevailing dynamics of the hitherto Basque-Irish “connection”. In summation, with the relative congruity of the campaign for Home Rule in Ireland and the fallout from the Third Carlist War leading to the complete loss of *foruak* in the Basque provinces, the central pillar for a potential (discursive and analogous) political nexus based on a common alignment of autonomous-based grievances and aspirations was already in place by the time Sabino Arana Goiri’s PNV was established in 1895.

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<sup>30</sup> Ibid., pp. 206–207. This partial (and translated) extract is taken directly from Agirreazkuenaga’s text on page 207. The original source provided by the author is: Bizkaiko Foru Artxiboa-Archivo Foral de Bizakia, *Libro de Actas de los Regimientos Generales Diputaciones del Señorío de Vizcaya, de veinticinco de noviembre de 1833 a tres de septiembre de 1836*: “Acuerdo del 24 de Mayo de 1836” Sign.: AJ00149/001; Gipuzkoako Artxibo Orokorra-Archivo General de Gipuzkoa: Sec.1, no. 11, folder 96.

<sup>31</sup> Coro Rubio: *La identidad vasca en el siglo XIX: discurso y agentes sociales*, Madrid, Biblioteca Nueva, 2003, pp. 153–176.



## **The germination of a Basque-Irish nationalist nexus “if it pleases Heaven, some future day”**

Arthur Welsley etched his name into Spanish history in 1813 when the Dublin-born “Duke of Wellington” led a combined British, Spanish and Portuguese force to victory over a French army on the outskirts of Vitoria-Gasteiz. Not only did Welsley’s victory in Araba prove to be a significant moment in what would become known as the Spanish War of Independence, but the liberation of Spain itself hastened the ultimate defeat of Revolutionary France at Waterloo two years later. Louis XVII was subsequently restored to the French throne for the second time in July 1815. Louis’ restoration finally bookended a period of revolutionary fervour that had swept across Europe since 1789.

As briefly mentioned in chapter one, this French-centric era of European history triggered the emergence and coming to prominence of the nation-state (and its guiding ideology of nationalism) as the major prevailing *political* thread in a constellation of related changes to the economic, geographical (urban-rural), cultural and social fabric of European society.<sup>32</sup>

Dovetailing with the rise of nationalist ideology and the nation-state during the early period of *modernity*, was an exponential advancement in mass print media, communications, and the proliferation of the “national” newspaper. As the nationalist theorist Benedict Anderson has premised: these communication developments, working in tandem with national education systems, provided a crucial platform for the synergising and proliferation of coherent national narratives and “imagined communities”. One of the first and most important organs for the articulation of an Anderson-esque “imagined community” in the Irish context came in the shape of the nationalist newspaper, *The Nation*, launched in 1842.<sup>33</sup>

Notwithstanding the significance of the advent of newspapers such as *The Nation* in the mid-nineteenth century, a broad mass of Irish nationalist sentiment had already begun to coalesce around the Catholic “Liberator” Daniel O’Connell.<sup>34</sup> Having won a seat for Clare (Cláir) in the UK General Election of 1828, O’Connell rose to prominence by challenging and successfully overturning the legal bar on Catholics sitting in Westminster. Once this Catholic “emancipation” had been achieved, O’Connell threw his

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<sup>32</sup> T.C.W. Blanning: “Conclusion: the French Revolution and beyond” in T.C.W. Blanning (ed.): *The Eighteenth Century, 1688–1815*, New York, Oxford University Press, 2000, pp. 247–254.

<sup>33</sup> For Anderson, the nation is “an imagined political community – and imagined as both inherently limited and sovereign”. Anderson: *Imagined Communities*, p. 6, pp. 33–36.

<sup>34</sup> English: *Irish Freedom*, pp. 127–129.



weight behind the campaign for the repeal of the Act of Union that had formally wedded the kingdoms and parliaments of Great Britain and Ireland in 1801.

Ever the master propagandist, one of O’Connell’s primary tactics in this struggle was to stage a series of “monster meetings” across the country. In August 1843, the “Liberator” addressed up to one and a half million people on the Hill of Tara (Teamhrach) — the traditional seat of the Gaelic High Kings of Ireland.<sup>35</sup> A subsequent report in *The Nation* speaks to the mutual reciprocity of growing mass Irish nationalist sentiment and the effectiveness of the new communicative tools in cultivating and harnessing this momentum into a coherent and powerful national narrative:

“The strength and majesty of the national movement never were exhibited so imposingly as at this great meeting. The numbers exceeded any that ever before congregated in Ireland in peace or war. The enthusiasm was equally without precedent [...] [the people’s] will is irresistible; and any man having a shadow of doubt of their moderation or virtue, must, of necessity desire to see the awful power they possess quickly transferred to the calmer keeping of a domestic legislature, to Whig or Tory, this is now the lesser of two evils — the choice is between the Senate and the Pretorian [sic] Guards. The history of Tara is proud and old, but it never saw so proud a sight as this meeting. No council of Princes and feudal chiefs could have equalled in simple majesty this assembly of an educated, intelligent, unarmed PEOPLE. It was not, as of old, a nation represented by its dynasts that the old hill rejoiced to bear — but the nation itself, in its own thews and sinews, and virtue, and intellect. It was a free Parliament of the people without delegation — a grander spectacle, and one dearer to liberty, than our forefathers ever beheld [...]. Step by step we are approaching the great goal itself; but it is at length with the strides of a giant”.<sup>36</sup>

Unlike the eighteenth-century Irish Parliament, which was made up entirely from the minority Protestant ascendancy, the nationalist groundswell around O’Connell may be considered as a distinctively *modern* phenomenon. Notwithstanding the overblown nationalist rhetoric around O’Connell’s campaign (as above), fundamentally his was a movement that was at least theoretically grounded in the aspirational notions of a non-sectarian popular sovereignty in which every individual was a potential political actor: an “assembly of an educated, intelligent, unarmed PEOPLE”.<sup>37</sup>

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<sup>35</sup> Kee: *The Green Flag*, p. 208.

<sup>36</sup> “Monster Meeting at Tara”, *The Nation*, 19.08.1843.

<sup>37</sup> As Delanty and O’Mahony note during a discussion on different forms of nationalism and nationalist theories: “It is not the inherent popularity of statehood or constructions of history that has played the primary role in the appeal of nationalism but the notion of political community that lies behind it. That is the community of the *demos*, the essential belief in the basic equality of all people who are members of the polity”. See: Gerard Delanty, Patrick O’Mahony; *Nationalism and Social Theory. Modernity and the Recalcitrance of the Nation*, London, Sage Publications, 2002, p. 12.

One of the nationalist trappings utilised by O’Connell at the “monster meetings” to convey this sense of Irish popular nationalism was his wearing of a so-called “Milesian Cap”, symbolically reinforcing the idea of Ireland as a historic sovereign nation.<sup>38</sup> If the Irish people constituted a historic sovereign nation, identifiably separate from England/Britain and with a legitimate claim to some form of self-government, it would perhaps behave nineteenth-century Irish nationalists, in an age of great European nationalist narratives, to articulate and position their nation within the grand historic sweep of its European contemporaries. Did the Basque people/provinces appear in this schema? And if so, how were they perceived?

Although references to the Basques in *The Nation* are quite fleeting, those that do occur, illustrate the first tentative utilisations and allegorisations of coetaneous Basque issues by Irish nationalists. In the newspaper’s first year of publication, during a discussion of the French historian Augustin Thierry’s research into different European peoples, the Basques are referred to as “a race [...] at all times independent”.<sup>39</sup> Themes around the Basques usually centred on their mysterious origins, or their relative political and economic standing within Spain. The following 1847 extract in which land relations across the Spanish kingdom are discussed, exemplifies both of these strands:

“In Biscay a still more agreeable state of things is found [in comparison to the rest of Spain]. These fine old Basque provinces, along with their ancient local government and judicature, have retained their system of peasant-lords. Most of the farms are tilled by their owners, who are called *echejaunae* — that is, ‘lords of the house:’ and it is accounted disgraceful in a man to sell the patrimonial house or land. The soil is mountainous and barren; but the industry and energy of men working for themselves and their own families has made the very rocks fruitful. There is nowhere in Europe a nobler and more high-spirited peasantry than the Celts of ancient Biscay. They are near akin to us, these bold Biscayans; and shall be allies, if it pleases Heaven, some future day”.<sup>40</sup>

This highly idealised description of the “fine old Basque provinces” would have contrasted starkly with a perilous contemporary land system in Ireland that left the

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<sup>38</sup> In the view of Ní Lionáin: “O’Connell’s use of Milesian imagery made reference, not to the Spanish origin of the Irish, but to the ancient tradition of independent sovereignty that the Milesians’ arrival initiated in Ireland. Over time, as the origin myth was used exclusively in an Irish political context, the Spanish element diminished in importance, with Ireland’s glorious past and independent sovereignty, rather than its Iberian beginnings, being promoted. This contrasts to previous centuries when the origin myth was used in Irish-Hispano political dialogue, and emphasis was firmly placed on the Spanish origin of the Irish and the ancient kinship between both countries”. See: Ní Lionáin: “Lebor Gabála Éirenn” (quote on p. 40). It is worth recalling that O’Connell’s own vision and appetite for this sovereignty only extended as far as some form of Home Rule/autonomous government for Ireland within the UK and British Empire.

<sup>39</sup> “Continental Literature”, *The Nation*, 03.12.1842.

<sup>40</sup> “The Land Tenures of Europe”, *The Nation*, 09.10.1847.

majority of the population highly vulnerable to unsecured tenures. Meanwhile, the intriguing reference to “the Celts of ancient Biscay” as future allies is reflective of a romantic form of cultural nationalism that became *en vogue* across Europe throughout the nineteenth century. This tendency saw the mysterious origins of pre- and post-Romanised Europe pored over by linguists, archaeologists and historians alike, often directly or inadvertently servicing the formation of great national and nation-state narratives. Speculative articles on the Basques and theories surrounding their possible Celtic origins, ethnic lineage and language were to crop up sporadically in the pages of *The Nation* in the 1850s and 1860s.<sup>41</sup>

From the mid-1870s onwards, a more overtly *political* transnational analogy may be evidenced in *The Nation* around the newspaper’s coverage of the Third Carlist War (1872–1876). This discourse would be characterised by support for the somewhat simplistically homogenised “Basques” and “Navarrese” in their struggle against the liberal forces. The underlining rationale for *The Nation*’s stance, as the following extracts illustrate, was essentially one born out of concern for the Basque apparatus of self-government, embodied in the *foruak* and referred to in the Irish politically-colloquial language of “Home Rule”:

“The towns and hamlets of Catalonia, Aragon, Valencia, and Murcia, may still harbour as many Carlist sympathisers as ever, but the militant power of Don Carlos is once more confined behind the mountain fastness of the loyal North. In the North itself the decisive struggle has begun, and it would be idle to deny that the odds are enormously against the heroic peasantry of Biscay and Navarre. We may be sure, indeed, that they will continue to prove themselves worthy of their splendid reputation. [...] The *fueros*, those treasured relics of the provincial autonomy and wise decentralisation that were once the common property of medieval Spain, are to be totally abolished. The centralist parliament at Madrid, elected under the manipulation of the Ministry of the hour, and ultimately subject to the dictation of riots and *pronunciamentos*, is to be the sole organ of government, and the ‘peace of Warsaw’ is to descend on Spain. The Basques and Navarrese fight for Home Rule even more than for Don Carlos; and Don Alfonso’s triumph —worthy of its militarist source— will extend to the last free provinces of Spain the dead-level of passive obedience which has so long cursed the rest of the nation”.<sup>42</sup>

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<sup>41</sup> D. George Boyce: *Nineteenth Century Ireland: The Search for Stability*, Dublin, Gill & MacMillan, 2005, pp. 105–136. Interestingly, there is evidence to suggest that during his first tenure in office, the British Prime Minister William Gladstone may have looked to the Basque land system as a model that could potentially mollify Irish land agitation. See: “El pueblo más hermoso de Europa”, *Aberri*, no. 26, 27.10.1906. Under Gladstone, the first of a series of limited reforms to land ownership in Ireland was introduced by way of the Irish Land Act in 1870. For the emergence of Irish and Basque national narratives in a broader European context, see: Giovanni Costigan: “Romantic Nationalism: Ireland and Europe”, *Irish University Review*, vol. 3, no. 2, 1973, pp. 141–152; Mees: “Ethnogenesis in the Pyrenees”. For Basque references in *The Nation*, see: “Vindicle Celtica. Who are the Celts?”, *The Nation*, 08.03.1851; “‘Keltic’ or ‘Celtic’”, *The Nation*, 03.04.1869; “Celtic Antiquities”, 17.04.1869.

<sup>42</sup> “The situation in Spain”, *The Nation*, 09.10.1875.

“They fought not only for the cause of their legitimate monarch, but for their own liberties —for, in fact, the Home Rule the Basque provinces for centuries had enjoyed, and which was being filched away by modern governors. The provincial parliaments and all the privileges occurred by them, we fear, must now be considered at an end and though we may admire the courage, heroism, and endurance these peasants of Navarre and Biscay have displayed, the lessons taught by their effort is, on the whole, a sad and discouraging one”.<sup>43</sup>

As one long-standing MP for Limerick, Richard O’Shaughnessy, remarked in the Westminster House of Commons in 1877, the Basques were seemingly a “people having considerable analogies with the Irish [...]”. Indeed, Irish nationalist concern for the Basque provinces’ loss of autonomy came just prior to the first major parliamentary attempt to force through a limited form of Home Rule at Westminster in 1886. In this respect, a broad convergence of parallel mutual grievance and aspiration around the issue of autonomy is evident *ex-post* between proponents of Irish Home Rule (nationalists) and defenders of Basque autonomous “fueroismo” (*fueroista*) at this juncture.<sup>44</sup>

We have seen how the revocation of the Basque *foruak* in the aftermath of the Third Carlist War provided a “sad and discouraging” lesson for Irish nationalists. In Bilbo, the *fueroista* “Sociedad Euskalerria” cited Ireland (alongside Austria-Hungary) as an emulative reference for the recuperation of Basque political autonomous rights on the occasion of its inauguration in 1881:

“[...] pedimos para nosotros algo de lo que han conseguido los húngaros y están consiguiendo los bohemios en Austria; mucho de lo que piden y algún día conseguirán los irlandeses en Gran Bretaña”.<sup>45</sup>

Two contemporary works by influential political figures, the traditionalist Carlist and Mayor of Bilbo José María de Lizana (1881) and the republican industrialist Francisco de Goitia (1891), further demonstrate a hitherto relatively undocumented analogisation of

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<sup>43</sup> “The Week”, *The Nation*, 04.03.1876. See also: “Carlist War”, *The Nation*, 29.04.1876; “Carlist War”, *The Nation*, 20.05.1876.

<sup>44</sup> “Resolution”. HC Deb 16 March 1877 vol 233 cc17-51. <https://api.parliament.uk/historic-hansard/commons/1877/mar/16/resolution> (last accessed 27 February 2019). On the complicated gestation of “fueroismo”, Mees surmises that: “In 1876, after the liberal victory in the last Carlist War and due to the Basque support of the traditionalists, the status of self-government was definitively abolished. This drastic measure provoked the opposition even of the Basque liberals, who proposed a reform and an updating of the traditional laws, the ‘*Fueros*’, but not their abolition. ‘*Fueroismo*’, i.e. the huge social movement which was started with the aim of recovering the lost freedoms of the Basque people, can be considered a more culturally than politically successful proto-nationalist movement, which stimulated the shaping of a Basque national consciousness which, nonetheless, was not yet completely incompatible with a Spanish identity”. See: Mees: *Nationalism, Violence and Democracy*, pp. 7–8.

<sup>45</sup> “Nuestros deseos”, *La Unión Vasco-Navarra*, 20.04.1881. Cited in: Ander Delgado Cendagortagarza: “El fueroismo, el Home Rule Bill y la política británica: el contexto internacional en los inicios del movimiento nacionalista vasco (1890–1903)”, *Historia Contemporánea*, no. 25, 2002 (quote on p. 296).

Irish nationalist issues in Basque affairs. Published ten years apart, both authors utilised Ireland and the “Irish Question” as a referential foil in calling for a restoration of the Basque *foruak*.<sup>46</sup>

Interpreting Basque-Irish comparisons from a contemporary British perspective, the three-time Prime Minister, Robert Arthur Talbot Gascoyne-Cecil (Lord Salisbury), reportedly drew analogies between the Irish nation and its place within the British Empire to that of the Basques, Flemings and Bretons in France. Salisbury was quickly rebuked by *The Nation*, which witheringly claimed his analogy to be “on a par with the logic of a schoolboy”.<sup>47</sup>

While the above examples indicate a growing alignment of grievance and aspiration on the grounds of political autonomy (or a lack thereof) between what were essentially Basque “prenacionalistas” and Irish nationalists, analogies could also be found in regard to mutual Basque and Irish cultural and folkloric retreat. A review in *The Nation* of “Legends and Popular Tales of the Basque People”, written by Mariana Monteiro and published in 1890, speaks to this second analogous strand. The reviewer tells the story of Lémor/Jaun Zuria — the Irish-Basque hero referred to at the beginning of this chapter. He then laments the apparent twilight of an “immemorial” Basque people “shrinking before the curled sneer of the sceptical and scoffing nineteenth century. Another of its conquests!”. In this he sees parallels with Ireland, where “even the most rustic husbandman appears ashamed to recount the tales which at one time he listened to with enthusiasm and implicit faith”.<sup>48</sup>

If the above extracts typify a certain strand of doom-laden Irish nationalist thinking at the end of the nineteenth century, there were others who saw in the emerging “Gaelic

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<sup>46</sup> Francisco de Goitia: *La cuestión de Irlanda y la vascongada*, San Sebastián, Imp. La Voz de Guipúzcoa, 1891; José María de Lizana: *Cartas irlandesas y húngaras. Precedidas de una carta vascongada de D. Antonio de Trueba*, Bilbao, Viuda de Delmas, 1881. For a more detailed analysis of De Lizana and De Goitia’s texts and their implications regarding the issues of Basque autonomy and identity, see: Corcuera Atienza: *The Origins, Ideology, and Organization of Basque Nationalism, 1876–1903*, pp. 104–105, p. 421 (footnote 127).

<sup>47</sup> “Lord Salisbury in Wales”, *The Nation*, 14.04.1888.

<sup>48</sup> “Legends of the Basques”, *The Nation*, 03.01.1891. Basque folkloric tales of oral tradition were first collected by an English scholar, Wentworth Webster, in the 1870s and published in 1877 under the title: *Basque Legends, Collected Chiefly in the Labourd*. Webster’s book was dedicated to Antoine d’Abbadie, a fellow language scholar and Irish-Basque (French) noble, born in Ireland in 1810. See: David Hopkin: “Wentworth Webster and the Basque Question in Victorian Britain and Beyond” in *Bérose - Encyclopédie internationale des histoires de l’anthropologie*, Paris, IIAC-LAHIC, 2015.

Revival” the kernel of a movement that would in time coalesce around a slogan and political outlook simply referred to as “Sinn Féin” – “We Ourselves”.<sup>49</sup>

Appearing as a newspaper in 1902 and morphing into a political party under Arthur Griffith in 1905, Sinn Féin sought to vie —unsuccessfully for the first decade of its existence— with the dominant Irish Parliamentary Party for the hearts and minds of nationalist Ireland. In contrast to the IPP’s political strategy, Sinn Féin proposed a radical application of the principle of Irish sovereignty. Rather than sitting in Westminster, the party vowed to abstain from London and constitute an Irish parliament in Dublin.

Meanwhile, in the Basque Country, the first core tenets of organised Basque nationalism were being articulated publicly by Sabino Arana Goiri and his older brother Luis from the early-1890s onwards.<sup>50</sup>

The coetaneous Basque-Irish dynamic, initially grounded in and framed by the then millennia-old mythologies of Ireland’s purported peopling from Iberia, now contained the seeds of a transnational nexus around core grievances and aspirations for political autonomy that could be blown either way across the Bay of Biscay and Celtic Sea. How this newly prevailing Basque-Irish dynamic would manifest itself within mutually explicit nationalist contexts from 1895 onwards is the focus of the following section.

### **A Basque-Irish nationalist nexus, 1895–1915 (*north to south*)**

The maiden branch of the PNV was established in Bilbo, 1895. In a way, this was the culmination of a political vision first gesticulated to Sabino in conversation with his brother Luis thirteen years previously: namely that Bizkaia (and latterly the Basque provinces) constituted an independent sovereign entity entirely separate from Spain. And while the two brothers invented various tenets of Basque nationalism, including the flag (*ikurriña*), territorial name (*Euzkadi/Euskadi*) and anthem (*Eusko Abendaren Ereserkia*), it would be inaccurate to suggest that they “invented” Basque nationalism *per se*. For as Mees convincingly argues, the PNV project was not only on a response to immediate contemporary factors on the ground (mass immigration, industrialisation, castilianization, fuerismo, etc.), but it was also the accumulative outworking of a *long durée* Basque ethno-particularism. In short, Basque nationalism could not, and would not, have gained substantial traction in Hegoalde had it just been fabricated *ex nihilo*. Moreover, given that

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<sup>49</sup> Brian Feeney: *Sinn Féin. A Hundred Turbulent Years*, Dublin, O’Brien Press, 2002, pp. 18–20; Kee: *The Green Flag*, pp. 426–437; Ó Broin: *Sinn Féin and the Politics of Left Republicanism*, p. 178.

<sup>50</sup> Arana synergised and published his political vision in *Bizkaya por su independencia* in 1892. See: Sabino Arana Goiri: *Bizkaya por su independencia* (3<sup>rd</sup> ed.), Bilbao, Geu, 1980.



membership of the PNV effectively guaranteed political and juridical repression, the party's success as the key driver of a political, social, and cultural national movement is further indicative of the fertile ground from which it emerged.<sup>51</sup>

Composed of the traditional lower-middle and urban classes, alongside conservative *fuera* on the fringes of the party, the first few years of the PNV were largely underpinned by the political-religious societal vision of Sabino. He espoused for the complete independence of a confederation of sovereign Basque territories: "Euzkadi". Only in this way could the Basque race save itself from an oppressive and morally corrupt Spain.<sup>52</sup>

This core political idea and Sabino Arana's own resulting legacy would be somewhat complicated, however, when shortly prior to his death in 1903, the *Maestro* underwent an "evolución españolista" in his thinking, which saw him change tack and accept a hypothetical autonomous arrangement for "Euzkadi" within the Spanish state. Arana's pivot has been cited as emblematic of several historically ambiguous positions taken up by the PNV on substantive issues ever since.<sup>53</sup>

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<sup>51</sup> See: Mees: "Ethnogenesis in the Pyrenees". Similarly, Flynn suggests that "the PNV appeal would have been negligible if some Basque resonance had not already existed". See: Flynn: *Ideology, Mobilisation and the Nation*, p. 162. Muro states that: "Since Basque nationalism reared its head in 1895 (founding of the BBB [Bizkai Buru Batzar]) it has been repressed (Arana and sympathisers imprisoned)". Diego Muro: *Ethnicity and Violence: The Case of Radical Basque Nationalism*, London and New York, Routledge, 2008, p. 55.

<sup>52</sup> According to Mees: "[The PNV's] first followers were recruited among sectors of the traditional urban, lower middle classes, who saw themselves as victims of modernization, displaced from the centre to the periphery of society and under pressure both from the socialist labour movement and from the small clan of the politically and economically leading elite of the financial and industrial oligarchy. [...] The solution to all the problems and the way to never-ending happiness for the Basques, in the eyes of Sabino Arana, would come through the reaffirmation of their own history, culture and race, the consequent expulsion of everything considered external to that tradition and the recuperation of the old independence by restoration of the *Fueros*". Mees: *Nationalism, Violence and Democracy*, pp. 9–10. It is interesting to note that early Basque nationalism did *not* seek a unified nation-state typical to nineteenth century European norms. As Flynn observes: "Loyal to a new nation without a nation-state precedent, Basque nationalists applied decentralized regionalist tendencies as absolutes that defied national conceptualization, even within the Basque provinces, in unitary terms and instead called for the establishment of a confederacy". Flynn: *Ideology, Mobilisation and the Nation*, p. 172.

<sup>53</sup> Historians of Basque nationalism have referred to this PNV phenomenon as a "patriotic pendulum". See: De Pablo, Mees: *El Péndulo Patriótico*. It is worth emphasising here that Basque sub-state nationalism preceded late-eighteenth century/nineteenth century Spanish and French nationalism, which through centralised education, media, monuments and national symbols, etc., promoted the Spanish and French nation-states, respectively. For a comprehensive historical account of these dialectic Spanish-Basque and French-Basque processes, which continue to the present, see: Watson: *Modern Basque History: Eighteenth Century to the Present*. Ercegovac's dissertation on Basque, Irish and Croatian nationalist mobilisation also deals with similar dialectic processes. Ercegovac: *Competing National Ideologies. Cyclical Responses: The Mobilization of the Irish, Basque and Croat National Movements to Rebellion Against the State* (PhD Dissertation).



Throughout the first two decades of the PNV's existence (1895–1915), Ireland served as a frequently referenced external case study in the party's international lexicon.<sup>54</sup> As posited in the previous section, the *primary* gravitational pull in this interest was the congruity of grievances and aspirations around political autonomy in each territory. Other more self-evident factors facilitated the easy drawing of parallels and analogies across both cases: Ireland and the Basque Country were relatively small territories in western Europe of a similarly strong Catholic vocation. They also constituted minor territories of broader political unions (Kingdom of Spain, Kingdom of Great Britain and Ireland) and transcontinental empires (Spanish Empire and British Empire). Furthermore, for many Basque and Irish nationalists, the exponential debilitation of Euskara and Gaeilge called into question the very survival of their respective peoples and nations.

Between 1895 and 1915, Irish-centric discourse around the above themes was to appear sporadically across a range of periodicals officially published by, or associated with, the PNV and its wider movement: *Euskalduna* (1896–1909), *Euzkadi* (1901–1915), *La Patria* (1903–1906), *Aberri* (1906–1908) and *Bizkaitarra* (1909–1911), among others. Dissecting this period, a divergence between autonomist and more orthodox “Aranist” sectors of the PNV became increasingly visible post-1906.<sup>55</sup> However, despite this internal schism within the party, it is important to note that there is no evidence to suggest a discernible or meaningful deviation of opinion on Irish matters within the PNV along the lines of this fissure prior to 1916.

In his article “Ecos de Pascua”, Núñez Seixas suggests that the principal function of the early PNV's external discourse (and by extension its broad approach to Irish nationalism) was to essentially flag pertinent issues to the party and gesticulate these towards specific PNV policy objectives.<sup>56</sup> Within this transnational schema, intermittent analyses of the IPP's advances towards Home Rule could be analogised and compared directly and indirectly to the Basques' own lack of political autonomy. This, in turn, provoked debate regarding the possible appropriateness of harnessing and imitating aspects of the constitutionalist Irish (Home Rule) model towards the objectives of Basque nationalism. For example:

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<sup>54</sup> Ugalde Zubiri: *La Acción Exterior del Nacionalismo Vasco*, pp. 67–154.

<sup>55</sup> Santiago de Pablo, Ludger Mees, José A. Rodríguez Ranz: *El Péndulo Patriótico. Historia del Partido Nacionalista Vasco I: 1895-1936*, Barcelona, Crítica, 1999, pp. 74–79.

<sup>56</sup> Núñez Seixas suggests that “los modelos exteriores fueron seleccionados en función de la mayor o menor semejanza percibida entre los objetivos del PNV y los problemas de otros pueblos fuese la situación de la lengua nacional, el pasado histórico e institucional o el factor confesional”. Núñez Seixas: “Ecos de Pascua” (quote on p. 453).

“Muchos puntos de semejanza presenta la historia de Irlanda con la historia de Euskaria. Ambas vivían en otros tiempos muy felices al amparo de sus leyes propias, y las dos las perdieron por causa de la política absorbente y asimiladora, y desde entonces sus desgracias han ido en aumento [...]. Y a este fin Parnell se mueve, se agita, dirige su palabra al pueblo, le expone las incontestables ventajas de la unión y consigue formar de nuevo el partido nacionalista irlandés, del que forman parte el clero y el proletariado, la clase media y la riqueza, y con fuerzas tan importantes consigue llevar al parlamento británico unos ochenta diputados nacionalistas que estando siempre en la lucha combatiendo sin caer al gobierno inglés y sin jamás humillarse ni ceder a los halagos, llegan a convencer al jefe del partido liberal W. Gladstone de la razón de sus pretensiones. De creer es que de seguir en esta misma actitud de franca oposición y de unión de aspiraciones, consiga pronto Irlanda realizar una gran parte de su programa político [...]. ¡Todos estos hermosos frutos los ha dado la unión de un pueblo! En Euskaria ocurre todo lo contrario; desunión en todos, ninguna fijeza en las ideas; sus diputados complacientísimos con los jefes de los partidos españoles, se convierten en agentes de negocios oficiales y para nada tienen en cuenta las aspiraciones de su país; únicamente procuran a todo trance, aún a costa de concesiones que jamás debieran hacer, la amistad ministerial para servir mejor a sus paniaguados y muy frecuentemente sus particulares intereses. Con esta política tan pequeña, rastrera y nada independiente, Euskaria tiene que sucumbir, porque el pueblo no ha llegado a comprender los nefastos frutos que produce, y si lo comprende carece de valor y de energía para desprenderse de ella y adoptar la de unión para formar el partido exclusivamente euskeriano que, como sucede a Irlanda, es el único que puede salvarnos. En medio de nuestra desgracia, a la que no vemos el fin, no podemos menos de exclamar a imitación de Irlanda ¡Dios proteja a Euskaria!”<sup>57</sup>

“Si ahora los nacionalistas irlandeses no se muestran contrariados por las medidas de represión que se les anuncia, por estar seguros que serán saludables para su país, mañana nosotros estaremos también perfectamente tranquilos cuando se nos diga que terminado el actual Concierto económico no es posible concertar otro nuevo, porque de esta manera los naturales de Euskalerría obrarán como verdaderos hijos de este País, porque habrá desaparecido la tenue venda que cubría sus ojos, verán con toda claridad la enormidad del mal en que nos hallamos sumidos, y una vez conocida no es posible sean indiferentes a tanta desgracia”.<sup>58</sup>

The advancement of the Irish Home Rule campaign at the end of the nineteenth/early twentieth century was, of course, just the latest symptom of a wider “Irish Question” that had, by then, dominated Irish *and* British domestic politics for well over a century. This meant that for Basque nationalists, the triangle of Ireland, Britain and the British Empire could not be easily disentangled, nor could elements of this equation be blithely ignored for convenience in Basque nationalist discourse. Taking an overarching view on this matter, the balance of evidence would suggest that in as much as there was a strong current of sympathy and emulative discourse towards Irish nationalist aspirations in

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<sup>57</sup> “¡Dios proteja á Euskaria!” *Euskalduna*, no. 43, 04.07.1897.

<sup>58</sup> “Por el País”, *Euskalduna*, no. 225, 16.03.1902.

Basque nationalist publications throughout these two decades, there was at least the same admiration for Britain and her Empire. Consequently, the “Irish Question” —enmeshed within the context of Britain and her Empire— also provided opportunities for the PNV to comparatively gauge Spain and its attitude towards the Basque Country with that of Britain and her relationship with Ireland. In this regard, Spain was more often than not deemed to be unreasonable and inflexible in comparison:

“Muchísimos años hace que Irlanda lucha valerosa contra Inglaterra para conseguir su *home rule*; es decir su personalidad en el orden político. Sus diputados en el Parlamento británico, en distintas ocasiones han hecho manifestaciones ruidosas contrarias a Inglaterra, muy principalmente durante la guerra del Transvaal. Pues bien, Inglaterra no por esto ha cambiado sus procedimientos dirigiéndolos en sentido represivo con los irlandeses, sus enemigos tradicionales; por el contrario, ha respetado su convención electoral, ha suavizado la ley agraria con la adquisición por el Estado de tierras para concedérselas a los colonos, y poco a poco se va aproximando al otorgamiento del *home rule*, que esto significan la promesa de la concesión nuevas libertades. En España en cambio acontecen las cosas de manera diametralmente opuesta. Terminó la primera guerra carlista el 30 de agosto de 1839, y el 25 de octubre del mismo año se promulgó la ley atentatoria a los Fueros vascongados; y el 21 de Julio de 1876, después de finalizada la segunda guerra carlista, por otra ley se hace que desaparezca lo que por tolerancia existía después de la primera fecha. Muchos años han transcurrido desde entonces, y el Pueblo vascongado ha demostrado que ama, desea y que es merecedor de volver a ser lo que fue, porque con eso cree que a nadie se perjudica; y los gobiernos, lejos de atender a estos justos deseos, se llenan de recelos y suspicacias y tratan de acallarle con el rigor de las leyes y cerrando la puerta a la esperanza. Esta oposición de criterios de los Estados inglés y español respecto a hechos muy similares, no tiene otra explicación que en que Inglaterra se medita y obra en consonancia con las aspiraciones de sus gobernados; y en España, engolfada en la política mezquina de siempre, nada se medita y obra siempre por impresión de momento, creyendo ver en todos lados peligros que no existen en realidad. Por eso Inglaterra es grande. Lo que no se explica cómo en España se pasa la vida ensalzando la libertad y los procedimientos ingleses y nadie haga nada para imitarlos”.<sup>59</sup>

“La verde *Erin* encontró en su opresora Inglaterra un hombre de inteligencia privilegiada, encarnación ideal de la democracia cristiana, Gladstone, que reconociendo el derecho de los pueblos a la vida propia, rechazando que la fuerza pueda causar estado de derecho, ofreció a Irlanda su *Home rule*, y con ello medios prácticos para el logro de sus justísimas aspiraciones. La miseria Euskalerría encontró, a su vez, en su desventura, a un Cánovas del Castillo, que al verla crucificada y agónica desde el año 1839, permitiósse en 1876--¡rasgo sublime de ilustre legalista! —ponerle INRI”.<sup>60</sup>

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<sup>59</sup> “Ejemplo que imitar”, *Euskalduna*, no. 433, 10.03.1906.

<sup>60</sup> “Paralelo,” *Euskalduna*, no. 483, 02.03.1907. For another direct example of this dichotomous view vis-à-vis Britain and Spain, see: “La Libertad en Inglaterra”, *La Patria*, no. 36, 29.06.1902.

Was the dual position of Basque nationalist support for, on the one hand, moderate Irish nationalism, and on the other, admiration for Britain and her Empire, contradictory? This would only appear to be the case if we erroneously read history backwards. In reality, pre-1916, broad PNV hiberno- /anglophilia essentially dovetailed with each other.

Firstly, it was not uncommon for nineteenth-century European sub-nationalists — Basque nationalists included— to develop a certain “blind spot” to British imperialism, such was her dominant imperial power and prestige.<sup>61</sup> In this sense, PNV admiration for Britain was conditioned by a certain international *realpolitik*.

Secondly, a close affinity and history of transnational Basque-English relations and contacts had, by that stage, stretched back for centuries. For example, a unilateral commercial treaty negotiated between Gipuzkoa and England in 1482 had opened up English ports to Gipuzkoan commerce. In more recent times, British capital, coal, and expertise had helped to drive Basque industry, with vast quantities of iron shipped in the opposite direction, throughout the nineteenth century.<sup>62</sup>

Thirdly, it must be remembered that, *fin de siècle*, the realistic frontier for mainstream Irish (constitutionalist) nationalist ambition was for a limited form of Irish Home Rule comfortably within the confines of *both* the UK and Empire. This is how John Redmond, leader of the IPP from 1900 until his death in 1918, was able to be both a firm advocate for Irish Home Rule *and* a campaigner for Ireland’s place to the fore of the British Empire and her imperial “mission”. Even Sinn Féin, a minor political force until 1917, when the party won its first abstentionist seats in successive by-elections, officially espoused a monarchical solution to the “Irish Question” until November of that same year.<sup>63</sup>

Finally, with Britain “ruling the waves” at the apex of *Pax Britannia* and her old imperial rival Spain losing the last remaining non-African territories of a previously vast intercontinental empire in 1898, PNV anglophilia hinged on a dichotomous perception of a “suave yugo” British Empire and its supposed flexible attitude towards Irish nationalist

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<sup>61</sup> Costigan: “Romantic Nationalism: Ireland and Europe”.

<sup>62</sup> William Douglass, Jon Bilbao: *Amerikanuak: Basques in the New World*, Reno, University of Nevada Press, 1973, p. 65. There is some evidence to suggest that the Arana brothers may have based their design of the ikurriña flag on the British “Union Jack”. See: Jesús Casquete, José Luis de la Granja: “Ikurriña” in De Pablo *et al.* (eds.): *Diccionario ilustrado de símbolos del nacionalismo vasco*, pp. 508–531; Watson: *Modern Basque History*, pp. 118–119.

<sup>63</sup> Pat Walsh: *The Rise and Fall of Imperial Ireland: Redmondism in the Context of Britain’s Conquest of South Africa and Its Great War on Germany 1899–1916*, Belfast, Athol Books, 2003, p. 148; Peter Pyne: “The politics of parliamentary abstentionism: Ireland’s four Sinn Féin Parties, 1905–1926”, *The Journal of Commonwealth & Comparative Politics*, vol. 12, 2, pp. 206–227.

aspirations, in direct contrast to a weak, cruel and vindictive Spain.<sup>64</sup> The preceding extract from *Euskalduna* illustrates this approach succinctly: “Por eso Inglaterra es grande” — and Spain, *not*.

This trajectory was no more evident than in the PNV’s position regarding the Second Boer War (1899–1902). While Arana’s personal stance towards Britain’s approach in the southern African territories may be considered to be nuanced, or even contradictory, other leading contemporaries in the PNV were openly supportive of Britain’s aggressively assertive actions.<sup>65</sup> One such *jeltzale* was the party’s leading figure on international matters, Luis de Eleizalde (*Axe*). Writing under his first pseudonym *Iturraín* in 1901, Eleizalde attacked the Boers for “destruyendo bárbaramente la raza indígena” in their conquest of southern Africa. In the same breath, Eleizalde challenged those Basques who ostensibly sought to undermine the British cause, to let go of a Latin-engendered hatred of “Inglaterra”. In doing so, Eleizalde sought to remind his readers of their true enemy:

“[...] los vaskos [sic] no tenemos, hoy por hoy, motivo alguno para temer ni odiar a Inglaterra. Por el contrario, Inglaterra es el enemigo constante y tradicional de la raza latina, de nuestro enemigo. [...] que hora es ya de que los vaskos [sic] nos despojemos [sic] de las prevenciones que nos han sugerido los latinos, entre ellas de ese odio hacia Inglaterra, odio de la impotencia y de la envidia”.<sup>66</sup>

Although Eleizalde’s rationale in this regard is instrumental, as in “the enemy of my enemy is my friend” (echoing the Gaelic Irish and Spanish monarchical alliance of the late sixteenth-early seventeenth century), he also recalls that the Basques “ha mucho tiempo ya —cerca de seis siglos— que hicimos las paces con los ingleses, y otros son ahora nuestros enemigos”.<sup>67</sup> This anglophile posture of Eleizalde, and that of many of his party colleagues, was perhaps best evidenced in a plan hatched by Sabino Arana in 1902, in which the PNV leader envisaged an independent Basque Country coming directly under British protection.<sup>68</sup>

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<sup>64</sup> Sabino Arana referred to a “suave yugo Gran Bretaña” in a telegram that he wrote to the British Prime Minister Salisbury on the cessation of the Boer War. Cited in: Ugalde Zubiri: *La Acción Exterior del Nacionalismo Vasco*, p. 133.

<sup>65</sup> For examples of Arana’s position on the Boer War, see: Corcuera Atienza: *The Origins, Ideology, and Organization of Basque Nationalism*, p. 79; Ugalde Zubiri: *La Acción Exterior del Nacionalismo Vasco*, pp. 90–92. Up to 50,000 Irishmen fought on both sides of the Second Boer War, either as part of the British army, or in two Irish commandos of the Boer army. See: Luke Diver: “Ireland’s South African War, 1899–1902”, *Scientia Militaria, South African Journal of Military Studies*, Vol 42, Nr 1, 2014, pp. 1–17; Matthew Stout: “MacBride’s Brigade in the Anglo-Boer War”, *History Ireland*, Vol. 8, Issue 1, Spring 2000.

<sup>66</sup> “Boers y boerófilos”, *La Patria*, no. 10, 29.12.01

<sup>67</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>68</sup> De Pablo; Mees: *El Péndulo Patriótico*, pp. 23–24; Ugalde Zubiri: *La Acción Exterior del Nacionalismo Vasco*, pp. 132–135.

If a mutual hiberno-/anglophile outlook may be said to have characterised the PNV's Irish-led discourse and approach throughout this period, there were also secondary thematic areas of engagement. For instance, analysis of the Home Rule movement and its historical leadership could speak to the formulation of the PNV's own internal party organisational and ideological policies. According to Sabino Arana:

“[...] siempre hemos creído que el partido nacionalista de Irlanda se resentía de los cimientos, por carecer de base sólida. Esta no puede obtenerse, mientras no se fije el lema religioso-político. Nunca nos hemos explicado que un partido esencialmente católico, como debe ser el irlandés, haya tenido por jefes, primeramente a uno afecto a los protestantes (O'Connell), y luego a un protestante y libertino (Parnell). Es muy probable que sea la masonería el parásito de Irlanda, que le debilite el organismo y no la deje reaccionar conforme a sus tradiciones”.<sup>69</sup>

In this example, Charles Stewart Parnell, the “libertine”, serves as a lightning rod for the questionable morals and lifestyle seemingly identifiable with a non-Catholic religious vocation. Similarly, O'Connell's “affection” for Protestantism is perceived as suspicious on the grounds that it suggests a deviation from the one true patriotic religious-political faith that so imbued Arana's vision for the Basque Country. And lastly, by attributing these Irish patriots' defects to a hidden and manipulative hand of masonry, Arana alludes to his own hostility towards liberalism, which he believed to be inextricably linked to the former.<sup>70</sup>

The Irish language issue was also of some relevance to the PNV. In a compendium of articles originally written by Luis Eleizalde for *Euzkadi*, *Axe* articulated Gaeilge's fight for survival not only in linguistic terms but also as “la mejor defensa contra el agnosticismo y paganismo de los tiempos presentes”.<sup>71</sup> The *quid pro quo* of this being that there existed a correlation between the decline of Gaeilge and its replacement by English to an increase in moral decadence and decline. In this sense, Gaeilge was viewed, at least in the case of *Axe*, as a bulwark against the ills of modern society — an analogy that could be easily applied to Euskara in the Basque context. This example is also an early pointer to a strand of thinking within Basque nationalism (and as we shall see, latterly within ETA's early cultural nationalists) that conceptualised the existence of the

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<sup>69</sup> “Los nacionalistas de Irlanda”, *Bizkaitarra*, no. 19, 29.01.1895.

<sup>70</sup> José Luis de la Granja Sainz: “El ‘antimaketismo’: la visión de Sabino Arana sobre España y los españoles”, *Norba. Revista de Historia*, vol. 19, pp. 191–203.

<sup>71</sup> Luis Eleizalde: *Países y razas. Las aspiraciones nacionalistas en diversos pueblos*, Bilbao, Grijelmo, 1914. As quoted in Núñez Seixas: “El mito del nacionalismo irlandés y su influencia en los nacionalismos gallego, vasco y catalán (1880–1936)”, p. 33.



Irish nation and its essential nationhood (or “essence”) through a Basque-centric language prism: as inextricably linked to the strength of the indigenous language itself.<sup>72</sup>

As much as the PNV demonstrated a keen interest towards Ireland during the first two decades of the party’s existence, Ireland was also but one of a plethora of European nations (re)emerging in the early twentieth century:

“El renacimiento es, pues, un hecho en las nacionalidades europeas que parecían más postradas: Desde Islandia hasta el país vasco, y desde las provincias eslavas hasta Erin, como lo dice un escritor celtista, se propaga la Buena nueva del resurgimiento de las Viejas nacionalidades”.<sup>73</sup>

In extrapolating an Irish-specific lesson from these cases on offer to the PNV, one may surmise, as per the following example, that it was to emulate the same gradualist and possibilist moderate path set out by the likes of O’Connell, Parnell and Redmond. In contrast, the more radical (and often violent) methods of Irish “Fenians” and republicans on both sides of the Atlantic (IRB, Clan na Gael), who sought an independent Irish republic by any means, were disparaged:

“Irlanda combate bravamente contra el Estado británico, y en tanto pone en juego los principios revolucionarios del terrible fenianismo nada consigue; se atasca y no puede avanzar un solo paso. Pero cuenta en su seno con hombres de talento perspicacia que le colocan en el terreno evolutivo, de conformidad con las circunstancias, y con O’Connell consigue la libertad religiosa; con Parnell se organiza y vislumbra la libertad agraria, y con Reymond [sic] consigue esta libertad, llegando a preveer [sic] para tiempo no lejano la consecución del *home rule*, o lo que es lo mismo, su libertad política [...]”.<sup>74</sup>

The problem for the PNV, post-1915, was that in parallelising much of their project to that of the IPP,<sup>75</sup> and in synonymously equating the horizon of Irish “libertad política” to a limited form of Home Rule within the UK, they were also inadvertently making themselves political hostages to fortune. This became evident when the political tide in Ireland turned dramatically in 1916, leaving the IPP and the Home Rule project effectively dead in the water, a mere two years later.

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<sup>72</sup> See chapter three. It is worth briefly noting that at the turn of the twentieth century, Basque speakers followed their Irish peers in wearing an insignia (known as a *fáinne* in Gaeilge) to indicate their ability and willingness to converse in Euskara. See: Santiago de Pablo: “Letra E” in De Pablo *et al.* (eds.): *Diccionario ilustrado de símbolos del nacionalismo vasco*, pp. 609–618 (specifically p. 613).

<sup>73</sup> “Caminemos hacia la realidad”, *Euskalduna*, 27.8.1908.

<sup>74</sup> “Ejemplos”, *Euskalduna*, núm. 318, 27.12.1903. The lack of strong Basque equivalents to O’Connell and Parnell was bemoaned in: “Imitemos”, *Euskalduna*, no. 10, 15.11.1896, and ¡Dios proteja á Euskaria! *Euskalduna* no. 43, 04.07.1897.

<sup>75</sup> Núñez Seixas: “Irlanda”.



### **A Basque-Irish nationalist nexus, 1895–1915 (*south to north*)**

In comparison to the steady stream of Irish-related material appearing in Basque nationalist discourse throughout the period 1895–1915, the same cannot be said of any equivalent degree of rhetoric in the opposite direction. Indeed, in late Victorian Ireland and the early twentieth century, one was more likely to encounter the clothing version of a “Basque” than that of the country or its people in Irish newspapers. This can be primarily attributed to the fact that, unlike the proponents of Basque nationalism, Irish nationalists and republicans, as briefly synthesised in chapter one, had already established deep transnational nexuses of political influence and support networks (particularly in North America) by the end of the nineteenth century. In this sense, it is logical that the nascent Basque nationalist movement did not figure greatly as an emulative, or even comparative, reference on the radar of Irish nationalists and republicans.

Notwithstanding this general synopsis, the struggle of Euskara, which was often referenced alongside Gaeilge as the two “most ancient” languages of Europe, occasionally appeared in the Irish national press. A visit by the English-born Basque linguist, Edward Spencer Dodgson, to gaelteachtaí (official Irish speaking areas) in 1897, and the story of a Basque Capuchin priest, relayed in the following extract to an Irish language rally in Cork in 1913, provide rare examples of how this shared Basque-Irish language struggle was viewed:

“[...] the Basques had to fight the same battle for their language and their distinct nationality as the people of Ireland. [The Irish] would all remember the days of the old tally stick and how it was used on the pupils who spoke Irish in school. In the Basque schools there was a corresponding implement called the ring, which was thrown over the neck of any Basque child who dared to speak anything but the Castilian language in school. Well the days of the ‘tally’ had gone in Ireland, but it was interesting to find another people in Europe that had to fight in a similar way for their language and distinct nationality. They preserved their language, notwithstanding the ring of the Castilian teachers (applause)”.<sup>76</sup>

In Arthur Griffith’s *United Irishman* (1899–1906) and *Sinn Féin* (1906–1914), allusions to contemporary Basque issues were made via indirect articles on Spanish Carlism and non-political themes such as handball. One notable exception was an article published in *Sinn Féin* in 1907 in which “The Separatist party of the Basques” were, as far as this author can tell, introduced to Griffith’s readership for the first time:

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<sup>76</sup> See: “Scoil Geadhilde Tamhna”, *Connacht Tribune*, 23.09.1911; “What the Irish Language Is”, *Nationalist and Leinster Times*, 07.03.1914. “Gaelic League, Lee Branch. Cork City”, *Irish Examiner*, 09.11.1897; “Colaisde na Mumhan. Opening of Winter Session. Fr. Augustine’s Opening Address”, *Irish Examiner*, 08.10.1913.

“Of all the extinct nationalities of the Iberian Peninsula the most incompatible with the unification of Spain are the Basques. The Separatist party of the Basques, calling itself ‘The National Basque Party’ has published, since its recent meetings in Bilbao, a curious programme intended to regenerate the Basque race and language, contaminated, the manifesto asserts, by French and Spanish influence. [...] This project of a national resurrection has much more importance than many people think, seeing that the Basque delegations and provincial deputations (to the Cortes) are negotiating with the Spanish Government the restoration of the economic accord whereby they will enjoy economic autonomy”.<sup>77</sup>

Despite the stated “importance” of these developments in the Basque Country, the Basque case ultimately failed to feature as a significant international reference for Arthur Griffith’s Sinn Féin in the years leading up to 1916. Instead, Griffith was to heavily focus on the dual Austro-Hungarian monarchy as a potential emulative model for Ireland and its future relations with Britain.<sup>78</sup>

Overall, regarding the emergence of a *nationalist*-led political nexus between the Basque Country and Ireland during the period 1895 to 1915, it is readily evident that this phenomenon was an almost entirely asymmetric relationship, primarily centred on the PNV’s discursive engagement with the “Irish Question” and the gradualist approach taken by moderate Irish nationalists towards Home Rule. Radical Irish (“Fenian”/republican) methods were, by contrast, disparaged. Meanwhile, the perceived facilitatory attitude of the British government towards Ireland in comparison to that of the Spanish vis-à-vis the Basque Country was also utilised.

There is little evidence to suggest that this nexus extended beyond a strictly discursive (“talking about”) dynamic, save for mutual Basque and Irish membership of a “Sociedad Internacional de la Juventud Nacionalista” that was founded in London, May 1903. Composed of Basque, Irish, Polish, Finnish and Philippine representatives, commitments were made by delegates on the occasion of the society’s inauguration to mutually exchange nationalist newspapers (to be translated into French), and to report incidents “cuando los Gobiernos cometan abusos con nuestros compatriotas”.<sup>79</sup>

One other potential space for cross-pollination of contacts and relations between Irish and Basque nationalists existed in the Basque and Irish diasporic hubs of the Americas. From the limited research that has been conducted in this area (in Argentina), it would

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<sup>77</sup> See: “Foreign Notes. The Carlist outbreak in Spain”, *United Irishman*, 10.11.1900; “Some suggestions from Argentina”, *United Irishman*, 12.11.1904. “Over The Frontier”, *Sinn Féin*, 16.02.1907.

<sup>78</sup> Arthur Griffith: *The Resurrection of Hungary: A Parallel for Ireland* (3<sup>rd</sup> ed.), Dublin, Whelan and Son, 1918.

<sup>79</sup> “Propaganda Nacionalista”, *Euskalduna*, 19.07.1903.

seem as though the overall tendency reflected the same European framework of a mostly unreciprocated moderate-led political interest shown towards the Irish case by the Basque-Argentinian community.<sup>80</sup>

Back on the European side of the Atlantic, the Milesian myth that had provided the parameters of a folkloric and occasionally politically-led undergirding between the Basque Country and Ireland for centuries did not figure to any extent in the formation of the Basque-Irish nationalist nexus between 1895 and 1915. This in itself adds weight to the thesis that congruent contemporary claims for political autonomy drove the germination and early evolution of this (mainly asymmetric) transnational nexus.

When a third Home Rule bill was finally passed by the Westminster House of Commons in 1912, to become law in 1914 (after an expected two-year delay in the House of Lords), moderate Irish nationalist demands for an autonomous arrangement with London appeared to have reached a satisfactory conclusion. This prospect was put in jeopardy, however, when an alliance of mainly Ulster-based Irish/British unionists and rebel British Conservative politicians, refused to countenance Home Rule to the point that they were prepared to take up arms against “His Majesty’s Government”. A militia of “Ulster Volunteers” subsequently formed in January 1913. Within a year, an equally determined counterweight force named the “Irish Volunteers” had formed in Dublin.<sup>81</sup> As fate would have it, the outbreak of World War I postponed the long-awaited Home Rule legislation, and in turn, the likelihood of an Irish (and potentially UK-wide) civil war over the issue.

After two decades of the PNV’s steady and consistent position on the “Irish Question”, logic dictated that any radical strike for Irish independence during Britain’s precarious war would be looked upon critically among the anglophile leadership of the *jeltzales*. On Easter Monday, 24 April 1916, and seemingly against all perceived wisdom in both Britain and Ireland, just such a radical strike for independence occurred. Standing outside the neo-classical building of the General Post Office (GPO), which dominates Dublin’s main thoroughfare O’Connell Street, Pádraig Pearse read out the “Proclamation of the Irish Republic”.

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<sup>80</sup> María Eugenia Cruset: *Nacionalismo y Diásporas: los casos vasco e irlandés en Argentina: (1862-1922)*, Universidad Nacional de La Plata, Cátedra Libre de Pensamiento y Cultura Irlandesa, 2015, pp. 16–17 (prologue by Santiago de Pablo).

<sup>81</sup> Hanley: *The IRA. A Documentary History 1916–2005*, pp. 4–5.

## 2.2. The emergence of a radical Basque nationalist-Irish republican nexus (1916–1922)

“[...] the world did gaze with deep amaze  
at those fearless men but few  
who bore the fight that freedom’s light  
might shine through the foggy dew [...]”<sup>82</sup>

The events of Easter week 1916 are of enormous significance to Irish history. Following Pearse’s reading of the proclamation, his comrades —mainly consisting of members of the Irish Volunteers and the Irish Citizen Army— attempted to take control of several strategic positions in Dublin. Only partially successful in this objective, the rebels dug in and sought to hold their positions. Small pockets of rebellion also broke out in other parts of the country.

Six days later, the men and women of the Rising capitulated to the British army. In the days and weeks that followed, the rebel leaders, including all seven signatories to the proclamation, were summarily executed. In strictly military terms, the 1916 Rising was a failure. However, the sacrifice of the Easter rebels, the manner in which they were dealt with, and the ideal of their short-lived “Provisional” Irish Republic, all began to resonate with the general public.<sup>83</sup>

Reflecting on the 1916 Rising, historians unanimously agree that the events of Easter week and the subsequent executions was a major transformative event in Irish history — synthesised and popularised in William Butler Yeats’ famous oxymoronic couplet: “All changed, changed utterly”. There is, however, less consensus as to what this transformation entailed (and arguably still entails). In other words, what was the Rising’s short, medium and long term impact and legacy in respect to the “Irish Question”? — hitherto *largely* conceptualised in Irish terms as Home Rule within the UK; understood in British terms as whether to implement Home Rule or not, and if so, how to do so against a majority of the mainly Ulster-based unionist community. From an abundance of analyses, perhaps of most relevance to this present study is that of Brian Hanley.

Hanley suggests that the key transformative effect of the Rising was the demonstrative impact of the short-lived nominal republic, and how its proclamation and defence in arms

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<sup>82</sup> Excerpt from the traditional ballad “The Foggy Dew”, which chronicles the Easter Rising of 1916.

<sup>83</sup> The seven signatories were: Éamonn Ceannt, Tom Clarke, James Connolly, Seán MacDiarmada, Thomas MacDonagh, Pádraig Pearse, Joseph Plunkett. There is an enormous body of literature on the 1916 Rising. This ranges from first-hand accounts of the week’s events to major works that place the Rising within a historical sequence of complex political changes. For a handful of examples, see: Gabriel Doherty, Dermot Keogh: *1916: The Long Revolution*, Cork, Mercier Press, 2007; Diarmaid Ferriter: *A Nation and not a Rabble: The Irish Revolution 1913–1923*, London, Profile Books, 2015; Fearghal McGarry: *The Rising: Ireland, Easter 1916*, Oxford, Oxford University Press, 2016.

expanded the frame of reference for what Irish nationalists —and Irish people *en masse*— considered to be politically feasible. In this sense, what had been previously viewed as a realistic and pragmatic answer to the “Irish Question” (Home Rule within the UK and British Empire) was effectively supplanted by the ideal of a sovereign Irish republic as the *de rigueur* vehicle for the majority of the Irish public. This was to be categorically evidenced only two and a half years later when Sinn Féin, running on a mandate for the establishment of precisely such a republic, swept aside the IPP in the December 1918 General Election.<sup>84</sup>

### **Basque reflections in the Irish mirror**

In the days and weeks following the 1916 Rising, the main Basque nationalist newspaper *Euzkadi* published a series of articles critical of the Irish rebels. Leading this response, the senior party figure Engracio de Aranzadi (*Kizkitza*) chastised those who “sellar con su sangre las convicciones”.<sup>85</sup> Likewise, *Axe* singled out Pearse as someone who “da la impresión de un iluso casi demente”. Meanwhile, Sinn Féin, despite neither being involved in the rebellion, nor officially republican (common misrepresentations at the time), were maligned as:

“[...] un partido nacionalista revolucionario [...] herederos de las violentas tendencias de John Mitchell [nineteenth century Irish nationalist], los afiliados de ‘Sinn Féin’ forman dentro del Nacionalismo irlandés una minoría revolucionaria que se contrapone en todos los puntos a la mayoría moderada, oportunista y legalista que dirige actualmente John Redmond [...]. Enemigos declarados del ‘Home Rule’, del parlamentarismo, de toda inteligencia con el gobierno inglés, se complacen en ver en John Redmond —como vieron antes en Parnell y antes en O’Connell— ‘el mayor enemigo de Irlanda, después de Inglaterra’, y sólo admiten en la

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<sup>84</sup> In Hanley’s view: “British rule had very little legitimacy in nationalist Ireland. That is why the Rising was ultimately successful, not because a passive, cowed population were awakened by a blood sacrifice. Most nationalists more or less accepted that Britain’s overwhelming power made change unlikely, but to assume that they were becoming happy west Britons, as some hoped, and the more pessimistic feared, is incorrect. National self-determination was the question of the age. The generation that carried out the Rising made it seem possible that Britain could be challenged, that its power was not unassailable and that the questions of Irish self-determination would have to be dealt with. That was their achievement”. Brian Hanley: “The Ireland of our ideals”, available at:

<https://cedarlounge.wordpress.com/2016/01/26/the-ireland-of-our-ideals-paper-delivered-at-proclaiming-the-revolution-conference-brian-hanley/> (last accessed 13 March 2019). In the December 1918 election, Sinn Féin won 73 of 105 seats. The IPP won 6. Unionists won 26 seats, split between the Irish Unionist Party (22), Labour Unionist (3) and 1 Independent Unionist candidate. For a comprehensive study of Sinn Féin throughout the Irish Revolutionary Period, see: Michael Laffan: *The Resurrection of Ireland: The Sinn Féin Party, 1916–1923*, Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, 1999.

<sup>85</sup> “Ante la revolución irlandesa. Enseñanzas católicas sobre la revolución”, *Euzkadi*, 27.05.1916. See also: “Ante la revolución irlandesa. Hemos faltado”, *Euzkadi*, 27.05.1916.

independencia, inmediata y a todo trance, el remedio soberano de los males que sufre la isla verde”.<sup>86</sup>

Notwithstanding the pointed criticism of the rebels in *Euzkadi*, this strand was often encompassed within a broader sympathetic analysis which summated that although the Rising was disastrous for Irish nationalism, the “buenos patriotas” of Ireland had, in fact, acted in good —if ultimately misguided— faith.<sup>87</sup>

Several interwoven elements account for the stance taken by moderate Basque nationalists vis-à-vis the Rising. First, as we have seen, over the previous two decades, the PNV had keenly followed and attempted to extrapolate lessons and political capital from the IPP’s advances towards the objective of Irish Home Rule. Second, the broader contemporary context of the “Great War” also fed into the moderate Basque nationalist perspective: Britain, long admired by Basque nationalists, was seen as defending a small Catholic nation in the shape of Belgium. The Irish rebels, by contrast, were seen as being under the influence of Germany — Britain’s imperial enemy. And third, not only was condemnation of the Irish rebels’ actions (if not necessarily their sense of patriotism) consistent with the PNV’s approach to the “Irish Question” over the previous two decades, but it also served as a warning shot to the increasingly dissenting youth/radical wing of the party.

Oscillating between moderate and radical positions almost since its inception, PNV cohesion had begun to badly fracture around 1914 due to the perceived marginalisation of non-Bizkaian interests, seemingly incompatible positions on the merits of autonomist/pro-independence strategies, and diverging views on the imperial protagonists of World War I. While the more radical wing tended to coalesce around Juventud Vasca (Basque Youth) and the Euzkeldun Batzokija of Luis Arana, who was expelled from the party in 1916; the moderates controlled *Euzkadi* and the levers of power within the party itself. This moderate majority officially changed the PNV’s name to *Comunión Nacionalista Vasca* (CNV) (Basque Nationalist Communion) in 1916.<sup>88</sup>

In sharp contrast to the critical approach taken by the likes of Aranzadi and Eleizalde towards the Easter Rising, for the radical faction of Basque nationalism, the executed

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<sup>86</sup> “Actualidad irlandesa. Sinn Féin”, *Euzkadi*, 09.05.1916. John Redmond’s own personal condemnation of the Rising was published in English and Spanish in *Euzkadi* in June 1916. “Declaración de Redmond acerca de la Revolución en Irlanda”, *Euzkadi*, 02.06.1916.

<sup>87</sup> For example, see: “Para los pajarracos...”, *Euzkadi*, 05.15.1916; “John Redmond y la Revolución Irlandesa”, *Euzkadi*, 25.07.1916.

<sup>88</sup> De Pablo; Mees: *El Péndulo Patriótico*, p. 60; Núñez Seixas: “Ecos de Pascua”; Watson: *Basque Nationalism and Political Violence*, p. 101.



Irish rebel leaders were quickly venerated as heroes and martyrs who had sacrificed themselves for the salvation and renewal of their nation.<sup>89</sup> When the last of these leaders, Roger Casement, was executed in London in August 1916, the hitherto diverging reflections of this “Irish mirror” in the Basque nationalist context became particularly visible. Luis Arana’s publication, *Bizkaitarra*, lamented:

“El telégrafo nos trae la tristísima noticia de la horrible ejecución de este valiente héroe irlandés. ¡Pobre Erin!, simpática y dulce Erin, que gimes con llanto amargo —como el de Euzkadi— bajo la bota británica que te oprime pesadamente, haciendo saltar al dolor roja y preciosa, la sangre de tus venas. [...] No te importe, Irlanda, no, la ejecución sangrienta de tu querido hijo. Su sangre de héroe, al saltar con la opresión de la argolla por aquellos ojos que tan dulce y tiernamente te miraron, será fecunda semilla de nuevos héroes que contagiando a todos tus hijos haga surgir nuevos y bravos luchadores”.

*Euzkadi*, for its part, centred on the misguided naivety of Casement and his comrades:

“Juventud Vasca de Bilbao ha acordado la celebración de una Misa por el alma del desgraciado patriota irlandés, para quien pedíamos hace pocos días el indulto Sir Roger Casement, que, creyendo servir a su patria, cayó, como decíamos, en la emboscada preparada por los enemigos del Nacionalismo irlandés”.<sup>90</sup>

In protest against the editorial line taken by the latter periodical towards the Irish rebels, Eli Gallastegi, director of Juventud Vasca de Bilbao, organised a series of demonstrations.<sup>91</sup>

The implication of the 1916 Rising in the Basque context should not be underestimated. Whatever limited role that Ireland and Irish nationalism had played in Basque nationalist discourse prior to 1916, the fundamentals of this dynamic —of this “mirror”— irrevocably shifted with the Rising and subsequent events of the Irish Revolutionary Period. Thus, in the same way that Pearse *et al.* had imagined a new Ireland, embodied in the “Proclamation of the Republic”, the reflections of these events not only reformulated Ireland as a hitherto useful ideological, strategic and tactical international reference for Basque nationalists, but *a la* Hanley’s analysis, also arguably assisted in recalibrating what was (rightly or wrongly) considered feasible in the Basque Country for an emerging section of radical Basque nationalists.

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<sup>89</sup> Antonio Elorza: *Ideologías del Nacionalismo Vasco, 1876–1937*, San Sebastián, E. Itxaropena S.A., 1978, p. 357; Lorenzo Espinosa: “Influencia del nacionalismo irlandés”; Núñez Seixas: “Ecos de Pascua”.

<sup>90</sup> “¡Roger Casement! La muerte del mártir”, *Bizkaitarra*, 05.08.1916; “Por el alma de Casement”, *Euzkadi*, 09.05.1916.

<sup>91</sup> Lorenzo Espinosa: *Gudari. Una pasión útil*, p. 56; Núñez Seixas: “Ecos de Pascua”.



As we shall see, more than any other radical Basque nationalist, the Easter Rising sparked in Eli Gallastegi a life-long engagement with Irish republicanism and the demonstrative lessons that it ostensibly provided for the Basques.<sup>92</sup>

### Self-determination

“They say ‘the right of self-determination’ of all people. How are you to distinguish what the people want when you make that statement? Is it to be by the size of the body which makes the claim, or what is it? [...] They say, ‘We represent Ireland; we want it. It does not matter what another part of Ireland wishes; they have to submit to our desire’. That is what they mean by ‘self-determination’. These phrases are only generalities, which have actually no meaning. I think it was at the time of the French Revolution—I am not quite sure of the exact time at which it happened—that some speakers were eloquently expressing these views about self-determination, and a member of the Chamber, with some common sense, got up and said, ‘Well, the Basques are really quite different from Frenchmen. They do not talk our language; they are in every sense a different nationality. If they ask for self-determination as against France, what would your answer be?’ There was a universal shout, ‘They would be traitors!’ That is what these hon. Gentlemen mean. If the community in Ulster does not agree with them, their self-determination means that the people of Ulster are traitors, and they have got to be made to agree with them”. (Andrew Bonar Law, MP).

“No; it means that the majority have to rule in Ireland”. (Thomas Scanlan, MP).<sup>93</sup>

The Irish Revolutionary Period was not just a domestic Irish-British affair defined by internal dynamics. On the contrary, the broader international context influenced its course. Perhaps of most significance in this regard was the coming to prominence in 1918/1919 of the concept of “self-determination” in international politics. Various factors fuelled this newly acquired pre-eminence: the macro narrative of the victorious allies who claimed that World War I had been fought in the defence of small nations; US President Woodrow Wilson’s 14-point plan, which centred on the notion of inalienable principles of self-determination; and the rapid dismantlement and/or dismemberment of the German, Russian, Austrian-Hungarian and Ottoman empires. As the above excerpt from a November 1918 debate in the Westminster House of Commons between Andrew Bonar Law (then leader of the Conservative Party and future UK Prime Minister) and an IPP

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<sup>92</sup> In slightly more provocative language, Jon Juaristi in *El Bucle Melancólico* suggests that for Gallastegi “la insurrección demostraba que el sueño aranista de una nueva Arrigorriaga no era un desatino”. In the same book, Juaristi recalls an anecdotal family story that was relayed to him about Eli Gallastegi and the 1916 Rising. Juaristi suggests that Eli Gallastegi may have attempted to raise a group of Basque volunteers to support the rebels in Dublin. According to Juaristi, the Rising came to an end before the militia had the chance to organise. See: Juaristi: *El Bucle Melancólico*, p. 207, p. 232, p. 265.

<sup>93</sup> “Government of Ireland”. HC Deb 05 November 1918 vol 110 cc1962-2069. <https://api.parliament.uk/historic-hansard/commons/1918/nov/05/government-of-ireland> (last accessed 13 March 2019).

MP for Sligo (Sligeach) Thomas Scanlan demonstrates, the “Wilsonian moment” clearly overarched and impinged on the coetaneous “Irish Question”. Yet, Britain, with her still vast Empire, and emerging on the victorious side in the war, was never likely to cede Irish self-determination willingly.<sup>94</sup>

Complicating matters further, and as Bonar Law’s comments provoke: even if self-determination *were* granted to Ireland, how could this be squared with the opposition of the unionist/Protestant tradition in Ireland given that an extremely limited form of self-government, as outlined in the Third Home Rule Bill of 1912, had been deemed “*beyond the pale*” by the forces of Ulster unionism? — both figuratively and literally.

A month after his involvement in the above parliamentary exchange, Scanlan, along with nearly all of his Irish Parliamentary Party colleagues, were ousted as political representatives by the Irish people. With Sinn Féin’s victory in the December 1918 election, the IPP’s newly vacated Westminster seats were simply left empty by the incoming republican deputies.

Heralding the electoral victory of Sinn Féin, the CNV’s radicals, who by now were usually referred to as “*aberrianos*” on account of their main newspaper *Aberrri*, claimed vindication for the laudatory position that they had held towards the 1916 martyrs. In doing so, they also simultaneously attacked their moderate party colleagues, and put Ireland front and centre as a model for Basque nationalists to “imitar”:

“Aquellos bravos hijos de Irlanda que nunca regatearon su sangre por la patria que les vió [sic] nacer, aquellos bravos *sin* [sic] *feiners* que se jugaron la vida en las calles de Dublín sin retroceder un paso ante el nutrido fuego de las ametralladoras inglesas que lo segaban todo [...] aquellos bravos compañeros del intrépido patriota Roger Casement [sic] tan furiosamente combatidos por el laberíntico diario *Euzkadi*, han obtenido un señalado triunfo en las elecciones celebradas últimamente en la Gran Bretaña. [...]. [A] pesar del diario *Euzkadi* y de haberse acabado la *influencia* alemana en Irlanda después de la derrota germánica, han triunfado los *malos hijos* del leopardo inglés que no repararon en promover una gran revolución cuando su madre patria Inglaterra se encontraba seriamente comprometida en la conflagración mundial... [...] Saludemos con admiración y respeto a los compañeros de Casement [sic], intransigentes y leales en la verdad patriótica. Ellos, con la energía y valor que infunde el patriotismo sostenido por la sinceridad y la hombría de bien, nos arrastran a imitar su alto ejemplo. Sigamos, pues, rectamente su conducta para que un día también veamos con santa alegría en nuestra patria *Euzkadi*, el triunfo de los legítimos representantes de la patria esclavizada.

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<sup>94</sup> Núñez Seixas: *Patriotas Transnacionales*, p. 43; Erez Manela: *The Wilsonian Moment. Self-Determination and the International Origins of Anticolonial Nationalism*, Oxford, Oxford University Press, 2009. Wilson was himself opposed to Irish self-determination. See: Knirck: “The Irish Revolution and World History”. Brian Hanley: “Why Irish Revolutionaries had to go global”, available at <https://www.rte.ie/centuryireland/index.php/articles/why-irish-revolutionaries-had-to-go-global> (last accessed 26 March 2019).

Este triunfo, como el de ahora en Irlanda, será el preludio de la sagrada independencia de nuestra desgraciada Euzkadi”.<sup>95</sup>

The “triunfo” of Sinn Féin was not quite as complete as perhaps some of the aberrianos understood or wanted to believe. Leaving aside the political, legal, and moral arguments around this issue, there was no escaping the reality that Sinn Féin’s interpretation of Irish self-determination was at odds with both a sizeable unionist community in the northeast of Ulster and the British government in London. Something had to give. Having abstained from Westminster, the Irish Republic that convened in Dublin —an “illegal parliament consisting of democratically elected representatives”<sup>96</sup>— immediately became embroiled in a war of attrition against the British state. The contested issue of Irish self-determination and the Ulster riddle encased within it looked set to be clarified one way or another.

Many of the captured 1916 Rising volunteers had reorganised during their internment in the Welsh prison camp of Frongoch. Replenished by thousands of new members, by 1919 the “Volunteers” had a new political *raison d’être* as the army of the fledgling Irish Republic. These Óglaigh na hÉireann (Volunteers of Ireland) would soon become more popularly known as the Irish Republican Army, or simply: the IRA.<sup>97</sup>

### “A Message to the Free Nations of the World”

The Irish War of Independence lasted nearly two and a half years. While the IRA unofficially (and from 1921 officially) spearheaded the revolutionary government’s military campaign with a force of up to 70,000 volunteers, this was but one component of the republic’s multifocal struggle to establish itself through its own parliament, courts, cabinet and police force. Another front would be crucial: the court of international opinion.<sup>98</sup>

From the outset, Dáil Éireann deputies were keenly aware of the need to win legitimacy abroad if the republic were to have any chance of surviving. A “Message to the Free Nations of the World”, formally seeking recognition of the nascent entity, was issued on the occasion of its inauguration. Meanwhile, in the summer of 1919, Éamon de

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<sup>95</sup> “¡Gloria a Irlanda! El triunfo de los Sin-Feiners”, *Bizkaitarra*, 04.01.1919.

<sup>96</sup> Flynn: *Ideology, Mobilisation and the Nation*, p. 90.

<sup>97</sup> See: Sean O’Mahony: *Frongoch: University of Revolution*, Dublin, FDR Teoranta, 1987. While the term “IRA” had been used as early as 1866, it only became widely used circa 1920. See: Hanley: *The IRA. A Documentary History 1916–2005*, p. 7.

<sup>98</sup> Figure of 70,000 cited in: Brian Hanley: “Very Dangerous Places: IRA Gunrunning and the Post-War Underworld”, *History Ireland*, March 2019, pp. 23–26.

Valera, the newly coined President of Dáil Éireann, began a lengthy tour of the United States in an attempt to rally support. Closer to home, Seán Tomás Ó Ceallaigh (sometimes Seán T. O’Kelly), the Ceann Comhairle (Chairman) of Dáil Éireann, became the Irish Republic’s first “ambassador” in Paris. In the French capital, Ó Ceallaigh made concerted, but ultimately futile, attempts to gain representation at the Versailles peace talks. A number of analogous offices to that in Paris were soon set up internationally, including, as we shall see, in Spain and Argentina.<sup>99</sup>

Similarly influenced by the new departure that Woodrow Wilson’s thesis on “self-determination” seemed to herald, Basque nationalists also attempted to break ground in establishing a foothold of recognition in the emerging post-war international order. However, despite petitioning Wilson personally and seeking Basque representation akin to the Irish Republic at both Versailles Conference and the founding of the League of Nations, these raised expectations amounted to little.<sup>100</sup>

The CNV encountered further disappointment domestically when a series of Basque (and Catalan) political initiatives aimed at exerting pressure on Madrid to grant limited autonomous control, ended in acrimony and violence on the streets of Bilbo and Barcelona in 1920. Political and juridical repression of Basque nationalists followed, contributing to the radicalisation of the *aberriano* wing and a definitive split with the moderate “*comunitarios*” in 1921. While differences of opinion over the 1916 Rising and the Irish Revolutionary Period more generally did not *directly* contribute to this parting of ways, “Irish mirror” had, as succinctly put by Núñez Seixas: “actuaba como talismán que definía las posiciones de unos y otros”.<sup>101</sup>

It was within these dual contexts —that of a revolutionary Irish government seeking international legitimacy and Basque nationalists’ frustrated attempts at attaining a minimum level of Basque autonomy— that the first direct contacts and relations between radical Basque nationalists and Irish republicans would start to develop on the peripheries of the Irish Republic’s diplomatic hubs in Madrid and Buenos Aires.

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<sup>99</sup> Emblematic of this international push was a letter sent by De Valera to Arthur Griffith from New York, in which the former states: “The Republic is established, *is there*, and our fight is to have it recognised”. See: “Letter from Éamon de Valera to Arthur Griffith (for Cabinet) (No.3)”. Dated 13 August 1919. New York. No. 21 P150/96. University College Dublin Archives (UCDA). <http://difp.ie/docs/Volume1/1919/21.htm> (last accessed 13 March 2019).

<sup>100</sup> Daniele Conversi: *The Basques, the Catalans and Spain: Alternative Routes to Nationalist Mobilization*, Londres, Hurst & Company, 1997, p. 70; Ugalde Zubiri: *La Acción Exterior del Nacionalismo Vasco*, pp. 272–273.

<sup>101</sup> Mees: *Nationalism, Violence and Democracy*, p. 18; Watson: *Basque Nationalism and Political Violence*, pp. 104–107; Núñez Seixas: “Ecos de Pascua” (quote on p. 462).

## The Irish Republic and Spain

A young Dubliner, Máire O'Brien (occasionally Ní Bhríain), was living in Spain when the 1916 Rising broke out. It would be at least a month until she discovered what had happened. By that stage, all the leaders, with the exception of Roger Casement, had been executed, and thousands of active participants as well as suspected sympathisers — usually collectively referred to as “Sinn Féiners”— had been rounded up and sent to Britain for internment. Deeply affected by the news, O'Brien began collecting for the “Sinn Féin and the Prisoners’ dependent fund” in Spain until, as she recalls: “the British consul intervened”. After returning to Ireland in 1917, O'Brien subsequently offered her services to the Dáil Publicity Office in August 1920, “for any work that they might wish me to do” in Spain.<sup>102</sup>

Her proposal accepted, O'Brien was initially based in Barcelona as “Press Agent” for the republic before being reassigned to Madrid in the spring of 1921 by Sinn Féin Teachta Dála (TD) (Member of the Dáil) and external envoy George Gavan-Duffy.<sup>103</sup>

As early as October 1919, Spain had been earmarked by the revolutionary government as one of the countries in which “garbled versions of events in Ireland”, usually provided via English news agencies, could potentially be countered.<sup>104</sup> Among the reasons cited for this optimistic outlook was the continued influence of the “exiled [Irish] noble families in Spain from the 16<sup>th</sup> to 17<sup>th</sup> centuries”, and the fact that Spain and Ireland, as two Catholic nations, were inherently “hostile to” and “wronged by England”.<sup>105</sup>

Contemporary evidence of this perception was naturally seized upon by the Irish Republic. For instance, in February 1921, the British Chief Secretary for Ireland, Thomas Hamar Greenwood, made disparaging remarks about De Valera and his Spanish origin: “De Valera belongs to a race of treacherous murderers, and he has inducted Ireland into the murderous treachery of his race”. While clearly upset by the attack, De Valera also sought to turn this “insult to Spain and to everyone with a drop of Spanish blood” to his advantage, and use it to propagandise against the British in Spain — a country which he viewed as a strategic gateway between Latin America and the Vatican. To this end, De

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<sup>102</sup> “Statement No. 363 Maire Ní Bhríain (Maire O'Brien)”; “Maire Louise O'Brien”. Military Service Pensions Collection. MSP34REF59976. Irish Military Archives (IMA).

<sup>103</sup> Ibid.

<sup>104</sup> “Dáil Éireann Report on Foreign Affairs presented by Count George Plunkett”. Dated 27 October 1919. Dublin. No. 27 DE 2/269. NAI. <https://www.difp.ie/docs/Volume1/1919/27.htm> (last accessed 18 March 2019).

<sup>105</sup> “Memorandum titled ‘Ireland and Spain’”. Dated September 1921. Madrid. No. 107 DFA ES Spain. NAI. <http://difp.ie/docs/Volume1/1921/107.htm> (last accessed 18 March 2019).

Valera wrote to the republic's chief representative in London, Art Ó Briain, with the suggestion that he take up a role as "Permanent Representative" in Madrid. Although tempted by the offer, Ó Briain politely declined, citing the importance of his work in the English capital.<sup>106</sup> Ó Briain's namesake in Madrid, Máire, would have to carry the cause of the Irish Republic to the Spanish alone.

The bulk of Maire O'Brien's work in Spain consisted of editing, translating, and distributing propaganda material that she received from Dublin and the main continental Irish office in Paris. She also translated and conjoined written works by the republicans Erskine Childers and Darrel Figgis into one Spanish-language volume titled: "La Tragedia de Irlanda". Armed with this propaganda, O'Brien regularly lobbied state and regional media, individual deputies of the Spanish Congress, and the general public from her base in Madrid.<sup>107</sup>

All extant records concerning O'Brien's work in Spain suggest that her mission was deemed reasonably successful, if ultimately limited, in disseminating the republic's case and countering British propaganda. The supposed influence that the "exiled noble families" could bring to bear in lobbying for the Irish Republic seemed to have amounted to little, save an official visit by the Duke of Tetuán Juan O'Donnell to O'Brien's tiny Madrid flat/office "in full regimentals" and with the apparent knowledge and consent of King Alfonso XIII.<sup>108</sup>

If Spain was deemed *a priori* to be susceptible to the revolutionary government's propaganda — "a big field open and untilled" according to Gavan Duffy<sup>109</sup> — where did the Basque Country figure, if at all, in the Irish Republic's schema? Existing evidence from Irish reports would suggest that although there was apparently "great popularity of the Irish movement in Barcelona and Viscaya", the *quid pro quo* of support in the Basque and Catalan territories was "an impediment to interests in Madrid". Indeed, according to one contemporary Irish diplomatic source, this weakness was already being exploited by a successful (*British and/or Spanish?*) counter-propaganda campaign:

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<sup>106</sup> See: "Letter from Éamon de Valera to Art Ó Briain". Dated 21 February 1921. MS 8429/1; "Letter from Éamon de Valera to Art Ó Briain". Dated 04 April 1921. MS 8429/1; "Letter from Art Ó Briain to Éamon de Valera". Undated. MS 8429/1. Art Ó Briain Papers, No. 150. National Library of Ireland (NLI).

<sup>107</sup> "Maire Louise O'Brien". Military Service Pensions Collection. MSP34REF59976; "Statement No. 363 Maire Ní Bhríain (Maire O'Brien)". IMA.

<sup>108</sup> "Maire Louise O'Brien". Military Service Pensions Collection. MSP34REF59976. IMA;

<sup>109</sup> "Extract from a letter from George Gavan Duffy to Robert Brennan". Dated 11 March 1921. Rome. No. 67 DFA ES Box 33 File 232. NAI. <https://www.difp.ie/docs/Volume1/1921/67.htm> (last accessed 18 March 2019).



“Attempt made and with certain success to confound Irish case and Irish movement with that of Viscaya and Catalonia, and even to represent the IRA as akin to the Socialist and Anarchical party of Barcelona, this is a factor that works on prejudices with the Church and Catholic Party. [...] Hence although possibly the great popularity of the Irish movement in Barcelona and Viscaya is an impediment to its interests in Madrid it could nevertheless probably be utilised for commercial purposes. Sota the head of the Great Shipping Company of Bilbao (Sota y Anans [sic]) one of the great leaders of the Basque movement. His son Manuel de la Sota (whom I did not meet though he called on me) most enthusiastic in the Irish Cause”.<sup>110</sup>

The same document put forward the suggestion that consuls of the Irish Republic be opened in Barcelona and Bilbo. Possibly written by Robert Brennan, who was appointed the Under-Secretary of Foreign Affairs (USFA) by De Valera in February 1921, the second part of the above extract indicates that incremental contacts were already being made in the Basque Country.<sup>111</sup> These seemed to pivot around the influential Basque nationalist, industrialist and owner of *Euzkadi*, Ramón de la Sota, and his son Manu, a leading aberriano. Indeed, McCreanor’s research offers supporting evidence of direct contact between O’Brien and the elder De la Sota regarding the possible distribution of republican propaganda via *Euzkadi*.<sup>112</sup>

While the consuls never materialised, opinions were starting to turn in the Basque Country regardless. As Watson and Ugalde Zubiri have noted, the moderate CNV’s initial hostile attitude to the Irish revolutionaries, as reflected in the pages of *Euzkadi* in the immediate aftermath of the Rising, had begun to undertake its own quiet revolution towards a more pro-republican position as events unfolded throughout the Irish Revolutionary Period.<sup>113</sup> Watson suggests that this about-turn owed much to the internal

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<sup>110</sup> “Memorandum titled ‘Ireland and Spain’”. Dated September 1921. Madrid. No. 107 DFA ES Spain. NAI. <http://difp.ie/docs/Volume1/1921/107.htm> (last accessed 18 March 2019).

<sup>111</sup> “Letter from Eamon de Valera to Robert Brennan”. Dated 06 February 1921. Dublin. No. 59 DFA ES Box 14 File 96. NAI. <https://www.difp.ie/docs/Volume1/1921/59.htm> (last accessed 10 July 2019). Robert Brennan visited Maire O’Brien in Madrid in 1921. See: “Statement No. 363 Maire Ní Bhriain (Maire O’Brien)”. IMA.

<sup>112</sup> McCreanor: *Ireland and the Basque Country*, p. 30.

<sup>113</sup> Watson: *Basque Nationalism and Political Violence*, pp. 117–120. See also: Ugalde Zubiri: *La Acción Exterior del Nacionalismo Vasco*, pp. 282–285. An example of this change in attitude to the Irish situation may be observed in an article which appeared in *Euzkadi*, August 1921. At odds with its previous coverage in the immediate aftermath of the 1916 Rising, the newspaper characterised the rebels as: “[...] la primera afirmación activa del deseo de independencia. Aquella rebelión era más que la protesta de unos cuantos hombres: era la demostración tradicional del sentimiento nacional consciente. Tomaron parte en ella menos de mil soldados irlandeses; pero la nación habló por medio de los fusiles de los sublevados, y cuando se aplastó la protesta el pueblo irlandés se alegró de que hubiese sido hecha y habló con reverencia de los sublevados. Unos cuatro mil hombres fueron detenidos y deportados después del levantamiento de 1916. El pueblo, privado de sus jefes, supo resistir la represión del Gobierno militar británico”. See: “La Cuestión Irlandesa”, *Euzkadi*, 13.08.1921.



fissures in Hegoalde and the seemingly analogous thorny issue of Ulster. Citing several sources, the Scot argues that the CNV “used Ulster in a guarded attack on what it saw as a traitorous element within the Basque Country: the Spanish liberal parties”. In this equation, it was CNV hostility towards Spanish liberal forces within the Basque Country that provoked sympathy for the radical Irish rebels and their cause.<sup>114</sup> Another factor was perhaps the stark political realities born out as a result of Sinn Féin’s electoral victory and the establishment of the Irish Republic — a development that killed the Home Rule project stone dead, and by extension, the moderate Basque nationalists’ Irish analysis.

In the round, these macro political factors would seem to be far more relevant in accounting for *Euzkadi*’s change in tone than the influence of any direct propaganda or contacts that may have been made between Irish republicans (O’Brien, Brennan, or others) and the *jeltzale* movement.<sup>115</sup> Growing Basque solidarity with the Irish Republic’s cause did not go unnoticed in Ireland. In May 1920, favourable articles that had appeared in *Euzkadi* were reported in the popular Irish nationalist daily *Freemans Journal* as evidence of a:

“[...] friendship [that] has, in our own times, developed into warmest sympathy — a sympathy born of fellow-feeling, and of which we have had within recent years practical and very generous proof”.<sup>116</sup>

Incidentally, the same newspaper, under the headline of “Sinn Féin in Spain”, had reported on the repression of the official bulletin of the Provincial Government of Bizkaia in early 1919.<sup>117</sup>

Aside from coverage in the Basque nationalist press, what of any other relations that may have existed between elements of the revolutionary government (Sinn Féin) and sympathetic Basque nationalist factions or groups? O’Brien’s own quite-detailed personal recollections of her time in Spain offer no hint of anything more substantial than what has been mentioned above. Nor does the research conducted by Núñez Seixas or McCreanor reveal even a hint of a ‘smoking gun’ in the shape of attempted arms or material procurements from the Basque Country, Catalonia, or Spain to Ireland during the War of

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<sup>114</sup> Watson: *Basque Nationalism and Political Violence*, pp. 119–120.

<sup>115</sup> One other noteworthy republican contact with the Basque press from this period came in the shape of an “exclusive” interview for *Euzkadi* conducted by a “W.W. O’Mahony” on 24 October 1921 with Seán Tomás Ó Ceallaigh in Paris. At the end of the interview, Ó Ceallaigh encouraged Basque language activists to study the Irish language movement’s efforts of the previous 25 years. See: “Mensaje al País Vasco”, *Euzkadi*, 01.12.1921.

<sup>116</sup> “‘A THORN IN HIS HEART’. Basque Visitor’s Sympathetic Views on Irish Question”, *Freeman’s Journal*, 15.05.1920. See also: “Los vascos en Irlanda”, *Euzkadi*, 28.05.1920.

<sup>117</sup> “SINN FEIN IN SPAIN. Basque Bulletin Suppressed by Governor”, *Freeman’s Journal*, 04.01.1919.

Independence. The IRA would instead look to Britain, Italy, the Soviet Union, Germany, and the United States in this regard.<sup>118</sup>

A British intelligence report from the spring of 1921 is perhaps indicative as to the true level, type and dynamic of contacts between Irish republicans and Basque “separatists” at this juncture. While the report suggests a certain degree of contact taking place at propaganda level, which can be more than likely attributed to O’Brien; in the same breath, it highlights, akin to the Irish Republic’s own analysis, that Sinn Féin’s propaganda campaign in Madrid was effectively hamstrung by the unfavourable analogies drawn between the Irish cause and the Basque/Catalan situations vis-à-vis Spain:

“The pro-Sinn Féin campaign continues in certain separatist organs. There is little doubt that the Sinn Féiners are in communication with the separatists in Catalonia and the Basque Provinces. Responsible Spanish newspapers have, however, generally abandoned the Sinn Féin cause, since parallels between Sinn Féin and the Basque and Catalan movements can too easily be drawn. Foreigners, however, are not affected by such trifles. J. [sic] Gavan Duffy who is called an emissary extraordinary of the Sinn Féin Republic and member of Parliament, gave an interview to the ‘Debate’ early in March, in which he stated he had found comrades in other countries, but brothers in Spain. He asserts that in Ireland the good fight is carried on by the Republican Army who, with an iron discipline, are actuated by a solemn faith in their ultimate success, against which the power of England is shattering itself”.<sup>119</sup>

Despite the resolute words of Gavan Duffy, England did not “shatter itself” against the “solemn faith” of the Irish revolutionaries and the oath to the Irish Republic that all IRA volunteers had foresworn to uphold. Instead, a truce was declared between both sides in May 1921. Gavan Duffy would be one of seven Irish signatories to the Anglo-Irish Treaty, signed in London on 06 December 1921.

By any metric, the Treaty fell far short of the sovereign 32-county Irish Republic that had nominally existed since January 1919. Defending the Treaty in subsequent Dáil debates, Gavan Duffy articulated the dilemma that the negotiators had faced in London, and the choice now faced by Sinn Féin as to whether it should accept the terms of the Treaty or be subject to the resumption of war with Britain:

“I do not love this Treaty now any more than I loved it when I signed it, but I do not think that that is an adequate answer, that it is an adequate motive for rejection to point out that some of us signed the Treaty under duress, nor to say that this

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<sup>118</sup> Núñez Seixas: “Ecos de Pascua”; McCreanor: *Ireland and the Basque Country*; Hanley: “Very Dangerous Places: IRA Gunrunning and the Post-War Underworld”.

<sup>119</sup> “Monthly Review of Revolutionary Movements in British Dominions Overseas & Foreign Countries”. No. 29. March 1921. CAB/24/122. NA.

Treaty will not lead to permanent peace. It is necessary before you reject the Treaty to go further than that and to produce to the people of Ireland a rational alternative (hear, hear). My heart is with those who are against the Treaty, but my reason is against them, because I can see no rational alternative. You may reject the Treaty and gamble, for it is a gamble, upon what will happen next. You may have a plebiscite in this country, which no serious man can wish to have, because after what you have seen here it is obvious that it will rend the country from one end to the other, and leave memories of bitterness and acrimony that will last a generation. You may gamble on the prospects of a renewal of that horrible war, which I for one have only seen from afar, but which I know those who have so nobly withstood do not wish to see begun again without a clear prospect of getting further than they are to-day. We are told that this is a surrender of principle. If that be so, we must be asked to believe that every one of those who have gone before us in previous fights, and who in the end have had to lay down their arms or surrender in order to avert a greater evil to the people, have likewise been guilty of a breach of principle. I do not think an argument of that kind will get you much further. No!”<sup>120</sup>

On 07 January 1922, the Dáil voted 64 votes to 57 in favour of the Treaty. De Valera led the anti-Treaty minority out of the parliamentary chamber. Sinn Féin and the IRA effectively split between pro- and anti-Treaty forces.

When news of the vote reached Máire O’Brien in Madrid, she immediately resigned from her position, packed up her belongings and returned to Dublin in February 1922. She immediately offered her services for those who would continue to fight for what they considered to be the legitimate government of the Irish Republic.<sup>121</sup> Rejection of the Treaty and the institutions that stemmed from it as illegitimate usurpations of the *true* 32-county sovereign and independent Irish Republic would become the fundamental cornerstone of the Irish republican movement’s ideology.

## **The Irish Republic and Argentina**

When the Irish rebels occupied the GPO on the morning of Easter Monday 1916, among the ranks was a young Argentinian of Irish stock named Eamon Bulfin. The son of the writer William Bulfin, it has been suggested that Eamon was charged with hoisting the green flag with “Irish Republic” emblazoned across it in gold text from the rooftop.<sup>122</sup> Within a week, both the flag and Bulfin were captured by British forces. The young Bulfin, alongside hundreds of his comrades, was subsequently interned in Frongoch Camp in northern Wales.

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<sup>120</sup> “Debate on Treaty”. Dáil Éireann debate. Wednesday, 21 Dec 1921.

<https://www.oireachtas.ie/en/debates/debate/dail/1921-12-21/2/> (last accessed 18 March 2019).

<sup>121</sup> “Statement No. 363 Maire Ní Bhriain (Maire O’Brien)”. Bureau of Military History. IMA.

<sup>122</sup> Proinsias Mac Fhionnghaile: *Laurence Ginnell. Father of the Irish Republican Movement*, Donegal, LorcArt Publishing, 2015, pp. 87–90.

Upon his release in 1917, Bulfin was deported back to Argentina, where he was condemned for military desertion and locked up again. Released from a Buenos Aires jail in 1919, De Valera designated Bulfin as an emissary of the Irish Republic in the land of his birth on 17 June. Occasionally working in tandem with Sinn Féin TD Laurence Ginnell, who was appointed Irish Government Representative to Argentina and South America in 1921, both men attempted to further the republic's interests along the Río de la Plata.<sup>123</sup>

In parallel to Bulfin, another Argentinian of Irish stock had also crossed the Atlantic to his “motherland” prior to the Rising. Born in 1900, Ambrose Martin arrived at his maternal Grand Uncle's farm in Westmeath (An Iarmhí) in 1914, “unable to speak any language but Spanish”. In March 1919, Martin's “part in the Sinn Féin Movement” led to his arrest in Dublin, apparently “arranged by the RIC [Royal Irish Constabulary], the English Police and the Argentine Police”. Incarcerated in Walton Prison, Liverpool from the end of March 1919 until 20 May, Martin was subsequently, akin to Bulfin, deported back to Argentina. According to family documentation made available to McCreanor, Bulfin and Martin were, by this stage, “already friends”.<sup>124</sup>

Argentina proved to be somewhat of a mixed bag, at best, for the official delegation of the Irish Republic. While Ginnell attended numerous public functions, secured interviews with major newspapers and attempted to raise loans within the Irish-Argentinian community, outside of this immediate bubble —itself seemingly riven with “intense factionalism”— general Argentinian awareness and interest in the Irish Republic's cause was thin on the ground. Irish “friends” were, as one official source suggested, solely limited to “Argentine Nationalists and Priests” and “representatives of small nations here (Basques etc)”.<sup>125</sup>

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<sup>123</sup> Cruset: *Nacionalismo y Diásporas: los casos vasco e irlandés en Argentina: (1862–1922)*, pp. 125–126.

<sup>124</sup> “Garda report on Ambrose Martin”. Undated. Irish-Iberian Trading Company. E.S.2/24. NAI. “Garda report on Ambrose Martin”. Undated. Irish-Iberian Trading Company. E.S.2/24. NAI; “Gran acontecimiento patriótico”, *Aberri*, 31.03.1922. McCreanor: *Ireland and the Basque Country*, p. 30. There is some discrepancy as to whether Ambrose Martin was born in 1900 or 1901. 1900 seems the most likely year. The above Garda Síochána (Irish police) report states 04 April 1900 as his date of birth. He is also referred to as 22 years of age in a Basque newspaper report from 07 April 1922. See: “Un Ejemplo. Por la Libertad y por la Patria”, *Aberri*, 07.04.1922. The following documentation located in the National Library of Ireland suggests that Martin was born on 05 April 1901 (a year and a day later than the above sources): “Draft claim of citizenship of Ambrose Victor Martin, written in O'Brien's hand, including information of his birth, family, passport and life in Ireland and France”. William O'Brien (1881–1968) Papers. MS13,961/3/111. NLI.

<sup>125</sup> “Précis of a report on Argentina by P.J. Little”. Dated 04 October 1921. Buenos Aires. No. 109 DE 5/21. NAI. <https://www.difp.ie/docs/Volume1/1921/109.htm>; “Department of Foreign Affairs Report”. Dated 10 August 1921. Dublin. No. 104 DE 4/4/2. NAI. <http://difp.ie/docs/Volume1/1921/104.htm> (sites

Regarding this Basque connection, Ginnell and another Irish representative to Argentina, Patrick J. Little, were hosted and toasted by “Basque Clubs” on at least two occasions. According to Little’s records, on 25 October 1921, the Irish representatives were invited to a “Basque Club, where they paid us great honours and spoke with great eloquence”. The following month, Ginnell was invited to another Basque banquet, at which a laudatory speech by one Tomás Otaegui “afirma que Jaun Zuria, primer señor de la República de Bizcaya, procedía de la bella Erin”.<sup>126</sup> In contrast to this goodwill, the government of the Argentinian President Hipólito Yrigoyen, who was himself of Basque extraction, was reportedly at pains not to “involve [Argentina] in diplomatic entanglements by recognising [the Irish] Republic”.<sup>127</sup>

Running parallel to the official Irish diplomatic offensive in Argentina, a number of underground Irish associations and groups operating in and around Buenos Aires kept British intelligence on their toes between 1919 to 1921. Among the alleged plots cited in British records were the activities of a “Comite pro Libertad de Irlanda”, which was apparently assisting the “Arab Colony” to agitate for “Arab liberty and independence from England and France”. Other dispatches raised the spectre of “Sinn Féin” attacks on British government representatives, shipping companies and industrial establishments.<sup>128</sup>

What of Ambrose Martin’s activities in Argentina during this period? There is some evidence to suggest that he may have been involved in the establishment of a number of revolutionary “Circulo Irlandes” that sprang up in various Argentinian towns and cities, including Arrecifes, Pergamino, Venado Tuerto, Capitán Sarmiento, and Buenos Aires.<sup>129</sup>

Regarding the activities of the “Circulo” in the Argentinian capital, a British intelligence report from November 1920 asserts that the group was intent on blowing up

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last accessed 20 March 2019); Michael Kennedy: “‘Mr Blythe, I think, Hears from him Occasionally’: The Experiences of Irish Diplomats in Latin America, 1919-23” in Michael Kennedy, Joseph Morrison Skelly: *Irish Foreign Policy, 1919–166. From Independence to Internationalism*, Dublin, Four Courts Press, 2000, pp. 44–60.

<sup>126</sup> “Statement by Mr. P.J. Little”. No.WS. 1769. Bureau of Military History. IMA. <http://www.bureauofmilitaryhistory.ie/reels/bmh/BMH.WS1769.pdf> (last accessed 20 March 2019); Cruset: *Nacionalismo y Diásporas: los casos vasco e irlandés en Argentina: (1862–1922)*, p. 132. In January 1922, Arthur Griffith, the (then) President of Dáil Éireann received a telegram from “the Basque Colony” in Buenos Aires that read “Congratulate Ireland on winning freedom”. See: “Messages received by Mr. Griffith and Mr. Duffy”, *Evening Herald*, 14.01.1922.

<sup>127</sup> “Précis of a report on Argentina by P.J. Little”. Dated 04 October 1921. Buenos Aires. No. 109 DE 5/21. NAI. <https://www.difp.ie/docs/Volume1/1921/109.htm> (last accessed 20 March 2019).

<sup>128</sup> “Monthly Review of Revolutionary Movements in British Dominions Overseas & Foreign Countries”. No. 23. September 1920. CAB/24/112. NA; “Monthly Review of Revolutionary Movements in British Dominions Overseas and Foreign Countries”. No. 27. January 1921. CAB/24/120. NA.

<sup>129</sup> See: “La estancia en Bizcaya de un gran propagandista irlandés”, *Aberri*, 19.05.1922.

the city's "Edificio Británico", which housed the British Legation, Consulate, Royal Wheat Commission, Royal Mail and other British companies.<sup>130</sup>

The "Círculo Irlandés" also seemed to have been viewed dimly by the official Irish delegation in Argentina. For instance, in April 1920, Eamon Bulfin wrote to De Valera, outlining his frustrations at the *ad hoc* association, whom he suggested "represented nobody but themselves". Bulfin continued: "It would be advisable to hold no communication with them if any real good is to be done for the Republic here".<sup>131</sup>

From European archives, it is difficult to ascertain the extent of Ambrose Martin's activities on the Río de la Plata during these years. His apparent friendship with Bulfin and his possible involvement in the "Círculos" aside, Martin does not crop up in any Irish state documentation from this period — or at least none of those consulted by this author. Citing correspondence with a member of the Martin family, McCreanor suggests that Ambrose Martin may have even attempted to establish a fully trained and uniformed IRA reserve during this period in Argentina.<sup>132</sup> As will become apparent throughout the rest of this chapter, Ambrose Martin had a tendency towards exaggerating and embellishing his revolutionary credentials.

Regardless of the veracity of above claims, what can be verified is that in the wake of the divisive Anglo-Irish Treaty, Ambrose Martin, akin to Máire O'Brien, set out to return to Ireland. *En route*, the mercurial Irish-Argentinian docked at the port of Bilbo in the spring of 1922.

### **An Irish hero comes to town**

Ambrose Martin's arrival in Bilbo in 1922 was seemingly the first time that he had set foot in the Basque Country. He was, however, no novice when it came to Basque political issues. Having grown up just outside Buenos Aires in the village of Suipacha — a settlement known for its significant mix of Irish and Basque immigrant communities — he was already well versed in Basque affairs and possibly even had some knowledge of Euskara.<sup>133</sup>

For the duration of his four weeks in the Basque Country (01 to 28 April), the Irish-Argentinian delivered numerous lectures on the Sinn Féin movement, the experience of

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<sup>130</sup> "Monthly Review of Revolutionary Movements in British Dominions Overseas and Foreign Countries". No. 25. November 1920. CAB/24/117. NA.

<sup>131</sup> "Letter from Eamon Bulfin to Éamon de Valera". Dated 20 April 1920. Éamon de Valera Papers. P150/735. UCDA.

<sup>132</sup> McCreanor: *Ireland and the Basque Country*, p. 31.

<sup>133</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 30.



the Irish Republic, and the potential lessons that could be extrapolated by Basque political activists. This took him to the *Juventud Vasca locales* of Algorta, Barakaldo, Bilbo, Begoña and Erandio; the *Batzokis* of Alonsotegi (Alonsótegui), Burtzeña (Burceña) and Zorrotza (Zorroza), as well as conferences in Deustu (Deusto) and Portugalete, among others.<sup>134</sup>

Exactly how and why the enigmatic Irish-Argentinian ended up in Bilbo is still unclear. What *is* evident, is that by any metric, his visit was a resounding success. Indeed, by the end of his trip, Martin was being lauded almost as a heroic embodiment of the Irish revolution itself, walking among the *aberrianos*:

“Un irlandés, un patriota, un muchacho de 22 años, con una historia de un gran hombre, os presento. Ha sido encarcelado y perseguido por afirmar definitivamente, que su Patria, Irlanda, es independiente y libre. Su vida sencilla y heroica, como la de los vascos primitivos, lleva la ejecutoria de su origen romántico. Su rostro, como el de todos los defensores de las Patrias opresas, tiene un tinte de sangre. ¡Ah! nadie se liberará de la servidumbre, sin dejar una estela de sacrificio en su camino. Hijo de Irlanda, de esa isla de un verde húmedo, llena de fuego interior, como un volcán, tierra de las baladas de poesía y de los mártires, y de los hombres de corazón de león [...]”<sup>135</sup>

Apart from evoking romantic notions of sacrifice for one’s homeland, Martin’s tour also had direct tangible effects. As referenced in chapter one, a lecture he gave on *Cumann na mBan* (The Irishwomen’s League) has been widely credited as the spur for the establishment of a sister Basque organisation, *Emakume Abertzale Batza*. More importantly perhaps, Martin’s visit provided a timely boon to the *aberriano* strand of Basque nationalism, which had re-consecrated itself under the original *jeltzale* moniker of the PNV the previous September. If, as according to Núñez Seixas, Gallastegi saw in Sinn Féin the possibility of building up a nucleus of associations and organisations that could provide the basis for a radical Basque civil alternative to the Spanish state, then Martin’s explications of the “Sinn Féin movement” in front of large, youthful and enthusiastic crowds, lent demonstrable emulative examples for the *aberrianos* to engage with — regardless of whether this was based in his own lived reality or not.<sup>136</sup> The following extracts illustrate this transfer vividly:

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<sup>134</sup> Ugalde Zubiri: *La Acción Exterior del Nacionalismo Vasco*, p. 296.

<sup>135</sup> “Un Ejemplo. Por la Libertad y por la Patria”, *Aberri*, 07.04.1922.

<sup>136</sup> In the words of Núñez Seixas: “El nuevo líder del PNV Eli Gallastegi veía en el nacionalismo irlandés un modelo de movilización social polivalente ‘alrededor de un centro nacional euzkadiano, siempre dentro de la patria’. En esa perspectiva, el nuevo nacionalismo vasco debía aspirar a crear una sociedad civil paralela, con el fin de sustituir al Estado en todos los ámbitos. Este fue el estímulo para la articulación de los grupos de *Mendigoizaleak* (1921) o montañeros nacionalistas vascos, la extensión de



“Jamás hemos visto enardecerse a nuestra juventud patriota como el pasado sábado, sugestionada por el cálido verbo del elocuentísimo orador irlandés que honró la tribuna de Juventud Vasca. Por espacio de hora y media nos tuvo suspensos de su palabra arrebatadora—encendida en amor patrio por la desgraciada Irlanda—ese joven patriota irlandés que se ha alzado ante nosotros, vibrante y apocalíptico, para anunciar a nuestra raza abatida el único faro de salvación de los pueblos que aspiran a su libertad. Con voz conmovida, profética, sugestionadora nos hizo una relación emocionante de la trágica epopeya de Irlanda la gloriosa, que ha encontrado en el patriotismo de sus hijos una fuerza misteriosa e irresistible que le impulsa contra la raza enemiga, contra la raza fatal, astuciosa y dominadora, con tal decisión y tan grande empuje, que nos hace ver muy próxima la resurrección de su cadáver nacional. Durante su breve estancia en ésta, de paso para su Patria, este joven patriota —carácter de acero— no ha descansado un solo momento en la propagación de los ideales de la República Irlandesa, de la cual es un abnegado y valiente defensor. En otro lugar de nuestro semanario damos cuenta de los actos en que ha tomado parte, en Juventud Vasca de Bilbao, de Barakaldo y Salón de la Filarmónica en el acto en su honor organizado por nuestra Juventud. No podía Juventud Vasca de Bilbao haber aprovechado una ocasión más oportuna para levantar el espíritu de sus socios, con el ejemplo vivo del hombre que ha sabido sacrificar en el altar de la Patria los bienes de fortuna y las delicias del hogar, cantando, lejos de ella, en la amargura del destierro, sus heroicas virtudes y su gloria inmarcesible. Así es como se educa al pueblo. Nuestra enhorabuena a Juventud y nuestro más efusivo y cordial saludo a tan simpático visitante. ¡Viva la República de Irlanda independiente!”<sup>137</sup>

“Los que nos preciamos de patriotas vascos, debemos aprender e imitar, la labor ejemplar que este infatigable sembrador del Ideal Nacionalista ha desarrollado en todo momento, y en cuantos territorios ha visitado. Porque el día que contemos en nuestras filas con media docena de jóvenes del temple de alma, de la cultura, del patriotismo y del espíritu de sacrificio del irlandés Mr. Martin, habremos conquistado no solo la beligerancia y las simpatías del mundo entero, sino hasta la liberación de nuestra Raza”.<sup>138</sup>

Martin’s visit to the Basque Country came just prior to the outbreak of the Irish Civil War in June 1922, between pro- and anti-Treaty forces. Reaction to the Anglo-Irish Treaty the previous December from within Basque nationalist ranks had been broadly positive, with even Gallastegi initially taking a circumspect view. Akin to its leading Irish proponent Michael Collins, the Bilbaino seemed to view the Anglo-Irish Treaty as a transitional arrangement towards full Irish freedom:

“¿Qué hará ahora Irlanda ante el Convenio de Londres? ¿Aceptarán los republicanos *sinn feiners* las concesiones británicas? Es probable que la mayoría de los irlandeses, desangrados y fatigados por una lucha tan desigual como lo que han sostenido durante estos cinco últimos años, renuncien temporalmente a su

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grupos teatrales de inspiración nacionalista y la incorporación de la mujer a la movilización nacionalista”. See: Núñez Seixas: “Ecos de Pascua” (quote on p. 463).

<sup>137</sup> “Conferencias Patrióticas”, *Aberri*, 07.04.1922.

<sup>138</sup> “La estancia en Bizkaya de un gran propagandista irlandés”, *Aberri*, 19.05.1922.

República Independiente, con la que tanto se habían encariñado; y el Dáil Eireann acepte transitoriamente, solo como un compás de espera, el llamado Estado libre de Irlanda, sin hacer por ello dejación de sus inalienables derechos a la plena soberanía e independencia de su Patria. Aprendamos, vascos. Jamás se ha dado en la Historia de los pueblos un caso tan ejemplar como el de esta lucha titánica de siete siglos por la independencia de la patria [...] Los nacionalistas vascos, en el día de hoy representantes de la raza más antigua de Europa —la única civilizada que permanece aún sojuzgada— henchidos de júbilo por el triunfo de la libertad y de la justicia de Irlanda, felicitan calurosamente al Pueblo Irlandés, modelo de heroísmo y de amor al Ideal Nacionalista, y hacen votos porque consiga Irlanda una prosperidad eterna y una Independencia absoluta. ¡Gora Irlanda Azkatuta!”<sup>139</sup>

When the Irish Civil War began, expressions of aberriano sympathy solidified behind the anti-Treaty republicans.<sup>140</sup> Coupled with Gallastegi’s enthusiasm for an Irish revolutionary type model in the Basque Country, and Martin’s own personal rejection of the Anglo-Irish Treaty,<sup>141</sup> it not surprising that each man would quickly find in the other a close political affinity.

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<sup>139</sup> “El Estado libre de Irlanda”, *Aberri*, 17.12.1921.

<sup>140</sup> See: McCreanor: *Ireland and the Basque Country*, pp. 40–41.

<sup>141</sup> “Draft claim of citizenship of Ambrose Victor Martin, written in O’Brien’s hand, including information of his birth, family, passport and life in Ireland and France”. William O’Brien (1881–1968) Papers. MS13,961/3/111. NLI.



## CHAPTER TWO (Part II)

### 2.3. Fragments of a radical Basque nationalist-Irish republican nexus (1923–1945)

“We had fed the heart on fantasies,  
The heart’s grown brutal from the fare;  
More substance in our enmities  
Than in our love; O honey-bees,  
Come build in the empty house of the stare”.<sup>1</sup>

The Irish Civil War came to an end on 24 May 1923 when IRA Chief of Staff Frank Aiken ordered all units “to dump arms”. Fought between adversaries who had until so recently been allies against the British, the increasingly bitter war was pockmarked by a number of high-profile assassinations and the execution of at least seventy-seven anti-Treatyites and civilians at the hands of Saorstát Éireann forces.<sup>2</sup> By war’s end, the 32-county “Irish Republic” that had been proclaimed by a militant minority in 1916 and unilaterally established by an electoral majority in 1919, had definitively given way to the 26-county Irish Free State, as stipulated in the terms of the Anglo-Irish Treaty. In an address to the “Soldiers of the Republic. Legion of the Rearguard”, De Valera acknowledged that: “The Republic can no longer be defended successfully by your arms. [...] Military victory must be allowed to rest for the moment with those who have destroyed the Republic”.<sup>3</sup>

Meanwhile, in Spain, an Andalusian Captain General of the Spanish army, Miguel Primo de Rivera, came to power in September 1923 and established a military dictatorship. Given the title of Prime Minister by King Alfonso XIII, Primo de Rivera attempted to justify his usurpation of parliament by presenting his regime as a stop-gap “parenthesis” that would be reversed just “as soon as the country offers us men uncontaminated with the vices of political organisation”.<sup>4</sup> The ascent of the hard-line Spanish nationalist to power led to the immediate repression and dismantling of the abertariano PNV, including the closing down of its publications, social centres, and the

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<sup>1</sup> Excerpt from “The stare’s Nest by my Window” by William Butler Yeats.

<sup>2</sup> Michael Hopkinson: “The Guerrilla Phase and the End of the Civil War” in Crowley, Ó Drisceoil, Murphy, Borgonovo (eds.): *Atlas of the Irish Revolution*, pp. 703–715.

<sup>3</sup> Cited in: Ronan Fanning: *Éamon De Valera. A Will to Power*, London, Faber & Faber, 2015, p. 142.

<sup>4</sup> Cited in: Raymond Carr: *Modern Spain, 1875–1980*, Oxford, Oxford University Press, 2001, p. 98.

exile of many of the movement's rank-and-file members. The CNV, while more tolerated by the regime, also had to effectively withdraw its nationalist rhetoric from public.<sup>5</sup>

Owing to civil war defeat and an authoritarian coup, respectively, Irish republicans and radical Basque nationalists were essentially driven underground in 1923. These were the changed political contexts that would frame the fitful and fragmented contacts and relations between the two movements over the next decade.

### **Legions of the rearguard**

While Eamon Bulfin was the man seemingly charged with hoisting the “Irish Republic” flag over the GPO in 1916, one anecdote suggests that his future republican comrade in Argentina, Laurence Ginnell, had donated the green bed sheets from which the famous green banner was tailored.<sup>6</sup> Ginnell was not so easily willing to part with the Irish Republic itself. After rejecting the terms of the Anglo-Irish Treaty, Ginnell was made the notional Irish Republic's ambassador to the USA by De Valera. He served in Washington DC until his death in April 1923.

According to an article published in *Aberri* two months after his death, Ginnell was said to have helped to facilitate a cordial relationship between the aberriano-PNV and (anti-Treaty) republicans:

“[...] estamos muy obligados [*¿ligados?*] a base de una relación cordial que el Partido Nacionalista Vasco, por medio del diputado y ministro irlandés, Mr. Ginnell, había llegado a cimentar alcanzado hasta una credencial para que un querido amigo nuestro nos representara en Dublín ante Mr. Eamon de Valera. En esta armonía entre Irlanda y Euzkadi, nos sorprendió la tragedia irlandesa, que quisiéramos tuviera su victoria en las próximas elecciones. Y ahore [*sic*] sea nuestro mejor homenaje al Ejército republicano de Irlanda, un aleccionador discurso de su liustre [*sic*] caudillo y presidente Eamon de Valera, que evidenciara quiénes fueron los rebeldes a la causa de la independencia nacional y si los soldados republicanos cumplieron sacrificando sus vidas y su paz en aras del deber y del honor patrios, dando con su gesto viral y heroico, una enseñanza practica a todos los nacionalistas de los pueblos oprimidos”.

McCreanor hypothesises, with good reason, that the “querido amigo nuestro” in question probably refers to Ambrose Martin.<sup>7</sup>

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<sup>5</sup> De Pablo; Mees: *El Péndulo Patriótico*, pp. 97–99.

<sup>6</sup> Mac Fhionnghaile: *Laurence Ginnell. Father of the Irish Republican Movement*, pp. 87–90; “The MP for Ireland: Laurence Ginnell and 1916”, available at: <https://www.rte.ie/centuryireland/index.php/articles/the-member-for-ireland-laurence-ginnell-and-1916> (last accessed 21 March 2019).

<sup>7</sup> “En Euzkadi sobran hombres,” *Aberri*, 06.06.1923. McCreanor: *Ireland and the Basque Country*, p. 44. See also: Ugalde Zubiri: *La Acción Exterior del Nacionalismo Vasco*, p. 298, p. 322.

Pinpointing exactly when this meeting took place is challenging. Years later, in 1936, Ambrose Martin would reportedly claim to have accompanied a Basque member of the clergy to Dublin in 1920 for a “two-hour conversation with De Valera, who was “then in hiding”.<sup>8</sup> There are two problems with Martin’s reported claim. Firstly, De Valera embarked for the United States on 01 June 1919 and did not set foot on Irish soil again until 20 December 1920.<sup>9</sup> Secondly, Ambrose Martin was himself in Argentina until early 1922. One can only speculate that an error was perhaps made in the reportage of Martin’s statement.

Another source refers to a similar (*or perhaps the same?*) encounter between a Basque nationalist delegation and De Valera around this time. Published in Eli Gallastegi’s “Por La Libertad Vasca” (1933), the following meeting is recounted:

“En relación con las actividades vascas, tuvo el nacionalismo ocasión de enviar una embajada personal a Irlanda. Los miembros del gobierno republicano, que secretamente funcionaba presidido por De Valera, escucharon con todo interés nuestro problema y nuestros propósitos, y el propio De Valera pronunció frases alentadores reconociendo la existencia de la nacionalidad y patria de los vascos, — ¡lo que muchos vascos no quieren reconocer aún!—, su derecho a la independencia y, asimismo, como legítima representación del pueblo euskadiano, a los jefes de la organización que en aquel tiempo existía, alentado a todos los vascos a que lucharan sin descanso por su liberación. [...] Fueron presentados nuestros enviados a cada uno de los miembros de aquel gobierno clandestino de la república, en el que figuraban dos o tres mujeres, las condesas de Markiewicz y de Plunket [sic] [...]”.<sup>10</sup>

At the beginning of this article, the presumed author, Gallastegi, refers to the deaths of two Irish republicans, Terence MacSwiney (October 1920) and Kevin Barry (November 1920), prior to the introduction of the details of the meeting. The following extract provides the only (indirect) indication of when this meeting may have taken place: “Han pasado pocos años después de estos hechos trágicos”.

Regardless of the exact details of the PNV-De Valera encounter, which still need to be clarified by further research, for the moment, one can affirm that a meeting did indeed take place in Ireland between De Valera (as President of the “Irish Republic”) and a PNV delegation at some stage in the early 1920s. Most likely facilitated by either, or both, Laurence Ginnell and/or Ambrose Martin, this may be considered as the first “organisational” meeting of Irish republican and radical Basque nationalist bodies.

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<sup>8</sup> “A Dublin Meeting”, *The Irish Independent*, 06.11.1936.

<sup>9</sup> “De Valera in America”, <https://www.rte.ie/centuryireland/index.php/articles/de-valera-in-america> (last accessed 01 May 2020).

<sup>10</sup> Elías Gallastegi: “E.A.B. así va naciendo”, *Por La Libertad Vasca*, Bilbao, Talleres Tipográficos E. Verde, 1933, p. 119.



Despite the difficulties posed by the new regime in Spain, Gallastegi chose not to go into exile. It was not long, however, until the authorities suppressed his political activities. In November 1924, the Bilbaino and eleven aberriano comrades, including an ex-cleric, Francisco Gaztañaga, were in the process of holding a clandestine meeting in Ordizia, Gipuzkoa, when the Spanish police suddenly turned up. Also present at the gathering — ostensibly to discuss the Irish struggle for independence— was “an official from the Irish ‘Sinn Féin’ army”: one Ambrose Martin.<sup>11</sup>

As we shall see later, Ambrose Martin either managed to evade the police in the commotion of the raid or was perhaps released. Either way, he escaped across the border into France. The 12 aberrianos were not so lucky. Transferred to prison in Ondarreta, four of the men, including Gallastegi, were formally charged. It would be a full year before the aberriano leader faced court in relation to the Ordizia affair.<sup>12</sup> In the meantime, he had more pressing domestic concerns to attend to: a marriage to arrange with his partner, Margarita de Miñaur Mújica.

The following May, Gallastegi threw his “bachelor” party in Artxanda (Archanda), Bilbo. Attended by as many 500 people, including prominent Basque nationalists, *Gudari* used the occasion to mix the political with the familiar, praising the leading protagonists of various worldwide struggles, De Valera included.<sup>13</sup> As night closed in, the celebrations were curtly broken up by armed police, forcing Gallastegi to flee quickly. A few months after the Artxanda incident and a short stint in prison, the aberriano leader was finally due in court over the Ordizia meeting and several other minor charges related to his political activities. Weighing up the situation, Gallastegi crossed the frontier from Spain into France.<sup>14</sup> He was neither the first nor last Basque political exile under Primo de Rivera’s regime to flee to France.

North of the Pyrenees, radical (aberriano) Basque and Catalan (Estat Catalá – Catalan State) nationalists maintained regular contact in shared exile. Francisco Gaztañaga, who moved regularly between Paris and Hamburg, was the main aberriano in the French

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<sup>11</sup> De Pablo, Mees, Rodríguez Ranz: *El Péndulo Patriótico*, p. 174, p. 321 (footnote 34). As the authors note, the Ordizia meeting has often been erroneously cited as occurring in 1925. Vibrant (pseud. Daniel Cardona), *Res de nou al Pirineu*, Barcelona, Nosaltrés Sols!, 38, 71, 1933. Vibrant reference cited in: McCreanor: *Ireland and the Basque Country*, p. 45.

<sup>12</sup> De Pablo, Mees, Rodríguez Ranz: *El Péndulo Patriótico*, pp. 174–175.

<sup>13</sup> Ugalde Zubiri: *La Acción Exterior del Nacionalismo Vasco*, pp. 347–348.

<sup>14</sup> “Gallastegui Uriarte, Elías”, available at: <http://aunamendi.eusko-ikaskuntza.eus/en/gallastegui-uriarte-elias/ar-55939/> (last accessed 17 February 2019).

capital. Meanwhile, the pro-independent Estat Catalá, headed up by Francesc Macià, maintained its headquarters in the Parisian commune of Boise-Colombes.

In January 1925, Gaztañaga signed a “Pacto de la Libre Alianza” with the Catalans on behalf of the aberrianos. This pact anticipated an armed revolt against the Spanish state as a first strike leading to Basque and Catalan independence. That autumn, another Paris-based aberriano, Adolfo Larrañaga, set out provisional plans for the Basque leg of the plot to his Catalan counterparts. Larrañaga’s audacious proposal envisaged the arming of 300 Basque volunteers who would ostensibly go on pilgrimage to the French town of Lourdes. Once armed and ready, this group would then lead a naval attack on Bilbo from Bordeaux, sparking an insurrection. If it is true that the plot owed much of its inspiration to the 1916 Rising, as De Pablo, Mees and Rodríguez Ranz suggest, it was also destined to suffer from the same poor planning that had hampered the Easter rebels. The “Lourdes plot” ultimately never materialised.<sup>15</sup>

Macià continued his planning for Catalan liberation. In 1926, he approached Eli Gallastegi, who, as we have seen, was also now in exile. The Catalan leader floated two ideas in his meeting with *Gudari*: the first, a joint Catalan-Basque rebellion; the second, the possible procurement of arms and munitions from the factories of Eibar (Éibar) — a heavily industrialised Gipuzkoan town where armaments were produced for the Spanish army. Although nothing came of these proposals, Macià decided to press on regardless. A rebellion to be launched from the south of France was earmarked for November 1926 (Complot de Prats Molló). Shortly prior to its planned commencement, however, Macià and his co-conspirators were detained by French authorities.<sup>16</sup>

Running concurrently to these mainly Paris-centric Basque-Catalan connections, Ambrose Martin, having fled the Ordizia gathering in November 1924, was living in the French capital. Indeed, his *de facto* home was none other than the Estat Catalá headquarters in Boise-Colombes. A dossier on Martin compiled by a Garda Síochána sergeant who years later interviewed Martin’s estranged wife, indicates that the Irish-Argentinian had left Ireland “in October 1924 [...] for Bilbao in the Basque Province of Spain”.<sup>17</sup> This would tally with his attendance at the Ordizia meeting in November and a likely border crossing into France shortly after. A series of letters subsequently written

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<sup>15</sup> De Pablo, Mees, Rodríguez Ranz: *El Péndulo Patriótico*, pp. 175–177.

<sup>16</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 177–178.

<sup>17</sup> “Garda report on Ambrose Martin by Sergeant John O’Boyle”. Dated 20 August 1940. Irish-Iberian Trading Company. E.S.2/24. NAI.

by Martin during his stay in Paris (and synergised in Soler Parício's PhD dissertation), state that the British government had alerted the Spanish authorities to his presence in Spain. Seemingly forced into hiding on several occasions, Martin had managed to safely cross the Spanish-French frontier with the assistance of Basque nationalists.<sup>18</sup>

Also based in Paris was Leopold Kerney, an envoy to the defeated anti-Treaty Irish Republic, which was still presided over by its "President" Éamon de Valera. Without going into significant detail, the following section will attempt to partially account for some of the relations and contacts between Martin, Kerney, and the Basque and Catalan nationalists in Paris during this period.

### **"Dangerous friends"**

Francesc Macià spent much of 1924 attempting to construct a Lliga de Nacions Oprimides (League of Oppressed Nations). This league, it was envisaged, would seek to coordinate mutual assistance between its members. Prospective members included the likes of Catalonia, the Basque Country, Galicia, India, Ireland, Philippines, Egypt, and Morocco, among others. To this end, Macià wrote to De Valera requesting that Sinn Féin send a delegate to the Paris-based (and ultimately short-lived) entity.<sup>19</sup> The aberriano Francisco Gaztañaga was also apparently dispatched to Ireland in order to "atraer los sinnfeiners".<sup>20</sup>

While De Valera authorised Leopold Kerney to attend the league's inauguration as the Irish representative, there is no evidence that Kerney actually did so.<sup>21</sup> Kerney, nevertheless, began to maintain and develop close relations with Macià in the French capital. In addition to Kerney's close relationship with Macià—and Macià's with Martin—Kerney and Martin also became mutual acquaintances in Paris, completing the triangle. Regarding the third of these relationship strands, Soler Parício cites a series of letters sent between the two men, which, in the view of the Catalan researcher, suggests that Martin acted as a sort of "intermediary" between Kerney and Macià.<sup>22</sup>

On 17 March 1925, all three attended a St. Patrick's Day banquet in Paris that was hosted by Kerney and organised under the banner of Cercle Francais Irlande (French

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<sup>18</sup> Soler Parício: *Irlanda y la guerra civil Española*. (PhD Dissertation), p. 55.

<sup>19</sup> Soler Parício: *Irlanda y la guerra civil Española*, p. 58.

<sup>20</sup> Núñez Seixas: "El mito del nacionalismo irlandés y su influencia en los nacionalismos gallego, vasco y catalán (1880–1936)".

<sup>21</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>22</sup> Soler Parício: *Irlanda y la guerra civil Española*. (PhD Dissertation), pp. 51–55.

Circle Ireland), an ostensibly “non-political” entity.<sup>23</sup> Addressing the guests, Macià invited his “distinguished friend” and “republican soldier” Martin to read out a message on behalf of the Catalan people. What follows is an excerpt, translated by Soler Paríció, from the original English version:

“Este acto es la consagración de una amistad entre dos pueblos que son, en el presente, hermanos de esclavitud y martirio y serán, en un futuro cercano, hermanos en la resurrección y manumisión. Isla Esmeralda, heroica Erin, Catalunya os ama, desde hace muchos años, como alguien que se halla enamorado. Le gustaría daros su brazo, pero no se aventura a ello porque sigue llevando una túnica como Cinderella, una túnica de esclavitud. Tú, brava Irlanda, vas, por el contrario, vestida de púrpura. El derrame de tu preciosa sangre te asemeja a una reina. Tienes por estrado real un Calvario, y por trono real una Cruz. Es desde este reino de sufrimiento que, durante setecientos años, por encima de Océanos y Continentes, vienes clamando justicia [...]. Es en vista de esto que, con hielo en mis labios y fuego en mi corazón, os gritaría, hermanos: [...] No permitáis que Irlanda siga sufriendo. Levantad la sangrienta venda que cubre los ojos de vuestros hermanos y permitidles que vean las atrocidades de los crímenes que han cometido. La conversión puede redimirles si han de convertirse en grandes penitentes. En caso contrario, exterminarles haciendo de su muerte la penitencia con la que lavar el deshonor de sus vidas malgastadas. Al deciros esto, permitidme que dirija mi atención hacia Catalunya. No nos falta gente que, mientras los verdaderos patriotas disponen sus vidas al sacrificio supremo, se ofrecen, públicamente, a colaborar con el opresor por un Estado Libre de Catalunya pareciéndose a ese Estado Libre de pantomima, que desafortunadamente existe en Irlanda. Pero la senda a seguir debe quedar clara bajo vuestro ejemplo. Catalunya debe aprender de Irlanda el coraje para luchar y la resignación ante el crudo sacrificio que le espera”.<sup>24</sup>

These fiery words aside, private correspondence between the Under-Secretary of Foreign Affairs (USFA) of the defeated (though still acting) government of the “Irish Republic” in Dublin and Kerney in Paris, hint at a certain unease concerning Macià and the perception of the republic being associated with “dangerous friends”.<sup>25</sup> One dispatch read: “Macià:- (present at the banquet?) M.F.A. [Minister of Foreign Affairs] agrees with you about this and the care needed”.<sup>26</sup> In May, Kerney responded:

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<sup>23</sup> “Letter from USFA to Leopold Kerney”. March 1925. Contemporary Document 260/4/1-6, Leopold H Kerney Collection. IMA. For a full list of attendees, see: *Inis Fáil: Bulletin de la Ligue pour l'Indépendance de l'Irlande*, no. 1, April 1925. Available at:

<http://catalogue.nli.ie/Record/vtls000654454#page/10/mode/1up> (last accessed 02 September 2019).

<sup>24</sup> Cited in: Soler Paríció: *Irlanda y la guerra civil Española* (PhD Dissertation), pp. 52–53.

<sup>25</sup> According to Kerney’s biographer, Barry Whelan, the Paris-based Kerney usually stayed in contact with Dublin via Britain: “Reports were sent to covering addresses and couriered to Art Ó Briain, the anti-treaty representative in Britain, who then sent them to another covering address in Ireland. To prevent detection, reports needed to be small and appear innocuous in the post. Frequently couriers were arrested in transit with documents and reports in their possession, which hindered communications. House raids and other searches also disrupted communications”. See: Barry Whelan: *Ireland's Revolutionary Diplomat: A Biography of Leopold Kerney*, Notre Dame, University of Notre Dame Press, 2019, p. 60.

<sup>26</sup> “Letter from USFA to Leopold Kerney”. Undated. Contemporary Document 260/4/1-6, Leopold H Kerney Collection. IMA.

“Catalonia. I have read with interest the warning note enclosed with your letter and am glad to have it. There is of course difficulty in steering a proper course. We cannot prevent Catalonia from parading our tricolour in furtherance of their own interests and we cannot take sides as between them and the Spaniards. Yet, we are anxious for openly expressed sympathy wherever we can get it. There are ‘freestaters’ in Catalonia, as well as in India and elsewhere, and they are necessarily opposed to us; separatists there and in other countries may indeed be dangerous friends, unless these countries are situated in the British Empire. I do not seek close contact with the Catalans, but hesitate to refuse their sympathy. Failing definite instructions from you, I use my own judgement as best I can. Separatist Catalans affirm that they are preparing an armed revolt; if this is true, and if they succeeded, they might possibly be able to render us good service”.<sup>27</sup>

Potentially “dangerous friends” to the usurped Irish Republic were not just limited to “separatists” outside the British Empire. In the aftermath of the Irish Civil War, anti-Treaty republicans were also wary of being associated with communism, given that such perceptions could be seized upon by Saorstát Éireann, or the pro-Treaty and powerful (Irish) Roman Catholic Church. This concern extended to Kerney’s diplomatic dealings in Paris, as evident in a letter sent to him by the USFA in June 1925:

“We want all the sympathy we can get, in any quarter but, under present circumstances, the mere whisper of an understanding between the communists and ourselves can do us incalculable harm”.<sup>28</sup>

Notwithstanding such reservations, while Kerney’s tone is cautious in relation to Catalan displays of solidarity with the Irish Republic, he is ultimately welcoming of their support. Moreover, his final remarks indicate knowledge of a planned Catalan revolt and a willingness to take advantage of it, should it be successful. Under Kerney’s typed dispatch, a scribbled handwritten note from the envoy also read: “I am advised that the President of Euzkadi will call on me at the end of May”.<sup>29</sup>

The month of May came and went with no visit from the President of Euzkadi — an office that in reality did not exist. However, slightly later than expected, a prominent Basque did indeed turn up at Kerney’s Parisian office in June. It was Eli Gallastegi. This may not have been the first time that Kerney and Gallastegi had met. According to a letter written by Kerney in 1937, the two men had been acquainted for about 15 years (circa

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<sup>27</sup> “Letter from Leopold Kerney to USFA”. Dated 06 May 1925. Contemporary Document 260/4/1-6, Leopold H Kerney Collection. IMA.

<sup>28</sup> “Letter from USFA to Leopold Kerney”. Dated 03 June 1925. Contemporary Document 260/4/1-6, Leopold H Kerney Collection. IMA.

<sup>29</sup> “Letter from Leopold Kerney to USFA”. Dated 06 May 1925. Contemporary Document 260/4/1-6, Leopold H Kerney Collection. IMA.

1922).<sup>30</sup> Kerney's account of his 1925 conversation with Gallastegi in Paris is immediately striking in light of the main topic of discussion: the possible exportation of arms to Ireland.

“Uzkadi [sic]. Had a visit from Mr. Galastegi [sic], who said he was known to P. [President De Valera] to whom he desired me to convey his greetings; his wife is President of an organisation similar to and inspired by example of Cumann na mBan. For documentary purposes, I suggested that a report as to possibilities of his country being able to supply light artillery, machine guns, rifles, etc, the conditions of payment and shipping facilities would be of great interest to me personally and he promised to give me information of this kind. Otherwise our conversation ran on general lines and I kept in mind your recent warning, which would no doubt apply to these people also”.<sup>31</sup>

Notwithstanding Kerney's statement that his enquiry was simply for “documentary purposes”, both men at the time represented clandestine movements that sought to usurp enemy states in their respective homelands. In this sense, it would be naïve to simply dismiss the encounter and main focus of conversation as idle chat. Kerney's biographer, Barry Whelan, surmises the episode as “rather peculiar, given the envoy's previous lack of interest in any military consideration”.<sup>32</sup> Indeed, it is difficult to decipher what Kerney could have reasonably, or realistically, expected from pursuing such a line of enquiry at this juncture with Gallastegi — an exiled Basque nationalist in France. One hypothesis is that perhaps Kerney, akin to Macià, had some knowledge or expectation of Gallastegi's ability to access armaments manufactured in the Basque Country. The reply Kerney received from the USFA adds little in terms of insight:

“Uzakdi [sic]: - and the visit paid you by Dr. Galastegi [sic]– his message to P [De Valera] and your talk with him. This was very interesting and I have sent copies to M.D. [Minister of Defence], Keo, and another. I hope that you may get the information for which you asked”.<sup>33</sup>

Digging a little deeper into Kerney's dispatches from Paris reveals information that *may* be relevant to the Gallastegi-Kerney meeting, or possibly indicates, at least in the view of this author, another potential transnational military link.

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<sup>30</sup> “Letter from Leopold Kerney to Department of External Affairs”. Dated 12 November 1937. Manufacture of bicycles in Ireland by Mr. Ambrose Martin and group of Spanish experts, 1937. 115/236. NAI.

<sup>31</sup> “Letter from Leopold Kerney to USFA”. Dated 24 June 1925. Contemporary Document 260/4/1-6, Leopold H Kerney Collection. IMA.

<sup>32</sup> Whelan: *Ireland's Revolutionary Diplomat*, p. 71.

<sup>33</sup> “Letter from USFA to Leopold Kerney”. Dated 08 July 1925. Contemporary Document 260/4/1-6, Leopold H Kerney Collection. IMA.



In early July 1925, Kerney again wrote to the republican government's USFA in Ireland. This time he had news of a written request sent to him by Ambrose Martin, who was now apparently in Bilbo. It read:

"Martin, about whom I write to you in my No. 120 + 131 and see yours 24<sup>th</sup> Feb [italics handwritten] writes to me from Bilbao to ask if I can recommend a couple of furniture polishers, 'members of I.R.A. or at least men who have taken an active part for Irish Republic; we will not have any others. Their return fare from Dublin would be paid. Work guaranteed as soon as they arrive in Bilbao. Earnings will depend on themselves, for it is they will fix the prices for different classes of work, and they will be fully occupied. They will have to answer some questions before being engaged. There must be a good many people out of work in Dublin belonging to our organisation whom we would wish to help'. He asks for men who will be ready to work well and who will be a credit to the country. The work is to polish all kinds of high class furniture. He asks to be put in touch with Sinn Féin employment bureau. Can you recommend a couple of men with experience in this line? I am asking Martin whether they must necessarily (as I presume) have previous knowledge of the work. You know the circumstances in that country and whilst I think the offer very interesting, it would doubtless be well to select reliable men, on whose discretion, judgement and intelligence you could count".<sup>34</sup>

Martin's request for IRA "furniture polishers" in Bilbo can of course be taken literally at face value. Coinciding as it did, however, with the various Basque and Catalan plots afoot in Paris, and Kerney's imploring tone to the Under-Secretary: "You know the circumstances in that country [...] it would doubtless be well to select reliable men, on whose discretion, judgement and intelligence you could count", it could also be interpreted as a proposition for work in Bilbo more befitting to "members of I.R.A. or at least men who have taken an active part for Irish Republic" than polishing furniture.

Of the "No. 120 + 131" letters mentioned in Kerney's correspondence, only reference to the latter survives from the envoy's incomplete Paris records. According to Kerney's letter above, it is in this communication where evidence of "Martin, about whom I write to you" should appear. Mindful of not wishing to enter into the realm of unsubstantiated conjecture, the following passage from letter 131 *may* or *may not* have some relation to Martin and a possible codeword:

"By now you [Kerney] will have received a visit from a friend who will give you a present from me and told [sic] you about its purpose. Also you will have noted the word. I will use sparingly but on occasion it will be very helpful to us both".<sup>35</sup>

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<sup>34</sup> "Letter from Leopold Kerney to USFA". Dated 03 July 1925. Contemporary Document 260/4/1-6, Leopold H Kerney Collection. IMA.

<sup>35</sup> "USFA to Leopold Kerney". Undated. Contemporary Document 260/4/1-6, Leopold H Kerney Collection. IMA.



Kerney received the following two updates from Dublin concerning Martin's proposals. The letters were dated a week apart:

"Martin: - I am circulating these questions and asking for names. I also checked KEO for the same. In a few days [sic] time I hope to have some suggestions".<sup>36</sup>

"Bilbao. Martin, French Polishers:- Today I get this message from K.E.O. – that X department has sent out queries to Cork, Belfast and Dublin to find out if there are any such workers unemployed and willing to go to France.

Uskadi [sic]: - One of Keo's confreres after getting a copy of this passage in your last letters, wrote asking that you would be kind enough to report the success, if any, of your request for information. In answer I said that I was sure that you would do this, but that you would have to wait long, perhaps, to find a door to door messenger, such information being valuable and requiring care in transmission".<sup>37</sup>

The last mention of Martin in Kerney's extant Paris papers came on 17 July 1925 in a dispatch to USFA which simply read: "Martin. I have not heard further from him".<sup>38</sup> It is safe to assume that the IRA "furniture polishers" did not arrive in Bilbo.

His letter to Kerney from Bilbo notwithstanding, the main body of Martin's writings identifies his *de facto* residence from early 1925 to late 1926 as Boise-Colombes. From the Estat Català's Parisian headquarters, he exchanged letters with his wife, who wrote of the destitution that she and their three children faced in Ireland. On occasions, she beseeched him to return; on others, she warned him that he, as a republican, had no future in the Irish Free State. With the assistance of his Catalan comrades, Martin gained temporary employment as a Spanish teacher in Hamburg, Germany.<sup>39</sup> Given that the Basque aberriano Francisco Gaztañaga regularly moved between Paris and Hamburg, it is likely that he assisted Martin in this regard.

Soler Paríció's analysis of Martin's writings reveal additional details regarding the Irish-Argentinian's backstory. The Catalan researcher, who describes Martin as an "IRA veteran", cites Martin's deportation from Ireland at the hands of the British as occurring in 1916. If this information is accurately cited by Soler Paríció from source letters, it opens up the possibility that Martin, as a 16-year old, *may* have played some sort of minor

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<sup>36</sup> "Letter from USFA to Leopold Kerney". Dated 10 July 1925. Contemporary Document 260/4/1-6, Leopold H Kerney Collection. IMA.

<sup>37</sup> "Letter from USFA to Leopold Kerney". Dated 17 July 1925. Contemporary Document 260/4/1-6, Leopold H Kerney Collection. IMA.

<sup>38</sup> "Letter from Leopold Kerney to USFA". Dated 19 July 1925. Contemporary Document 260/4/1-6, Leopold H Kerney Collection. IMA.

<sup>39</sup> Letters cited in: Soler Paríció: *Irlanda y la guerra civil Española* (PhD Dissertation), pp. 57–58.

part in the activities of Easter week, 1916. Indeed, an “Ambrose Martin” was subsequently interned in Frongoch camp in Wales in the aftermath of the Rising.<sup>40</sup>

Another claim is that Martin participated in the Irish Civil War. While there is no independent source to this author’s knowledge that supports this suggestion, Soler Paríció refers to a detailed collection of military guidelines left by Martin in Boise-Colombes before he left Paris. These include Martin’s own personal reports on IRA tactics, as well as notes related to espionage and the movement of armed contingents.<sup>41</sup>

By November 1926, Martin had left Estat Català’s headquarters, evidenced by a letter he wrote and addressed to Macià in Boise-Colombes. The Catalan leader’s planned revolt had recently ended in failure. An extract from Martin’s letter read:

“Después de pedir perdón por explicarme en el idioma de vuestro enemigo. Deseo comunicarle mi respeto por su noble acción en buscar por todos los medios posibles la independencia de vuestra amada patria. De mi parte y de la parte de una gran cantidad de la juventud de Irlanda le digo que su acción [illegible] como un rayo de luz en la historia de los pueblos oprimidos. El destino no le ha permitido culminar vuestra vida y las vidas de vuestros nobles compatriotas en el altar de la libertad, pero el buen Dios que todo [illegible] la puede ser decretado, de que en este momento más oportuno vuestra noble sangre abrirá las puertas de la libertad para Cataluña. Como la sangre del hijo de Dios abrió las puertas del cielo. Tengo una sola cosa de la cual no estoy muy contento, que Vd. conociendo mi amor por todos los pueblos oprimidos no me ha llamado para formar parte de vuestra banda heroica. Espero que en el futuro próximo cuando otra banda heroica se forme por el mismo ideal no olviden que los irlandeses somos hermanos de todos los patriotas del mundo que como Vd. y los vuestros tienen la fe y la fuerza de rebelarse contra las cadenas del opresor”.<sup>42</sup>

This letter from Martin to Macià may be considered emblematic of the contacts and relations between Irish republicans and Basque and Catalan nationalists that have been documented in this section. Notwithstanding Kerney and Martin’s associations with Macià and Gallastegi, and their apparent awareness of military plots and discussions of arms, these relations were ultimately grounded in (and probably limited to) overblown nationalist rhetoric.

Unlike Martin and his somewhat “fuzzy” (or at least unsubstantiated) revolutionary backstory, Leopold Kerney held an important position for the defeated Irish Republic in its efforts to win international support. To all intents and purposes, the envoy had been given a free hand by De Valera to develop the republic’s interests with all manner of

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<sup>40</sup> See: O’Mahony: *Frongoch*, p. 215. This line of inquiry needs more research.

<sup>41</sup> Soler Paríció: *Irlanda y la guerra civil Española* (PhD Dissertation), p. 55, p. 58.

<sup>42</sup> Extract of letter cited in Soler Paríció: *Irlanda y la guerra civil Española. Nuevas perspectivas de estudio*, (PhD Dissertation), p. 56.

international actors in the French capital (communists aside).<sup>43</sup> In this sense, contacts and relations with exiled Basque and Catalan nationalists such as Gallastegi and Macià were practically inevitable. It is also relatively clear that Kerney, in step with his superiors, was wary of too close an association with these actors.

At the 1926 Sinn Féin Árd Fheis, De Valera declared that he would end his abstention of the Free State parliament if the oath to the British monarch was removed. Unable to carry a majority in favour of this shift in policy, Sinn Féin split. De Valera and his supporters formed Fianna Fáil (Warriors of Destiny), leaving representatives such as Kerney in a bind as to what to do: anti-Treaty Sinn Féin republicanism, or anti-Treaty Fianna Fáil republicanism? Before Kerney had made up his mind, De Valera's successor as President of Sinn Féin, Art O'Connor, ended Kerney's work with the party (and by extension, the "Irish Republic") by letter in October 1926.<sup>44</sup>

Under the Fianna Fáil moniker, De Valera would go on to build the most powerful political party in the Irish state. Sinn Féin, on the other hand, would become a "ghost-like" organisation, effectively disappearing into irrelevancy for the next three decades.<sup>45</sup>

Coinciding with Kerney's retreat from diplomacy, the other key actors in Irish republican-radical Basque (and Catalan) relations from this period were also experiencing significant changes in their personal lives. Following the failed Complot de Prats Molló and a short stint in a French prison, Francesc Macià made his way from France to Belgium before crossing the Atlantic to the Americas in 1927. He would later return to become President of the Catalan Government in the 1930s.

Having left Paris in late 1926, Ambrose Martin returned to the land of his birth in 1927, where he set up a confectionary store, appropriately named 'Confitería VascoIrlandesa' (Basque-Irish Confectionary).

In December 1926, Eli Gallastegi went into exile in Mexico with his wife Margarita and their young son, Iker. Once settled, Gallastegi founded a new nationalist periodical *Patria Vasca* (1928–1932). As his writings from this period testify, *Gudari's* reverence for the Irish Revolutionary Period remained central to his articulation of a more socially imbued vision for aberrianismo. In sharp contrast, and continuing a, by-now, very evident

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<sup>43</sup> Whelan: *Ireland's Revolutionary Diplomat*, p. 71.

<sup>44</sup> Whelan: *Ireland's Revolutionary Diplomat*, pp. 76–77. The IRA severed its relationship with Sinn Féin in 1925. See: Maillot: *New Sinn Féin: Irish Republicanism in the Twenty-first Century*, p. 13.

<sup>45</sup> For a comprehensive history of Sinn Féin, from the 1926 split until the "Provisional"/"Official" split of 1970, see: Agnès Maillot: *In the shadow of history. Sinn Féin, 1926–70*, Manchester, Manchester University Press, 2015. "Ghost-like" quote on p. 37. See also: Ó Broin: *Sinn Féin and the Politics of Left Republicanism*, pp. 195–197.

trajectory, the Basque Country was effectively absent from the international coverage of *An Phoblacht* throughout the 1920s and early 1930s.<sup>46</sup>

With Eli Gallastegi in Mexico and Ambrose Martin in Argentina, there was a distinct lull in contacts and communications between radical Basque nationalists and Irish republicans post-1926. It was not long, however, until the geopolitical plates shifted again. Gallastegi and Martin, the hitherto leading brokers of this nexus — one: a significant leader of the aberriano PNV; the other: a mysterious peripheral figure in Irish republican circles, were to return to Europe in the early 1930s and fall into the same political orbits.

### **Republicans and rebels (part I)**

After seven years of dictatorship in Spain, Primo de Rivera capitulated to mounting internal army and external public pressure in January 1930. The Andalusian's sudden resignation sparked a political crisis in Spain, leading to the establishment of the Second Spanish Republic the following year. Emerging from years of underground stasis, Basque nationalism now had the opportunity to reorganise politically as an open movement.

In September 1930, a “Comité pro-resurgimiento vasco” sought to take stock of the previous decade and spark debate regarding the future direction of Basque nationalism. The Irish case was still evidently an indicative reference for some. Telesforo Uribe-Echevarría, an aberriano nationalist who would one day flee to Ireland as a refugee, cited the Sinn Féin model in his attempts to steer the nationalist body politic towards a leftist aconfessional position.

Intra-nationalist talks eventually culminated in rapprochement between the aberriano and *comunidad* factions, leading to a newly re-consecrated and unified party operating again under the umbrella of the PNV. Uribe-Echevarría's secular appeal ultimately fell on deaf ears. Rejecting the confessional, Aranist and right-wing orientation of the reorganised PNV, he and a group of the party's leftists broke away to form *Acción Nacionalista Vasca* (ANV).<sup>47</sup>

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<sup>46</sup> De Pablo, Mees, Rodríguez Ranz: *El Péndulo Patriótico*, p. 178. McCreanor: *Ireland and the Basque Country*, p. 48. For a collection of Gallastegi's published writings, many of these related to Ireland, see: Gallastegi: *Por La Libertad Vasca*. James Peter McHugh: *Voices of the rearguard: a study of An Phoblacht: Irish Republican thought in the post-revolutionary era, 1923–1937*, University College Dublin (MA Thesis), 1983.

<sup>47</sup> José Luis de la Granja: “Una autocrítica del Nacionalismo Vasco tras la dictadura de Primo de Rivera: El manifiesto del comité pro-resurgimiento vasco (1930)”, *Bilduma*, no. 3, 1989, pp. 185–209. The historical political “line” of *Acción Nacionalista Vasca* has been categorised by José Luis de la Granja Sainz as “heterogeneous”. See: De la Granja Sainz: *El Nacionalismo Vasco*, pp. 19–20. See also: José

Returning from Mexico in March 1931, Gallastegi joined the reorganised PNV. The following year, on Easter Sunday 27 March 1932, the first Basque Aberri Eguna (Day of the Fatherland) took place. Inaugurated to celebrate the 50<sup>th</sup> anniversary of Sabino Arana's aforementioned nationalist epiphany, it has since morphed into a Basque national holiday.<sup>48</sup>

Despite the unity of purpose that the newly consecrated PNV seemed to herald, it wasn't long until the fundamental schisms in Basque nationalism that had been dormant—and largely irrelevant during the dictatorship—emerged yet again between moderate and radical tendencies over whether to pursue an autonomous arrangement, federalisation, self-determination, independence, etc. Under the leadership of a young, charismatic Bilbaino named José Antonio Aguirre, the moderates within the party ultimately prevailed.

In September 1932, Gallastegi, alongside other influential aberrianos, including Manuel de la Sota (*Txanka*) and a Basque mountaineering group (Mendigoxales) initiated a political seminary called “Jagi-Jagi” (Arise-Arise). Without formally breaking from the PNV, Jagi-Jagi sought to recapture the pure Aranism of early Basque nationalism by advocating for outright independence. Its political model, as Lorenzo Espinosa suggests, owed much of its basis to “la trayectoria política independista irlandesa”. Within two years, Jagi-Jagi had fallen from the PNV whip.<sup>49</sup>

At the beginning of the 1930s, significant political changes were also afoot in Ireland. In 1931 the “Statute of Westminster” elevated the Irish Free State (and other “Dominions”) to greater parity with the Imperial Parliament in Westminster, meaning that aspects of the Anglo-Irish Treaty were now potentially more vulnerable to unilateral Irish modifications and repudiations.<sup>50</sup>

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Luis de la Granja Sainz: *Nacionalismo y II República en el País Vasco*, Madrid, Siglo, 2008.

<sup>48</sup> José Luis de la Granja, Jesús Casquete: “Aberri Eguna” in De Pablo *et al.* (eds.): *Diccionario ilustrado de símbolos del nacionalismo vasco*, pp. 33–56.

<sup>49</sup> Lorenzo Espinosa: “Influencia del nacionalismo irlandés en el nacionalismo vasco, 1916–1936”; Santiago de Pablo: “Gallastegi, Eli” in De Pablo *et al.* (eds.): *Diccionario ilustrado de símbolos del nacionalismo vasco*, pp. 395–406. *Txanka* translated a number of Irish plays, including William Butler Yeats' *Cathleen ni Houlihan* into Spanish. They were received enthusiastically in the Basque Country in the 1930s. See: Juaristi: *El Bucle Melancólico*, pp. 207–210. For an analysis of the impact of *Cathleen ni Houlihan* —“the most nationalist and the most propagandist work that Yeats ever wrote”— see: Conor Cruise O'Brien: *Ancestral Voices*, Chicago, University of Chicago Press, 1995, pp. 61–70. The Mendigoxales co-opted “Gu Bakarritik” (Sinn Féin/We Ourselves) as their own motto. See: De Pablo: *La Patria Soñada*, p. 199.

<sup>50</sup> Tim Pat Coogan: *Ireland in the Twentieth Century*, London, Arrow Books, 2004, pp. 177–178.

In domestic politics, a General Election to form the 7<sup>th</sup> Dáil Éireann was called in early 1932. As we have seen, De Valera had ended his boycott of the state's institutions five years previously and re-entered electoral politics as leader of Fianna Fáil. Stoking fears of a communist takeover, the sitting government of Cumann na nGaedheal (League of Gaels) and the mainstream media mounted a concerted campaign to portray De Valera and his new republican party as card-carrying communists.<sup>51</sup> In this propaganda war, the Second Spanish Republic and its supposed “red” inclinations served as a warning for the likely perils faced by Ireland in the event of a Fianna Fáil victory:

“It is your duty to help the government party to eliminate once and for all the danger of a Spanish republic in Ireland... A careless electorate gave Spain a weak government. Then the rest came”.<sup>52</sup>

Weathering this narrative, Fianna Fáil won enough seats to form a minority government. As well as becoming Taoiseach (Prime Minister) of Dáil Éireann, De Valera also appointed himself as Minister for External Affairs — a position he would hold for the next 16 years. In this dual role, “Dev” immediately set about dismantling aspects of the Anglo-Irish Treaty, including the withholding of deeply unpopular land annuities that extended back to the land reform acts of the late nineteenth century. De Valera's stance triggered an “Economic War” with Britain.<sup>53</sup>

Meanwhile, as a gesture of goodwill to the IRA, he released the organisation's prisoners and suspended all coercive legislation that had been used against republicans under the previous administration.<sup>54</sup>

Notwithstanding the above measures introduced by De Valera on his ascent to power, many Irish republicans remained faithful adherents to the Irish Republic of 1919, and continued to consider the Irish Free State as illegitimate.

Not long after Fianna Fáil came to power, a group of Basque nationalists arrived in Dublin in June 1932. Stemming from a trip made by a 1916 veteran and Irish handball enthusiast Michael Lennon to the Basque Country in 1931 —during which he met the “President of the Basque Pelota Federation in San Sebastian”— a Basque team was

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<sup>51</sup> See: Knirck: “The Irish Revolution and World History”. O’Halpin notes that Cumann na nGaedheal often depicted De Valera as a “Bolshevik stooge”. O’Halpin: “The Geopolitics of Republican Diplomacy in the twentieth century” (quote on p. 88).

<sup>52</sup> “Irish Free State Election News, 6 Feb. 1932”. Ernest Blythe Papers. University College Dublin Archives (UCDA). P24/6222(b) (I). Extract cited in Knirck: “The Irish Revolution and World History”, p. 184.

<sup>53</sup> Coogan: *Ireland in the Twentieth Century*, pp. 185-187.

<sup>54</sup> McGarry: *Irish Politics and the Spanish Civil War*, Cork, Cork University Press, 1999, p. 6.



invited to compete at the 1932 Tailteann Games.<sup>55</sup> The hosting of the Tailteann Games (a modern revival of an ancient Irish athletic championship) also happened to shortly precede the 31<sup>st</sup> International Eucharistic Congress that was due to take place in Dublin. Having initially declined the invitation, the Basque delegation, including the PNV nationalists Aingeru Irigaray Irigaray, Teodoro G. Hernandorena, and a Jesuit priest Ramón Laborda, decided to belatedly take up Lennon's offer. Their rationale: it presented a double opportunity to "llevar fuera de Euzkadi nuestro juego de pelota y el problema de nuestro nacionalismo".<sup>56</sup>

Among the Basques' activities in Ireland were audiences with the new Taoiseach De Valera, and the leader of the opposition, William T. Cosgrave. Mary MacSwiney, a significant figure in Cumann na mBan and sister of Terence MacSwiney, who had died on hunger strike in 1920, was presented with an ikurriña by the Basque delegates.<sup>57</sup> Leading figures in EAB had also arranged for the all-male Basque delegation to deliver a recently published book titled "Historia Vasca" by Padre Bernardino de Estella, to Eithne Coyle, President of Cumann na mBan. Handwritten on the book's inlay was the following message:

"Taking advantage of the voyage of some of our countrymen to Ireland the women of Euzkadi have the pleasure of sending you this little token of esteem for your many sacrifices in Erin's cause".<sup>58</sup>

Other meetings were arranged and attended by what could be considered *ex-post* as a 'who's who' of leading IRA and leftist republicans of the 1930s. A report from one such meeting in Dublin speaks to the explicitly anti-imperialist rhetoric that underpinned the expressions of transnational "solidarity" between the Basque delegates and the assortment of Irish republicans at this juncture:

"[...] over the heads of the 2,500 guests, shone the flag of the Basque people and our own tricolour. The room was full of strange faces, men and women from many lands, men and women who should know Ireland deeply, for they came from other Irelands: Bretons, Basques, Flemings. [...] There is a stir in the room, and Rev. father Ramon Laborda sang the songs of his Basque land, one by a patriot who had given his life [...]. Mr. Frank Ryan, speaking on behalf of the organising committee, said he would ask the foreign visitors to take back that freedom was not something to be negotiated for but a God-given right to be asserted. The organisations represented in the hall that night were revolutionary organisations who had not made their peace with England, and never would until every vestige of British

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<sup>55</sup> "Basque-Irish handball", *Irish Press*, 23.11.1931.

<sup>56</sup> Ugalde Zubiri: *La acción exterior del nacionalismo vasco*, pp. 415–416.

<sup>57</sup> Núñez Seixas: "Ecos de Pascua"; "A Little Ireland", *Irish Press*, 18.10.1932.

<sup>58</sup> "Handwritten message on book presented to Cumann na mBan, on behalf of Emakume Abertzale Batza". Eithne Coyle Papers. UCDA. P61/8.



Imperialism was swept out of Ireland. Señor Irigaray then made a presentation of the Basque flag and a book dealing with the customs of the Basque nation to Miss Eithne Nic Chumhail, President of the Cumann na mBan. Speaking in French, he said that he regretted he could not express himself in the beautiful Irish language, but he wished to offer his salutations to the patriotic women of Ireland. Miss Nic Chumhaill acknowledged the gift and presented Señor Irigaray with a volume of the works of Padraigh Pearse. The presentation, she said, was made on behalf of the revolutionary women of Ireland. In the same way that they in Ireland were striving to secure freedom, the Basques were making an effort to break the connection with the big Powers”.<sup>59</sup>

After spending two weeks in Ireland, the Basque delegation returned to their homeland. Back in the Basque Country, their paths may well have crossed with a familiar Irish face. Once again, precisely ten years on from his first influential visit, Ambrose Martin had docked in Bilbo.<sup>60</sup>

## **Republicans and rebels (part II)**

Martin’s second tour of the Basque Country was as relentless as his first. From 09 June to 16 July, he criss-crossed Basque territory, giving talks on the history of Ireland, its revolutionary experience, and the parallels and lessons that could be drawn by Basque nationalists.<sup>61</sup> These general themes aside, one newspaper referred to what can only be assumed was his escape to France after the Ordizia gathering in November 1924:

“[...] [Martin] quien con ardientes y elocuentes palabras demostrativas de su amor a la libertad de los pueblos oprimidos, relató la coincidencia existente entre el nacionalismo irlandés y el vasco; recordó su estancia en esta localidad durante el Gobierno de Primo de Rivera, escondido en un caserío para evadirse de la persecución de que era objeto por los secuaces del funesto dictador. Fue constantemente aplaudido, siendo acogido al final con una estruendosa ovación”.<sup>62</sup>

During another meeting, Martin reportedly presented his own “dissertation” on the contemporary Irish situation. From the darkest days of the Irish Revolutionary Period, the Irish people were now, once again, in the good hands of De Valera, the most senior surviving 1916 leader:

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<sup>59</sup> “Young Ireland at Reception”, *Irish Press*, 29.06.1932. Notable figures at this meeting were Maurice Twomey, Frank Ryan, Peadar O’Donnell, Sean Russell, George Gilmore, Mary MacSwiney and Sean MacBride. Many leftist republicans in the 1930s coalesced around two different groups: Saor Éire (Free Ireland), founded in 1931, and Republican Congress, founded in 1934.

<sup>60</sup> “Juventud Vasca de Bilbao”, *Euzkadi*, 08.06.1932.

<sup>61</sup> Martin’s second tour began on 09 June in Bilbo with an audience of the Juventud Vasca. His final talk seems to have taken place in the Batzokija of Gernika on 16 July. See: “Juventud Vasca de Bilbao”, *Euzkadi*, 08.06.1932; “Actos a Celebrar”, *Euzkadi*, 14.07.1932

<sup>62</sup> “Inauguración de los locales de Emakume Abertzale. Batza de Gaztelu. Elexabeitia”, *Euzkadi*, 15.07.1932.

“La disertación del señor Martin fue interesantísima. Explicó con emocionantes detalles la persecución de que fue objeto su patria, haciendo especial hincapié en la heroica figura de Mac Swiney, alcalde de Cork, y después de haber dado cuenta de la fecha en que reconquistó sus libertades y hacer una acertada exposición de la situación actual, terminó diciendo que el pueblo irlandés tiene plena confianza en su caudillo y que Eadmon [sic] de Valera labora con el mayor entusiasmo en favor de su patria. El orador fue ovacionado repetidas veces, y la organización de esta conferencia ha sido un verdadero éxito”.<sup>63</sup>

It is clear that Martin, akin to many previously dissatisfied republicans, had found a political home in the shape of De Valera’s Fianna Fáil — the party now in control of the Free State.

In the Basque Country, the redemptory narrative arc of De Valera tended to be lapped up by the moderate, radical, and “heterogenous” (ANV) nationalist press alike. For example, following De Valera’s second electoral victory in January 1933, “J. Aitzol” [José Ariztimuño] wrote in *Euzkadi*:

“En la primera época de 1916 a 1921, como caudillo revolucionario de un pueblo al que Inglaterra se siente impotente para imponer su poder y al que llama para pactar un tratado de conciliación que De Valera rehúsa, aunque sus delegados, contra sus instrucciones, reconocen, según veremos. Esta segunda vez, como jefe político de un pueblo asistido por el poder del derecho democrático. Un pueblo entero ha depositado en él la confianza para conseguir la plena libertad de Irlanda. Ya no habrá traidores a la causa separatista, como lo fueron Collins y Griffith, y contemporizadores, como Cosgrave. De Valera, aleccionado por la experiencia, es él el único que lleva las riendas de las negociaciones diplomáticas. El antiguo profesor de matemáticas que por la patria se convirtió en caudillo revolucionario y fracasó como político, es hoy el jefe de un pueblo que, encastillado en el derecho, actúa como diplomático hábil y experimentado. No es un soñador. Tiene trazado su programa económico y social. No es comunista, como de él han dicho. Pero tampoco es partidario de la burguesía y del capitalismo. Quiere restaurar a Irlanda dentro de los postulados sociales cristianos. Su separatismo es constructivo. Es el hombre que siente la emoción de su enorme responsabilidad al crear un pueblo libre”.<sup>64</sup>

According to the ANV’s *Tierra Vasca*, the Irish people were faced with a stark choice at the 1933 General Election: “¿De Valera o Cosgrave: Libertad o Servilismo?”<sup>65</sup> Finally, De Valera’s return to power also provided vindication, akin to 1916, for Gallastegi *et al.* and his analysis of the “Irish mirror” — precisely at a moment when votes on Basque Statutes (1932 and 1933) dominated the domestic Basque agenda. The galvanising effect of this transfer may be observed in the closing lines of an article published in a February

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<sup>63</sup> “Martin O’Daly, en Algorta. La conferencia de anoche,” *Euzkadi*, 16.06.1932.

<sup>64</sup> “El Separatista Irreductible,” *Euzkadi*, 21.02.1933.

<sup>65</sup> “¿De Valera o Cosgrave?,” *Tierra Vasca*, 27.01.1933.

1932 edition of *Jagi-Jagi*, in which Fianna Fáil's electoral victory was discussed: "Que el ejemplo del pueblo irlandés nos sirva para fortalecer nuestras convicciones y también para aliento en la empresa salvadora de Euzkadi".<sup>66</sup>

Picking up on the above sentiment, Gallastegi's biographer Lorenzo Espinosa has written about De Valera and the Irish model as continuously serving to crystallise the contours of Jagi-Jagi's political outlook:

"Sólo la fidelidad en los principios independistas, junto al manteamiento de actitudes radicales en la lucha política, como predicaba el modelo irlandés, podían conducir a la verdadera emancipación. Para aprobar este supuesto, en el plano de la realidad internacional, no existía ningún ejemplo más apropiado que el reto que la verde Erin había lanzado al mundo imperialista, con su presidente De Valera al frente".<sup>67</sup>

In conversation with this author, Gallastegi's late son, Iker, also expressed similar sentiments regarding De Valera and his true republican credentials:

"The old leaders [of the republican movement], especially Collins, they surrendered; but when De Valera came to power, he broke all connections with England, and all that, because the [pro-Treaty] others would never have done it. And well, England, she couldn't do anything about it".<sup>68</sup>

While it is certainly true that De Valera did much to dismantle the Anglo-Irish Treaty of 1921, culminating in a new constitution (Bunreacht na hÉireann) in 1937, he also ended up crushing all republican dissent from those who still maintained the most "actitudes radicales": i.e., those who continued to hold out and fight for the *true* Irish Republic of 1919 (the IRA/Sinn Féin). Within five years of releasing IRA prisoners and cutting back on repressive legislation, De Valera's government had banned the republican newspaper *An Phoblacht* and proscribed the IRA as an illegal body on account of an increase in IRA activities. Moreover, during World War II, up to two thousand republicans were interned and six IRA men executed under draconian legislation that had last been used during the Civil War.<sup>69</sup>

Having effectively gone AWOL from his family for the best part of a decade, Ambrose Martin's return to Bilbo in 1932 and his subsequent reappearance in Dublin dovetailed

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<sup>66</sup> "El triunfo de los grandes ideales", *Jagi-Jagi*, 11.02.1933.

<sup>67</sup> Lorenzo Espinosa: "Influencia del nacionalismo irlandés en el nacionalismo vasco, 1916–1936".

<sup>68</sup> Author interview with Iker Gallastegi (Getxo, 2017).

<sup>69</sup> Coogan: *The IRA*, pp. 191–201; Henry Patterson: *The Politics of Illusion* (2<sup>nd</sup> ed.), London, Serif, 1997, p. 81; <https://www.irishtimes.com/culture/books/garda-assassinations-and-ira-executions-during-the-emergency-1.3075417> (last accessed 04 September 2019).

seamlessly with De Valera's ascent to power.<sup>70</sup> Given the costly "Economic War" with Britain, alternative trade routes were quickly sought with continental Europe, notably in Spain. It was probably during his second Basque tour, or shortly afterwards, that Martin first proposed a business venture to Eli Gallastegi that would tap into these changing circumstances. The two men decided to set up a trading initiative.<sup>71</sup>

The Irish-Iberian Trading Company (IITC), headed up by Martin as Managing Director in Dublin, would work in conjunction with a Bilbo-based sister company called Euzkerin (a wordplay on Euzkadi-Erin), in the reciprocal import and export of produce between Spain and Ireland (cattle, eggs and potatoes from Ireland; oranges and other fruits from Spain).<sup>72</sup> A preceding Bilbo-based entity, Cortina & Co, of which Gallastegi was apparently a "member", had previously "introduced Irish eggs into Spain" — or at least according to an Irish diplomatic file. Besides the personal financial motivations of those involved, the trade route would also, in its own small way, serve to offset some of the damage done to the Irish economy as a result of the ongoing "Economic War".<sup>73</sup>

The IITC-Euzkerin venture benefited greatly from the good offices of Fianna Fáil at home and abroad. Records show that Martin and Leopold Kerney (reinstated by De Valera to the diplomatic service as the Irish government's representative to France) discussed the possibility of developing Spanish-Irish trade relations when they met in Paris in 1932. The following year, Kerney travelled to Bilbo as part of an Iberian-wide trade mission, resulting in a Trade Agreement between Ireland and Spain and the acceleration of diplomatic ties.<sup>74</sup> Joining Martin in the IITC was Seán Hayes, a Fianna

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<sup>70</sup> "Garda report on Ambrose Martin". Undated. Irish-Iberian Trading Company. E.S.2/24. NAI. "In 1923 Martin disappeared [from Ireland] and was not seen in Kilbeggan [where his estranged wife was living] until 1932".

<sup>71</sup> Michael Kennedy: "Leopold Kerney and Irish-Spanish diplomatic relations, 1935–6" in Declan M. Downey, Julio Crespo MacLennan (eds.): *Spanish–Irish Relations through the Ages*, Dublin, Four Courts Press, 2008, pp. 189–211 (specifically pp. 194–196); Lorenzo Espinosa: *Gudari. Una pasión útil*, p. 241.

<sup>72</sup> "Basque-Irish Wedding", *Irish Examiner*, 09.07.1936; "Letter from Irish Embassy in Paris to Department of External Affairs". Dated 24 August 1937. Visa Applications of (1). Eli Gallastegi and (2) Cosme Orramantia Elorrieta. Spanish Nationals. DFA. 3/102/176. NAI.

<sup>73</sup> "Letter from Leopold Kerney to Department of External Affairs". Dated 06 December 1937. Manufacture of bicycles in Ireland by Mr. Ambrose Martin and group of Spanish experts, 1937. 115/236. NAI; Lorenzo Espinosa: *Gudari. Una pasión útil*, p. 127.

<sup>74</sup> "Letter from Ambrose Martin to Leopold Kerney". Dated 13 September 1935. Irish-Iberian Trading Company. E.S.2/24. NAI. Martin visited Kerney again in Madrid in November 1935, having come from Bilbo. See: "Letter from Leopold Kerney to the Department of External Affairs". Dated 06 November 1935. Irish-Iberian Trading Company. E.S.2/24. NAI. Whelan: *Ireland's Revolutionary Diplomat*, pp. 100–101.

Fáil TD and later Senator. Finally, Patrick Cooney, the brother of Fianna Fáil TD Eamon Cooney, was also involved in the running of the company.<sup>75</sup>

Martin seemingly harboured his own political ambitions. Evidence of him speaking at a local Fianna Fáil meeting in 1936, and comments made about his political affinities in an intelligence report, confirm, if there was any doubt, that Fianna Fáil would have been the Irish-Argentinian's favoured political vehicle. It seems, however, that rumours of Martin's personal life, described in one police report euphemistically as "broadminded", effectively scuppered his electoral career.<sup>76</sup>

In June 1936, a military rebellion was initiated against the Popular Front government in Spain, overshadowing the democratic institutions of the Second Spanish Republic and aggravating the historical social and political cleavages between the "Two Spains" (one: democratic and liberal; the other: reactionary and conservative).<sup>77</sup> A bitter civil war ensued. By September, a Galician General, Francisco Franco, had emerged as commander-in-chief of the rebels. Within a year, on the northern front, his forces had broken through the "Iron Ring" defences of Bilbo.

Gallastegi and Martin's joint business venture came to an abrupt end.<sup>78</sup>

### **A struggle on every front**

The June rebellion launched against the Spanish Republic had immediate repercussions in the Basque Country. In response to this gravest of crises, the PNV momentarily dithered, before throwing its lot in with the republic.<sup>79</sup> Within a matter of days, however, Carlist *Requeté* militias, who were opposed ideologically to the secular Popular Front government and the central tenets of Basque nationalism, swiftly took control of conservative heartlands in the rural provinces of Nafarroa Garaia and Araba. Only Bizkaia and parts of Gipuzkoa remained under effective republican control.

Despite this major setback, in October 1936, the PNV finally managed to secure an autonomous Basque statute from the beleaguered republic after what had been a

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<sup>75</sup> "Garda report on Ambrose Martin by Sergeant John O'Boyle". Dated 20 August 1940. Irish-Iberian Trading Company. E.S.2/24. NAI; "Letter from Ambrose Martin to Leopold Kerney". Dated 14 December 1933. Irish Iberian-Trading Company. E.S.2/24. NAI.

<sup>76</sup> "Mr. Lemass's Call to Electors", *The Irish Press*, 06.06.1936; 'Ambrose Martin'. G2/0267. IMA. "Garda report on Ambrose Martin by Sergeant John O'Boyle". Dated 20 August 1940. Irish-Iberian Trading Company. E.S.2/24. NAI. This conclusion is based on personal correspondence with Kyle McCreanor.

<sup>77</sup> Mees: *The Basque Contention*, pp. 18–19.

<sup>78</sup> Watson: *Modern Basque History*, p. 283; Valencia López de Dicastillo: *La Ternura de Los Pueblos*, p. 22.

<sup>79</sup> Mees: *The Basque Contention*, p. 77.

protracted and often acrimonious process. Euzko Gudarostea (Basque Army) battalions, under the leadership of Lehendakari Aguirre, were immediately drawn up for the defence of the remaining Basque territories from various political parties, including two battalions raised from the ranks of Jagi-Jagi. For Eli Gallastegi, the Basques should have nothing to do with the “Spanish” conflict.<sup>80</sup>

By June 1937 Bilbo was on the verge of falling to Franco’s troops. Among the thousands of Bilbaino residents evacuated to France shortly before the city’s capture was Gallastegi and his family. After a few months in France, Gallastegi decided to go further afield. In September 1937, he and his family arrived in Ireland. Why Ireland? In addition to his enormous political interest in the country and his friendship with Martin, Gallastegi had also accrued significant back payments related to the IITC-Euzkerin enterprise. These payments had been unable to reach him since the outbreak of the war. And while Irish immigration officers usually turned away foreign “aliens” for fear of worsening the high levels of unemployment in the state, figures of significant assets or wealth tended to have their papers cleared. The Gallastegis were accepted into Ireland.<sup>81</sup>

Apart from the obvious personal wrench of having to leave family, friends, and his homeland behind, Gallastegi’s departure from Bilbo and subsequent settlement in Ireland came with an additional painful cost. Accused of fleeing the good fight, his reputation and standing among many Basque nationalists suffered greatly. Whether just or not, this criticism proved particularly cutting given his own self-assigned *nom de guerre*: *Gudari* (Basque soldier).<sup>82</sup>

With Bilbo in the hands of Franco’s forces and the Basque government forced into exile, the remains of the Basque army fell back to Cantabria, where it would later surrender. Having struggled for four decades to achieve a degree of political autonomy for the Basque Country, the fledgling PNV-led Basque autonomous government had been snuffed out. For many Basques, Franco’s victory starkly bore out Arana’s vision of the Basque Country as an occupied and subjugated nation.<sup>83</sup>

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<sup>80</sup> De Pablo: “Gallastegui, Eli”; Antonio Elorza: “Vascos guerreros” in Antonio Elorza (coord.), José María Garmendia, Gurutz Jáuregui, Florencio Domínguez Iribarren: *La Historia de ETA*, Madrid, Temas de Hoy, 2000, pp. 13–75 (specifically pp. 53–54).

<sup>81</sup> Daniel Leach: *Fugitive Ireland: European Minority Nationalists and Irish Political Asylum, 1937–2008*, Portland, Four Courts Press, 2009, pp. 57–58.

<sup>82</sup> For examples of this criticism from fellow Basque nationalists, see: De Pablo: “Gallastegui, Eli”; Fernández Soldevilla: “De *Aberrri* a ETA, pasando por Venezuela”. For a defence of Gallastegi’s actions during this episode, see: Lorenzo Espinosa: *Gudari. Una pasión útil*, pp. 234–238.

<sup>83</sup> Woodworth: *Dirty War, Clean Hands*, p. 30.



In deeply conservative and Catholic Ireland, the main narrative surrounding the Spanish Civil War from the outset was one of a conflict between “communism” and “Christianity” — most evident in the state’s biggest selling newspaper, the pro-Franco *Irish Independent*.<sup>84</sup> On 10 August 1936, a former-IRA Chief of Staff, former-Commissioner of the Garda Síochána, and former leader of Fine Gael (Tribe of the Gaels), Eoin O’Duffy, published a letter in the *Irish Independent* calling for an “Anti-Red Crusade” in Spain.<sup>85</sup>

Under O’Duffy’s tutelage, approximately 700 Irishmen, divided into two brigades, ended up partaking in the war on the side of Franco’s rebels.<sup>86</sup> In his autobiographical account of the conflict, published in 1938, O’Duffy reserved notable hostility for the Basques, whom he accused of allying “with the avowed destroyers of their religion”. As for Basque *nationalists* more specifically, he dismissed their claims for independence as “equally absurd” as the notion of six of Ulster’s nine counties seceding from Ireland. Notwithstanding this hostility, O’Duffy’s formal agreement with General Franco had asserted that his forces must *not* be deployed to the Basque theatre of war “for reasons of religion and traditional ties between the Basques and the Irish”.<sup>87</sup> After a derisory campaign in Spain, O’Duffy and his brigades’ returned to Ireland in the summer of 1937.<sup>88</sup>

Sentiment in Ireland on the Spanish Civil War was not all one way. In August 1936, George Gilmore of Republican Congress embarked on a one-man mission to track down the Basque priest, Father Laborda, who had visited Ireland in 1932 as part of the Basque delegation. Attempting to counter the prevailing perception of the Spanish conflict in Ireland as one being fought between Christianity and godless communism, Gilmore sought to recruit Laborda. Who better to debunk this myth than a Basque nationalist priest?

On his flight into Bilbo, Gilmore’s plane crash-landed during a rainstorm. Hospitalised, and now with a badly injured leg, he nonetheless managed to arrange a

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<sup>84</sup> “‘Faith or Antichrist’ — An Irishman’s Diary on Irish Newspapers and Franco”, *Irish Times*, 05.01.2018, available at <https://www.irishtimes.com/opinion/faith-or-antichrist-an-irishman-s-diary-on-irish-newspapers-and-franco-1.3345098> (last accessed 14 May 2019).

<sup>85</sup> “Irish Brigade for Spain”, *Irish Independent*, 10.08.1936.

<sup>86</sup> McGarry: *Irish Politics and the Spanish Civil War*, p. 17, pp. 24–27.

<sup>87</sup> Eoin O’Duffy: *Crusade in Spain*, Clonskeagh, Browne and Nolan, 1938, pp. 195–198. O’Duffy had actually met the 1932 Basque delegation in Dublin. At the time, O’Duffy was still Garda Commissioner, tasked with organising the Eucharistic Congress. The following year he was relieved of his duties by De Valera. See: McGarry: *Irish Politics and the Spanish Civil War*, pp. 18–19.

<sup>88</sup> For the best account of O’Duffy and the Irish Brigades in Spain, see: Fearghal McGarry: *Eoin O’Duffy: A Self-Made Hero*, New York, Oxford University Press, 2005 (specifically pp. 292–315).



meeting with Aguirre and other leading *jeltzales* at the city's Carlton Hotel — the temporary headquarters of the Basque government. During the meeting, Lehendakari Aguirre explained to Gilmore that while he did not know the whereabouts of Laborda, the republican might have better luck tracking down the priest north of the border in Baiona (Bayonne). As the Basque Army had been cut off by the *Requetés*' northward sweep to the coast, Gilmore began a dangerous journey into southwest France. Unperturbed, Gilmore eventually managed to get hold of Laborda and convinced him to return to Dublin in the new year.<sup>89</sup>

Meanwhile, back in Dublin, Republican Congress was planning on how best to counter:

“O’Duffy’s Foreign Legion and the so-called Irish Christian Front [...] [who] are taking advantage of the divisions in the national ranks to organise terrorist squads to break up Republican and working-class meetings and to stifle free speech. They are taking advantage, too, of events in Spain to pose as the ‘defenders of Christianity’ here. And abroad, they misinterpret Ireland as a country that would strangle the liberties of her ancient allies the Spanish, Catalan and Basque people. The Fascist organ, the ‘Irish Independent’, is conducting on their behalf, a campaign of calumny and intimidation in an endeavour to isolate the several sections of the Republican and working-class movements in order to destroy each individually. The campaign must be halted. The different, and differing, sections of the Independence movement must act together against Fascism and for the Irish Republic”.<sup>90</sup>

The same month that this internal document was circulated, Frank Ryan, a leading figure in Republican Congress, sent a telegram to the Spanish government expressing “sympathy and support to the Spanish, Catalan and Basque people in their fight against Fascism”.<sup>91</sup>

George Gilmore’s Basque odyssey was not the only contact between Irish republicans and the Basque government in 1936. In a letter sent to Lehendakari Aguirre from a Parisian-based Basque government official, Daniel de Mendialdua, dated 31 October 1936, the latter described the visit of: “dos Jefes del Ejercito Republicano Irlandés (IRA). Hace varios días estuvo el Sr O’Donnell y en la actualidad el portador de la presente”.

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<sup>89</sup> Cronin: *Frank Ryan. The Search for The Republic*, p. 81. Incidentally, Aguirre had visited Ireland in the early 1930s. Little is known of any political contacts, republican or otherwise, that he may have made on this trip. See: Keogh: *Ireland and Europe, 1919–1948*, p. 79.

<sup>90</sup> “Rare Republican Congress letter (September 1936)”, <https://comeheretome.com/2016/06/01/rare-republican-congress-internal-letter-september-1936/> (last accessed 01 May 2020).

<sup>91</sup> Cited in: Seán Cronin: *Frank Ryan. The Search for The Republic*, Dublin, Repsol Publishing, 1980, pp. 78–79.

Based on this encounter, De Mendialdua outlined the possibility of forthcoming military aid from Ireland:

“En mi conversación con Mr. O’Donnell hablamos en líneas generales de los defectos que él había encontrado en nuestra organización militar. Hablaba de falta de cuadros de oficiales y de especialistas en las distintas ramas en que podíamos dividir el Ejército Moderno, sobre todo cuestión, especialistas para artillería antiaérea, tanques, y naturalmente cuadros de oficialidad y clases. Todo esto en parte cuando menos podríamos conseguirla en Irlanda. También se quejaba de la falta absoluta de organización de un servicio de espionaje y contraespionaje, así como de servicio de información general. Ellos por la experiencia de años y lucha con Inglaterra y algunos por experiencia obtenida durante la Gran guerra podrían ser auxiliares preciosos para nosotros en estos momentos y creo que si se la escribiese no habría de faltarnos su apoyo e incluso se podría pensar en formar una Legión Irlandesa que luchase a nuestro lado”.

Speculating on the Irish government’s stance regarding the war, De Mendialdua suggested that such was the strength of the pro-Franco lobby in Ireland, De Valera had, thus far, been reluctant to act on his sympathies for the Basques and their plight:

“De Valera y sobre todo la parte más selecta de su mayoría desean apoyarnos de todas las formas posibles, pero necesitan encontrar la justificación para hacerlo. Esta justificación una vez encontrada les pondría en situación de poder darnos un apoyo e incluso de reforzar su situación política dentro de Irlanda, pudiendo oponerse de frente a las pretensiones del Chritsian Front y de los fascistas Irlandeses que, tienden al reconocimiento del Gobierno Burgos y desvaneciendo uno de sus argumentos de sus propagandas anti De Valeristas”.

In the view of De Mendialdua, Irish perceptions of the war and the Basque’s role in it could be countered by a focused and concerted propaganda strategy. To this end, he suggested that the PNV send a delegate of high calibre, “tal como Telesforo Monzon”, to an upcoming Dublin meeting on the Spanish Civil War, scheduled for 05 November 1936.<sup>92</sup>

Since Gilmore’s return from the Basque Country, focus on the war—or at least within Irish republican circles— had apparently been drawn to the particular issue of the Basques.<sup>93</sup> Two meetings took place at the Engineer’s Hall in Dublin within the space of a month (05 November and 03 December). Across both nights, Gilmore, two other Republican Congress comrades, Frank Ryan and Peadar O’Donnell, Ernie O’Malley (an IRA guerrilla leader during the War of Independence), Father Michael O’Flanagan (a

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<sup>92</sup> “Letter from Daniel de Mendialdua to José Antonio Aguirre”. Dated 31 October 1936. Paris. Correspondencia mantenida entre los años 1936 y 1937 por el Gobierno de Euzkadi con responsables de la Delegación de París. Secretaría General (Bilbao, Barcelona, París). Secretaría. Legajo: 26. Número legajo: 01. Archivo Histórico de Euskadi (AHE).

<sup>93</sup> Cronin: *Frank Ryan. The Search for The Republic*, p. 83.

former President of Sinn Féin, 1933–1935), and Hannah Sheehy Skeffington (a suffragette and political activist), all spoke in support of the Basques and against the misrepresentation of the war in the *Irish Independent*.

As Fearghal McGarry has noted, the Spanish Civil War and its political connotations in Ireland often played out as a rerun of the Irish Civil War.<sup>94</sup> Indeed, at the first of the two Dublin meetings, O'Donnell accused the *Irish Independent* of “viciously conducting a campaign to work up feeling in Ireland so that it could complete the job it had failed to do in 1913, 1916, and 1922”.<sup>95</sup> In a similar vein, Father O’Flanagan drew the analogy of O’Duffy’s Irish Brigades fighting alongside Franco’s “Moors” as akin to Spaniards fighting alongside the British “Black-and-Tans” (Royal Irish Constabulary Special Reserve) during the Irish War of Independence.<sup>96</sup>

Also in attendance at both events was Ambrose Martin — ostensibly as a representative of “the Basque government”. Evidently De Mendiakua’s suggestion that an official *Basque* delegate travel to Dublin had not materialised. Acting in this capacity, Martin was reported to have read out the following translated telegram at the first meeting:

“Basque Nationalist Party, in struggle in these bloody moments for God and liberty, fatherland and democracy, thank your intentions and work to make known the truth in Ireland. Euzkadi remembers once more with emotion, the Irish patriots. Azuria-guerra [sic]. Presidente”.<sup>97</sup>

Reading from his own prepared speech, Martin also informed the audience that twenty-five Basque priests had already been shot dead and the Bishop of Vitoria-Gasteiz forced to flee.<sup>98</sup>

The first Engineer’s Hall meeting immediately rose the ire of Franco’s most prominent Irish supporters. Chief among these was Patrick Belton, a Cumann na nGaedheal TD for Dublin North and President of the Irish Christian Front. Reacting to the meeting, Belton urged the Irish people not to be deceived “as some of the Basque nationalists” by the Irish “Communists” who “now call themselves Republicans”. Their real agenda, according to

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<sup>94</sup> McGarry: *Irish Politics and the Spanish Civil War*, p. 7.

<sup>95</sup> As reported in “Republicans criticise Dublin daily newspaper”, *Irish Press*, 06.11.1936.

<sup>96</sup> As reported in “The War in Spain”, *Irish Press*, 04.12.1936.

<sup>97</sup> “Republicans criticise Dublin daily newspaper”, *Irish Press*, 06.11.1936. “Azuria-guerra” most likely refers to Juan de Ajuriaguerra, at the time a member of the PNV’s executive in Bizkaia: BBB.

<sup>98</sup> See: McGarry: *Irish Politics and the Spanish Civil War*, p. 95.

Belton, was “to establish Communism in [Ireland] and to do it by the methods adopted in Russia, Mexico, and Spain. It is our job in the Irish Christian Front to stop them”.<sup>99</sup>

Two days later, Belton embarked on a boat journey to Portugal via Liverpool. From Lisbon he would make his way to Spain and fulfil his objective of meeting the rebels’ much-vaunted military leader. Face to face with Francisco Franco, Belton personally offered the Galician General “the congratulations of the Irish people on his fight”.<sup>100</sup>

### “Irlanda negra”

“Así como hay en la Historia una España negra, existe también una irlanda negra. Esta negrura odiosa es representada hoy por O’Duffy. Mal irlandés es él y mala irlanda es la suya. [...] En la Europa contemporánea, Irlanda aparece sobre todo con el carácter de un pueblo rebelde al yugo de la servidumbre y con la gloria de una nación heroica que ha subido reconquistar las libertades perdidas. La irlanda de O’Connell, de Parnell, de Mac-Swiney, de Eamon de Valera, es respetada, admirada y amada por los vascos y los catalanes. Euzkadi y Cataluña han estado siempre, en espíritu, al lado de Irlanda, de la Irlanda nacional y noble. Esta otra Irlanda que O’Duffy representa hace pareja —triste pareja— con la España de los generales sublevados”.<sup>101</sup>

At the beckoning of George Gilmore, Ramón Laborda finally made his return to Ireland in January 1937. The priest would spend the following three weeks writing letters to Irish newspapers, and delivering public lectures with the help of “Mr. Martin and his other foreign acquaintances”.<sup>102</sup> In the national press, Laborda attempted to bat away the accusations of O’Duffy and Belton: that the Basques had sold out to ungodly communism. Explaining the Basque position, Laborda insisted that it was “merely a coincidence that the Basque Nationalists and Communists find themselves in the same camp [...]”. Laborda and his people were, on the contrary, “primarily concerned with the good name and fortunes of my own people in this hour of our small nation’s fight for freedom”. To this end, Laborda appealed directly to the Irish people’s sense of nationhood and recent

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<sup>99</sup> “Mr. Belton off to Spain”, *Irish Independent*, 07.11.1936. Incidentally, Belton described Ambrose Martin as “one of the most pronounced and prominent Communists in this country”. He also claimed that the IITC was nothing but a front for Republican Spain. Cited in Leach: *Fugitive Ireland*, p. 57.

<sup>100</sup> “Trip to Spain stated to have three-fold object”, *Irish Press*, 07.11.1936.

<sup>101</sup> “El mal irlandés”, *Euzkadi*, 28.08.1936.

<sup>102</sup> “Garda report on Ambrose Martin by Sergeant John O’Boyle”. Dated 20 August 1940. Irish-Iberian Trading Company. E.S.2/24. NAI. “Mr. Martin and his other foreign acquaintances acted as interpreter and Mr. Martin and his other foreign acquaintances assisted in the preparation of these lectures as well as in the preparation of letters which then appeared in the public press over the name of the Priest”.

history: “The Basque Country is now fighting as Ireland has done for its freedom from an alien race”.<sup>103</sup>

As a priest, Laborda’s presence in the Irish media inevitably drew the attention of the “anti-Red” Irish clergy. A back and forth debate across the national press involving the Basque priest and Ambrose Martin on one side, and a Father P.J. Gannon and Father Stephen J. Brown on the other, ensued. As well as attacking the Basque government’s supposed turn towards communism, the Irish priests dismissed Basque and Catalan “independence efforts” as the inevitable culmination “of long years of Liberal and Masonic propaganda”. Laborda did his best to refute the claims.<sup>104</sup>

The Basque priest received a more sympathetic audience when Ambrose Martin delivered a lecture on his behalf at Dublin’s Gaiety Theatre on 17 January 1937. As with Laborda’s interjections in the media, Martin was at pains to emphasise the Basques’ ardent Christian credentials and rejection of communism. For his part, Laborda entertained the audience by singing a number of traditional Basque folk songs.<sup>105</sup>

Following the Gaiety meeting, a telegram of goodwill sent to the Basque government, signed by Peadar O’Donnell of Republican Congress, seems to have been received by the Secretariat of the Council of Defence in Bilbo as an offer of “assistance”. This was quickly clarified by Republican Congress, lest there be any misinterpretation. It was stated that O’Donnell’s signature was “merely for credential purposes” and “had no other significance”.<sup>106</sup>

There *may* have been very good reason for Republican Congress to assuage any possible mixed messages regarding its intentions — or at least those of O’Donnell. In a letter dated 10 January 1937, only one week before the Gaiety meeting in Dublin, a telegram sent from Paris to Bilbo from a Basque government delegate “Lezo” stated that:

“O’Donnel [presumably Peadar O’Donnell] partido irlandés confirma tiene licencia exportación aviones caza aviones bombardeo de 2 motores. Tanque dos a tres toneladas morteros trinchera”.<sup>107</sup>

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<sup>103</sup> “Spain-Euzkadi”, *Irish Press*, 21.01.1937. Reproduced article (by Ramón Laborda) from *The National Student*, titled: “Euzkadi in Ireland. Rebellion in Spain and the Basque Country”, *Euzko-Deya*.

31.03.1937. DFA/3/102/43. “Visa facilities for Father Ramon Laborda, a Basque (Spanish) Priest”. NAI.

<sup>104</sup> For examples of this correspondence, see: “The truth about the Basques”, *Irish Independent*, 07.01.1937; “The truth about the Basques”, *Irish Independent*, 21.01.1937; “Spain and the Basques”, *Irish Press*, 25.01.1937; “Spain and the Basques”, *Irish Press*, 26.01.1937; “Spain and the Basques”, *Irish Press*, 29.01.1937; “Spain and the Basques”, *Irish Press*, 01.02.1937.

<sup>105</sup> “Aims of the Basque nationalists”, *Irish Press*, 18.01.1937.

<sup>106</sup> “Basque Government’s Statement”, *The Liberator (Kerry)*, 26.01.1937.

<sup>107</sup> “Telegrama sent by Lezo de Urreiztieta”. Dated 10 January 1937. Paris; “Telegram by Liega”. Dated 12 January 1937. 178/27. Personal correspondence with Santiago de Pablo (text of letters).

If this was loose talk from O'Donnell, it was probably taken seriously by the Basque government. Not only was "Lezo" de Urreiztieta, a Jagi-Jagi Basque nationalist tasked with the importation of military equipment from abroad to the Basque front during the civil war, but at that precise moment, the Basque was seeking permission from the Spanish Republic government to purchase planes.<sup>108</sup>

Laborda continued his tour north of the border to Belfast, where he was accompanied by the same Peadar O'Donnell. At Ulster Hall, he was heckled by shouts of "Up Franco!". An invitation to speak at the city's Queen's University was subsequently withdrawn.<sup>109</sup>

Laborda left Ireland shortly afterwards, making his way to Canada, and then the USA. Reflecting on his time in Ireland, Laborda later remarked to a Spanish journalist:

"En Dublín y otras poblaciones irlandesas, en mítines, conferencias, publicas, en la radio, en la prensa, durante varias semanas he hecho escuchar mi voz de sacerdote católico en favor de nuestra causa, demostrando que nuestra Guerra no era una guerra religiosa, ni una Guerra ideológica; que era una guerra impuesta al pueblo trabajador español por un puñado de traidores de su Patria... Esto es lo que he proclamado a los cuatro vientos en Irlanda y tengo la conciencia tranquila de haber cumplido con mi deber como católico y español".<sup>110</sup>

Notwithstanding this positive philosophical outlook, Laborda must have left Ireland with something of a heavy heart, disillusioned by the Irish people's apparent disregard and/or ignorance of the nature of the war and the plight of the Basques.<sup>111</sup> Had the Basques not supported the Irish in their struggle? In fact, if it had not been for an oversight by an official in the Department of External Affairs, it is highly likely that Laborda's entry into Ireland would have been denied in the first place. In the view of an official in the department, the Basque priest's activities four years previously had "caused embarrassment to the Government".<sup>112</sup>

Two months after Laborda's departure (March 1937), Leopold Kerney, who had been moved from Paris to Madrid in 1935 and was now the Irish "Envoy Extraordinary and Minister Plenipotentiary" to Spain, wrote to his superiors in the Department of External Affairs. Kerney remarked that he had recently met with the British Consul in Bilbo, R.C.

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<sup>108</sup> Ibid. For information on "Lezo" and his quite extraordinary life, see: Eugenio Ibarzabal: "Lezo de Urreiztieta, un aberriano", *Muga*, no. 4, March 1980.

<sup>109</sup> McGarry: *Irish Politics and the Spanish Civil War*, p. 100.

<sup>110</sup> "Los exiliados y otros problemas", available at:

<http://www.euskalmemoriadigitala.eus/bitstream/10357/25682/1/206822.pdf> (last accessed 14 May 2019). Ugalde Zubiri: *La Acción Exterior del Nacionalismo Vasco*, p. 655.

<sup>111</sup> McCreanor: *Ireland and the Basque Country*, p. 80.

<sup>112</sup> "Letter from Sean Murphy to the Irish Embassy in Paris". Dated 06 March 1937. DFA/3/102/43. Visa facilities for Father Ramon Laborda a Basque (Spanish) Priest. NAI.



Stevenson. Stevenson had relayed to Kerney his impressions of Lehendakari Aguirre (“of whom he spoke highly”) and the general situation in the Basque Country. According to Kerney, Stevenson had surmised that the Basque government in Bilbo:

“[...] had matters well in hand and that the extreme element were not likely to get out of control unless perhaps as the result of an air raid; that priests and nuns went unmolested through the streets, and that anyone daring to interfere with them would be lynched [...]”.

In the same report, the Irish envoy also mentioned that Stevenson had suggested Kerney travel to Bilbo, where he could meet with Aguirre personally and observe conditions on the ground for himself. Kerney politely declined, citing his personal feelings as “averse to travelling on a British destroyer and that, in any case, this might not be the most opportune moment for such a visit”.<sup>113</sup>

The following month, a squadron of German bombers attacked and flattened the Bizkaian town of Gernika. Reports of the deliberate and sustained bombing of a defenceless civilian population provoked international outrage. This, it has been argued, was the moment that Irish public opinion finally became more nuanced in relation to the war and the particularities of the Basque situation. The Spanish Civil War could no longer be simply viewed as a “clean crusade” to save Christian civilisation, even if some clerical voices in Ireland claimed the attack to be the “devilish inspiration” of Spanish republicans seeking “to destroy the holy town of the Basques and then accuse the Nationalists”.<sup>114</sup>

Yet, it is in the wake of Gernika that evidence of Basque nationalist disenchantment towards Ireland, and its lack of involvement in relief, starts to emerge. For instance, a “Confidential Report” sent from De Valera’s private secretary Kathleen O’Connell to P.J. Walshe at the Department of External Affairs spoke of the frustrations of “the London delegate [José Ignacio Lizaso] of the Autonomous Government of Euzkadi”. The Basque delegate was said to be “greatly distressed” over what he perceived to be the Irish government’s “failure to take any share in the relief work which is being organised”. O’Connell’s letter also reported Lizaso’s unhappiness at “Mr. Dulanty’s treatment of a request of his”. The Mr. Dulanty in question was Ireland’s High Commissioner in London. In barely legible handwriting at the bottom of the letter, there are some notes jotted down in response, presumably by Walshe:

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<sup>113</sup> “Letter from Leopold Kerney to Department of External Affairs”. Dated 23 March 1937. DFA 3/119/17A. General and Confidential Reports from St. Jean de Luz. NAI.

<sup>114</sup> O’Driscoll; Keogh: “Ireland’s military engagement in Spain and Hispano-Irish military cooperation in the twentieth and twenty first centuries” in O’Donnell (coord.): *Presencia irlandesa en la milicia Española. The Irish Presence in the Spanish Military*, pp. 135–194 (quotes on p. 164, p. 176).



“I told Miss O’Connell the result of my conversation with the High [Commissioner] i.e. the Basque Rep[illegible] had said nothing to him about relief. [The Basque Rep] had asked the [High Commissioner] to act as a go between with the [illegible]”.<sup>115</sup>

A month later, Lizaso made his feelings on Ireland publicly known in an explosive interview published in the *Irish Times*:

“‘Oh! Ireland! Ireland!’ [Lizaso] exclaimed. ‘What a disappointment you have been to the Basque people. We have watched your struggle for liberty. We have followed your people with our heartfelt sympathy and love. Our hearts were raised at your victories, and we believed that the spirit of freedom had spread through your land. Had we been asked what country in the whole world we might depend on for sympathy and understanding, I should have at once placed Ireland as the first who would give us courage and hope. And then comes the news that an Irish regiment has arrived to fight against us. [...] I know all about your Christian Front,’ [Lizaso] said. ‘Are we not Christians? What an insult to our people!’”<sup>116</sup>

While Britain took in 4,000 Basque children in the aftermath of Gernika, Ireland refused to take any. Again, the pro-Franco *Irish Independent* was vociferous in its rejection of any suggestion of a similar Irish offer of relief.<sup>117</sup> More Basque frustration was to follow.

In February 1938, the Basque government received authorisation from the Spanish Republic’s Ministry for State to nominate a Consul General (of the Spanish Republic) to Ireland. A Basque priest, Canon Alberto Onaindía, was eventually earmarked for the position. However, given the Irish public’s sympathies towards the Spanish “Nationalist” cause and the perception of the treatment of Catholics under the Spanish Republic, De Valera refused the request.<sup>118</sup>

Later in the year, a more indirect Basque approach to the Irish government took place. In a letter dated “August 1938”, Michael Lennon, the 1916 Rising veteran who had invited the Basque pelota players to Dublin in 1932 and acted as a sort of chaperone during their visit, wrote to the Basque nationalist Chomin (or Txomin) Epalza — himself a member of the same 1932 Basque delegation. In the view of Lennon:

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<sup>115</sup> “Letter from Kathleen O’Connell to J.P. Walshe”. Dated 13 May 1937. DFA 3/119/17A. General and Confidential Reports from St. Jean de Luz. NAI.

<sup>116</sup> “Basque Point of View”, *Irish Times*, 15.06.1937.

<sup>117</sup> .“The reception of Basque refugees in 1937 showed Britain at its best and worst”, *The Guardian*, <https://www.theguardian.com/world/2017/may/22/the-reception-of-basque-refugees-in-1937-showed-britain-at-its-best-and-worst>; “Escaping the horror of Guernica — An Irishman’s Diary on Basque Child Refugees in 1937”, *Irish Times*, available at <https://www.irishtimes.com/opinion/escaping-the-horror-of-guernica-an-irishman-s-diary-on-basque-child-refugees-in-1937-1.3059680>. (sites last accessed 17 July 2019).

<sup>118</sup> McGarry: *Irish Politics and the Spanish Civil War*, p.223.

“[...] no veo razón alguna por la que no podáis pedir al Sr. De Valera que se interese en el porvenir de los Vascos. Ha llegado a ser considerado en Ginebra [seat of the League of Nations] como algo así como el padre de algunas pequeñas naciones, y a él la agrada esta postura. La gestión habría de hacerse privadamente primero, y en el sentido de que hiciera valer su influencia con el Primer Ministerio Ingles en favor de los Vascos. Si no se consigue nada con esta gestión, no se habrá perdido nada. Si no se consigue con esta gestión, no se habrá perdido nada. Existe siempre la posibilidad de que el Sr. De Valera se dedica a ayuda a vuestro pueblo, y bien merece la pena de hacer el esfuerzo y tratar de obtener su ayuda”.

To get things moving, Lennon recommended that Lehendakari Aguirre personally write to De Valera. Secondly, attempts should be made to lobby Sir John Keane, a London-based Irish correspondent for the *Sunday Times* who had, according to Lennon, helped to broach the end of the British-Irish “Economic War”. Lennon signed off by warning Epalza to be aware that the murder of an Irish “governess” in Bilbo had generated bad publicity for the Basques and left De Valera talking “en terminos muy energeticos sobre este asunto hace algun tiempo”.<sup>119</sup>

Alongside Lennon’s letter came an unauthored précis. Probably penned by Lennon himself, the précis outlined ostensible support for the Basque cause in “Irlanda” and “Inglaterra”. Regarding the former, the précis referred to a: “Persona destacada por el Partido nacionalista en Irlanda manifiesta que ha quedado constituida una Junta pro-Euzkadi dispuesta a laborar en todo lo que se les pida”. Elaborating further, the précis suggested that:

“Elementos del I.R.A (Irish Republican Army) y Fiaina Fail [sic] (Partido de De Valera) esperan con interés y ansiedad instrucciones precisas y concretas para comenzar a laborar en lo que es los mande. Quiere decir esto que podrían incluso enviar jefes militares”.<sup>120</sup>

Given his status within Basque circles and the exaggerated claims of IRA and Fianna Fáil support, it is probable that the “Persona destacada” in question was Ambrose Martin.

“Elementos del I.R.A”, as we shall see, did indeed partake in the Spanish Civil War on the republican side. It is worth underlining, however, that in no way was there any

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<sup>119</sup> “Letter from Michael Lennon to Chomin Epalza”. Dated 29 August 1938. London. Archivo Histórico del Gobierno Vasco. Fondo del Departamento de Presidencia. Secretaría General (Bilbao, Barcelona, París). Secretaría. Legajo: 52 Número legajo: 03. AHE. An Irish governess, Bridget Boland, was murdered in Bilbo on 16 June 1937 along with the family she worked for. See: “Extracts from the annual report from Leopold H. Kerney to Joseph P. Walshe (S.J. 19/5)”. Dated 02 May 1938. No. 180 DFA 119/48. NAI. <https://www.difp.ie/docs/1938/Irish-legation-in-Madrid/2326.htm>; <http://irelandscw.com/docs-NonCom.htm> (sites last accessed 21 July 2019).

<sup>120</sup> “Untitled précis containing the sub-headings Irlanda and Inglaterra”. Archivo Histórico del Gobierno Vasco. Fondo del Departamento de Presidencia. Secretaría General (Bilbao, Barcelona, París). Secretaría. Legajo: 52 Número legajo: 03. AHE. Underline for stress in original.

IRA involvement on an organised basis. On the contrary, individual IRA volunteers who went abroad without IRA Army Council permission were effectively committing acts of desertion and were, in theory, to be punished accordingly.

If Ireland was still a possible source of relief for the beleaguered Basques (giving voice to a small nation, offering humanitarian help, demonstrating a more pro-republic stance, etc.), the second part of the *précis*, concerning “Inglaterra”, reflected the true hierarchy of European geopolitics during the Spanish Civil War: “Hay que tener en cuenta que Europa esta mirando a lo que dice Inglaterra”.<sup>121</sup> With this in mind, could pressure really be leveraged on Britain via De Valera’s Ireland as Lennon had tentatively suggested in his letter to Epalza?

In mid-September, De Valera arrived in Geneva ahead of the 19<sup>th</sup> Ordinary Session of the League of Nations. Two Basque nationalist officials, José María Izaurieta and Francisco de Javier de Landaburu, were also in the city, lobbying on behalf of their government.<sup>122</sup> Following the instructions of Pedro de Basaldúa, a Paris-based secretary to the President of the Junta de la Defensa José Echeverría Novoa, Izaurieta wrote to De Valera on 13 September. Receiving no response from the taoiseach, Izaurieta remarked in a letter that he was “perplexed”. Having (presumably again) tried and failed to arrange a meeting with De Valera, De Landaburu wrote to De Basaldúa four days later:

“Desesperanzado de que De Valera nos reciba en estos días, mucho más por haber dado la prensa ginebrina noticias de mi nombre y de las gestiones nacionalistas que realizamos cerca de la S. de N., le he escrito una carta en la que la hablo de los tres objetivos que la vista había de tener. Con ella inicio una relación con dicho Sr. que luego debe continuar oficialmente el Gobierno”.<sup>123</sup>

It appears that no meeting took place between De Valera and the Basque government officials.

Whatever hope or expectation that Basque nationalists had of receiving support from the Irish government —of the moral or material kind, or by way of influencing Britain— was ultimately misplaced. Addressing the League of Nations directly on the issue of the Spanish Civil War at the previous year’s session, De Valera had outlined his overall view

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<sup>121</sup> Ibid.

<sup>122</sup> Ugalde Zubiri: *La acción exterior del nacionalismo vasco*, pp. 603–604.

<sup>123</sup> “Letter from José María Izaurieta to Pedro de Basaldúa”. Dated 13 September 1938. Paris; “Letter from José María Izaurieta to Pedro de Basaldúa”. Dated 15 September 1938. Geneva; “Letter from Francisco de Javier de Landaburu to Pedro de Basaldúa”. Dated 17 September 1938. Geneva. 45/20/1. Servicio Histórico Militar. Personal correspondence with Santiago de Pablo (text of letters). Incidentally, in September 1935, De Valera and Aguirre had apparently been very close to holding a meeting but due to a problem of synchronising their agendas, the meeting fell through. See: Ugalde Zubiri: *La acción exterior del nacionalismo vasco*, p. 416.

of the situation. Within the speech, there was enough indirect evidence to indicate the underlining rationale of why Basque overtures to Dublin were never likely to be successful:

“We deplore the interventions and counter-interventions which have bid fair to make Spain a cockpit for every European antagonism. The people of Ireland are far from being indifferent to some of the issues at present being fought out in Spain, but the Irish Government is determined to adhere to the policy of non-intervention and steadfastly to advocate it as the best for Spain and the best for Europe”.<sup>124</sup>

Despite the policy of non-intervention, direct non-governmental Irish support to the Spanish Republic did eventually materialise in the shape of some 200 Irish-born volunteers, about half of whom were, or had been, members of the post-civil war IRA. Frank Ryan served as their “unofficial and highly regarded moral leader”. Fighting in the International Brigades, Ryan, alongside O’Donnell, and others such as Charlie Donnelly and Bob Doyle would all go on to become leading luminaries and martyrs of the Irish republican left.<sup>125</sup> Thirty-five years after Ryan died (1944) in Germany, a Herri Batasuna delegate attended and laid a wreath at his reinternment in Dublin in 1979.<sup>126</sup>

Curiously, in a contribution to a book titled “Brendan Behan: Interviews and Recollections”, Ambrose Martin’s son, Eamonn, later claimed that his father had fought “in the International Brigade with Frank Ryan’s Irish contingent”.<sup>127</sup> To this author’s knowledge, there is no evidence to support this assertion.

Only one Irishman is known to have volunteered in the Basque battalions. John (occasionally Jack) Prendergast rose to the rank of Captain before he was captured by Franco’s forces. Only the intervention of Leopold Kerney seemingly prevented his execution. Prendergast was released and crossed the frontier on 23 December 1937. Having returned to Dublin, Prendergast shot and killed his girlfriend in April 1942, before

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<sup>124</sup> “Extract from a speech given by Eamon de Valera at the Eighteenth Ordinary Session of the League of Nations”. No. 93 P150/2807. UCDA. <https://www.difp.ie/docs/1937/Address-to-the-18th-Assembly-League-of-Nations/2239.htm> (last accessed 14 May 2019).

<sup>125</sup> O’Driscoll; Keogh: “Ireland’s military engagement in Spain and Hispano-Irish military cooperation in the twentieth and twenty first centuries” in O’Donnell (coord.): *Presencia irlandesa en la milicia Española. The Irish Presence in the Spanish Military*, (quote on p. 179); McGarry: *Irish Politics and the Spanish Civil War*, p. 48, pp. 56–58.

<sup>126</sup> Cited in: Thomas J. Morrissey: “Review of Frank Ryan (Historical Association of Ireland: Life and Times — New Series) by Fearghal McGarry”, *An Irish Quarterly Review*, Vol. 100, No. 397, (Spring 2011), pp. 105–107.

<sup>127</sup> Eamonn Martin: “Brendan Behan’s Quare World” in E.H. Mikhail (ed.): *Brendan Behan: Interviews and Recollections*, vol. II, Dublin, Gill and Macmillan, 1982, pp. 200–204.

turning the gun on himself. A subsequent inquest found that he was of an “unsound mind”.<sup>128</sup>

With the beleaguered Spanish Republic facing defeat, a somewhat desperate Luis Arana travelled to London in late 1938 with his good friend Lezo de Urreiztieta, the Jagi-Jagi nationalist who had seemingly discussed military hardware with Peadar O’Donnell in early 1937. Arana’s objective in the English capital was to submit an unofficial “message” (with no prior approval from the Basque government) to the British Foreign Office. Echoing the plan his brother Sabino had in mind nearly four decades previously, Luis’ message proposed that Britain assume a protectorate role in the Basque Country. Once the communication was submitted, Luis Arana and Urreiztieta made their way to Liverpool, from where they boarded a boat bound for Dublin. Waiting for the two Basques across the Irish Sea on the morning of 12 November were Eli Gallastegi and Ambrose Martin.<sup>129</sup>

Since his arrival in Ireland the previous year, Gallastegi and his family had been living in a large house located just outside Dublin in a small rural area called Gibbstown (Baile Ghib). As part of a government initiative, a number of gaelgeoirí (native Irish speakers) families from different parts of Ireland had recently converged in and around the otherwise unremarkable townland. The Gallastegis settled into the community well, quickly becoming fluent Irish speakers.<sup>130</sup>

Arana and De Urreiztieta spent four nights in total at the Gallastegi homestead. According to a diary kept by Arana during the trip, Martin and Gallastegi arranged interviews for both he and De Urreiztieta with the following Fianna Fáil government heavyweights: Gerald Boland, Minister for Lands and Fisheries; Patrick J. Little, Government Chief Whip, and as the reader may recall, a veteran of Irish-Basque contacts in Argentina during the era of the “Irish Republic”; and finally, the taoiseach himself, Éamon de Valera. Boland would go on to become Minister for Justice in 1939. It was under his watch that the IRA was effectively crushed during the war years. In interview with this author, Iker Gallastegi recalled that one of the minister’s sons, Enda, had

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<sup>128</sup> “Extracts from the annual report from Leopold H. Kerney to Joseph P. Walshe (S.J. 19/5)”. Dated 02 May 1938. DFA. 119/48. NAI. Sam McGrath: “The story of Jack Prendergast: The only known Irish soldier of the Basque army”, *Gernika Then and Now: 80 years of Basque-Irish anti-fascist struggles*, Dublin: Gernika 80 Committee, 2017. pp. 28–29.

<sup>129</sup> Jean-Claude Larronde: *Luis Arana Goiri 1862–1951. Historia del Nacionalismo Vasco*, Bilbao, Archivo del Nacionalismo Vasco - Abertzaletasunaren Agiritgia (ANV-AA), 2010, pp. 437–441. For details of Arana’s “descabellado” plan, see: De la Granja Sainz: *El Nacionalismo Vasco*, pp. 122–123.

<sup>130</sup> Author interview with Iker Gallastegi (Getxo, 2017).

previously been in Bilbo and met Ambrose Martin. Iker Gallastegi suggested that this was perhaps the source of the Boland connection. For unknown reasons, Eli Gallastegi opted not to accompany his Basque compatriots to the meeting with De Valera in 1938. This apparently provoked fury from De Urreiztieta, although the meeting went ahead regardless.

Arana and De Urreiztieta left Gibbstown on 16 November, making their way back to Ipparralde via Belfast, Glasgow, London, Dover, Paris, and Brittany. In Brittany, they spent a night in an elegant French chateau, ‘Kerlut’, close to Quimper. It had recently been purchased by Ambrose Martin.<sup>131</sup>

In 1939, Franco’s forces eventually defeated the Spanish Republic. There would be no reconciliation in the “New Spain” — only “victors” and “vanquished”. Thousands of republican soldiers, civilians and refugees were subsequently executed or left to perish in prisons and concentration camps. As many as 150,000 Basques were forced into exile during the war and in its immediate aftermath.<sup>132</sup> All the while, the Irish government was kept abreast of Franco’s vindictive campaign through the regular dispatches of its representative to Madrid, Leopold Kerney. Among Kerney’s communications with Dublin was a report of “400 Basques” that were rounded up at a church and imprisoned in a concentration camp for alleged separatist sympathies. Another Kerney dispatch included a photograph of the socialist leader Julián Besteiro awaiting execution in Ocaña prison. In the photograph, Besteiro was surrounded by at least 40 priests (“mostly Basque”), dressed in cassocks.

Given that the general narrative surrounding the Spanish Civil War in Ireland had been one of a struggle between Christianity and communism, there is of course a certain irony that Kerney’s dispatches highlighted the repression of Basque priests under the new regime. Despite reports of this ilk, and others of a far more gruesome nature, De Valera’s government, neither publicly nor privately, were moved to protest against the new regime or its actions in the Basque Country or wider Spain.<sup>133</sup>

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<sup>131</sup> Larronde: *Luis Arana Goiri 1862–1951*, pp. 437–441, p. 452 (footnote 48). One of Leopold Kerney’s brothers, Arnold, apparently managed the Kerlut estate in Brittany. See: Whelan: *Ireland’s Revolutionary Diplomat*, p. 13. Personal correspondence with Barry Whelan. Author interview with Iker Gallastegi (Getxo, 2017).

<sup>132</sup> For an authoritative and often harrowing account, see: Paul Preston: *The Spanish Holocaust. Inquisition and Extermination in Twentieth-Century Spain*, London, Harper Press, 2012.

<sup>133</sup> For the relevant reports, see: Barry Whelan: *Ireland and Spain, 1939–55: Cultural, Economic and Political Relations from Neutrality in the Second World War to Joint Membership of the United Nations*, National University of Ireland, Maynooth, (PhD Dissertation), 2012, pp. 104–106, pp. 109–110, pp. 117–118, pp. 200–208.



The hope and expectation that some (radical and moderate) Basque nationalists stored in Ireland as a possible voice for their wellbeing during these years of existential threat was ultimately misplaced. That it was De Valera —the ostensible “father of small nations”, as Lennon referred to him— who was in power in Ireland throughout this period, must have made this experience even more deflating. And while the actions and attitudes of O’Duffy, his Irish Brigades and the Irish Christian Front could be compartmentalised as representative of “La Irlanda Negra” (as quoted in the *Euzkadi* excerpt at the top of this section); the apparent disregard shown by De Valera and his government was more difficult to comprehend for a Basque nationalist political culture that had cultivated an instinctive affinity and deep reverence for “Erin” for over half a century.

Yet, any Basque nationalist analysis of De Valera’s government at this juncture, must, of course, be strongly qualified by the prevailing *realpolitik* of domestic Irish attitudes to the war. As early as November 1936, De Valera had come under intense pressure from the opposition to recognise Franco’s “government”. He refused to do so. Likewise, De Valera had managed to push a “Non-Intervention Act” through Dáil Éireann despite bitter hostility from the pro-Franco Catholic Church and *Irish Independent*.<sup>134</sup> Moreover, and notwithstanding Basque nationalists’ desperation at this juncture, there was also a touch of naivety in placing any of their hopes and expectations in Ireland.

In 1935, a personal greeting from De Valera to the PNV on the occasion of the Basque party’s fortieth anniversary had read: “with the great sentiments of a patriot. I salute all the Basques and trust that they will obtain their liberties”.<sup>135</sup> Five years later, in April 1940, Leopold Kerney received a letter from Joseph P. Walshe (External Affairs) concerning the diffusion of Irish anti-partitionist propaganda to the Spanish press. Walshe enquired as to whether Kerney could perhaps “write occasional paragraphs or columns on the [Irish] unity issue, taking care to make them as international and as unlike the Basque parallel as possible”.<sup>136</sup> As Walshe’s letter to Kerney conveys, whatever genuine sympathies De Valera held in regard to Basque political rights, or however the cause of Basque nationalism may have been viewed positively within certain elements of the Irish body politic, these were ultimately secondary afterthoughts to the reality of the Irish state’s desire to maintain positive, long-standing and historical relations with Spain — even in its new extreme right-wing, dictatorial and ultra-nationalist form.

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<sup>134</sup> Fanning: *Éamon De Valera. A Will to Power*, p. 184.

<sup>135</sup> Cited in Núñez Seixas: “Ecos de Pascua”.

<sup>136</sup> Whelan: *Ireland and Spain, 1939–55*, pp. 118–119.

## The Basque colony

On 14 June 1940, Paris fell to Nazi Germany. As Hitler's forces drove towards the western and southern peripheries of France, thousands of Basque refugees who had crossed the border from Hegoalde into Iparralde when Franco came to power, now found themselves squeezed between two hostile protagonists. On 25 June, 11 Basque refugees embarked from Donibane Lohizune on board a lobster boat named "Salangane" just as German forces were approaching the town. After thirteen days at sea, the refugees landed on the south coast of Ireland in the town of Cóbh (Cobh). Once on dry land, the group explained to the Irish authorities that they had intended to sail for England but, while at sea, had changed their minds and decided to go to Ireland instead.<sup>137</sup>

This was no "ordinary" group of refugees — if there ever is such a term. Among the ten men and one woman on board were: Ángel Aguirreche, former editor of *Jagi-Jagi* and commander of two of the Basque battalions "Lenago il" (before dying) and "Zergaitik ez?" (why not?); Telesforo Uribe-Echevarría, the aforementioned former aberriano and leading protagonist of ANV; his brother Manuel, a cartographer in the Basque Army and member of ANV; José Camiña, a renowned stockbroker and former advisor to the Basque government; and Manuel de Egileor (sometimes Eguileor), a former President of Juventud Vasca in Bilbo, former Vice-President and Treasurer of the PNV, former political representative for Durango, and co-founder of *Aberri*.<sup>138</sup>

The local Irish police were, naturally, none the wiser as to who had just landed ashore. Reports indicate that some of the refugees made it known that they were associates with one of, or both, Eli Gallastegi and Ambrose Martin. Meanwhile, Camiña claimed to be a "personal friend" of Leopold Kerney and informed the authorities that he had £60,000 sitting in a bank in London. Contact was soon made with Gallastegi by telephone and the offices of the IITC in Dublin. After a few nights in a Cork hotel, the refugees were brought to Gallastegi's home in Gibbstown.<sup>139</sup>

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<sup>137</sup> "Arrival of Spanish Refugees at Cobh. Report by Superintendent J.J. Murphy to Commissioner C (3)". Dated 04 July 1940. 202/946. Illegal landing of a party of Basque refugees at Cobh. NAI. Another report names the boat as "Delange". See "Report by D. O'Coiléain". Dated 04 July 1940. 202/946. Illegal landing of a party of Basque refugees at Cobh. NAI.

<sup>138</sup> "Arrival of Spanish Refugees at Cobh. Report by Superintendent J.J. Murphy to Commissioner C (3)". Dated 04 July 1940. Illegal landing of a party of Basque refugees at Cobh. 202/946. NAI.

<sup>139</sup> "Arrival of Spanish Refugees at Cobh. Report by Superintendent J.J. Murphy to Commissioner C (3)". Dated 04 July 1940. Illegal landing of a party of Basque refugees at Cobh. 202/946. NAI; "Memo regarding a party of Aliens who landed at Cobh, 3.7.'40". Undated. Illegal landing of a party of Basque refugees at Cobh. 202/946. NAI.

The influx of the new Basques to Gibbstown was a diplomatic headache for neutral Ireland. As one member of Irish military intelligence (G2) surmised in a dispatch to External Affairs: “In view of the political outlook of these aliens, I think it is extremely dangerous to have them at large”. Another complained that “we are saddled with the task of supervising the activities of yet one more group of suspects”.<sup>140</sup> The new Francoist-ambassador in Ireland, Juan García Ontiveros, immediately demanded details of the landing party. He would keep up a relentless campaign of harassment against the refugees during their stay.<sup>141</sup> Ontiveros seemed to be particularly rankled by Camiña, whom the ambassador cited in one report to Madrid as:

“[...] el que, por sus años y su fortuna, y su intransigencia superior, inclusive, a los de otros refugiados más jóvenes, de la misma procedencia, es él que es considerado jefe del grupo que reniega de su españolismo, para circunscribirse a su condición de ‘vascos’”.<sup>142</sup>

At the first meeting between De Valera and Ontiveros, Ambrose Martin’s details were passed on to the Spanish Ambassador. Martin and Ontiveros subsequently met to discuss commercial links between the two countries.<sup>143</sup>

Despite the initial concerns of Irish intelligence, and the sabre rattling of Ontiveros, the new Basque colony in the heart of Ireland did not engage in any significant political activities. While some agitated to join the allied cause on the continent, others applied for, and were granted, visas to the Americas (Canada, Chile, USA) and Britain. By September 1941, four of the party had already left the state.<sup>144</sup>

As for the Gallastegi family, a sort of unofficial Basque museum named “Erresñoleta” was set up in Gibbstown House, complete with a model Basque village, church, baserri and village green. It was said to have occupied “half a large room”. Endeavours such as Erresñoleta, alongside his family’s proficiency in Gaeilge, earned Eli Gallastegi the affectionate, if a little clumsy, local nickname: “Pearse of the Basque Land”.<sup>145</sup> Eli Gallastegi would remain in Ireland until 1958.

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<sup>140</sup> “Letter from G2 Branch to J.P. Walshe”. Dated 13 July 1940. Illegal landing of a party of Basque refugees at Cobh. 202/946. NAI; “Memo regarding a party of Aliens who landed at Cobh, 3.7.‘40”. Undated. Illegal landing of a party of Basque refugees at Cobh. 202/946. NAI.

<sup>141</sup> Barry Whelan: “The experience of Basque dissidents in Ireland during the Second World War”, *International Journal of Iberian Studies*, vol. 26, no. 3, 2013.

<sup>142</sup> “Actividades de los separatistas vascos y catalanes en Irlanda (1942)”. (10) MAE caja 82/6492 (2224, 25–36). Archivo General de la Administración (AGA).

<sup>143</sup> Whelan: *Ireland and Spain, 1939–55*, p. 39.

<sup>144</sup> “Letter to Foreign Affairs”. Dated 30 July 1946. 202/946. Illegal landing of a party of Basque refugees at Cobh. NAI; Whelan: “The experience of Basque dissidents in Ireland during the Second World War”.

<sup>145</sup> “P.C.’S Column”, *Drogheda Independent*, 23.10.1948; Lorenzo Espinosa: *Gudari. Una pasión útil*, pp. 241–242; “Biggest effort in Eire”, *Meath Chronicle*, 16.12.1944.

As for Ambrose Martin, having been hit by a car in Dublin in late 1939 and gone to France to ostensibly recover from his injuries, Martin took up residence in his Breton chateau for the duration of the war.<sup>146</sup> A local Irish newspaper report from May 1941 concerning a forestry dispute on one of Martin's properties suggests that his family did not know if he was "dead or alive". He had been expected to return from France after only two months. Multiple sources attesting to an extra-marital affair provide additional context.<sup>147</sup>

Intelligence reports indicate that Martin's family home in Naul (An Aill), Co. Dublin, was kept under regular surveillance during the war. The phone was also tapped. One officer stated that "the house appears to be a rendezvous for [illegible] of people of extreme views". The Irish head of military intelligence (G2), Colonel Dan Byrne, deemed Martin to be a "suspicious character". Conflicting reports regarding Martin's political leanings probably played into this view. For instance, a Garda Síochána report from July 1940 suggested that the Irish-Argentinian "would not find it difficult to don Nazi colours". Conversely, in another report from the same month, an intelligence officer suspected Martin to be "of communist sympathies". As did the devoutly Catholic Ontiveros once he learned of Martin's extra-marital relationship. Finally, according to McCreanor, Martin may have sheltered Basque refugees during the war in Brittany.<sup>148</sup>

In November 1945, Ambrose Martin wrote a letter from his Breton chateau to William O'Brien, a long-time stalwart in the Irish labour movement. He requested O'Brien's unspecified help for a new business venture, which he referred to as his "little pig". He hoped it would "grow into a respectable pig, and thereby increase the value of the capital invested". In the meantime, according to Martin:

"Business is beginning to move rather fast as regards Spain and Ireland and France and Ireland. I am leaving for Paris on Tuesday next and then I am going down to the Spanish frontier to give instructions at the frontier post to my Spanish representative as regards Irish-Spanish trade, I must meet him at the post as I cannot enter Spain. It is very annoying to me to see splendid opportunities for developing Irish trade going to waste [...]"<sup>149</sup>

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<sup>146</sup> ; "Letter to Leopold Kerney". Dated 08 December 1939. Irish-Iberian Trading Company. ES.2/24. NAI.

<sup>147</sup> "Naul trees cut", *Drogheda Independent*, 31.05.1941; "Garda report on Ambrose Martin by Sergeant John O'Boyle". Dated 20 August 1940. Irish-Iberian Trading Company. E.S.2/24. NAI; "Ambrose Martin". G2/0267. IMA; Whelan: "The experience of Basque dissidents in Ireland during the Second World War".

<sup>148</sup> 'Ambrose Martin'. G2/0267. IMA. Whelan: "The experience of Basque dissidents in Ireland during the Second World War"; McCreanor: *Ireland and the Basque Country*, p. 94.

<sup>149</sup> "Letter from Ambrose V. Martin to William O'Brien". Dated 17 November 1945. William O'Brien (1881-1968) Papers. MS 13, 961/3/9. NLI.

Two years earlier, on 14 December 1943, Martin had been granted a visa to enter Spain.<sup>150</sup> Now unable to do so, perhaps the Spanish authorities had finally taken note of his pro-Basque sympathies.

Practically all trace of the mysterious and mercurial Ambrose Martin would seem to disappear from the archives post-1945 — or at least those consulted by this author. Thanks to familial research conducted by McCreanor, we know that when Martin's wife passed away, he remarried and settled into a private life in Dublin, frequently holidaying in Brittany.<sup>151</sup> He died in 1974, incidentally the same year as his long-time friend, political foil, and occasional business partner: Eli Gallastegi.

## 2.4. Conclusion

From early medieval utilisations of Basque-Irish origin myths, to the diplomatic headache caused by the arrival of Basque refugees to Ireland during World War II, this chapter (part I and II) has sought to illustrate the *long dureé* trajectory of Basque-Irish relations up until the commencement of the *latter* post-war, and BIA-IRM-centric, phase. As the reader will appreciate, the deep historical timeframe dealt with thus far has encompassed a number of diverse eras, historical processes, events, groups, and individuals. In offering some concluding analysis to this chapter, we must, therefore, return to the core questions that guide this study: *What* are the historical facts of the relationship between radical Basque nationalism and Irish republicanism? *How* and *why* has this nexus developed in the manner that it has across a number of time periods, actors, and transnational strands? And finally: *has* this nexus had any tangible impact (and if so, *how?*) with respect to the historical development of each movement and wider associated conflict?

Although these questions are primarily concerned with the modern post-1945 period, their core rationale may also be applied to what has been covered in this chapter. Accordingly, in what follows, a brief summary of the historical trajectory of Basque-Irish relations, explications of relevant changes in this dynamic, and a broad assessment of the reciprocal impact of this nexus, pre-1945, is offered.

As the reader will recall, what could be termed as an Iberian-Irish *association*, grounded in early medieval texts that purported to account for the origins of the (Gaelic)

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<sup>150</sup> “Nota Verbal. Ministerio De Asuntos Exteriores a la Legación de Irlanda Madrid”. Dated 14 December 1943. Irish-Iberian Trading Company. E.S.2/24. NAI.

<sup>151</sup> Personal correspondence with Kyle McCreanor.

Irish, tended to overarch and impinge on the folkloric and historical narratives of Ireland (and Spain and England/Britain more indirectly) well into the nineteenth century. This *association* was occasionally utilised for political expediency by various political, religious, and social actors. Within this framework, a *Basque*-specific version of the origin myth also operated, although its political utilisation usually differed little from the broader Iberian-origin narrative.

Towards the second half of the nineteenth century, political movements in the Basque provinces and Ireland that centred on the preservation or attainment of different forms of autonomy (Basque *fuerismo* and Irish Home Rule) became more pronounced. With the relative convergence of political grievance and aspiration in both contexts came more overt parallelisations and analogies drawn between the Basque provinces and Ireland. The hitherto Basque-Irish “connection” —grounded in the shared origin myth— was, by this stage, effectively absent from what was an emerging contemporary and politically-oriented transnational schema.

When the PNV was founded in 1895, Ireland (in conjunction with its perceived relationship with Britain) immediately became a key international reference for the *jeltzales*. In contrast, neither constitutionalist Irish nationalists nor revolutionary-minded republicans, analysed or approached the Basque (or Spanish) political situation in the same manner. In short, Irish eyes tended to be focused on other places and political contexts.

Up until 1915, the PNV perceived Irish Home Rule to be increasingly within the grasp of Irish nationalists. Given that a similar analogous scenario in the Basque context (restoration of the *foruak*) would have arguably satisfied the demands of at least half of the PNV at this juncture (the moderate ascendant wing), the attraction of the Irish case to Basque nationalism, and the perception, rightly or wrongly, of British accommodation of Irish political claims in contrast to Spain, was strong.

The 1916 Rising and the establishment of a revolutionary Irish Republic in 1919 radically altered this transnational schema. The moral victory of a small nation against seemingly impossible odds chimed with the rhetoric of an increasingly radical tendency of Basque nationalism.<sup>152</sup> And while the views of both moderate and radical wings of the CNV had almost converged in regard to Ireland by the time the party split in 1921, it was the *aberriano* wing that embedded a heroic and glorious narrative of the Rising and the

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<sup>152</sup> Watson: *Basque Nationalism and Political Violence*, p. 92.



political model of Sinn Féin into its discourse. This can be attributed to two main factors: firstly, a certain logical outworking of the aberrianos' own orthodox nationalist position; and secondly, the unrelenting utilisation of Ireland by the aberriano leader Eli Gallastegi as his international reference *par excellence*.

From the Irish Revolutionary Period onwards, a diffuse *radical* Basque nationalist-Irish republican transnational nexus existed until the Spanish Civil War. And while this nexus existed primarily in (asymmetric Irish-to-Basque) media and propaganda terms, Basque-Irish personal contacts, plots, meetings, and expressions of solidarity also occurred. Personal (micro) connections between individuals —especially that of Eli Gallastegi and Ambrose Martin— played a significant role in this development. The Gallastegi-Martin axis was born out and sustained as a result of the two men's shared politics, business interests and personal circumstances.

From the moment Fianna Fáil came to power in 1932, the primary transnational frame of reference for radical Basque nationalism (aberrianismo/Jagi-Jagi) pivoted from post-Irish Revolutionary Period disaffected republicanism (Sinn Féin and the IRA), to Fianna Fáil republicanism and the Irish state, under De Valera's stewardship.

Accordingly, when the Spanish Civil War broke out in 1936, Basque nationalists of “moderate” and “radical” persuasions looked to De Valera's Ireland for succour and solidarity. Unlike previous contacts, these initiatives were motivated and pursued as a direct (macro) existential threat to Basque nationalism and the Basque body politic *per se*. In general, Basque nationalist overtures towards Fianna Fáil republicanism failed. In contrast, non-Fianna Fáil leftist republicans from the orbit of Republican Congress were keen to express solidarity with the Basque Country in its plight. And while we have also seen suggestions of transnational military connections via this link, the only direct republican assistance that can be categorically verified came in the shape of the Irish International Brigade volunteers who fought for the cause of the Spanish Republic.<sup>153</sup>

Given the almost constantly changing political circumstances in both the British-Irish (*Home Rule movement, 1916 Rising, War of Independence, Irish partition, Irish Civil War*) and Spanish-Basque (*Restoration Monarchy, Primo de Rivera dictatorship, Second Spanish Republic, Basque autonomy, Spanish Civil War*) contexts since the latter half of the nineteenth century, radical Basque nationalist-Irish republican connections and

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<sup>153</sup> McGarry cautions that personal, economic and social factors need to be factored in alongside political “solidarity” when assessing the Irish volunteers' actual motivations. See: McGarry: *Irish Politics and the Spanish Civil War*, pp. 49–52, p. 96.

relations were highly fragmented. What underpinned Basque nationalist-Irish republican affinity in discursive/narrative (propaganda) terms throughout this period? Taking a broad view, an underlining discourse of grievance and aspiration around the issues of Basque and Irish autonomy, and the resurgence of the nation (nationalism), can be said to have characterised the pre-1916 phase. Addressing the post-1916 period feeds directly into our third core guiding question regarding the impact that Basque-Irish relations from this era had on their respective movements.

The 1916 Rising was the main domino that initiated the *radical* phase of Basque nationalist-Irish republican relations. The “gesto heroico”<sup>154</sup> of the martyrs, summarily executed by British firing squads, had a number of demonstrative and emulative effects on radical Basque nationalism. 1916 should not, however, be seen in a vacuum. Although certainly not reflected to the same extent across Basque nationalist discourse, of arguably equal importance to the *Aberrri* generation was the revolutionary Irish Republic established in January 1919. This Irish Republic not only provided vindication for the *aberrriano* strand of Basque nationalism and its position regarding the Rising, but it also presented an overarching social movement model of disruption that could perhaps similarly undermine the central state(s) in the Basque context: Sinn Féin (political), IRA (military), Na Fianna Éireann: “Irish Warriors” (youth), Cumann na mBan (women), Irish Republic embassies (international outreach), and the less-political, but equally important organisations of the Gaelic League (Irish language) and Gaelic Athletic Association (Irish sports). For a multitude of reasons (comparative strength of the CNV’s social movement, differing internal state dynamics, dictatorship of Primo de Rivera, etc.), this potential model was never realised by radical Basque nationalists — leaving the epic and mythologised 1916 Rising as the overbearing reference point.<sup>155</sup>

While it is fair to say that the events of the Irish Revolutionary Period had a broad galvanising impact right across the *aberrriano* spectrum,<sup>156</sup> it is also true that the *aberrriano* reflection of the “Irish mirror” (the apparent demonstrative and emulative lessons for Basque nationalists) tended to be quite closely associated with one man: Eli Gallastegi. McCreanor has described Gallastegi as a “Hibernophile extraordinaire”.<sup>157</sup> It is difficult

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<sup>154</sup> Núñez Seixas: “Ecos de Pascua” (quote on p. 451).

<sup>155</sup> This heavily lopsided concentration on the 1916 Rising (as opposed to the arguably far more important December 1918 election) is also prevalent in Irish historiography and Irish political discourse more generally. See: Brian Hanley: “Who fears to speak of 1916?”, *History Ireland*, March-April 2015.

<sup>156</sup> Lorenzo Espinosa: “Influencia del nacionalismo irlandés en el nacionalismo vasco, 1916–1936”.

<sup>157</sup> McCreanor: *Ireland and the Basque Country*, p. 68.

to argue with this assessment. It was Gallastegi who organised the first protests against *Euzkadi* in the wake of that newspaper's coverage of the executed 1916 martyrs. It was Gallastegi who, for almost two decades, ceaselessly lionised the struggle and sacrifice of the heroes of the Irish Revolutionary Period in radical Basque newspapers as a salutary model for Basque nationalism: "Aprendamos, Vascos".<sup>158</sup> It was also Gallastegi who, inspired by the martyrdom of Terence MacSwiney, began the first (ultimately aborted) hunger strike by a Basque nationalist in 1931.<sup>159</sup> It was he who cited James Connolly as a means of articulating a more socially-imbued understanding of *aberrianismo*.<sup>160</sup> Finally, it was Gallastegi who, through a personal, political, and business relationship with Ambrose Martin, became one half of a transnational tandem around which most other contacts, meetings, talks, propaganda and plots, orbited.

These Gallastegi-centric transfers of Irish republican elements into radical Basque nationalist culture also had their limits. As McCreanor sensibly notes, many of the ostensible transfers from Irish republicanism to radical Basque nationalist culture in the wake of the Irish Revolutionary Period (propaganda, violence, cult of prisoners, martyrs, self-sacrifice, etc.) were actually already hitherto present in broader Basque nationalist culture prior to 1916.<sup>161</sup> And although it is clear, as Núñez Seixas and Watson have pointed out, that the *aberriano* advocacy for an Irish revolutionary type model in the Basque Country "implied the use of violence" and "supported and amplified adherence to the potential strategy of violence in the Basque nationalist imagination", Gallastegi himself—as far as this author is aware—never *openly* advocated for its use.<sup>162</sup>

With the above caveats in mind, we return to the issue of what underpinned this affinity in discursive/narrative terms from 1916 onwards? We may conclude, as the evidence has indicated, that neither "shared ideology" nor "shared solidarity" featured to a significant extent. Instead, we find a nexus underpinning around the notion of heroic "struggle" in its most generic sense: neither directly advocating for *violent* struggle, nor providing a successful macro blueprint for a *political* struggle that could achieve an independent Basque Country.

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<sup>158</sup> Gallastegi: *Por La Libertad Vasca*, p. 15. Lorenzo Espinosa estimates that Gallastegi penned at least thirty prominent articles on Ireland. See: Lorenzo Espinosa: "Influencia del nacionalismo irlandés".

<sup>159</sup> De Pablo: *La Patria Soñada*, 151; Lorenzo Espinosa: *Gudari. Una pasión útil*, p. 192.

<sup>160</sup> De Pablo; Mees: *El Péndulo Patriótico*, p. 126; Muro: *Ethnicity and Violence: The Case of Radical Basque Nationalism*, p. 75.

<sup>161</sup> McCreanor: *Ireland and the Basque Country*, p. 37.

<sup>162</sup> Núñez Seixas: "Ecos de Pascua"; Watson: *Basque Nationalism and Political Violence*, p. 123.





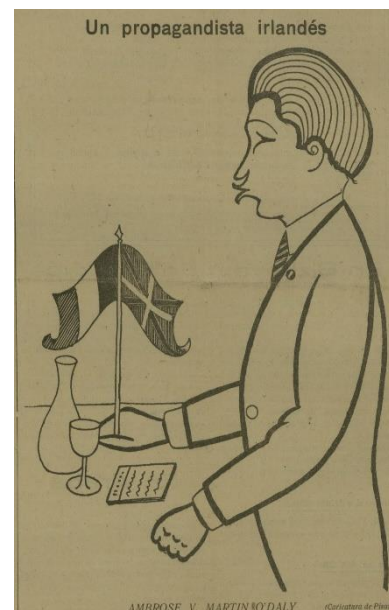
Sabino Aran Goiri  
(Wikimedia Commons)



“Irish Republic” flag flies over the GPO during the 1916 Rising (RTE)



A view of Henry Street in Dublin after the 1916 Rising (Royal Irish Academy)



“Un propagandista irlandés”  
Artist illustration of Ambrose Martin  
(Aberri)

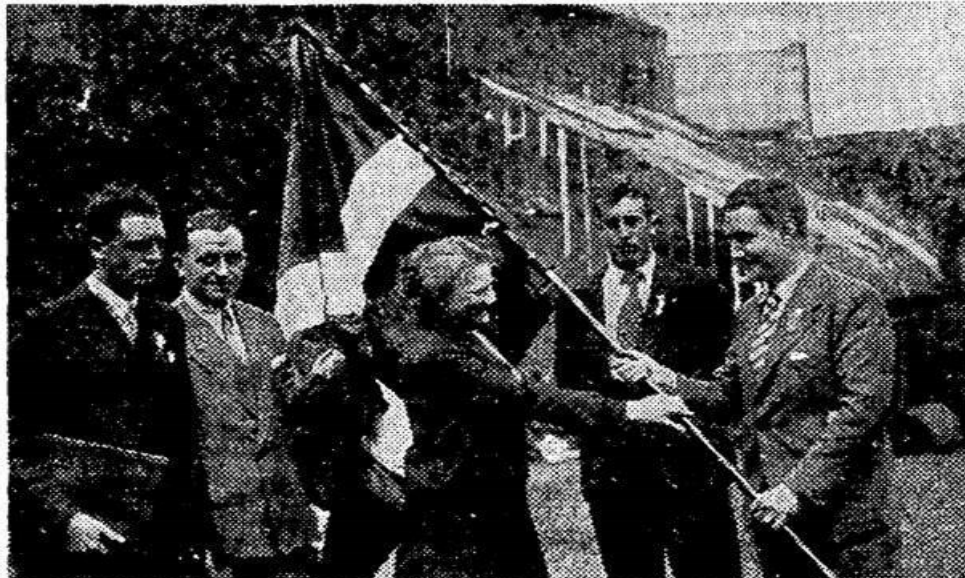




Eli Gallastegi  
(Añamendi Eusko Entziklopedia)



Ambrose Martin in the Basque Country, c.1924  
(Wikimedia Commons)



**Dr. L. Hernandorena presenting a flag of the Union of Basque Provinces of Spain on behalf of the women of San Sebastian to Miss Mary MacSwiney when he visited Dublin during the Eucharistic Congress.**

The Basques visit Dublin. 1932  
(Irish Press)





The ruins of Gernika. 1937  
(Wikimedia Commons)



## CHAPTER THREE

### 3.0. Introduction

“Se dieron muchos vivas a España e Irlanda, al catolicismo y a Franco, y la fiesta de Zarautz estuvo más emotiva que nunca”.<sup>1</sup>

In September 1953, Éamon De Valera took a break from the stresses and strains of his second stint as taoiseach. Having flown into Paris via London, the devoutly Catholic De Valera embarked on an overland trip with his son Éamon, his son’s wife Sally, and her chaplain brother, Father O’Doherty, to the pilgrimage town of Lourdes. The final destination in the itinerary for De Valera and his party was the Portuguese city of Fatima, famed for its apparitions of the Virgin Mary. In advance of De Valera’s departure, it was decided to break up the long and arduous journey across the Pyrenees and northern Spain. A four-day sojourn in the Basque seaside town of Zarautz (Zarauz) was arranged by Leo McAuley, the Irish Ambassador to Spain.

Despite wanting to keep the trip as low-key and “unofficial” as possible, the taoiseach’s visit to Zarautz was leaked to the Spanish state-controlled media shortly before his arrival. In addition to daily press coverage, a major feature on De Valera was published by the Madrid/Barcelona illustrated weekly, *FOCO*. Across six pages, *FOCO* lauded De Valera’s “tenacidad”, “habilidad política”, “personalidad de luchador” and most strikingly, “alma de conquistador” — the latter in reference to his father’s apparent Spanish origins. In short, De Valera was presented, akin to Francisco Franco, as a “national hero” — a “sober” and “serious” servant to a fraternal Catholic and conservative nation.<sup>2</sup>

A similar profile of the taoiseach, published in a Guardia Civil magazine earlier that year, also vividly illustrated this Franco-De Valera analogy:

“Se anuncia hoy en resurgir católico. Tres estadistas —De Valera, Salazar, Franco— acaudillan en sus pueblos la reforma ortodoxa cristiana y social, y en otros países va esbozándose la esperanza aún vacilante de un despertar frente a la barbarie roja, tras largos años de indiferencia y abandono en que durmiera la vieja fe a los arrullos soporíferos de liberalismo trasnochado. Traemos hoy a estas columnas, siempre abiertas a la actualidad, un diseño fugaz de Eamon de Valera, menos conocido de lo que se debiera por muchos españoles, a pesar de llevar sangre

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<sup>1</sup> “De Valera en Loyola y Zarauz”, *FOCO*, 19.09.1953.

<sup>2</sup> Ibid. For various Spanish press-cuttings related to this trip, see the file: “Taoiseach’s (Mr. De Valera) visit to Spain 1953”. DFA 5/5/3 MADRID. NAI.

nuestra. Sirva este esbozo del ilustre gobernante a modo de recordatorio por tantos bravos voluntarios, sus compatriotas, que —caballeros del ideal— ofrendaron su vida en el común esfuerzo junto a los nuestros para librar a España de la hidra bolchevique”.<sup>3</sup>

While Franco and De Valera’s politics were mutually guided, or ostensibly so, by firm Catholic convictions, there was an obvious glaring flaw in these types of Irish-Spanish analogies: the Irish state was underpinned by a parliamentary democracy; Spain (and Portugal), by contrast, was under the jackboot of an authoritarian regime. Still, at the time of De Valera’s visit, relations between Ireland and Spain were warm. Similarly denied entry to the United Nations (UN) after World War II, the two countries had signed a commercial agreement in 1947, followed by a trade pact in 1951.<sup>4</sup>

In Zarautz, De Valera was staying at the “Hostería del mar”, a hotel owned by General Luis Kirkpatrick y O’Donnell, a “descendant of the Wild Geese” and Vice-President of the National Tribunal of Political Responsibilities. Apart from walking along the beach and mingling with the local people during the *fiestas*, the taoiseach’s only planned engagement was to visit the nearby monastery of Loiola (Loyola). There, he was accompanied by the Spanish Minister of Foreign Affairs Alberto Martín Artajo, whose ministry was based in Donostia during the summer.<sup>5</sup>

Photographs taken for the Spanish press and friendly diplomatic relations publicly reaffirmed, De Valera’s genteel stay in Zarautz belied the barely contained repressed

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<sup>3</sup> “Lo eterno español en Eamon de Valera”, *Guardia Civil – Revista Oficial Del cuerpo*, April 1953. Éamon de Valera Papers. P150/3036. UCDA. The “Salazar” referred to is António de Oliveira Salazar, the authoritarian Prime Minister of Portugal from 1932 to 1968.

<sup>4</sup> Whelan: *Ireland and Spain, 1939–55*, p. 16, p. 204, p. 232, pp. 239–241. Prospective Irish membership to the UN was blocked by the Soviet Union until 1955 on account of Irish war-time neutrality. For the Irish state, war-time neutrality powerfully expressed its independence from Britain. See: Ronan Fanning: “Raison d’état and the evolution of Irish foreign policy” in Michael Kennedy, Joseph Skelly (eds.): *Irish foreign policy, 1919–66: From Independence to Internationalism*, Dublin, Four Courts Press, 2000, pp. 308–326 (specifically pp. 314–320). Thousands of Irish men nonetheless served in the ranks of the allied forces. For an overview of Irish involvement in World War II, see: Myles Dungan: *Distant Drums. Irish Soldiers in Foreign Armies*, Belfast, Appletree Press, 1993, pp. 91–149. Francoist Spain took a pro-axis position, even deploying a Spanish “División Azul” to fight alongside the Germans on the eastern front. See: Xavier Moreno Julia: *The Blue Division: Spanish Blood in Russia, 1941–1945*, Brighton, Sussex Academic Press/Cañada Blanch, 2016; Xosé M. Núñez Seixas: *Camarada invierno. Experiencia y memoria de la División Azul (1941–1945)*, Barcelona, Crítica, 2016. Although Spain was initially considered an international pariah in the aftermath of World War II, Cold War *realpolitik* soon dictated that the major western powers “rehabilitate” the Spanish dictator as a bulwark against communism. This process culminated in Franco signing a bilateral pact with the United States in 1953, thus paving the way for a cluster of US bases to be built on Spanish soil in return for full diplomatic recognition. See: Judith Keene, Elizabeth Rezniewski (eds.): *Seeking Meaning, Seeking Justice in a Post-Cold War World*, Leiden and Boston, Brill, 2018, p. 197.

<sup>5</sup> “Letter from Department of External affairs to Kathleen O’Connell”. Dated 27 August 1953. Éamon de Valera Papers. P150/344. UCDA; Whelan: *Ireland and Spain, 1939–55*, p. 271; “De Valera en Loyola y Zarautz”, *FOCO*, 19.09.1953.

tensions of Basque nationalists and democrats more generally under the dictatorship. Indeed, two massive workers' strikes, in 1947 and 1951, had even briefly raised the prospect of sustained internal resistance in Hegoalde. Both strikes, however, were mercilessly crushed within a matter of weeks.<sup>6</sup>

On the final day of his stay in Zarautz, just before he left for Portugal, a piece of paper headed "Euskadi" was covertly smuggled to the De Valera. It read:

"Zarauz a 10 de Septiembre 1953

Exmo. Sr. D. Eamond [sic] De Valera. Primer Ministro y Jefe de Gobierno.  
IRLANDA.

Exmo. Sr.:

Los Vascos patriotas de Zarauz, en nombre de todos los buenos patriotas de Euskadi, saludan a la noble Nación Mártir de Irlanda, en la persona de su dignísimo Primer Ministro Eamond [sic] De Valera, que con tenacidad y habilidad políticas supo conseguir la Independencia de su Nación. Y estimulados por su ejemplo, prometemos los mayores esfuerzos y hasta la sangre, si necesario fuere, por conseguir la Independencia de nuestra amada Patria, oprimida vilmente por la tiranía de la dictadura franquista. Euskadi oprimida saluda a la Libre Irlanda y todos los Vascos queremos expresar nuestros sentimientos de admiración y veneración el forjador de la Independencia de Irlanda.

ONGI ETORRIA EUSKADI'RA.

Los patriotas vascos de Zarauz".<sup>7</sup>

The previous autumn, another group of "patriotas vascos" had already begun to organise themselves at the University of Deusto in Bilbo under the name Ekin ("to act" or "to begin"). Akin to the state-controlled Spanish national press, this new crop of Basque nationalists would also, within a few short years, invoke the revolutionary fervour of a young De Valera in their search for a Basque "modelo de resistencia moderna":

"[...] en 1919 un año después de acabada la guerra europea se forma la verdadera organización secreta de Resistencia [irlandesa], con De Valera al frente. Este gran hombre, con su ingente figura de casi dos metros de estatura, con sus grandes dotes de mando y organización, secundado, a su vez, por hombres no menos valerosos e inteligentes, lleva a cabo esta gran organización, *modelo de resistencia moderna* [...]".<sup>8</sup>

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<sup>6</sup> Watson: *Modern Basque History*, p. 314.

<sup>7</sup> "Note from a group called the 'Basque Patriots of Zarauz' to Éamon de Valera". Éamon de Valera Private Papers, P150/3044. UCDA.

<sup>8</sup> ETA: *El Libro Blanco*, 1960, p.81. *El Libro Blanco* is reproduced in Equipo Hordago: *Documentos Y*, Donostia, Lur, 1979–1981, vol. I, pp. 148–326. My italics for *modelo de resistencia moderna*.

### 3.1. Models of modern resistance

“Absolutamente solos sin ningún apoyo, sin ninguna ayuda, se plantean el problema vasco. Todos saben que es necesario hacer ‘algo’. Ninguno sabe ni el ‘qué’ ni el ‘cómo’. Tienen que empezar desde cero”.<sup>9</sup>

Ekin was formed in 1952 by a group of students interested in Basque culture and history. Within a year, two clandestine cells consisting of about a dozen members were set up in Bilbo and Donostia. Starting from “zero”, the young Basques immersed themselves in whatever political material from home and abroad that they could get their hands on. This was risky business. Dissent in Francoist Spain, and in particular the “traitorous” Basque provinces of Bizkaia and Gipuzkoa, was usually met with brutal repression. Despite this danger, discreet “charlas” (talks) and an internal organ *Ekin*, from which “los de Ekin” got its name, provided the first articulations of the group’s *raison d’être*.<sup>10</sup>

“Los de Ekin” tended to be middle-class students from mainstream nationalist backgrounds. Unopposed to the Basque government-in-exile, Ekin, nonetheless, had little or no faith in the PNV’s overall strategy. With no clear plan of its own, the group’s initial core propulsion, as its name suggested, was to simply “act” —to do *something*— in the face of repression.<sup>11</sup> Ekin was not alone in this regard.

Throughout the early 1950s, the PNV youth sector, Eusko Gaztedi (EG) —later EGI (Euzko Gaztedi Indarra)— organised traditional Basque dance groups, choirs, and festivals in various Basque towns. While Basque political expression was outlawed, at least a semblance of cultural expression could be maintained. For “los de Ekin”, however, EG was a soft touch: open to the authorities, ineffective, passive, and folkloric. Ekin

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<sup>9</sup> “José Antonio Etxebarrieta, original inédito para ser publicado como ‘Zutik extraordinario 49-50’, en 1968, que no llegaría a editarse. II. Breve resumen de la historia de ETA”, *Documentos Y*, vol. I, p. 18.

<sup>10</sup> “Nacimiento de ‘EKIN’, 1952/56”, *Documentos Y*, vol. I, p. 12. When Franco captured Bilbo in 1937, the provinces of Bizkaia and Gipuzkoa were immediately stripped of their “economic accords” and officially declared “traitorous”. As Pérez-Agote notes, the intention of this decree was not so much to punish the “traitors” of Bizkaia and Gipuzkoa, but rather the provinces in general. Bizkaia and Gipuzkoa were, and remain, strongholds of Basque nationalism. See: Alfonso Pérez-Agote: *The Social Roots of Basque Nationalism*, Reno, University of Nevada Press, 2006, p. 97; “José Antonio Etxebarrieta, original inédito para ser publicado como ‘Zutik extraordinario 49–50’, en 1968, que no llegaría a editarse. II. Breve resumen de la historia de ETA”, *Documentos Y*, vol. I, p. 18.

<sup>11</sup> Key leaders of Ekin and/or ETA (José Mari Benito de Valle, José Luis Álvarez Enparantza (*Txillardegí*), Iñaki Gaintzarain and Iñaki Larramendi) had already experienced imprisonment under the regime prior to the founding of Ekin. See: Watson: *Basque Nationalism and Political Violence*, pp. 186–187.



would, on the contrary, seek to act from the underground, prioritising its clandestinity and security.<sup>12</sup>

These security considerations led to Ekin's first engagement with the Irish case and its republican tradition.<sup>13</sup> Drafted throughout the first few years of the group's "charlas", a set of evolving "Normas de seguridad" —from discreteness while talking on the telephone, self-censorship and concealment of literature; to discipline, punctuality and suspicion of strangers— were gleaned from a document titled "Historia del Sinn Féin", written by (or at least credited to) one "J. Erskino".<sup>14</sup> In this sense, the Irish revolutionary experience orientated Ekin to the "ABC[s]" of being an "organización clandestina".<sup>15</sup>

Other Ekin "white papers", based on themes such as Basque history, the Basque *foruak* and approaches to European federalism, were synthesised by the fledgling group through the collecting, studying and reporting back of information by individual cell members to the "charlas".<sup>16</sup> Thus, from an initial urge to "act", the embryonic cells of Ekin had, by 1954, put together a body of work that would begin to inform the group's ideological corpus and indicate how it sought to address the ills of Basque society. Julen (sometimes Iulen) Madariaga, one of Ekin's (and later, ETA's) founding members, recalls how he personally drew up a dossier on international case studies considered pertinent to the Basque Country:

"Ekin-ETA, empezamos por prepararnos, nosotros mismos, para intentar, digamos estar, lo mejor preparados en la historia del caso nuestro — lógicamente de nuestro pueblo, del pueblo vasco. Pero enseguida, nos dimos cuenta de que era no solamente conveniente, sino, incluso necesario el tener y tomar ejemplos que nos venían de otros pueblos, de otros casos de recuperación o de obtención [nacional]. En nuestro caso era recuperación de la independencia nacional. [...] Hicimos en esa autoformación que nos organizamos nosotros, nos fuimos, repartimos temas. Éramos 8 o 10 compañeros aproximadamente, y más o menos aprobamos 8... 10 temas, o una docena de temas si quieres, a repartirnos entre los 10 o 12 compañeros [...] y a mí me tocó para poder comparar el caso de Euskal Herria con otros casos históricos me tocó mí. Entonces elegí 2 o 3 casos bastante fuertes históricamente. Fueron Israel que en aquel tiempo no tenía nada que ver con Israel ahora. Nada que

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<sup>12</sup> "Notas a los 'Cuadernos EKIN'", *Documentos Y*, vol. I, p. 76; Eugenio Ibarazabal: "Así nació ETA", *Muga*, no. 1, June 1979.

<sup>13</sup> "Nacimiento de 'EKIN', 1952/56", *Documentos Y*, vol. I, p. 12.

<sup>14</sup> Ekin's "Normas de seguridad" were referred to as "Normas generales" when they were later re-edited and published by ETA as part of the "Cuadernos EKIN" series. They also appear at the start of *El Libro Blanco*. See: "Normas generales", *Documentos Y*, vol. I, pp. 87–90.

<sup>15</sup> "José Antonio Etxebarrieta, original inédito para ser publicado como 'Zutik extraordinario 49-50', en 1968, que no llegaría a editarse. II. Breve resumen de la historia de ETA", *Documentos Y*, vol. I, p. 18.

<sup>16</sup> The full "Cuadernos EKIN" series are reproduced in *Documentos Y*, vol I, pp. 77–110. According to "J.N." in *Documentos Y*: "Fruto de estas primeras inquietudes son las 'charlas' que, tras la primera asamblea de ETA, serían reeditadas años después en forma de 'cuadernos'". See: *Documentos Y*, vol I, p. 76.

ver. Al revés, Israel en ese momento era muy interesante porque estaba peleando, estaba luchando contra el imperio británico. [...] Y luego, además de Israel, elegí el tunecino, tenía elementos, ciertos elementos que conocía yo del caso tunecino. Y el resto, lógicamente yo me informé leyendo y estudiando cosas. Y el tercer caso: el irlandés [...].<sup>17</sup>

For Madariaga, the primary motivational factor in utilising Ireland was the inherent comparative potential that came with its geopolitical proximity to the Basque Country:

“[...] ambos casos se encuentran ubicados en una parte del mundo que hace que forzosamente tiene que haber una serie de influencias de un movimiento sobre el otro [...] porque ambos pasan en Europa y no en cualquier parte de Europa si no en el Europa de oeste y eso ya hace que la comparación sea pertinente”.<sup>18</sup>

Madariaga’s triumvirate case study not only helped Ekin compare, articulate and place the Basque Country within a wider international scheme of struggle, it would also appear later as a re-edited component of the influential “El Libro Blanco” —ETA’s “first ideological statement”<sup>19</sup>— published in 1960.

Another major topic of discussion in Ekin’s early series of “charlas” was the plight of Euskara. As the reader will recall, the reciprocal interest between advocates of the Basque and Irish languages had been an occasional feature of the pre-1945 transnational nexus. Testimonial evidence suggests that Gaeilge was discussed by Ekin during its formative years.<sup>20</sup> Moreover, the group’s working paper on Euskara, edited and published as part of the “Cuadernos EKIN” series, evidences in writing the continued relevance of Gaeilge as an indicative comparative reference into the post-war era:

“Cuando no hay unidad de instituciones políticas (como sucede en Euskadi) e incluso cuando la hay, nada une a un grupo de hombres más íntima y realmente que la comunidad de idioma. En la misma línea de ideas, nada separa más que la diferencia de idiomas. [...] En un sentido estricto, sólo el idioma vasco mantiene a un nivel indiscutible la unidad objetiva de Euskadi, a través de sus zonas euskaldunes de los Estados español y francés. El Bearn y la Rioja son racialmente zonas vascas. Pero esta afirmación no tiene otro valor que el de muestra de erudición. Ni los bearneses ni los riojanos se sienten vascos, ni los vascos consideran compatriotas a los riojanos y bearneses. La razón fundamental de esa escisión es que, hace de seis a ocho siglos, los bearneses y los riojanos dejaron de ser euskaldunes. El día en que al Norte del Pirineo se hable sólo francés, y al Sur sólo español, Euzkadi habrá desaparecido. Y si accede a la independencia en esas condiciones, lo que es inimaginable, no será más propiamente vasco que lo que hoy lo son la Rioja y el Bearn. Es decir, cero. [...] Desde los tiempos de Maquiavelo es consejo político conocidísimo, y de efectos infalibles, que para matar un pueblo no

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<sup>17</sup> Author interview with Julen Madariaga (Sare, 2016).

<sup>18</sup> Ibid.

<sup>19</sup> Watson: *Basque Nationalism and Political Violence*, p. 190.

<sup>20</sup> “El grupo ‘EKIN’ y los primeros pasos”, *Documentos Y*, vol. I, p. 26.

hay nada más fulminante que matar la lengua nacional. Pueblo que deja de hablar su lengua es pueblo que ha muerto. Pueblo que cambia su idioma por el del vecino, es pueblo que cambia su alma por la del vecino. [...] no hay NINGUNA razón para no percatarse de que la supervivencia de Euskadi se juega ante nuestros ojos, y en nuestra generación, POR ULTIMA VEZ. Los idiomas mueren, los pueblos mueren. Es milagroso resucitar a los Muertos. El problema ha sido siempre a tiempo. Hechas ciertas salvedades, no deja de ser instructivo el caso de Irlanda. Hay una URGENCIA EXTREMA en salvar el euskera”.<sup>21</sup>

If the “objective” survival of the Basque “race” was contingent and demarcated, as per the above understanding, on the existence and prevalence of Euskara, by any metric it was (and still is) more difficult for Basque nationalists to apply the same framework to the Irish case. Harboured on an island —a clearly-defined physical entity— and with a long history of political kingdoms and political entities, the Irish “race” could not have its “objective” survival called into question *to the same extent* regardless of a similar contraction of its native language.<sup>22</sup>

As Watson notes, many of the founders of Ekin and ETA were heavily influenced by existentialist and philosophical trends from the 1960s that effectively saw language as the primary vehicle of existence itself. As we shall see, this Basque-centric interpretative prism of linguistic understanding was later applied to the Irish context by ETA’s leading cultural nationalist José Luis Álvarez Enparantza (*Txillardegi*). In this equation, the essential quality or essence of Irish nationhood would be directly equated to the (ill) health of Gaeilge.<sup>23</sup>

During the first few years of Ekin’s existence, members of the clandestine cells were increasingly drawn into the orbit of the PNV *jeltzales*. In reality, there was little ideological difference between the two organisations. In 1956, two founding members of the Ekin upstarts, Benito de Valle and José Manuel Aguirre, attended a World Basque Conference organised by the PNV in Paris. In the French capital, they discussed and agreed with José Antonio Aguirre the merger of Ekin and the PNV’s youth branch, EG.<sup>24</sup>

Among the over 350 official attendees from across the non-Francoist (and non-communist) Basque political spectrum was a self-taught Basque linguist, Federico Krutwig Sagredo. Born in the Bizkaian town of Getxo to German and Italian heritage,

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<sup>21</sup> “Euskera y Patriotismo Vasco”, *Documentos Y*, vol. I, pp. 105–106.

<sup>22</sup> This is not to suggest that some Irish nationalists and republicans did not, or do not, equate the geographical extent of the Irish language to the essence of Irish nationhood.

<sup>23</sup> Watson: *Basque Nationalism and Political Violence*, pp. 201–216.

<sup>24</sup> Gurutz Jáuregui: “ETA: Orígenes y evolución ideológica y política” in Elorza (coord.) *et al.*: *La Historia de ETA*, pp. 170–266 (specifically, p. 184); John Sullivan: *ETA and Basque nationalism. The Fight for Euskadi, 1890–1986*, London and New York, Routledge, 1986, pp. 29–30.

Krutwig delivered a speech to the conference calling for an armed uprising as part of a wider campaign for Basque national liberation. While Krutwig's intervention went down like a lead balloon, it was a worrying omen for the PNV officials present. Frustrated Basque nationalists outside of the party's orbit and influence could, and perhaps would, seek alternative strategies to that of the government-in-exile.<sup>25</sup>

Tensions also surfaced in the new EG-Ekin merged entity: EGI. Mutual suspicion and accusations that American-backed "servicios" had infiltrated the group undermined confidence between both sectors from the outset. Despite these issues, EGI continued its activities for the best part of two years. Among its activities, the group distributed clandestine publications, organised Basque classes, cultural circles, folk dances, and mountaineering excursions. Ekin also painted ikurriñas in public spaces and disseminated stickers of the flag. Plans for more direct actions, such as the planting of incendiary devices and firecrackers, were, for the moment, kept on the backburner.<sup>26</sup>

Divisions within EGI eventually came to a head in April 1958 when a dispute over the expulsion of José María Benito de Valle compounded the underlying strains. Two clear visions emerged: one which upheld cultural events and performances as dissenting political activities (EG/PNV-EGI), and another which advocated for more active resistance to the dictatorship (Ekin-EGI). Talks to resolve these tensions were chaired by Lehendakari Aguirre in Paris. They were unsuccessful. A fundamental breakdown in relationships and an effective parting of ways occurred soon after.<sup>27</sup>

For a time, both factions of Euzko Gaztedi continued to operate under the same banner until the PNV insisted that "los de Ekin" cease using its acronym. In July 1959, this fissure was made definitive when the more Ekin-oriented sector of the young Basque patriots officially founded Euzkadi [later Euskadi] 'ta Askatasuna and informed Lehendakari Aguirre. Signalling a shift away from the overt Christian trappings of the PNV, ETA was established as a "movimiento abertzale aconfesional y democrático".<sup>28</sup>

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<sup>25</sup> Federico Krutwig: "El echo vasco, el euskera, y el territorio de Euskadi" in *Euskal Batzar Orokorra. Congreso Munial Vasco. 2 Aninersario*, Vitoria. Gobierno Vasco / Euzko Jauriaritza, 1987, pp. 130–131. Cited in: Conversi: *The Basques, the Catalans and Spain*, p. 93. Clark: *The Basques: The Franco Years and Beyond*, p. 157.

<sup>26</sup> "Integración en Euzko Gaztedi, 1956–57", *Documentos Y*, vol. I, p. 29; "Nacimiento de ETA (1958)", *Documentos Y*, vol. I, p. 31. Watson: *Basque Nationalism and Political Violence*, p. 198.

<sup>27</sup> De Pablo; Mees: *El Péndulo Patriótico*, p. 308; Ibarazabal: "Así nació ETA", *Muga*, no. 1, June 1979; Sullivan: *ETA and Basque nationalism*, p. 31.

<sup>28</sup> "La fundación de ETA", *Documentos Y*, vol. I, pp. 21–22; "Integración en Euzko Gaztedi, 1956-57", *Documentos Y*, vol. I, p. 30. De Pablo, Mees: *El Péndulo Patriótico*, p. 309. Initially, ETA maintained a certain reverence for the Basque government-in-exile. A "clean break" with the PNV on a strategic level would occur a few years later, as we shall see, circa 1963.

## Irish republicanism and the wider world

“The old tag, ‘an Irishman fights everyone’s battles but his own’ is still true today. But the kernel of it is that we have had it ingrained in us by an alien system of education for generations back, to know, discuss and settle the problems of countries from China to Hungary or from Tibet to the Congo but to avoid and run away from the problems that effect [sic] our own country: and this sort of moral cowardice, to call it no worse, is paraded as a virtue for the Irish”.<sup>29</sup>

As an organisation that had played a pivotal role in modern Irish (and British) history since the Irish War of Independence, unlike Ekin, the IRA were not starting from “zero” in the post-war era — or at least not quite. For starters, key republican objectives and principles born out of the Irish Revolutionary Period remained firmly in place. Ireland was to be reunified by any means necessary. Northern Ireland, as a British colonial statelet, and Éire, as a neo-colonial entity, were to be dismantled. The IRA was the keeper of the flame. Indeed, in 1938, the mandate of the true *de jure* Irish Republic (of the First and Second Dáil) had been symbolically handed over to the IRA Army Council by seven of the Irish Republic’s surviving anti-Treaty representatives.<sup>30</sup>

While this was the grandiose republican theology, the blunt reality was that the IRA had been demoralised and crushed by northern and southern war-time internment. Many questioned its very survival.<sup>31</sup> Meanwhile, seeing the entire institutional apparatus on the island as illegitimate, Sinn Féin maintained its policy of abstention and, by extension, the party’s almost total irrelevance to the Irish electorate.

In what one historian has described as a “friendly coup”, the IRA effectively took over the running of Sinn Féin in 1950. Paddy McLogan succeeded Margaret Buckley as party president. McLogan, Tony Magan, who had become Chief of Staff of the IRA in November 1948, and another republican hardliner, Tomás Mac Curtáin, dominated Sinn Féin and the IRA for the next decade.<sup>32</sup>

The “Three Macs” agreed to build towards an armed campaign in the North. Conversely, it was decided that the IRA should avoid all hostilities with the southern

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<sup>29</sup> “The Congo”, *United Irishman*, August 1960.

<sup>30</sup> “IRA take over the Government of the Republic”, *Wolfe Tone Weekly*, 17.12.1938.

<sup>31</sup> Bowyer Bell: *The Secret Army. The IRA, 1916–1979* (Rev. ed), Dublin, Poolbeg, 1989, p. 239; Hanley: *The IRA. A Documentary History 1916–2005*, p. 118; Moloney: *A Secret History of the IRA* (2<sup>nd</sup> ed.), p. 49.

<sup>32</sup> Robert W. White: *Ruairí Ó Brádaigh: The Life and Politics of an Irish Revolutionary*, Bloomington, Indiana University Press, 2006, pp. 36–37.

state. This new approach was formalised in 1954 by way of the IRA's "General Order No. 8".<sup>33</sup>

Tony Magan quickly set about turning the IRA into an effective and disciplined army, untainted by any hint of the left-leaning politics or dissent that, in his view, had undermined the organisation in the 1930s.<sup>34</sup> By the middle of the 1950s, there was fresh impetus on the political side of the republican "house" too. In May 1955, Sinn Féin ran on an abstentionist ticket in the Northern Ireland precinct of the UK General Election, surprisingly winning two seats. Four more abstentionist seats followed in the General Election to Dáil Éireann in March 1957. The party's strategy of building an all-Ireland republican parliament from abstentionist representatives (or in republican parlance, re-consecrating the true Dáil Éireann) had its first tangible results.<sup>35</sup> In between these two Sinn Féin electoral victories, the IRA launched a new military offensive in December 1956.

Partly inspired by events in Cyprus, Vietnam, and Israel, and codenamed "Operation Harvest", the IRA's campaign began with southern-based guerrilla-style attacks on British custom posts along the border. However, with few people rallying to support the campaign and the Northern Ireland government interning IRA suspects, any initial momentum had all but dissipated by 1958.<sup>36</sup> That same year, Sinn Féin was proscribed in Northern Ireland by the unionist-dominated administration in Belfast. Sinn Féin's fortunes continued to slide when, three years later, it lost the four (abstentionist) seats that it had won at the 1957 Irish General Election.

If these were the frustrated political (Sinn Féin) and military (IRA) fortunes of the republican movement on the domestic front from the late 40s to the early 1960s, the broader anti-colonial/anti-imperialist *international* context offered a more favourable narrative arc that even the most hermetic of republicans would have done well to ignore.<sup>37</sup>

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<sup>33</sup> Hanley: *The IRA. A Documentary History 1916–2005*, p. 120.

<sup>34</sup> Bowyer Bell: *The Secret Army. The IRA, 1916–1979* (Rev. ed), pp. 245–247.

<sup>35</sup> See: "Republicans and Six Counties' Elections", *United Irishman*, March 1958; "A Republican Parliament For All-Ireland", *United Irishman*, July 1958; "Who are the abstentionists?", *United Irishman*, September 1961.

<sup>36</sup> Coogan: *The IRA*, pp. 297–329; Hanley: *The IRA. A Documentary History 1916–2005*, p. 129.

<sup>37</sup> "Colonialism" and "Imperialism" are often used synonymously in academia. The Stanford Encyclopaedia of Philosophy notes that: "The distinction between the two [...] is not entirely consistent in the literature. Some scholars distinguish between colonies for settlement and colonies for economic exploitation. Others use the term colonialism to describe dependencies that are directly governed by a foreign nation and contrast this with imperialism, which involves indirect forms of domination". See: "Colonialism", <https://plato.stanford.edu/entries/colonialism/> (last accessed 25 May 2019). My own view is that "colonialism", involving the dispossession of lands, colonisation and subjection of other peoples, is



First published by Sinn Féin in 1948, the Dublin-based monthly republican newspaper *United Irishman* often complemented bread and butter republican themes with features and editorials on the emerging anti-colonial/anti-imperial context of the post-war era. For instance, Britain's relinquishing of India (and by extension, Pakistan and Bangladesh) in 1947, Sri Lanka (1948), Palestine/Israel and Transjordan (1948), Sudan (1956), Malaya (1957) and Ghana (1957), alongside the Suez Crisis of 1956, all fed into the objectively true assertion that the sun was indeed finally "setting" on the British Empire.<sup>38</sup>

Similarly, the Front de Libération Nationale (FLN)'s campaign (1954–1962) to liberate Algeria from France fed into the same broad thrust of anti-colonial/anti-imperial rhetoric. The Algeria conflict also lent itself to analogies being drawn between the French 'colons' and Northern Ireland's unionists. Meanwhile, the works of Frantz Fanon, himself a member of the FLN, became staple reading material for revolutionaries the world over — including in Ireland.<sup>39</sup>

Finally, in Cyprus, the success of Ethniki Organosis Kyprion Agoniston (EOKA)'s struggle against the British (1955–1959) was not only observed keenly in the pages of *United Irishman*, but also served to influence strategic thinking at the upper echelons of the IRA.<sup>40</sup>

Drawing together the above trends, from a republican perspective, it was logical to see the gradual weakening of the British (and French) Empires as stepping stones towards Britain, one way or another, inevitably having to relinquish the final "six counties" of her first colonial possession.

In 1959 this type of anti-colonial/anti-imperial discourse in *United Irishman* was briefly conjoined with the victorious revolutionary forces in Cuba. Traditionally hostile

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the most direct form of "imperialism", which may encompass other more indirect or less "obvious" forms of economic, political or cultural oppression.

<sup>38</sup> For a handful of examples, see: "The sun is setting on the Empire", *United Irishman*, April 1956; "The Dying Empire. It's happening All over the World", *United Irishman*, August 1956; "How Cyprus is tortured", *United Irishman*, July 1957.

<sup>39</sup> "With the rebels in Algeria", *United Irishman*, September 1957; "The Struggle in Algeria", *United Irishman*, March 1960. See also: White: *Out of the Ashes*, p. 392; White: *Ruairí Ó Brádaigh*, pp. 336–337.

<sup>40</sup> "The Cyprus Question", *United Irishman*, August 1958; "Then Peace came to Cyprus", *United Irishman*, June 1959; "They are Patriots – Not Terrorists", *United Irishman*, June 1959, "E.O.K.A. hero laid to rest", *United Irishman*, June 1960. Two future IRA leaders Cathal Goulding and Seán Mac Stiofáin were incarcerated alongside, and influenced by, a number of EOKA members in England in the 1950s. See: Brian Hanley, Scott Millar: *The Lost Revolution. The Story of the Official IRA and the Workers' Party*, London, Penguin Books, 2009, p. 11; Seán Mac Stiofáin: *Revolutionary in Ireland*, Edinburgh, Gordon Cremonesi, 1975, p. 70; pp. 74–79. Prior to his elevation to the position of Chief of Staff of the IRA, Goulding, as Quartermaster General, incorporated smaller EOKA-style cells into the organisation. See: Matt Treacy: *The IRA, 1956–69. Rethinking the Republic*, New York, Manchester University Press, 2011, p. 11, p. 19.

to any association with communism, even Fidel Castro and the Cuban Revolution provided:

“[...] lessons for Irish people. [Castro] has shown that no tyranny is powerful enough to withstand the massed strength and will of the people for freedom. He has shown what a few determined men can do when moved by a common ideal and a will to win. And he has shown, in his victorious fight against tremendous odds, that the battle does not go to him who has the most tanks or planes or men, but to him who carries the banner of freedom and of right. If we in this country are to learn one final lesson from Fidel Castro’s war of liberation, it is that victory comes only after years of struggle and sacrifice and bloodshed. The Cubans achieved victory: So can we”.<sup>41</sup>

Emerging from the anti-colonial/anti-imperial and leftist revolutionary context of the post-war period, new frameworks to reconfigure and re-contextualise the Irish case within the lexicon of seemingly analogous international “struggles” was available for any republican willing to absorb, analyse and articulate it. And while this was not the first time that seemingly kindred international struggles appeared in Irish republican discourse, the major difference post-1945 was that decolonisation (and especially British decolonisation) was *actually* happening around the globe and on a significant scale. In this sense, it was of far more salience than any previous anti-imperial/anti-colonial engagement in Irish republican discourse.<sup>42</sup>

These new narrative schemes gained further traction following British Prime Minister Harold Macmillan’s “wind of change” speech in the South African Parliament in 1960. Much to the chagrin of his South African hosts, Macmillan acknowledged the growth of “African national consciousness” and suggested that “[o]ur national policies must take account of it”. British decolonisation in Africa, and elsewhere, gathered apace in the 1960s.<sup>43</sup>

The broad anti-colonial/anti-imperial international context not only offered new angles for Irish republicans to analyse their struggle, but it also indirectly challenged the Irish

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<sup>41</sup> “Castro Fought Terror”, *United Irishman*, July 1959.

<sup>42</sup> For examples of anti-colonial/anti-imperial discourse in the republican movement throughout the 1920s and early 1930, see: McHugh: *Voices of the rearguard: a study of An Phoblacht: Irish Republican thought in the post-revolutionary era, 1923–1937* (specifically pp. 265–318).

<sup>43</sup> Frank Myers: “Harold Macmillan's ‘Winds of Change’ Speech: A Case Study in the Rhetoric of Policy Change”, *Rhetoric and Public Affairs*, vol. 3, no. 4, Winter 2000, pp. 555–575. For Macmillan’s speech: “The wind of change”,

[https://journals.co.za/docserver/fulltext/ayor/6/2/ayor\\_v6\\_n2\\_a2.pdf?expires=1576055870&id=id&accname=guest&checksum=8098DFD107DB53B471CC8D94FF8917D7](https://journals.co.za/docserver/fulltext/ayor/6/2/ayor_v6_n2_a2.pdf?expires=1576055870&id=id&accname=guest&checksum=8098DFD107DB53B471CC8D94FF8917D7) (last accessed 11 December 2019).

Between 1960 and 1969, the following territories gained independence from Britain: British Cameroon, Nigeria, Somalia (1960); Kuwait, Tanzania, Sierra Leone (1961); Jamaica, Trinidad and Tobago, Uganda (1962); Kenya (1963); Malawi, Malta, Zambia (1964); Maldives, Gambia (1965); Aden, as part of Yemen (1967); Mauritius, Swaziland [Eswatini] (1968).

government's *laissez-faire* approach to Northern Ireland and its notional aspirations for Irish unity. In this sense, the republican movement could call out the hypocrisy —as they saw it, and as quoted above at the top of this section— of the Irish government's concern for “the problems of countries from China to Hungary or from Tibet to the Congo” while they seemingly did nothing but “avoid and run away from the problems that [a]ffect [their] own country”.

Finally, a third international prism through which republicans could potentially view their struggle started to appear in the pages of *United Irishman* in the early 1960s. This was the (re-)emergence of the idea of “pan-Celticism” and the mutual political and cultural struggles of the historic “Celtic” nations of Ireland, Scotland, Wales, Brittany, Mann, and Cornwall, against the British and French states.<sup>44</sup> As we shall see, it was from this discursive frame that the Basque Country and its similar political and cultural issues vis-à-vis Spain and France, would begin to crop up in post-war republican discourse.

### **ETA, *El Libro Blanco* and the international angle**

Upon its founding in 1959, ETA was organised into a loose network of sectors: one oversaw the formation of cells and controlled education; another penned the group's internal literature; a third promoted Euskara; an “Acción legal” branch propagated and agitated at the very limits of what was permissible under the law; a fifth sector printed and disseminated the group's publications; and a sixth looked to carry out actions against the dictatorship.<sup>45</sup> While ETA would eventually become an organisation principally associated with “armed struggle”, the fledgling group did not immediately set a course for violent confrontation. This deliberate decision would be arrived at some years later.

In the meantime, the macro anti-colonial/anti-imperial international context that impinged on the external vista of Irish republicans was also very much present in ETA's early ideological and strategical development. As has been noted by several historians, the conflicts in Algeria, China, Cyprus, Israel, Cuba, and Tunisia, among others, all served to inform and heavily influence the young generation of ETA nationalists. Framed by these contemporary conflicts and their “indirect transfusion”, ETA's struggle against a much more powerful enemy did not necessarily seem irrational.<sup>46</sup> If it is possible to

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<sup>44</sup> For reflections on pan-Celticism and Ireland as a mythical revolutionary model for Breton and Scottish nationalists in the early twentieth century, see: Leach: *Fugitive Ireland*, pp. 20–21, pp. 29–30, pp. 41–52.

<sup>45</sup> “La fundación de ETA”, *Documentos Y*, vol. I, p. 22.

<sup>46</sup> José María Garmendia: *Historia de ETA*, vol. I, San Sebastián, Haramburu, 1979, p. 17; Mees: *The Basque Contention*, p. 103. The idea of transnational “indirect transfusion” in Rebecca K. Givan, Kenneth

discern one case as being particularly salient in ETA's formative years, it was that of the Israeli group Irgun, which simultaneously provided ETA contemporary models of movement security, cultural revival (Hebrew), and military insurrection.<sup>47</sup>

As referred to previously, Israel was one of three case studies, alongside Tunisia and Ireland, that were scrutinised by Ekin's Julen Madariaga and discussed during the group's educational "charlas". In 1960, the newly founded ETA published its landmark "El Libro Blanco", containing a revised and updated version of Madariaga's international treatise. Ten pages in length, Madariaga's Irish study incidentally included "La Tragedia de Irlanda" in its bibliography: one of the texts that had been translated and distributed four decades previously by the Irish Republic's representative in Spain, Máire O'Brien.

The Irish case study in "El Libro Blanco" had a handful of take away lessons for the Basque people in general, and ETA in particular. First, it was asserted that Irish attempts to find a compromised accommodation with Britain had consistently ended in the weakening of Irish nationalism. Conversely, it was through direct confrontation with Britain that Ireland had gained the required strength for the renewal of her epic and perpetual "guerra de nación a nación". This war between Ireland and her ancient adversary was seemingly a "perfecta analogía" for Euskadi:

"Antes de entrar nuevamente en brega, ya en el pleno siglo XX, haremos destacar un punto importantísimo, a nuestro juicio en la heroica lucha de los Irlandeses por su independencia. Importantísimo, decimos, porque tiene casi una perfecta analogía con la causa que hoy en día se desarrolla en nuestra querida Euzkadi, y trata este punto de los siguiente: cada vez que Irlanda volvía hacia fuera sus ojos, su vida interior decaía. Una vez más fijó su atención en la demanda de Home Rule, o estatuto de autonomía, y una vez más su fuerza interior se debilitó, pues no había nada que esperar del Parlamento londinense. Así, pues, el poder del Sinn Féin se diluyó en una espera estéril; la actividad de la Gaelic League se debilitaba. Y la esperanza de hallar una satisfacción honrosa acudiendo al Parlamento británico, resultó una quimera. Las tendencias extremistas se apoderaron del pueblo irlandés, y la doctrina de los Sinn Feiners quedó plenamente demostrada como la única aceptable ante un enemigo de tal naturaleza. El pueblo irlandés comprendió que la libertad sólo podía esperarla de 'su propio esfuerzo', y comenzó a ejercitarse y

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Roberts, Sarah A. Soule: *The Diffusion of Social Movements: Actors, Mechanisms, and Political Effects*, New York and Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, 2010, p. 2. Cited in: Tarrow: *Power and Movement* (3<sup>rd</sup> ed.), p. 192.

<sup>47</sup> José María Garmendia: "ETA: Nacimiento, Desarrollo y Crisis (1959–1978)" in Elorza (coord.) *et al.*: *La Historia de ETA*, pp. 77–170 (specifically 99–100); Watson: *Basque Nationalism and Political Violence*, p. 201, pp. 211–212. See also: "Nacimiento de ETA (1958)", *Documentos Y*, vol. I, p. 31; "La Guerra Revolucionaria", *Zutik!* (Caracas), no. 2, *Documentos Y*, vol. II, p. 505–508. See also: "Euskadi-Israel: A relationship of military training, ETA's empathy for Zionism and politics", *The Times of Israel*, <https://blogs.timesofisrael.com/euskadi-israel-a-relationship-of-military-training-etas-empathy-for-zionism-and-politics/> (last accessed 13 January 2020).

maniobrar abiertamente, proclamando su irreductible voluntad de independencia. La guerra de nación a nación volvió a renovarse por centésima vez en la Historia”.<sup>48</sup>

Second, the corollary of a heroic-Irish victim/villainous-British repressor dichotomy in the “secular epopeya de Irlanda” chimed with ETA’s master analytical framework, which considered Spain itself to be the fundamental source of the Basque nation’s ills, as opposed to the dictatorship.<sup>49</sup>

In the account of the Battle of Kinsale, 1601, the Spanish (in military alliance with Hugh O’Neill) play a particularly villainous role in the Irish defeat. In doing so, they demonstrate a number of traits: dishonour, disorganisation, weakness, and perfidy.

“En los últimos años del siglo XVI, surge O’Neil, que había sido oficial de guardias ingleses, circunstancia que le permitió conocer la astucia y procedimientos del invasor. Fue un hombre extraordinario, sagaz e invencible, tanto en el campo de batalla como en el de la política, ya que seguía los mismos procedimientos del tirano invasor, añadidos a su ardiente fé [sic] patriótica. Realizó alianzas con la Santa Sede y con España. A mala hora lo hizo con la última, pues la palabra de honor castellana, es, en verdad, harto peligrosa ya que no constituye otra cosa que garantía de traición o engaño. En efecto: se estipuló con España que, O’Neil aguardaría los refuerzos españoles antes de proceder al ataque; pero esperó en vano. Sus tropas hubieron de salir a combatir forzosamente y como consecuencia se debilitaron sobremana. Por fin llegaron los españoles (en menor número, claro está, de lo que se estipuló) y desembarcaron en el sur, cuando precisamente O’Neil había preparado todo para que lo hicieran en el norte. Resumiendo: O’Neil se empeñó en una lucha de caballerosidad por defender a los hispanos siendo, lógicamente, derrotado”.<sup>50</sup>

Third, throughout the long history of “la heroica lucha de los Irlandeses por su independencia”, the Irish people’s endurance and sacrifice against a bellicose invader had never wavered. This heroic image was juxtaposed with the Basques, who were perceived on the contrary as passive agents in their own demise:

“Y esta es poco más o menos la resumida historia política de Irlanda, de la cual sólo nos resta extraer una feliz moraleja y aplicarla a todas las restantes minorías nacionales del mundo entero y, especilmente [sic], a la nuestra. Constancia y sacrificio fueron las cualidades excepcionales de este gran pueblo, el cual, ni por un momento, abandonó su conciencia nacional, lo que, desgraciadamente, hemos hecho nosotros o, mejor dicho, nuestros antepasados, dejando de lado la vigorosa vida propia, interior de la raza, con su Historia y su milenaria lengua, y adoptanto [sic], por el contrario, idioma y costumbres exóticas, asesinos verdaderos del genio vasco”.<sup>51</sup>

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<sup>48</sup> ETA: *El Libro Blanco*, p. 80.

<sup>49</sup> ETA: *El Libro Blanco*, quote on p. 56. For ETA’s perception of Spain, see: Iñigo Bullain: *Revolucionarismo Patriótico. El Movimiento de Liberación Vasco*, Madrid, Tecnos, 2011, p. 249; Fernández Soldevilla: *La voluntad del gudari*, p. 39.

<sup>50</sup> ETA: *El Libro Blanco*, pp. 76–77. The surname O’Neill can also be written as O’Neil.

<sup>51</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 83–84.

Apart from a degree of shame and self-loathing, the above excerpt also speaks to an underlying fear that the Basques could conceivably completely disappear as a people. Indeed, according to Conversi, the plight of the Basque language and culture (understood by ETA's cultural nationalists as the essence of "Basqueness") was a key determinant in the group's formation under the dictatorship.<sup>52</sup> Another significant factor was the disillusionment of a young post-civil war generation that was growing increasingly frustrated with the government-in-exile and its unwillingness and/or helplessness to address the multifaceted political, cultural and social crises present in Basque society: political repression, mass immigration, cultural and language decline, rapid urbanisation, environmental degradation, etc.<sup>53</sup>

Faced with these challenges, for ETA, the solution was to move beyond the initial urge to simply "act". What was required instead was the sacrifice and steadfast endurance of the young Basque patriots of the *interior*. Akin to the contemporary revolutionary struggles of the era and that of the Irish four decades earlier, these young patriots would have to take matters into their own hands to save the Basque nation. If the requirement for military action was not yet explicit, it was certainly implicit:

"La independencia de Irlanda, Israel, Chipre, etc., no se ha conseguido a base de una ayuda armada americana, ni francesa, etc. si niquiera [sic] a base de los irlandeses, israelitas, etc. residentes en Estados Unidos, o en cualquier otro país. La salvación de esos países la han conseguido sus patriotas del interior y de una forma especialísima sus jóvenes patriotas. De la misma forma, los vascos podemos desear y aún esperar una mayor o menor tolerancia, de nuestro Gobierno en el exilio o de los partidos políticos vascos residentes en Francia etc. Pero por suerte o desgracia, el esfuerzo fundamental, el peso que incline la balanza, el sacrificio de vidas y haciendas, lo tendremos que hacer nosotros, los del interior. Y sobre los jóvenes de hoy serán los llamados al mayor, sacrificio, si es que queremos conseguir algo, ya que la juventud, por su valentía, por su decisión y por tener menos que perder, es la que ha originado siempre la caída de todas las dictaduras, tanto de las que los dictadores como Batista o Perón impusieron en sus países, como las que las 'demócratas' Inglaterra y Francia, por ejemplo, impusieron a Irlanda, Israel, Chipre, Marruecos, Túnez, etc. Nuestra obligación, si queremos alcanzar esos fines será doble: luchar por no perder la personalidad vasca y luchar por derrocar al tirano y conseguir alguna de las metas o, por lo menos, ir acercándose a ellas".<sup>54</sup>

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<sup>52</sup> "Aranist" concepts of Basque nationalism and identity were centred around race. See: Aritz Farwell: *Borne Before the Moone: A Social and Political History of Basque at the Dawn of the Twentieth Century*, University of the Basque Country (PhD Dissertation), 2015, pp. 60–66. ETA rejected Arana's racial analysis and instead emphasised Euskara as the key component of Basque identity. See: William A. Douglas, Joseba Zulaika: "On the Interpretation of Terrorist Violence: ETA and the Basque Political Process", *Comparative Studies in Society and History*, vol. 32, 2, 1990; Zulaika: *Basque Violence: Metaphor and Sacrament*, p. 135. For the weakness of Euskara as a factor in the mobilisation of ETA, see: Conversi: *The Basques, the Catalans and Spain*, pp. 265–269.

<sup>53</sup> Mees: *Nationalism, Violence and Democracy*, pp. 24–25.

<sup>54</sup> *El Libro Blanco*, p. 92.



What were ETA's "metas" (objectives) referred to above? "El Libro Blanco" defined the only acceptable objectives for the Basque Country as either "Integración federal directa en Europa" or "Independencia absoluta". Moreover, by ruling out any permutation of an autonomous government, ETA effectively rejected the "Pacto de Bayona" (Baiona) — an agreement signed in 1945 by the PNV as part of a coalition of anti-Franco forces.<sup>55</sup>

Could ETA, acting as a vanguard of the Basque people, really establish an independent state from under the jackboot of an ultranationalist and authoritarian Spain? While many within the PNV upheld full Basque sovereignty as a matter of principle and agreed with the aims and idealism of the young ETA activists, in practical terms, the party deemed the restoration of a Basque autonomous government a far more realistic prospect. Still, fifteen years on from the agreement in Baiona, only the most partisan *jeltzale* could convincingly claim that the PNV's post-war strategy had borne any fruit. Basque nationalism was at a crossroads with big decisions to make.

On 22 March 1960, Lehendakari José Antonio Aguirre died suddenly of a heart attack. Much loved and admired by Basques *en masse*, the charismatic Aguirre had steadfastly led his people through their many travails for the best part of a quarter of a century.<sup>56</sup> Aguirre was replaced as lehendakari by Jesús María de Leizaola, a man who through no fault of his own, simply lacked his predecessor's magnetic personality. Neither the "metas" of the pragmatic and moderate PNV under Leizaola, nor those of the more idealistic and radical upstarts ETA, appeared close to being realised.

### ***Gatari* returns to Gibbstown**

"I came back here [Basque Country], and of course, I got mixed up in politics in Franco's time. I came in 1952, and then the last day in 1959 I had to leave".<sup>57</sup>

Having spent 15 years in Ireland, Iker Gallastegi (*Gatari*), son of Eli, left his adopted home in 1952 for Bilbo. Seeing EGI as "the only thing there was" in opposition to the dictatorship, Iker would get involved with the young *jeltzales*.

Spanish police cracked down on EGI in the autumn of 1959, provoking a wave of detentions that continued until the following summer. Fearing imminent arrest, on New Year's Eve 1959 the young Gallastegi crossed the Spanish-French border. He quickly

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<sup>55</sup> *El Libro Blanco*, p. 102. "Pacto de Bayona", <http://aunamendi.eusko-ikaskuntza.eus/eu/pacto-de-bayona/ar-127870/> (last accessed 24 May 2019).

<sup>56</sup> Ludger Mees: "Constructing and deconstructing national heroes. A Basque case study", *Studies on National Movements*, 3, 2015, pp. 1–35.

<sup>57</sup> Author interview with Iker Gallastegi (Getxo, 2017).

made his way to Donibane Lohizune, to the home of his father Eli, who had himself returned from Ireland in 1958.<sup>58</sup>

According to Iker's recollections of this period, in late 1959 *Gatari* and some of his Eusko Gaztedi comrades had apparently been promised by the PNV that the party "would get some people from [a US base in Bordeaux] to train us". After "one or two months" waiting in vain in Iparralde—"we were doing nothing; typical of the PNV"—Gallastegi made a decision: he would go to Ireland instead.<sup>59</sup>

Despite intermittent references made to this trip in the decades since, the specific details of Iker Gallastegi's 1960 Irish foray have been few and far between.<sup>60</sup> Based on an interview with the late Iker Gallastegi, archival letters and some additional contemporary sources, the bare bones of the 1960 Gallastegi-led trip to Ireland can now be fleshed out, if not necessarily all of the intrigue surrounding it.

In the words of Gallastegi: "I said, look, I'll go to Ireland because I know people in the IRA, and in fact, I can arrange with them to... I can keep us training there. I'll call for the others".<sup>61</sup> The "others" were Patxi Amézaga (occasionally Amezaga), an EGI activist; Borja Escauriaza (occasionally Eskauriza); and Mikel Isasi, who became a member of the PNV's Euskadi Buru Batzar (EBB) (Basque Central Committee) the same year. Once in Ireland, and having met "people from the IRA", Gallastegi "called for the other three to come over" and join him.<sup>62</sup>

Another prominent figure in this episode was Joseba Rezola, a PNV stalwart who had become the first President of the Consejo Delegado y de la Junta de Resistencia in 1943. Rezola seemingly had a keen interest in Irish affairs. For instance, Ambrose Martin

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<sup>58</sup> Author interview with Iker Gallastegi (Getxo, 2017); Nacimiento de 'ETA' (1958)", *Documentos Y*, vol. I, p. 31; Lorenzo Espinosa: *Gudari. Una pasión útil*, p. 128. Hereafter, Iker Gallastegi is sometimes simply referred to as "Iker" and Eli Gallastegi as "Eli", so that the reader may easily differentiate between son and father.

<sup>59</sup> Author interview with Iker Gallastegi (Getxo, 2017). While Gallastegi's claim regarding possible American help should be treated with caution, Joseba Rezola's biographer, Eduardo Jauregui Beraza, refers to a similar initiative around the same time. "Desde 1960 empezaron a hacerse las gestiones para contactar con posibles preparadores que formaran activamente a los jóvenes elegidos. Los primeros pasos fueron encaminados a conseguir la colaboración de uno de los antiguos oficiales americanos que prepararon a los gudarís en el 45". See: Eduardo Jauregui Beraza: *Joseba Rezola. Gudari de Gudaris. Historia de la resistencia*, Bilbao, ANV-AA, 1992, p. 94. The USA maintained an airbase in Bordeaux-Merignac in the 1950s. It would appear as though they officially left in 1958. See: "Bordeaux Air Base, 1951–1961", [http://www.france-air-otan.net/STRUCTURE/Pages\\_web/Bordeaux\\_Historique\\_Fr.html](http://www.france-air-otan.net/STRUCTURE/Pages_web/Bordeaux_Historique_Fr.html) (last accessed 25 May 2019).

<sup>60</sup> For example, see: Fernández Soldevilla: "De Aberri a ETA, pasando por Venezuela"; Ibarazabal: "Así nació ETA", *Muga*, no. 1, June 1979; Juaristi: *El Bucle Melancólico*, p. 271.

<sup>61</sup> Author interview with Iker Gallastegi (Getxo, 2017).

<sup>62</sup> Ibarazabal: "Así nació ETA", *Muga*, no. 1, June 1979; Garmendia: "ETA: Nacimiento, Desarrollo y Crisis (1959–1978)", (specifically, p. 97). Author interview with Iker Gallastegi (Getxo, 2017).

penned the following reference 1956 letter for Rezola to bring to the Irish Embassy in Paris:

“The bearer of this letter, Sr. Jose Rezola, who is a Basque patriot, is anxious to get some information in reference to the Irish language. Hoping you will put him on the right path in procuring the information he requires”.<sup>63</sup>

Rezola also communicated back and forth with Eli Gallastegi on the subject of Gaeilge in 1957 and 1958.<sup>64</sup>

On 01 February 1960, just one month after Iker Gallastegi had fled across the Spanish-French border fearing imminent arrest, *Gatari* wrote to an “adizkide” (friend) from London. Based on the information that follows, it can be clearly deduced that this “adizkide” was Joseba Rezola. Commencing with the 01 February letter, so began a series of communications in which ongoing “negocios” relating to an important “asunto” dominated the conversation. While the nature of the “asunto” is never openly discussed, it is clear that the purpose of the trip was, in the words of Rezola’s biographer: “la preparación paramilitar de los grupos nacionalistas”.<sup>65</sup>

Prior to reading the letter extracts, some brief additional information should be noted. First, given that *Gatari*’s first letter to Rezola was sent from London, it follows that the young Gallastegi, —having waited (a little less than) “one or two months” in vain for PNV instructions— must have left Iparralde at some stage in January for the English capital. The London-based “primo” (cousin) mentioned in Iker’s first letter seems to refer to a “Beñat”, who was also in correspondence with Rezola. The three “fardos” mentioned are almost certainly Patxi Amézaga, Borja Escauriaza and Mikel Isasi. Finally, as the reader will note, Iker Gallastegi made his way from London to Ireland at some stage between 01 February and 23 March.

All of the following extracts are contained in Rezola’s archives.

Iker Gallastegi to Joseba Rezola (01.02.1960). London.

“Este país [Inglaterra] no es nada propicio por ahora para hacer aquí negocios pero creo con un poco más de tiempo se podrá conseguir algo. Claro que como no conozco mucha gente aquí no me he atrevido a plantear el asunto hasta tener tiempo para formar una opinión de la gente que he tratado pues además de ser bastante

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<sup>63</sup> “Letter from Ambrose Martin to Donal Hurley”. Dated 12 December 1956. Dublin. Correspondencia General B-L. REZOLA,KDP.00142,C.1. Rezola Arratibel, Joseba. ANV-AA.

<sup>64</sup> For example: “Letter from Eli Gallastegi to Joseba Rezola”. Dated 04 October 1957. Dublin; “Letter from Joseba Rezola to Eli Gallastegi”. Dated 15 October 1957. Ziburu; “Letter from Eli Gallastegi to Joseba Rezola”. Dated 16 January 1958. Correspondencia General B-L. REZOLA,KDP.00142,C.1. Rezola Arratibel, Joseba. ANV-AA.

<sup>65</sup> Jauregui Beraza: *Joseba Rezola. Gudari de Gudaris*, p. 94.

desconfiado tampoco estoy en situación de arriesgarme con ellos y quedarme sin chiquita. Mi primo me ha presentado a varias personas y quizás me decida por alguno de ellos pero no lo he hecho todavía, ni les he explicado el asunto. No he querido decidirme por ninguno hasta no ver qué posibilidades hay en Irlanda pues no por ir más rápido se hacen las cosas mejor. Desde luego si no puedo colocar la mercancía en Irlanda volveré aquí, pues con más tiempo estoy prácticamente seguro de conseguir un bonito negocio en Inglaterra. De todas maneras mi primo ha quedado encargado de ver lo que se puede hacer y activar el negocio durante mi ausencia en Irlanda y me tendrá al tanto de lo que haya”.<sup>66</sup>

Joseba Rezola to Iker Gallastegi (09.03.1960).

“Ha hecho V, bien en no precipitarse en el mundo de negocios de Londres. Conviene examinar bien el terreno y mirar cuidadosamente donde si pisa, para evitar sorpresas desagradables. Además, me parece muy acertado que explore antes el mercado irlandés, porque así tendrán más lelemntos [sic] de juicio para hacer lo que más convenga. [...] A sus amigos se les está arreglando la documentación y de momento les han autorizado a permanecer aquí [Iparralde] lo cual no quiere decir que no estén dispuestos a trasladarse ahí si conviniera hacerlo”.<sup>67</sup>

Iker Gallastegi to Joseba Rezola (23.03.1960). Dublin.

“La empresa con la cual esperarla solucionar algo atraviesa en estos mementos una crisis bastante ayuda. La dirección se ha separado y cada cual ha formado su propia compañía y parecen están más empeñados en destruirse mutuamente que otra cosa. He conocido y tratado [con] bastantes de ellos pero francamente no es prudente meterse en negocios con ellos en estos momentos. Desde luego no cesare en mis esfuerzos ni en mi trato con ellos ya que [sic] aunque no sea ahora pueden ser útiles más adelante y no es cosa de perder estos contactos”.<sup>68</sup>

Iker Gallastegi to Joseba Rezola (02.05.1960). Dublin.

“Creo haber agotado las posibilidades de hacer algo concreto aquí. Encuentro dos condiciones que me aconsejan en contra de hacer negocios aquí. Una es la falta de seguridad, que por varios motivos que ya le explicaré a mi regreso, no veo manera de poder remediar. La otra, que [sic] aunque creo podría solucionarse, también representa una gran desventaja es la del idioma. Mas que desventaja en si mismo la representa en lo que llama la atención pues como siempre hay aquí estudiantes españoles a la fuerza se tropieza con ellos. Por lo tanto creo que mi estancia en Irlanda no solucionará nada. Puedo si le parece volver por Londres y hacer otro intento allí o de lo contrario quisiera volver a reunirme con mis tres compañeros para juntos tratar del asunto y cambiar impresiones y ver lo que entre todos podemos hacer de positivo. Aquí no hago yo más que perder el tiempo”.<sup>69</sup>

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<sup>66</sup> “Letter from Iker Gallastegi to Joseba Rezola”. Dated 01 February 1960. London. Correspondencia General B-L. REZOLA,KDP.00142,C.1. Rezola Arratibel, Joseba. ANV-AA.

<sup>67</sup> “Letter from Joseba Rezola to Iker Gallastegi”. Dated 09 March 1960. Correspondencia General B-L. REZOLA,KDP.00142,C.1. Rezola Arratibel, Joseba. ANV-AA.

<sup>68</sup> “Letter from Iker Gallastegi to Joseba Rezola”. Dated 23 March 1960. Dublin. Correspondencia General B-L. REZOLA,KDP.00142,C.1. Rezola Arratibel, Joseba. ANV-AA.

<sup>69</sup> “Letter from Iker Gallastegi to Joseba Rezola”. Dated 02 May 1960. Dublin. Correspondencia General B-L. REZOLA,KDP.00142,C.1. Rezola Arratibel, Joseba. ANV-AA.

Joseba Rezola to Iker Gallastegi (12.05.1960). Bayona

“Oportunamente llegó a mi poder la suya del día 2 del corriente en la que entre otras cosas me manifestaba su propósito de volver por estas tierras en vista de las dificultades que ahí existen para montar ningún negocio por ahora. Me dice también que está vd. dispuesto a volver por Londres para tantear allí el terreno. Por mi parte, tengo precisamente en proyecto un viaje por la capital mencionada, que lo emprenderé en cuanto tenga arreglados los papeles y me gustaría que coincidiéramos allí para hacer juntos las gestiones pertinentes. Le ruego, pues, que me espere y que me diga cómo anda Vd. de recursos para que yo le envíe el dinero que le haga falta. Creo que mis papeles me los despacharán en un par de semanas, porque tienen que hacer uno o dos viajes a Pau, pero de todas formas, vamos a calcular, echando por alto, que dure un mes”.<sup>70</sup>

Iker Gallastegi to Joseba Rezola (08.06.1960). Dublin.

“Aunque quizás esta no le llegue antes de su salida para Londres quiero informarle que ¡por fin! mis gestiones aquí han dado fruto. Se puede montar el negocio de que hablamos con toda garantía. Incluso he inspeccionado el local y es perfecto para nuestros requerimientos. El socio de aquí es competente y serio y conoce muy bien el negocio, como también lo hacen los que trabajan con él. Además, como ellos tienen un negocio parecido al que queremos montar tienen casi toda la herramienta que necesitaríamos, así es que se puede comenzar enseguida. Creo que buena fecha sería hacia fines de Julio si es que se pueden arreglar ahí los documentos necesarios para enviar los tres fardos de materia prima que están ahí. Yo creo que la operación necesite durar más de dos o tres semanas pues durante ese periodo estaríamos dedicados al negocio día y noche. De todas maneras, no hay límite de tiempo y estaremos aquí el tiempo que sea necesario. Pero repito, hay que arreglar los documentos para enviar los tres fardos ahí. Creo que se dará cuenta perfecta de cómo está el asunto, pero en cuanto nos veamos en Londres le daré todos los detalles pertinentes”.<sup>71</sup>

Joseba Rezola to Iker Gallastegi (15.06.1960). Donibane Lohizune.

“Con gran alegría leí su carta del 8 y no fue menor la de sus amigos cuando les enteré de su contenido. Por fin va a poder ponerse en marcha el negocio y con las mejores perspectivas para el futuro. Antes que esta habrá recibido V, otra de su amigo Borja que quiere que V, le reclame de ahí, si no le ha contestado todavía dígame que cree que ha descubierto para él la posibilidad de dar unas lecciones y que de todas formas conviene que vaya por ahí porque la colocación es muy interesante y existen buenas posibilidades de conseguirla. El propósito de Borja es presentarse ahí en cuanto reciba su carta y haga las gestiones precisas. [...] Con Borja le puedo enviar dinero para los gastos que haya tenido por ahí. Los dos fardos [illegible] quedan los enviaremos también pronto desde luego para la fecha que V. indica Yo estoy aquí pendiente de una visita que se me anunció para en breve pero que está tardando más de lo que quisiera. En cuanto haya recibido a este amigo haré el viaje proyectado y nos veremos cómo habíamos previsto. Y en cuanto algo decidido no

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<sup>70</sup> “Letter from Joseba Rezola to Iker Gallastegi”. Dated 12 May 1960. Correspondencia General B-L. REZOLA,KDP.00142,C.1. Rezola Arratibel, Joseba. ANV-AA.

<sup>71</sup> “Letter from Iker Gallastegi to Joseba Rezola”. Dated 08 June 1960. Dublin. Correspondencia General B-L. REZOLA,KDP.00142,C.1. Rezola Arratibel, Joseba. ANV-AA.

tardaré en comunicárselo. En el negocio no deben andar Vdes con premuras. Tomen el tiempo que les haga falta para que las cosas se hagan de la mejor manera posible”.<sup>72</sup>

Iker Gallastegi to Joseba Rezola (20.06.1960). Dublin.

“Espero que todo salga bien y que el negocio sea provechoso. En cuanto esté todo preparado, nos iremos los cuatro, con uno o dos expertos de aquí, a una finca donde estaremos completamente dedicados al asunto entre manos el tiempo necesario. Me aseguran aquí que no estiman necesario ni conveniente se prolongue más de tres semanas pero que en fin, eso lo veremos sobre la marcha. Estoy en contacto continuo con ellos y le iré mandando detalles según se vayan concretando”.<sup>73</sup>

Iker Gallastegi to Joseba Rezola (05.09.1960). Dublin.

“Dado que la llegada de nuestros dos compañeros ha coincidido con las vacaciones de parte del personal de la fábrica, han surgido algunas dificultades y aunque ya conocemos todo lo referente a la maquinaria que utilizaremos sería conveniente completar nuestros conocimientos sobre administración, organización, etc. En el caso de que tenga Vd. alguna idea distinta, le agradaremos nos la comunique lo antes posible [...]”.<sup>74</sup>

According to Gallastegi, when his comrades finally arrived in Ireland, they came with a message from Rezola, who had orders ostensibly from “his superiors in the PNV”. Rezola requested that Gallastegi meet him at Pau airport, France. The message relayed, Gallastegi claims to have returned immediately and met with Rezola in Pau. He recalls:

“[Rezola] wanted to know what we were doing and all that [in Ireland]; but, he said, the main thing —and I got a little bit annoyed with him—, he said: ‘I have a priest that I know very well. He works for me sometimes’. And I said: ‘well what’s a priest got to do with any of this?’ And he said: ‘well, he’ll tell you when you can kill somebody and when you cannot. He said he’d advise you’. And for that, I went from Dublin to Pau and came back from Pau the same day! Back to Dublin. We never met that priest!”.<sup>75</sup>

In an interview conducted with this author, Gallastegi stated that the four men received “training” in Ireland: “Well, there were 3 or 4 [IRA] volunteers and we used to training [sic] in Gibbstown, in the castle. And sometimes in Dublin, but mainly in Gibbstown”. No further details of this “training” were forthcoming.<sup>76</sup> Ibarazabal’s account, based on

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<sup>72</sup> “Letter from Joseba Rezola to Iker Gallastegi”. Dated 15 June 1960. Donibane Lohizune.

Correspondencia General B-L. REZOLA,KDP.00142,C.1. Rezola Arratibel, Joseba. ANV-AA.

<sup>73</sup> “Letter from Iker Gallastegi to Joseba Rezola”. Dated 20 June 1960. Dublin. Correspondencia General B-L. REZOLA,KDP.00142,C.1. Rezola Arratibel, Joseba. ANV-AA.

<sup>74</sup> “Letter from Iker Gallastegi to Joseba Rezola”. Dated 05 September 1960. Dublin. Correspondencia General B-L. REZOLA,KDP.00142,C.1. Rezola Arratibel, Joseba. ANV-AA.

<sup>75</sup> Author interview with Iker Gallastegi (Getxo, 2017).

<sup>76</sup> Ibid.



interviews with former EGI and ETA leaders, states that the men were engaged in “aprendiendo técnicas guerilleras de manos del IRA [...]”.<sup>77</sup>

It has been established that, already by the early 1960s, the prospect of political violence against the dictatorship had been discussed within Basque nationalist circles and the government-in-exile. However, despite the temptation to resort to military means, the prevailing view to refrain from such a course of action, maintained by the likes of Aguirre, Manuel Irujo, and other leading Basque nationalists, had always held.<sup>78</sup> The formation of ETA in 1959 had been a shot across the bows of the PNV, illustrating that this may not always be the case.

Given the above, the Gallastegi-led trip to Ireland in 1960 warrants some closer analysis. First, while Gallastegi’s own words suggest that the initial impulse for the trip was his alone, with no official sanctioning from the PNV or EGI, the above evidence demonstrates a level of coordination and financial assistance offered to Gallastegi and his comrades. Indeed, Federico Krutwig later suggested that this trip may have been bankrolled by a wealthy “patriota vasco de Venezuela” via Rezola.<sup>79</sup>

Second, it has been *speculated* that two of the IRA volunteers involved in the Basque training were Seamus Costello and Frank Keane.<sup>80</sup> Active during the early phase of the IRA’s Operation Harvest in south Derry, Costello spent six months in prison and a further two years of internment in the Curragh prison camp before he was released in 1959. He later went on to become a member of the IRA Army Council in 1962 and a luminary of Irish socialist republicanism until he was killed in 1977. Keane was a rank-and-file IRA member who was court-martialled and dismissed in 1965 for organising training units without authorisation.<sup>81</sup> If these men were indeed central to the Basque group’s “training”, given their profiles in 1960, it is likely to have been an *ad hoc* venture rather than an arrangement sanctioned by the IRA Army Council.

Another point to consider is that the Gibbstown “Basque colony” had drawn considerable attention from Irish police and military intelligence from the very moment

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<sup>77</sup> Ibarazabal: “Así nació ETA”, *Muga*, no. 1, June 1979.

<sup>78</sup> Mees: *The Basque Contention*, pp. 101–103.

<sup>79</sup> Federico Krutwig: *Años de peregrinación y lucha*, Tafalla, Txalaparta, 2014, p. 29. Cited in: Fernández Soldevilla: “De Aberri a ETA, pasando por Venezuela”, p. 249.

<sup>80</sup> See: “Successful Newbridge meeting on Irish citizens of Basque origin”, [https://theirishrevolution.wordpress.com/2018/06/19/successful-newbridge-meeting-on-irish-citizens-of-basque-origin/?fbclid=IwAR3snOZaDHNZtT0BPpbolxzH0PcU32\\_BOScaXYxniiHZKYLq\\_91LPnnLWD8](https://theirishrevolution.wordpress.com/2018/06/19/successful-newbridge-meeting-on-irish-citizens-of-basque-origin/?fbclid=IwAR3snOZaDHNZtT0BPpbolxzH0PcU32_BOScaXYxniiHZKYLq_91LPnnLWD8) (last accessed 25 May 2019).

<sup>81</sup> Hanley; Millar: *The Lost Revolution*, p. 25, p. 45; White: *Ruairí Ó Brádaigh*, p. 115.

the refugees arrived in 1940. One would therefore have to assume that the Irish authorities were at least somewhat aware of the Gallastegi-led group's presence in 1960. Indeed, police raids on republicans around Gibbstown and its hinterlands were common in the late 1950s/early 1960s.<sup>82</sup> Yet, whatever specific "training" the Basques received, it evidently did not warrant the men's arrest or deportation.

According to Ibarazabal and Garmendia, Iker's comrades spent two months in Ireland.<sup>83</sup> Iker, as we have seen, had arrived months beforehand, in February or March. He returned to Iparralde, again via London, in October 1960. Passing through the English capital, he made sure to accumulate "un montón de notas, fotocopias, libritos militares, etc." from the British Museum.<sup>84</sup>

While questions regarding the exact details and scope of *Gatari's* return to Gibbstown in 1960 remain, what is clearly evident is that it was premised on Basque armed struggle and possible assistance from the IRA. In this sense, Krutwig's remarks that "[los] primeros comandos no fueron de ETA, sino que los creó gente escindida de Eusko Gaztedi"<sup>85</sup> are not without basis.

### **French connections**

Having returned to Donibane Lohizune from his Irish expedition, Iker Gallastegi came across a fellow exiled EGI comrade from Bilbo named José Antonio Etxebarrieta. The two men quickly struck up a friendship.

Etxebarrieta had been studying Law at the University of Deusto before he fled across the border. Now in Donibane Lohizune, he apparently had "nowhere to go and nothing to do". It was arranged that he travel north to Paris, "donde estaban varios otros refugiados jóvenes, además de bastantes estudiantes vascos, y donde podría hacer alguna labor útil". In the French capital, Etxebarrieta was able to resume his Law studies courtesy of a Basque government grant. Between Iparralde and Paris, the two young exiled Basques,

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<sup>82</sup> "Little Children Questioned After Co. Meath Raid", *United Irishman*, September 1959; "Swoop on Co. Meath", *United Irishman*, February 1962.

<sup>83</sup> Garmendia: "ETA: Nacimiento, Desarrollo y Crisis (1959–1978)", p. 97; Ibarazabal: "Ayer y Hoy de Federico Krutwig", *Muga*, no. 2, September 1979.

<sup>84</sup> Iker Gallastegi Miñaur: "El año en Donibane" in José Antonio Etxebarrieta Ortiz (ed. J.M. Lorenzo Espinosa, M. Zabala): *Los vientos favorables. Euskal Herria 1839-1959*, Tafalla, Txalaparta, 1999, pp. 31–35.

<sup>85</sup> Ibarazabal: "Ayer y Hoy de Federico Krutwig", *Muga*, no. 2, September 1979.

Iker, and José Antonio, kept up regular contact.<sup>86</sup> They would soon be joined in France by an influx of ETA militants fleeing across the border.

On 18 July 1961, a group of senior Francoist combatants boarded a train in Donostia. Embarking on a journey to Madrid to mark the twenty-fifth anniversary of the dictator's uprising, the veterans were the target of an attack carried out by ETA — the group's first major military action. As the train departed Donostia, ETA militants attempted to derail it from its tracks. They also endeavoured to burn two Spanish flags. Alas, despite concerted planning, the two-pronged venture failed on both counts.<sup>87</sup>

The repercussions of the botched train attack would prove to be a chastening experience for ETA. Over one hundred suspected militants were quickly rounded up. In a joint letter submitted to the United Nations by two International Trade Unions the following January, it was alleged that thirty-one of these suspects had been brought to Madrid, where they were beaten and tortured for days.<sup>88</sup> Moreover, ETA's entire presence in the Spanish state was effectively dismantled, leading to the ascendancy of a “pequeño grupo de los que lograron escapar en asamblea y discusión permanente” around Biarritz and Baiona.<sup>89</sup> Iparralde would thenceforth become ETA's *de facto* base for the next fifty years.

Three months after the attempted train derailment, a senior PNV figure, Manuel Irujo, invited a handful of EGI members to attend a conference at the *jeltzale* delegation offices in Paris. While officially the conference was held to mark the 25<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the Basque autonomous government, it would also serve as a controlled environment for the young activists to air their grievances. Renewing their friendship, José Antonio Etxebarrieta and Iker Gallastegi both attended. As did the aforementioned ETA leader, *Txillardegí*.<sup>90</sup>

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<sup>86</sup> Author interview with Iker Gallastegi (Getxo, 2017). Gallastegi Miñaur: “El año en Donibane”; “Jose Etxebarrieta”, <http://www.ehk.eus/es/biografias-de-proceso-de-liberacion/4494-jose-etxebarrieta> (last accessed 27 May 2019).

<sup>87</sup> Gaizka Fernández Soldevilla: “Dossier II. 1961, la primera operación policial contra ETA”, *Quadernos de criminología: revista de criminología y ciencias forenses*, no. 4, 2018, pp. 26–31.

<sup>88</sup> “Letter from International Confederation of Free Trade Unions and International Federation of Christian Trade Unions to the Secretary General of the United Nations: Violation of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights by the Spanish Government”. Dated 17 January 1962. Political situation in Spain. 2001/43/118. NAI. See also: Woodworth: *Dirty War, Clean Hands*, p. 36.

<sup>89</sup> “Notas a la primera asamblea”, *Documentos Y*, vol. I, p. 522.

<sup>90</sup> Fernández Soldevilla: “De Aberri a ETA, pasando por Venezuela”; Patxo Unzueta: “Regreso a casa. (Ayer y Hoy)” in Elorza (coord.), *et al.: La Historia de ETA*, pp. 421–439 (specifically pp. 425–428). According to Iker Gallastegi, Etxebarrieta “organised for Txillardegí and myself to give meetings in Paris in the PNV house”. Author interview with Iker Gallastegi (Getxo, 2017).

In the words of Iker, the two young EGI dissidents were eager: “to try to make it clear—myself and [José Antonio] Etxebarrieta—to make it clear that something had to be done”.<sup>91</sup> Addressing the conference, Iker’s speech transmitted to the *jeltzales* present that the “something” that “had to be done” may well require the use of violence:

“[...] hemos olvidado el camino de la libertad: el camino recto, el camino del sacrificio y de la generosidad. Este camino es duro y sangriento [...] Hoy sólo sabe un método; hoy sólo existe un camino, el camino verdadero, el camino que han tenido que recorrer todos los países que han tenido dignidad y todos los países que han conseguido su libertad: el camino de las armas; el único camino capaz de convencer o de vencer a nuestro enemigo. [...] No puede haber paz entre el bien y el mal, entre la verdad y la mentira, entre la justicia y la opresión, entre la libertad y la tiranía. La guerra existirá siempre entre ellos que hasta que el mal sea corregido, hasta que la verdad se imponga, hasta que sea hecha justicia, hasta que se gane la libertad. La guerra es una cosa terrible, pero no es una cosa mala”.<sup>92</sup>

Elements of Iker’s speech in Paris bore witness to the formative years he had spent in Ireland. For instance, his reference to “La guerra es una cosa terrible, pero no es una cosa mala” was almost certainly taken from a political treatise put forward by Padraig Pearse decades earlier.<sup>93</sup> Furthermore, in delivering some home truths, as he saw it, to the PNV leadership about the likely necessity for violence in overcoming the regime, the young Gallastegi quoted Terence MacSwiney in respect to the sacrifices that such a course of action would likely entail:

“No serán los que más pueden infligir sino los que más capacidad para sufrir tengan los que triunfarán. No seremos nosotros quienes derramaremos sangre inocente, sino nosotros quienes la ofrecemos”.<sup>94</sup>

Around the same time of the Paris conference, Etxebarrieta penned a short pamphlet titled “Un planteamiento, un problema, una opinión”, similar in tone and logic to his comrade, Iker:

“¿Quién cree sinceramente que existiría hoy una Irlanda libre y digna si los irlandeses hubiesen usado de los boletines y las misas a San Patricio? ¿Creen que existiría una problemática argelina si los líderes nacionalistas se hubiesen limitado a las bellas artes? ¿Creen que Chipre tiene su ‘status’ actual gracias a que San Juan Crisóstomo bajaba los viernes a convencer a los parlamentarios de la Gran Bretaña?”<sup>95</sup>

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<sup>91</sup> Author interview with Iker Gallastegi (Getxo, 2017).

<sup>92</sup> “El sentimiento de nacionalidad”, *Zutik!* (Caracas), no. 16.

<sup>93</sup> Patrick Pearse: “Peace and the Gael”, *Political Writings and Speeches*, Dublin, 1915, p. 217. Pearse writes: “War is a terrible thing, but war is not an evil thing”.

<sup>94</sup> “El sentimiento de nacionalidad”, *Zutik!* (Caracas), no. 16.

<sup>95</sup> Cited in: Unzueta: *Los nietos de la ira: Nacionalismo y violencia en el País Vasco*, p. 163.

Shortly after Paris, José Antonio took up residence with the Gallastegis in Donibane Lohizune. With the recent influx of EGI and ETA activists, Iparralde was becoming a revolutionary hothouse. According to Iker, the two organisations attempted to reach an accord, but this was apparently scuppered by his suspicion of the two ETA representatives: David López Dorronsoro and Paco Itturioz.<sup>96</sup>

Federico Krutwig recalls arriving in Biarritz in 1961, where “todo el mundo hablaba de violencia y de la necesidad de formar grupos armados”.<sup>97</sup> In the elegant seaside town, he met Iker and José Antonio. Observing the dynamic between the two men, he later recalled:

“Iker, como digo, estaba fuertemente influenciado por las ideas de la revolución armada, pero no sabía plasmarlas bien, y fue José Antonio Etxebarrieta, al que Iker había acogida bajo su manto, quien puso en orden y escribió las ideas de ‘Gatari’, introduciendo además algunas cosas de maoísmo”.<sup>98</sup>

Harnessing the materials that the young Gallastegi had brought back from London in October 1960, Iker and José Antonio debated the tenets of Basque nationalism, as well as the tactics and strategies that the Basques should pursue. Ireland, Algeria, Palestine, and the Congo featured in these conversations.<sup>99</sup>

While living in Donibane Lohizune, José Antonio, a future ETA intellectual, also spent much of his time talking politics with Eli Gallastegi.<sup>100</sup> Perhaps reading too much into this cross-generational encounter, various *izquierda abertzale* intellectuals have subsequently depicted the meeting of minds as a sort of “eslabón perdido” in the continuity between pre- and post-war generations of radical Basque nationalism.<sup>101</sup> Regardless of the long-term implications of this occurrence, it is clear that the tectonic plates of Basque nationalism were already shifting of their own accord.

In PNV circles, Iker’s October 1961 intervention in Paris had been met with consternation. Irujo delivered a public riposte in an article titled “Patriotas y gamberros”, published in the party’s official organ *Alderdi* in May 1962. Elaborating on Iker’s utilisation of Pádraig Pearse’s remarks on war, with his own qualification: “Que la guerra

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<sup>96</sup> Gallastegi Miñaur: “El año en Donibane”

<sup>97</sup> Cited in: Fernández Soldevilla: “De *Aberrri* a ETA, pasando por Venezuela” (quote on p. 249).

<sup>98</sup> Ibarazabal: “Ayer y Hoy de Federico Krutwig”, *Muga*, no. 2, September 1979.

<sup>99</sup> Gallastegi Miñaur: “El año en Donibane”

<sup>100</sup> Gallastegi Miñaur: “El año en Donibane”; Unzueta: “Regreso a casa. (Ayer y Hoy)”.

<sup>101</sup> The historian Fernández Soldevilla contends that such utilisations are both a “simplificación” of the historical facts, and moreover, part of a broader *izquierda abertzale* strategy to present a “narrativa histórica de un secular conflicto entre vascos y españoles y, por ende, para legitimar a posteriori el terrorismo etarra”. See: Fernández Soldevilla: “De *Aberrri* a ETA, pasando por Venezuela” (p. 264). See also: Unzueta: “Regreso a casa. (Ayer y Hoy)”, p. 423.

‘no es una cosa mala’ solamente lo dicen los fascistas”, Irujo disparaged what he saw as an emerging departure within some elements of the Basque nationalist youth.<sup>102</sup>

News of the Parisian conference had also travelled across the Atlantic, where a network of radical Basque exiles was also becoming increasingly emboldened in their rejection of the Basque government’s strategy.<sup>103</sup> Emblematic of this critical posture, the March 1962 issue of the periodical *Tximistak* was effusive in its support for the Parisian interventions of Iker *et al.* Synthesising the emerging strategic and generational departures between Basque nationalists on both sides of the Atlantic, *Tximistak* also invoked the spirit of the Easter Rising and the most famous martyr from the Irish Revolutionary Period, Terence MacSwiney:

“Durante los últimos meses se han escuchado, fuera de Euzkadi, la voz de la resistencia. Primero habló en París el representante del grupo ‘Eta’; luego el de ‘Euzko Gaztedi’ [...] Son hombres nuevos en el campo patriótico vasco y sus ideas son nuevas también. Ante estos hombres jóvenes y sus manifestaciones claras, tajantes, valientes, aparecen como cosa de museo los hombres del grupo que actuó en el 36, sus pensamientos y sus métodos. La nueva generación, a la que pertenecen los futuros gobernantes de Euzkadi, se aleja cada vez más de la que podríamos llamar ‘generación del estatuto’ [...] Se acabó, señores del ‘Gobierno vasco’, la hueca palabrería adormecedora. Ya no son estos los tiempos de D. Arturo Campion y de los liberales ingleses, cuya propuesta de autonomía para Irlanda, de nada hubiese valido, Sr. Irujo, sin todo lo que sobrevino: el holocausto de Mac Swiney, la sangrienta Rebelión de Pascua y el Ejército Republicano Irlandés... Un holocausto como aquél, una rebelión de ese tipo, un ejército como el I.R.A. necesita Euzkadi. Y los tendrá, porque se lo darán nuevos hombres que hoy actúan con nuevas ideas”.<sup>104</sup>

If “un ejército como el I.R.A. necesita Euzkadi”, whatever attempts that had been made to organise a militant front from *within* the ranks of the young *jeltzales* in Europe had, by early 1962, been firmly rejected by party leadership. As Etxebarrieta acknowledged in a letter to a Venezuelan friend in March 1962:

“[...] ha habido una serie de chinchorrerías y de falta de ganas de los viejitos que han acabado en que el último EBB y en el último Gobierno hayan dicho, sin oír a ninguno de los interesados, que la violencia no sirve para nada”.<sup>105</sup>

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<sup>102</sup> “Patriotas y gamberros”, *Alderdi*, núm. 182, mayo, 1962.

<sup>103</sup> A central figure in this dissident network was the journalist and publisher Manuel Fernández Etxebarrieta (*Matxari*). Expelled from the PNV in 1960, *Matxari* had a hand in several newspapers that catered for the immigrant Basque communities of Latin America: *Irrintzi* (1957–1962), *Frente Nacional Vasco* (1960/1964–1968), *Tximistak* (1961–1967) and *Sabindarra* (1970–1974). See: Fernández Soldevilla: “De Aberri a ETA, pasando por Venezuela”.

<sup>104</sup> “Nuevos Hombres, nuevas ideas”, *Tximistak*, *Frente Nacional Vasco*, March 1962.

<sup>105</sup> Cited in: Fernández Soldevilla: “De Aberri a ETA, pasando por Venezuela”, p. 250.



Seemingly unperturbed by this setback, and with funds replenished from America, José Antonio and Iker began to bring small groups from the Basque *interior* across the border for training (“darles una formación”) in Iparralde throughout the summer of 1962.<sup>106</sup>

Gallastegi’s movements did not go unnoticed. He would soon find himself as a pawn in a rather delicate French-Spanish matter.

In response to the granting of Algerian self-determination in 1961, several disparate hard-line French nationalist groups and former army officers had come together to resist their government’s pivot in policy. An Organisation Armée Secrète (OAS) immediately began to direct actions against French interests from Donostia. This led the French President Charles De Gaulle to request that the militants be expelled from the vicinity of the frontier. Franco agreed, but with the *quid pro quo* that the French reciprocate by expelling a number of Basque nationalists from Iparralde. Iker Gallastegi was one of eighteen Basque nationalists moved from the border area.

Relocated to Bar-le-Duc in northern France in October 1962, a month later, Joseph Barron, a TD for Clann na Poblachta (Family of the Republic) raised Iker’s expulsion in the chamber of Dáil Eireann, enquiring as to what actions the Minister for External Affairs “proposes to take with regard to an Irish citizen, Iker Gallastegi, against whom the French Government have issued an expulsion order”. Taoiseach Seán Lemass, responding on behalf of the absent Minister (Frank Aiken), assured Barron that:

“Representations about the case were immediately made to the French authorities by the Irish Embassy in Paris. In reply the Embassy was informed that Mr. Gallastegi could not be permitted to continue to reside on the Spanish frontier but that, in deference to its representations, his place of residence was being changed again to a district likely to be more acceptable to him. The Deputy will appreciate that the issues involved here are entirely within the jurisdiction of the French Government. If, however, it should later appear that further representations can usefully be made to the French authorities, the Embassy in Paris will be instructed accordingly”.<sup>107</sup>

Speaking to this author in 2017 — a year before he passed away— Iker Gallastegi suggested that he had no prior knowledge of, or connection to, Joseph Barron.<sup>108</sup>

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<sup>106</sup> Gallastegi Miñaur: “El año en Donibane”

<sup>107</sup> Author interview with Iker Gallastegi (Getxo, 2017); Gallastegi Miñaur: “El año en Donibane”; “Expulsion of Irish citizen from France”, <https://www.oireachtas.ie/en/debates/debate/dail/1962-11-08/16/?highlight%5B0%5D=barron&highlight%5B1%5D=basque> (last accessed 27 May 2019).

<sup>108</sup> Author interview with Iker Gallastegi (Getxo, 2017). Iker Gallastegi attended Blackrock College before going on to study Engineering at University College Dublin (UCD). See: “Former Gibbstown Resident”, *Drogheda Independent*, 15.12.1962.

Regardless of the provenance of Barron's intervention, the Irish Embassy in Paris did not need to make "further representations" to the French authorities.

When the Algerian situation had calmed down, Gallastegi returned to Iparralde in 1963. He settled into a more stable routine, raising a young family, and working in Biarritz. Iker Gallastegi never became a member of ETA. Apart from holding "some arms, which we passed to them, a small quantity of arms", he ceased his political activity to all intents and purposes in 1962.

Interviewer: "Were you active after 1962?"

Iker Gallastegi: "No, I wasn't active, [although] you always do something. In any case, I don't think very much can be done".<sup>109</sup>

*Gatari's* erstwhile comrade and future ETA intellectual José Antonio Etxebarrieta did not seem to share Iker's somewhat pessimistic assessment. Influenced by the Cuban Revolution, Maoism, the works of Karl Marx, Vladimir Lenin, Jean-Paul Sartre, and Frantz Fanon, Etxebarrieta had already synthesised these influences into a "Manual de Resistencia" for a pending armed struggle in Euskal Herria.<sup>110</sup>

### 3.2. Sowing new seeds

On 26 February 1962, Operation Harvest was called to a halt by the IRA Army Council. A statement cited "the attitude of the general public whose minds have been deliberately distracted from the supreme issue facing the Irish people — the unity and freedom of Ireland".<sup>111</sup> The failure of the campaign immediately set in train a period of reflection and restructuring within the republican movement. At a Sinn Féin Árd Fheis in June, the party officially recognised the primacy of the IRA as the "Government of the Republic". Thus, while still officially "independent and autonomous", Sinn Féin was now explicitly expected to conform to IRA policy.

Tomás Mac Giolla, a Co. Tipperary republican, took over the presidency of the party. Three months later, Cathal Goulding replaced Ruairí Ó Brádaigh as Chief of Staff of the IRA, when the latter stepped aside for personal reasons.<sup>112</sup>

For most of the 1960s, two broad gravitational pulls would stretch the movement's cohesion to its very limit. While one tendency prioritised the "traditional" mainstays of

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<sup>109</sup> Author interview with Iker Gallastegi (Getxo, 2017).

<sup>110</sup> Fernández Soldevilla: "De *Aberri* a ETA, pasando por Venezuela"; "Jose Etxebarrieta", <http://www.ehk.eus/es/biografias-de-proceso-de-liberacion/4494-jose-etxebarrieta> (last accessed 27 May 2019). Unzueta refers to José Antonio Etxebarrieta as "el primer teorizador de la lucha armada [in ETA]". See: Unzueta: "Regreso a casa. (Ayer y Hoy)", p. 423.

<sup>111</sup> "Campaign in six counties halted", *United Irishman*, March 1962.

<sup>112</sup> Treacy: *The IRA, 1956–69. Rethinking the Republic*, p. 11, pp. 18–19.

republican ideology and was suspicious of any slide towards constitutional republicanism, the other, led by Goulding and Mac Giolla, sought to pivot the movement in a “modern” leftward direction and to focus on grassroots-oriented social agitation.<sup>113</sup>

One of the main vehicles for the modernising tendency was the Wolfe Tone “Directories” (later “Societies”). Set up under the Goulding-Mac Giolla leadership on the bicentennial birthday of the “founding father” of Irish republicanism, the Societies aimed to gradually shift the tectonic plates of republicanism through debate.<sup>114</sup>

A central figure in the Society’s work and the “modernisers” strategy at large was Roy Johnston. Born in Dublin in 1929, Johnston became an active member of the Connolly Association whilst living in Britain in the early 1960s. He returned to Ireland in September 1963, and attended his first Wolfe Tone meeting the following January.<sup>115</sup> He recalls the forum as being fundamentally “a way for the IRA to extend the scope of Sinn Féin, [and] to get some intellectual, critical analysis of the concept of the Irish nation”. Coupled with his influence in the Societies and his joint membership of Sinn Féin and the IRA, Johnston took charge of the IRA’s Education programme in 1965. He quickly became a vocal proponent for the new leadership’s ostensible desire to, as he puts it: “give up the gun and go into politics”.<sup>116</sup>

In step with the establishment of the Wolfe Tone Societies and the leadership changes in both Sinn Féin and the IRA, Denis Foley became editor of *United Irishman* in 1962. A close ally of Goulding and two other “modernisers”, Sean Garland and the aforementioned Seamus Costello, under Foley’s watch, the paper increasingly focused on contemporary social and economic campaigns.<sup>117</sup> Inevitably, this resulted in a certain marginalisation of the grand narrative arc of 800 years of resistance to British occupation.

A young journalist on the fringes of the movement embodied some of the tensions at the heart of Irish republicanism in the 1960s. Deasún Breatnach was a founding member

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<sup>113</sup> Matt Treacy, author of perhaps the most comprehensive account of the republican movement during this period, has categorised these broad tendencies as “traditionalists” and “modernisers”, respectively. See: Treacy: *The IRA, 1956-69. Rethinking the Republic*, p. 16. Acknowledging these two broad tendencies is not to suggest that a mutual approach to social agitation and traditional military force were incompatible. See: Liam Cullinane: “‘A happy blend’? Irish republicanism, political violence and social agitation, 1962–69”, *Saothar*, vol. 35, 2010, pp. 49–65.

<sup>114</sup> Treacy: *The IRA, 1956–69. Rethinking the Republic*, p. 63.

<sup>115</sup> Roy H.W. Johnston: *Century of Endeavour. A biographical & autobiographical view of the Twentieth Century in Ireland* (Rev. ed.), Dublin, Tyndall Publications/Lilliput Press, 2006, pp. 167–171, p. 176.

<sup>116</sup> See: Treacy: *The IRA, 1956–69. Rethinking the Republic*, p. 48, pp. 57–58. Author interview with Roy Johnston (Dublin, 2017). As well as his influence in the Wolfe Tone Societies, Sinn Féin and the IRA, Johnston was also heavily involved in the republican movement’s Economic Independence Committee, Housing Action Committee, and *Comhar Linn* (a republican co-op organisation).

<sup>117</sup> Hanley; Millar: *The Lost Revolution*, pp. 75–76.

of the Wolfe Tone Societies, multi-linguist and occasional contributor to the *Irish Independent* under the pen name “Rex Mac Gall”. In April 1962, he began to contribute articles for *United Irishman*, many of which centred on his passionate advocacy for the Irish language.<sup>118</sup> Through his articles, Breatnach attempted to provoke philosophical debate and reappraisal of long-held Irish republican tenets and objectives. For instance, in an explainer next to one of his columns, published in September 1963, the reader was informed:

“The writer is not a member of any political organisation but is a Republican, disillusioned by 40 years of deceit, compromise and treason. He appeals here for an examination of issues, other than the fundamentals of Unity and Republicanism and the promises in the 1916 Proclamation and the democratic charter of the first Dáil, and asks that they be discussed realistically, without fear, as a prerequisite to the march of the nation in the unity that Tone, Rossa, Pearse and Connolly advocated. Readers’ views will be welcomed”.<sup>119</sup>

During the war, Breatnach served in the Irish Army’s “Local Defence Forces”. He had also been a member of Ailtirí na hAiséirghe (Architects of the Resurrection), a minor party with fascist leanings that sought to create a Christian-imbued totalitarian state with pan-Celtic ties to Welsh, Scottish and Breton nationalists.<sup>120</sup>

After World War II, he met his future wife, Maria de la Piedad Lucila (“Lucy”) Hellman de Menchaca whilst living in Madrid. Born in Bizkaia to a German father, “Lucy” had fled as a refugee during the Spanish Civil War to her father’s homeland. Conscripted for service in the German women’s land (farming) army, she had apparently “orchestrated her own escape” and made her way to Madrid in 1940. In 1950, the young couple made Ireland their home.<sup>121</sup>

That same year, the “39<sup>th</sup> Conference of the Interparliamentary Union” took place in the Irish capital. Manuel Irujo was among the representatives of the Spanish Republic, whose very presence provoked public protests in Dublin.<sup>122</sup> Under his pen name “Rex Mac Gall”, Breatnach wrote to Irujo to offer the Navarrese the hospitality of his home in

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<sup>118</sup> “The Materialist Concept of Patriotism”, *United Irishman*, April 1962; “Thoughts on the Irish language”, *United Irishman*, October 1962.

<sup>119</sup> “Realism”, *United Irishman*, September 1963.

<sup>120</sup> “Fógraí bháis. Deasún Breatnach”, *An Phoblacht/Irish Republican News*, 11.10.2007; Treacy: *The IRA, 1956–69. Rethinking the Republic*, p. 37, p. 64. For a comprehensive study of Ailtirí na hAiséirghe, its ideology, Celtic connections and references to Breatnach, see: R.M. Douglas: *Architects of the Resurrection: Ailtirí na hAiséirghe and the Fascist ‘New Order’ in Ireland*, Manchester, Manchester University Press, 2009 (specifically pp. 86–142, p. 231, p. 267–268, p. 271).

<sup>121</sup> “Who is Osgur Breatnach?”, <http://www.osgurbreatnach.com/osgur-breatnach/> (last accessed 27 May 2019).

<sup>122</sup> Whelan: *Ireland and Spain, 1939–55*, p. 228.

Dublin, “donde encontrara usted, no lo dude, amigos y calor familiar”. Furthermore, the Irishman looked forward to “poder abrazarle al cabo de tantos años de aislamiento”.<sup>123</sup> Irujo, who incidentally was “en relación directa con Eli Gallastegi” during his visit, was seemingly a little perplexed by Breatnach’s warm invitation. In a letter to a compatriot, the PNV stalwart remarked: “yo tengo algo confusas las señas de aquella periodista irlandesa, católica, republicana, que habla español y cuyo nombre no recuerdo”.<sup>124</sup> Whether as a result of living in Spain or his marriage to his Basque wife “Lucy”, Breatnach’s letter to Irujo illustrates a knowledge of, and warm disposition to, the Basques and their situation. In this sense, it is of little surprise that when Breatnach began to occasionally contribute to *United Irishman* in 1962, he would immediately incorporate contemporary language issues from the Spanish state (i.e., the plight of Catalan and Basque) as comparative references in his columns on Gaeilge, and broader Irish political, social and economic issues.<sup>125</sup>

Breatnach’s minor references to the Basque Country in the republican *United Irishman* were the first of their kind in the post-war era. They also dovetailed neatly with a broader prevailing emphasis on the political, linguistic, and cultural rights of small stateless European nations at the time.<sup>126</sup> This theme would spring up regularly in *United Irishman* throughout the 1960s.

Unsurprisingly, from a Sinn Féin perspective, there was a natural gravitational pull towards the other “Celtic” nations of Europe. Indeed, a Celtic League was set up in 1961 to foster cooperation and transnational solidarity between its members.<sup>127</sup> And while the Basque Country was certainly not a “Celtic” nation, as a western European stateless nation with its own struggling language, it generally fit into this schema.

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<sup>123</sup> “Letter from Rex Mac Gall [Deasún Breatnach] to Manuel Irujo”. Dated 31 August 1950. Unión Parlamentaria. IRUJO, K.00065,C.1. ANV-AA.

<sup>124</sup> “Letter from Manuel Irujo to Gondra”. Dated 04 September 1960. Unión Parlamentaria. IRUJO,K.00065,C.1. ANV-AA.

<sup>125</sup> For example, see: “The prospects for the Irish language”, *United Irishman*, May 1962; “The Irish language”, *United Irishman*, January 1963; “This is the moment of truth”, *United Irishman*, March 1963.

<sup>126</sup> Letamendia has referred to the emergence of “progressive” peripheral nationalisms in western Europe during the 1960s as a “third wave” of nationalist movements in Europe, following on from previous “royalist/reactive” and “populist waves”. See: Francisco Letamendia: *Game of Mirrors: Centre-Periphery National Conflicts*, Aldershot, Ashgate, 2000, pp. 54–56.

<sup>127</sup> For example, see: “Brittany Faces Question Of National Survival”, *United Irishman*, February 1960; “Growth of Welsh Nationalism”, *United Irishman*, October 1963; “Brittany: A Comparison With Ireland”, *United Irishman*, March 1964. The Celtic League was set up by leading members of the Welsh nationalist party Plaid Cymru (Party of Wales). The Breton nationalist Alan Heusaff, a veteran of the *Bezen Perrot* (Perrot Unit), was the League’s first General Secretary. Another Breton nationalist, Yann Fouéré, was a co-founder. Fouéré, who was granted Irish citizenship in the 1950s, was exonerated in 1955 of war-time collaboration allegations. See: Leach, *Fugitive Ireland*, p. 16, pp. 81–88, p. 106, pp. 124–127, p. 192.

In the August 1963 edition of *United Irishman*, the contemporary *political* situation in the Basque Country appeared in the newspaper for the first time. In a document sent directly to *United Irishman*, ETA detailed various allegations of torture that its members had suffered at the hands of Franco's regime. Among the allegations were reports of prisoner beatings to the point of unconsciousness (including that of Julen Madariaga), threats to family and friends, and insults of "incredible sadism" during interrogation. The article finished with the following editorial comment:

"Unfortunately, we have not the space to list the other allegations of torture which are contained in this document. Are these allegations true? The relationship between the methods allegedly used by the police in each case and the listing of names and addresses give one a picture of authenticity. And also, we have been learning so much of late about the ruthlessness of General Franco's dictatorial government that allegations like these do not seem out of place".

In hindsight, it is interesting to note *United Irishman's* measured and cautious response to ETA's allegations of torture. In treating the allegations as exactly that —*allegations*— the republican organ demonstrated an (understandable) guarded response to the hitherto unknown group, ETA. A wider lack of knowledge regarding the Basque Country may also be deduced from this article, given that the first line states: "The Basques are a Slavic nation in Northern Iberia".<sup>128</sup>

ETA's 1963 dossier of torture represents the first organisational contact between ETA (as the main modern articulation of radical Basque nationalism) and an organ of the Irish republican movement in the post-war era. At the time of the article's publication, Julen Madariaga was in Algeria seeking support from the Algerian revolutionary government.<sup>129</sup> Asked about the existence of any relationship channel between ETA and the IRA in the 1960s, Madariaga states that there was none to his knowledge. He does, however, concede that: "Sí, deseábamos tenerlos [relaciones]":

"No me acuerdo yo. Sí, deseábamos tenerlos. Sí, me acuerdo de eso. [...] No los había. De organización a organización no los había. No había todavía, pero si te puedo decir que deseábamos tenerlos. Deseábamos ya, en nuestro espíritu estaba el que algún día tendríamos que establecer una relación de organización a organización, eso sí".<sup>130</sup>

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<sup>128</sup> "Basques Accuse Franco of Terrorism", *United Irishman*, August 1963.

<sup>129</sup> "Julen de Madariaga", *Punto y Hora de Euskal Herria*, 18–24.08.1977.

<sup>130</sup> Author interview with Julen Madariaga (Sare, 2016).



His near-contemporary in the IRA, Roy Johnston, reflected a similar view in interview with this author: “I was aware of the existence of the Basques [in the 1960s], but I don’t remember any particular contacts”.<sup>131</sup>

Incidentally, the renowned Irish dramatist and former IRA volunteer Brendan Behan appears on a list of external contacts compiled by ETA during the early 1960s. It is quite possible that Behan received copies of *Zutik!* from the organisation’s office, which was located in Biarritz.<sup>132</sup>

ETA’s allegations of torture appeared in *United Irishman* as an indirect result of the attempted train derailment of 1961 and the wave of repression that had followed. Without exaggerating its importance, for Irish republicans this type of article would have offered another example of struggle for political, national, and cultural rights in western Europe that they could readily identify with — especially in Northern Ireland. That the Basques were “Celtic” or not hardly mattered. Their struggle had already begun to tentatively filter onto the pages of *United Irishman* via the stateless European nation critique.

### **Requiem for a revolution**

“En un lugar secreto, cercano a la aborrecida frontera, 30 jóvenes del IRA —según cifras del semanario ‘Time’—, únicos supervivientes de los 500 que iniciaron la campaña en 1956, enterraron los uniformes verde-olivo con hombreras tricolores en las que estaba escrita, en gaélico, la inscripción: ‘Luchadores de la Libertad’. Después enterraron también las pocas armas que les quedaban (y con ellas el corazón) en una emotiva ceremonia. El IRA frenaba así su carrera de violencia y se sentaba a esperar el juicio de la historia”.<sup>133</sup>

Three months after Operation Harvest (1956–1962) had come to an end, in an article titled “Requiem para el I.R.A.”, the dramatic vista of IRA volunteers interring their arms and uniforms was vividly reported in *Euzko-Gaztedi del Interior*. For the young *jeltzales*, the failure of the IRA’s campaign definitively illustrated once and for all that the gun in Irish politics was now obsolete. The reason: with Ireland and the UK seemingly set to join the European Economic Community (EEC), it was envisaged that partition would quickly fade into insignificance.<sup>134</sup> Reflecting this same analysis, Manuel Irujo penned an

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<sup>131</sup> Author interview with Roy Johnston (Dublin, 2017).

<sup>132</sup> Ricardo Zabala: *ETA. Una Historia en Imágenes, 1951–1978*, Tafalla, Txalaparta, 2015, p. 72. According to Ambrose Martin’s son, Eamonn, Brendan Behan’s most famous work, “The Quare Fellow” was finished at Gibbstown Castle. Brendan and Eamonn seemed to have had a friendship. If nothing else, it is *plausible* that Behan’s interest in the Basque case may have stemmed from either Eamonn, or his father, Ambrose. Brendan Behan died in 1964. See: Martin: “Brendan Behan’s Quare World”.

<sup>133</sup> “Réquiem para el I.R.A.”, *Gudari. Euzko-Gaztedi del Interior* (Caracas), May 1962, *Documentos Y*, vol. I, p. 517.

<sup>134</sup> *Ibid.*

article for *Alderdi* in which he quoted De Valera's own summation of Operation Harvest as an exercise in "violencia inútil".<sup>135</sup>

For the PNV, physical-force Irish republicanism was now a redundant and anachronistic politico-military ideology, at odds with the coming bright new European future. This analysis happened to chime with the *jeltzales'* own preferred vision of a federal Europe, made up of a patchwork of regions, nations, and peoples — as opposed to a club of European states.<sup>136</sup>

If the PNV considered the IRA to be effectively dead and buried, leading ideologues of ETA seemed to consider not only the IRA, but the Irish *nation* itself, as having suffered the same fate. The basis for this analysis was the plight of the Irish language, and more specifically, the aforementioned Euskara-based prism through which the fundamental essence of Irish nationhood tended to be gauged. According to ETA's most influential cultural nationalist *Txillardegi*, the corollary of the Irish lesson for the Basques was the following:

“Seamos realistas: ¿qué sería una Euzkadi erdeldún, sino otra Irlanda española? ¿Qué es la Rioja? Para qué queremos la independendencia? Para qué luchar por una Euzkadi independiente, y no por otra España u otra Francia simplemente, si no va a diferir en nada de España o Francia, y sí en todo de Euskal Herria?”<sup>137</sup>

The general thrust of *Txillardegi's* Irish critique also appeared in the landmark radical Basque nationalist text, “Vasconia”, written by Federico Krutwig and first published in 1963.

Throughout its 300 plus pages, Krutwig's “Vasconia” attempted to reconcile and conjoin the idea of Basque “National Liberation” with a Marxist-based analysis of “class struggle”. Given, however, that the Basque working class mainly consisted of Spanish immigrants, this was a problematic task. Krutwig's solution was to point towards the Basque bourgeoisie and its betrayal of the Basque nation through its collaboration with Spain — the colonial oppressor that was erasing the Basque Country from the inside out.

“Vasconia” not only managed to adeptly weave together a complete synopsis of all the ingrained ills in Basque society and their apparent panacea (armed struggle), but it also articulated a fundamental re-examination of what constituted the Basque nation and “Basqueness”.<sup>138</sup>

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<sup>135</sup> “La violencia inútil”, *Alderdi*, no. 180-181, March/April, 1962.

<sup>136</sup> Arrieta Alberdi: *Estación Europa: La política europeísta del PNV en el exilio (1945–1977)*, pp. 90–98.

<sup>137</sup> “Del patriotismo vasco al regionalismo norteño”, *Zutik!* (Caracas), no. 59, vol. IV, pp. 367–370.

<sup>138</sup> Douglas; Zulaika: “On the Interpretation of Terrorist Violence: ETA and the Basque Political Process”; Mees: *The Basque Contention*, p. 103.

Complementing the cultural nationalists' outlook, Krutwig conceptualised Euskara as the undergirding of the Basque nation. In this new schema, membership of the Basque nation was theoretically open to Spanish working-class immigrants — or at least those who learned Euskara and supported Basque national rights. The *quid pro quo* of this analysis, however, meant that the essence and survival of Basqueness was contingent on the health of the language and the inherent uniquely Basque mental patterns of thought that it bequeathed its speakers. It is therefore of little surprise that in looking to Ireland, de-Gaelicised politically for centuries, and with Gaeilge seemingly in terminal decline, Krutwig effectively pronounced the death of the Irish nation in “Vasconia”:

“[...] en Europa Occidental existía un pueblo que, habiendo luchado como leones durante siglos por alcantar [sic] la independencia nacional, tan pronto alcanzó la libertad de su patria, en realidad perdió la nación. Irlanda era este desastroso caso de un pueblo a quien la libertad para nada le ha servido, a no ser para desnacionalizarse más y más. [...] No había duda de que en toda Europa la base de la nacionalidad esta constituida por la personalidad que adquiere un pueblo y el deseo que tiene de conservar su idiosincrasia. Esta personalidad descansa casi siempre, cuando menos, preferentemente, en un idioma propio que estructura las relaciones mentales del pueblo que lo emplea. De aquí que en todas partes se considerase al idioma como el sostén y ligazón de la nacionalidad. Del idioma se deriva la mentalidad y de ésta la forma de actuar. Al pueblo que se le priva de su lengua se le altera la mentalidad”.<sup>139</sup>

In this Irish-Basque transnational schema, Krutwig (and *Txillardegi*) used the plight of Gaeilge and its implications vis-à-vis the Irish nation as a harrowing omen for what would await the Basque nation if some form of drastic action were not taken. As such, both men saw in Ireland a cautionary tale — *not* an emulative example.<sup>140</sup>

Krutwig had a lot more time for ETA's international contemporaries, such as Israel, Cyprus, and Algeria. Akin to these international cases, the new post-war generation of Basques (“los nuevos hombres”) had summoned up their own internal strength to resist and overthrow the Spanish colonial “yugo”:

“Esta generación vasquista tuvo que formarse sus propios ideales. Del exterior nunca le llegó ninguna savia nacionalista. La fuerza que este sentimiento tenía en el Pueblo Vasco a través de los siglos brotó de nuevo. Y los nuevos hombres buscaron su nutrición patriótica en el ejemplo de otros pueblos, de Israel, de Chipre,

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<sup>139</sup> Fernando Sarrailh de Ihartza [Federico Krutwig]. *Vasconia. Estudio dialéctico de una nacionalidad*, Buenos Aires, Norbait, s. a., 1963, p. 10. The text of Iker Gallastegi's 1961 Paris speech appeared as an annex to the first edition of *Vasconia*.

<sup>140</sup> During an interview published years later in *Punto y Hora de Euskal Herria*, Krutwig lamented what he saw as a Basque tendency to follow the Irish example, which “se daba más importancia a una especie de sentido cavernícola de tipo religioso, y todo lo que fuera cultura, se debaja de lado”. See: “Krutwig, un aristócrata de la revolución”, *Punto y Hora de Euskal Herria*, 16–31.01.1977.

Túnez, Argelia, Indochina, de los pueblos que sacudían el yugo del colonialismo”.<sup>141</sup>

As Ludger Mees notes in regard to Krutwig’s seminal text:

“[Krutwig’s] recourse to ideologues, ideas and concepts of anti-colonialism suggested that the Basques could learn from the experiences of the African and Asian movements of liberation. Nothing had to be invented. The strategies and tools for the fight against colonization were already available and only had to be picked up and adapted to the Spanish and Basque context”.<sup>142</sup>

Ireland’s long-dead revolutionaries, “interned” in their republican graves, had little room in this thesis.

### **An insurrection in Euskadi?**

In spring 1964, during the second part of ETA’s Third Assembly in Baiona, the group confirmed a “declaration of principles” from which a structure of “Hiruko” (activist cells), “Liberados” (full-time ETA activists) and Buruzagi (military leader) were put in place. While the position of “Buruzagi”, held by Madariaga, only lasted a little over a year, the “Hiruko” commandoes and “Liberados” became permanent fixtures in ETA’s military organisation. A key working paper “La Guerra Revolucionaria” also emerged from the assembly.<sup>143</sup>

“La Guerra Revolucionaria” went some way to articulating the actual requirements for a successful armed campaign in the Basque Country. This was something “Vasconia” had lacked. Early drafts specifically identified an urban campaign akin to that of Irgun as optimal for the Basque context:

“El ‘Irgum’ [sic] en Israel se compañía de 20 hombres y de 40 en sus momentos de apogeo y no obstante tuvo en jaque a todo un ejército inglés. [...] ETA afirma, y volvemos a decirlo, rotundamente la posibilidad. La guerra revolucionaria tiene unos principios abstractos que se deben cumplir siempre; son de validez universal. ‘Ahora bien, la guerra revolucionaria descendida de lo abstracto a lo concreto adquiere una determinada según sean las condiciones geográficas, políticas, humanas, etc., del país en que se aplique (Ibidem, pg. 25 [cuaderno-20]). De estas circunstancias concretas se concluye que ‘la guerra revolucionaria ha de comenzar en Euzkadi por los centros urbanos’. ‘En este punto no hay que dejarse engañar por el curso que siguió la guerra revolucionaria en países como Indochina, China, Túnez, Cuba, Argelia y otros países (Ibidem, p. 25-6 [cuaderno-20]). El caso que más se parece al nuestro es el de Israel. Para ETA, pues, la guerra revolucionaria es factible y con posibilidades reales de éxito en Euzkadi.<sup>144</sup>

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<sup>141</sup> Sarrailh de Ihartza [Krutwig]: *Vasconia*, p. 9.

<sup>142</sup> Mees: *The Basque Contention*, p. 103.

<sup>143</sup> “Notas a la III Asamblea”, *Documentos Y*, vol. III, pp. 123–126.

<sup>144</sup> “La Guerra Revolucionaria”, *Zutik!* (Caracas), no. 2, *Documentos Y*, Vol. II, pp. 505–508.

Closely resembling “La Guerra Revolucionaria”, another contemporary ETA document soon came to the fore: “La insurrección en Euskadi”. Pulling together military strategies, tactics and structures borrowed from Vietnam, Israel, and in particular the Algerian FLN, “La insurrección en Euskadi” stands as an explicit testimony to the influence of “Third World” revolutionary thinking on ETA — even if conditions in the Basque Country bore little resemblance to these theatres of war.<sup>145</sup>

“La insurrección en Euskadi” also subscribed to Krutwig’s ideas regarding the Basque bourgeoisie and its betrayal of the working class. Indeed, ETA was already projecting its future domestic allies and enemies, the latter of whom would become apparent through their self-exclusion from the militant group’s overarching “IDEA”:

“Si todos los pobladores de Euzkadi no son abertzales y partidarios de la justicia social es porque no son libres, porque no han tenido la oportunidad de conocer, de adoptar y de amar nuestra IDEA. No debemos excluir a nadie ‘a priori’. Nuestra IDEA hará de frontera natural. Nuestros enemigos se autoexcluirán ellos mismos. Nuestro combate no nos puede conducir más que a la victoria (definitiva) a través de derrotas (momentáneas), pero con exclusión de todo posible compromiso. Todo [sic] clase de consideraciones se hacen *secundarias* con respecto a nuestra victoria. No cuenta más que la meta final”.<sup>146</sup>

ETA’s class-based analysis of “National Liberation” in the Basque Country would have two consequences. First, as we shall see, it would lead to a number of splits in the organisation and the repeated triumph of the more militant nationalist sectors at the expense of those on the left considered to be too accommodative of Spain (“españolistas”). Second, in representing the PNV as passive, bourgeois and treacherous, the gap between radical and moderate Basque nationalism naturally widened. Indeed, at the Third Assembly, ETA called for nothing less than the PNV’s destruction: “PNV: Se aprueba unánimemente que la labor del PNV es contraria a los intereses de la Liberación Nacional. Se aprueba, por tanto, ir a su destrucción. Tácticas diversas”.<sup>147</sup> Since ETA’s founding five years earlier, the group had evidently travelled a long way from its initial warm approach to the late Lehendakaki Aguirre.

Suggestions of possible PNV-ETA collaboration, which had often appeared in the Francoist press, were dispelled in a March 1964 *Alderdi* editorial. Highlighting the *jeltzales* apparent “70 años de limpia historia”, the PNV organ took aim at the party’s sharpest critic and new *bête noire*, Federico Krutwig:

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<sup>145</sup> K. de Zumbeltz (pseud. José Luis Zalbide): “Cuadernos ETA – La insurrección en Euskadi”, Bayonne, Goiztiri, 1964. Reproduced in *Documentos Y*, Vol. III, pp. 21–70.

<sup>146</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>147</sup> “Notas a la III Asamblea”, *Documentos Y*, vol. III, pp. 123–126.

“Por simple seriedad política, y a fin de que las cosas quedan claras y que nadie se llame a engaño, creemos necesario desmentir estas falsedades y declarar públicamente que la organización conocida con las siglas de E.T.A. ni es núcleo activista, ni sección terrorista de nuestro Partido, ni tiene con éste ningún lazo de disciplina. [...] Desde hace algún tiempo, se han intentado o realizado en nuestro País, algunos actos que entran dentro de la denominación genérica de terrorismo. Estos actos han tenido su apología y excitación en el capítulo dedicado a la guerra revolucionaria del libro ‘Vasconia’, escrito por un ‘plastikolari’ literario, cuyos adjetivos y falsedades, recuerdan el lenguaje y el estilo de la propaganda de los mejores tiempos de Hitler y Stalin, quien tiene la osadía de atacar al Partido Nacionalista Vasco y al Gobierno de Euzkadi, nada menos que en el nombre del euskera, en nombre de la nación vasca y en nombre del derecho del pueblo vasco a su libertad, siendo su otra víctima predilecta, nada menos que el Clero Vasco. A la vista de ello, y de rápida y reiterada utilización que de la obra citada están haciendo las autoridades franquistas, caben todas las hipótesis sobre los móviles que el autor y los promotores de la edición se han propuesto conseguir, o sobre a quién sirven efectivamente estos nuevos discípulos de Mao-Tse-Tung”.<sup>148</sup>

If ETA’s approach was anathematic to the PNV, perhaps ETA could, and indeed should, look to develop other relations? At the Third Assembly in Baiona, ETA decided to initiate contact with “fuerzas no vascas”. These “relaciones exteriores” would be orchestrated by “un elemento de ETA de Euzkadi Norte”. Whether these forces were envisaged as coming from within the Spanish state (most likely Catalan and Galician nationalists) or beyond, there was only one simple and non-negotiable prerequisite:

“Condición sine qua non para tratar con [fuerzas no vascas]: que admitan el derecho de Euzkadi a su independencia”.<sup>149</sup>

### 3.3. Divergence and convergence

From Julen Madariaga’s research in the early 1950s to the publication of “La insurrección en Euzkadi”, “Third World” (and occasionally Irish Revolutionary Period-tinged) analyses had helped in a small yet significant way to shape and demarcate Ekin-ETA’s ideological and strategic path. From 1964 onwards, there appeared additional dimensions to ETA’s international scope.<sup>150</sup> The first of these would draw ETA closer into the previously outlined western European stateless nation critique.

Prior to the Spanish Civil War, Jagi-Jagi had occasionally cited and lauded Brittany’s political and cultural struggle against the highly centralised French state.<sup>151</sup> In 1964, a

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<sup>148</sup> “Aclarando Confusiones”, March 1964, *Documentos Y*, vol. III pp. 114–115.

<sup>149</sup> “Notas a la III Asamblea”, *Documentos Y*, vol. III, pp. 123–126.

<sup>150</sup> According to a report compiled by the Spanish Ministerio del Interior in 1984, ETA first initiated its activities abroad in 1964 — although this should be qualified on account of Madariaga’s earlier trip(s) to Algeria for assistance. See: “Un comando de ETA intentó asesinar en 1983 al ministro de Defensa de El Salvador, según un informe del Gobierno”, *El País*, 13.01.1984.

<sup>151</sup> For numerous references, see: Ugalde Zubiri: *La acción exterior del nacionalismo vasco*, pp. 394–395,



number of young left-leaning Breton nationalists founded Unvaniezh Demokratel Breizh/Breton Democratic Union (UDB).<sup>152</sup> Around the same time, limited coverage of Breton issues began to appear in ETA's *Zutik!*, including commentary on Basque news content published by the UDB's propaganda organ.<sup>153</sup> Sporadic notices on Scottish and Welsh political and cultural issues also began to crop up in *Zutik!* If coverage from Brittany, Scotland, and Wales, transmitted an underlining message that the Basques were not alone in their struggle, then reproductions of news articles from mainstream European media that were critical of Francoist repression of the Basque people, reinforced this sentiment.<sup>154</sup>

Secondly, ETA began to take a more direct approach to propagating the Basque cause to the outside world. Pre-dating more recent forms of izquierda abertzale activity, ETA militants reportedly handed out information to English, French and Spanish tourists in Donostia in 1965.<sup>155</sup>

A third external initiative by ETA came with less pre-planning. In late 1964, four of the organisation's key leaders: Madariaga, *Txillardegi*, Del Valle and Eguigaray were expelled from Iparralde.<sup>156</sup> While all four pleaded for asylum in Belgium, only *Txillardegi* was successful (Del Valle went to Venezuela; Madariaga and Eguigaray to Algeria). In Brussels, *Txillardegi* took on the role of coordinating with the group's disparate membership. A nascent "Federación de ETA en el Extranjero", which spread across the Americas (Venezuela, Mexico, Argentina), to Algeria, Paris, and Brussels, was born.<sup>157</sup>

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p. 463. Early twentieth-century Basque nationalist interest in Breton nationalism was generally reciprocated. See: Ludger Mees: "The *Völkisch* Appeal: Nazi Germany, the Basques and the Bretons" in Sandra Ott (ed.): *War, Exile, Justice, and Everyday Life, 1936–1946*, Reno, University of Nevada Press, 2011, pp. 251–284. Brittany's parliament last sat in Rennes in 1789. The incoming revolutionary French National Constituent Assembly abolished its powers and divided the territory into five separate *départements*.

<sup>152</sup> While the UDB sought cultural, linguistic, and political autonomy for Brittany, the group's main focus was to "gain recognition as a left-wing organization". M. Nicholas: *Histoire du mouvement Breton*, Paris, Syroze, 1982, p. 308. Cited in: Frans Schrijver: *Regionalism After Regionalisation: Spain, France and the United Kingdom*, Amsterdam, Amsterdam University Press, 2006, p. 212.

<sup>153</sup> See, for instance: "Noticias del extranjero", *Zutik Berriak*, 13.12.1963, *Documentos Y*, vol. III, p. 15; "Mesa Redonda de Zutik", *Zutik!*, no. 19 (Aberri Eguna), *Documentos Y*, vol. III, p. 210–214; "Noticias del extranjero", *Zutik Berriak*, 08.05.1964, *Documentos Y*, vol. III, p. 334.

<sup>154</sup> For examples, see: "Noticias del extranjero", *Zutik!*, 13.03.1964, *Documentos Y*, vol. III, pp. 326–327; "En la prensa extranjera", *Zutik!*, 30.05.1964, *Documentos Y*, vol. III, pp. 337–338; "La prensa internacional comenta...", *Zutik!*, no. 44 – Junio de 1964 (Caracas), *Documentos Y*, pp. 402–403.

<sup>155</sup> "Noticias de Euzkadi", *Zutik Berriak*, 30.09.1965, *Documentos Y*, vol. IV, p.p. 142–143.

<sup>156</sup> "Prologo al volumen III", *Documentos Y*, vol. III, pp. 3–4.

<sup>157</sup> Sometimes referred to as a "Federación Exterior de ETA". "Nota General a los informes entre el Comité Ejecutivo del Exterior y el Comité Ejecutivo de la organización. Años 1965–1966", *Documentos Y*, vol. IV, p. 394.

Under the pseudonym of “Jean”, *Txillardeg*i carried out his work in Brussels as part of the “Federación”.<sup>158</sup> From the scant documentation available in “Documentos Y”, the Donostiarra was keen to extend ETA’s organisational and propaganda structure outside of Euskal Herria and the traditional Basque émigré communities of the Americas. For instance, a proposal was made for an English version of *Zutik!* that would contain “las noticias fundamentales”. Another suggested that “se restablecerá contacto con Manlius, y se reorganizará la delegación de Gran Bretaña”. Of most relevance to this study was *Txillardeg*i’s desire to establish an “emisora” in either Ireland or Great Britain. This, he surmised, as being the principal objective of the “Federación”.

“Una emisora sigue siendo el objetivo principal de la Federación. Se tantearán las posibilidades en Irlanda y Gran Bretaña. Se propone como objetivo inmediato el objetivo de UN TECNICO en radio capaz de propulsar esta iniciativa”.<sup>159</sup>

In October 1965, a meeting took place in Paris between “miembros del Interior y (Federación de ETA) del extranjero”. A record of the “determinaciones” reached was drafted by a “J” – perhaps shorthand for *Txillardeg*i’s “Jean” alias. According to “J”, it was agreed that ETA’s international cells carry out operations against Spain’s diplomatic missions in the event of an *etarra* death:

“Las cosas se están poniendo dentro un nivel duro. El ejecutivo ha decidido que, en todos los puntos del mundo donde hay más de tres etarras (o tres incluso) se deben preparar hirukos, con el material correspondiente, que tendrán como misión, sin nuevas órdenes complementarias, el ataque a las embajadas respectivas en cuanto se produzca un suceso grave. El Ejecutivo considera que, en cualquier momento, puede producirse un choque sangriento que cueste la vida a un etarra; y que en tal caso, sin nuevo aviso, las embajadas deben ser atacadas en los diversos países en que la Federación Exterior tiene fuerzas y militantes. Esta decisión es secreta. Las medidas correspondientes deben ser tomadas inmediatamente”.<sup>160</sup>

In the Euskara version of this document, London is mentioned as one of the federation’s hubs. Coupled with *Txillardeg*i’s “emisora” proposal, the “J” document would seem to indicate that by late 1965, an ETA Hiruko was already in place in Britain, and that the organisation was at least interested in developing some sort of presence in Ireland.

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<sup>158</sup> Sullivan: *ETA and Basque nationalism*, p. 59 (footnote 85).

<sup>159</sup> “Federación ETA-Exterior”, *Documentos Y*, vol. IV, pp. 397–398. A once-off English edition of *Zutik!* was eventually produced on the occasion of the Aberri Eguna in 1968. See: *Zutik!* March 1968, *Documentos Y*, vol. VII, pp. 197–208.

<sup>160</sup> “ETA-Atzerriko Alkartasuna (Erabakiak)”, *Documentos Y*, vol. IV, pp. 407–409.

## Between green fields and red flags (part I)

Back in Euskal Herria, at ETA's Fourth Assembly (1965), the organisation debated and distilled the previous years' studies of external insurrectionary models. A strategic loop of "action-repression-action" was the agreed outcome. This model essentially envisaged ETA stepping up its actions against the regime and invoking state repression against "the masses". Repression would then, in theory, increase support for ETA, its subsequent attacks, and its revolutionary objectives.<sup>161</sup>

Broad support for "action-repression-action" went some way to papering over the ideological cleavages within the organisation. In the vacuum that had followed the leadership exile in late 1964, control of ETA had swung towards leftist elements on the *interior*. This group had effectively taken over the running of *Zutik!*, pushing ETA towards a more explicitly Marxist analysis of working class struggle at the expense of the national issue.<sup>162</sup> Not everybody was pleased with the shift in emphasis.

Throughout late 1965 and into 1966, tensions mounted within the organisation over its ideological direction. ETA's cultural nationalists/intellectuals and *tercermundista* tendencies accused the more Marxist-oriented "españolitas" of attempting to undermine and liquidate the organisation. Something eventually had to give. During ETA's Fifth Assembly, held over 1966 and 1967, the "liquidationists" were dismissed from the organisation.

In an attempt to mollify some of the tensions that had arisen between ETA's national and class positions, a concept referred to as the Pueblo Trabajador Vasco (PTV) was also introduced during the Fifth Assembly. The PTV, or the "Basque Working People", was to be ETA's revolutionary vanguard. Given its slightly ambiguous parameters, working-class immigrants were usually included or excluded from the PTV depending on their (Basque) nationalist convictions. Meanwhile, at an organisational level, ETA was restructured and streamlined into four autonomous fronts: economic, cultural, political, and military.<sup>163</sup>

The *tercermundista* analysis of José Antonio Etxebarrieta, the Bilbaino who had fled to Iparralde in 1960 and become a close associate of both Iker and Eli Gallastegi, proved

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<sup>161</sup> Jáuregui: "ETA: Orígenes y evolución ideológica y política" (specifically, pp. 228–229).

<sup>162</sup> "Prologo al volumen III", *Documentos Y*, vol. III, pp. 3–4; Sullivan: *ETA and Basque Nationalism*, p. 46.

<sup>163</sup> Conversi: *The Basques, the Catalans and Spain*, pp. 97–98; Luciano Rincón: *ETA (1974–1984)*, Barcelona, Plaza & Janes Editores, S.A. 1985, pp. 86–92; Sullivan: *ETA and Basque Nationalism*, pp. 55–62.

influential throughout the Fifth Assembly period.<sup>164</sup> And while the Irish case did not necessarily fit neatly into the “Third World” schema, instructive lessons from Ireland continued to be occasionally employed in the group’s literature:

“El siglo de las nacionalidades, el siglo XIX, ha pasado ya. El siglo XX, siglo de los movimientos nacionalistas y de las aspiraciones minoritarias finalizará pronto su segundo tercio. El problema nacional vasco, en tanto que, puesto a la luz pública, lleva ya siglo y cuarto de existencia, con tres derrotas militares en su haber; poco tiempo si se compara con los ocho siglos de guerra continuada que Irlanda entabló para no llegar a alcanzar más que la mitad corta de sus aspiraciones. Mucho tiempo en cambio si tenemos en cuenta que Argelia ha conseguido los objetivos nacionales en la mitad de tiempo y que otros pueblos como Chipre, India, Marruecos, etc., han liquidado su problema en un corto período de tiempo”.<sup>165</sup>

Similarly, in *Txillardegí’s* cultural periodical *Branka* (“un terreno semi-ETA [...] triligüe, abertzale, intelectual y progresista”), analogies were drawn from Irish-British history to attack the “tesis del anti-vasquismo ‘izquierdista’”. In this analogy, the Marxist “españolistas” focus on class issues was akin to a wilful ignorance of the national element in Ireland’s relations with Britain:

“Según *Arragoa* el problema vasco no es *frente* a España (no digamos frente a Francia...), sino dentro de España [...]. Esta es exactamente la línea de muchos Zutik-FLP a lo largo del año 1965: no hay problema *nacional vasco*, sino problema de *democracia en España*. Traduzcamos: no existe problema nacional irlandés, sino problema de democracia en Gran Britania.”.<sup>166</sup>

The expelled leftists of ETA soldiered on as ETA-Berri (New ETA), incurring the wrath of their former comrades. In 1972, they morphed into Euskadiko Mugimendu Komunista (EMK), before being absorbed into the state-wide, Movimiento Comunista.

## **Between green fields and red flags (part II)**

Ever since the climax of Operation Harvest and the change of leadership in 1962, the “traditionalist” and “modernising” factions within the Irish republican movement had *both* steadily moved towards leftist positions<sup>167</sup> — albeit the former less so than the latter. Despite this shared move towards the left, tensions had only increased. As Treacy identifies, one of the major differences between the two tendencies was that each side advocated a more socially conscious and active grassroots form of republicanism from

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<sup>164</sup> Garmendia: “ETA: Nacimiento, Desarrollo y Crisis (1959–1978)”, p. 127; Sullivan: *ETA and Basque Nationalism*, p. 51.

<sup>165</sup> “Del Pueblo Vasco”, *Zutik*, no. 20, *Documentos Y*, vol. III, p. 218.

<sup>166</sup> “La evolución del imperialismo español en euzkadi”, *Branka*, no. 6, *Documentos Y*, vol. V, pp. 306–321 (specifically p. 310).

<sup>167</sup> White: *Ruairí Ó Brádaigh*, p. 336.

two markedly different starting points. Thus, while the traditionalists tended to be influenced by 1960s Christian social doctrine, the outlook of the modernisers tended to be more based on the core ideology and tenets of socialism itself and its notions of development and modernisation.<sup>168</sup>

Another point of contention was the modernisers apparent running down of the IRA. Traditionalists suspected that this was a ploy to move towards more radical socialist and political policies, and the eventual creation of a National Liberation Front alongside the CPI and other leftist forces. Even more worrying from the traditionalist perspective was the view that British communists held major influence over the modernisers and their agenda. Long-held suspicions that Goulding and Johnston were, in fact, soviet infiltrators, only increased this contention.<sup>169</sup>

The divergence between republican “modernisers” and “traditionalists” also partially manifested itself in international perspectives. In the view of Treacy, the modernisers tended to more consciously portray themselves as being part of a great arc of worldwide social change.<sup>170</sup> Tensions also surfaced in regard to the progressively critical and vocal position taken up by *United Irishman* against the United States’ involvement in Vietnam. This stance went against the traditional grain of Irish-America, which was still the most prominent source of funding for Irish republicanism in the 1960s.<sup>171</sup> There was more cross-tendency consensus regarding the struggles of the other Celtic nations, whose presence in *United Irishman* steadily increased in the late-1960s.<sup>172</sup>

The 50<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the 1916 Rising presented an opportunity to cement some of the transnational links that had coalesced around the Celtic League in recent years. On Easter Sunday, visiting Breton, Welsh and Flemish nationalists marched through Dublin in a “Republican parade” from Custom House quay to Glasnevin cemetery. To their

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<sup>168</sup> Treacy: *The IRA, 1956–69. Rethinking the Republic*, pp. 29–32, p. 42. For a study of the utilisation of Catholic teaching by both ETA and the “Provisional” IRA to legitimise their armed campaigns, see: Nicola Rooney: *Violent Nationalism in Catholic Communities: The Provisional IRA and ETA*, Trinity College Dublin (PhD Dissertation).

<sup>169</sup> Patterson: *The Politics of Illusion* (2<sup>nd</sup> ed.), p. 119; Treacy: *The IRA, 1956–69. Rethinking the Republic*, pp. 120–127. As far back as 1962, the *United Irishman* had to deny even the faintest of associations with communism. See: “No Link With Communism”, *United Irishman*, July 1962.

<sup>170</sup> Treacy: *The IRA, 1956–69. Rethinking the Republic*, p. 32, p. 51.

<sup>171</sup> According to Treacy, most of the IRA’s finances throughout the 1960s still came from the United States. See: Treacy: *The IRA, 1956–69. Rethinking the Republic*, p. 13.

<sup>172</sup> For example, see: “Bretons Fear Common Market”, *United Irishman*, October 1967; “Welsh language movement sets the pace”, *United Irishman*, November 1967; “The Breton”, *United Irishman*, December 1967; “Free Wales Army”, *United Irishman*, March 1968; “Cultural Revolution in Wales”, *United Irishman*, May 1968; “Widespread arrests in Brittany”, *United Irishman*, April 1969; “Wales Defiled”, *United Irishman*, July 1969; “Appeal from Wales”, *United Irishman*, July 1969.

disappointment, however, they were (officially) curtailed from participating in the state parade. Not unlike Basque nationalists' unrequited overtures to Éamon De Valera in the 1930s, the 1966 commemorations illustrated how perceptions of Ireland as a *bone fide* champion of small stateless nations sometimes jarred with reality.<sup>173</sup>

One prominent Breton nationalist who partook in the commemoration was Yann Goulet. Availing of various contacts, Goulet had made his way to Ireland, via Wales, after the liberation of France from the Nazis. Accused of war-time collaboration, he was subsequently sentenced to death by a French court *in absentia*.<sup>174</sup> Living just outside Dublin in the seaside town of Bray (Bré), Goulet's home, for much of the 1960s, served as the official "letterbox" for a new revolutionary Breton group: Front de Libération de la Bretagne (FLB).

Founded in 1963, and taking inspiration from the rebels of the Irish Revolutionary Period, the FLB commenced an armed campaign in 1966, attacking administrative buildings, installations and statues of the French state in Brittany.<sup>175</sup> As we shall see in chapter four, a handful of joint statements between the FLB, the "Provisional" IRA and ETA were signed in the early 1970s.

Focusing out for a moment from the principal actors of this study, the 50<sup>th</sup> anniversary commemoration of the 1916 Rising also indirectly led to a far more chilling series of events on the streets of Belfast. Convinced that the IRA were to set to launch a new campaign to coincide with the 50<sup>th</sup> anniversary, a loyalist paramilitary group named the Ulster Volunteer Force (UVF) carried out three unprovoked sectarian-motivated killings in Belfast across the summer of 1966.<sup>176</sup> With tensions already escalating, the 1966 murders were an unnerving harbinger of the "Troubles" that would soon engulf Northern Ireland.

### **Boiling point**

"In Britain everyone over the age of 21 has the vote, but this is not so in Northern Ireland. I insist that Northern Ireland is an integral part of the United Kingdom. The people there are British subjects and are entitled to the same rights and privileges as are possessed by any other persons living in these islands. To perpetuate its own majority the Unionist Party in Northern Ireland has devised an electoral system which for local government purposes can give six votes to one person and yet deny a single vote to another. This is 1966, and if true democracy is to operate in these islands it is time that the procedure in Northern Ireland was abolished. Not only

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<sup>173</sup> "We Remembered", *United Irishman*, May 1966; Leach: *Fugitive Ireland*, p. 188, p. 196.

<sup>174</sup> "The Breton from Bray who carved a career", *Irish Times*, 04.09.1999.

<sup>175</sup> Leach: *Fugitive Ireland*, p. 204.

<sup>176</sup> Moloney: *A Secret History of the IRA* (2<sup>nd</sup> ed.), pp. 61–62.



does it deny a vote to a person who does not own a home; from this root stems all the other social evils. If a Person does not own a home, he does not have a local government vote, and if the Party In Power considers him to be an enemy or an anti-Unionist it will ensure that he will not get a home".<sup>177</sup>

In the mid-1960s, after decades of mobilisation, black communities across the USA began to see an end to systemic institutional discrimination and segregated spheres of public life. This movement had a profound effect on the Catholic/nationalist community in Northern Ireland, and in particular, the younger and better educated post-war generation.<sup>178</sup>

Systematically discriminated against politically, culturally, and economically within Northern Ireland since its inception, northern Catholics and nationalists now started to demand "full British rights" from the same state that had effectively excluded them.<sup>179</sup> First mooted in 1966, the Northern Ireland Civil Rights Association (NICRA) formed as a broad parish of northern nationalists, socialists, professionals, republicans and student activists who sought to put pressure on the Belfast administration precisely to these ends. The NICRA's most significant campaigns were to centre on demands for universal franchise and equal access to social housing.<sup>180</sup>

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<sup>177</sup> Extract from Gerry Fitt's maiden speech in the British House of Commons (25.04.1966) as a Republican Labour Party MP for West Belfast. See: <http://eamonmallie.com/2016/04/seeing-through-a-shut-eye/> (last accessed 29 September 2019).

<sup>178</sup> See: Brian Dooley: *Black and Green. The Fight for Civil Rights in Northern Ireland and Black America*, Chicago, Pluto Press, 1998. The introduction of free education across the UK in 1947 (Education Act) led to a new post-war generation of young, educated Catholics and nationalists in Northern Ireland, many of whom became leading voices in Northern Ireland's civil rights movement.

<sup>179</sup> Cruise O'Brien: *Ancestral Voices*, pp. 157–158. For instance, many majority-nationalist areas of Northern Ireland were redrawn ("gerrymandered") electorally to maintain unionist control of councils, even when the latter was in a minority. This was compounded by the denial of voting rights to non-ratepayers (people who did not own their own property or who did not rent from the local council) and the allocation of additional votes to commercial entities. Given that a Catholic was twice as likely to be in poverty than a Protestant, these voting arrangements further skewed political benefits towards unionists and marginalised nationalists. The most infamous example of structural inequality was in the city of Derry, where a large nationalist majority population was controlled by a unionist council. At a security level, the RUC was overwhelmingly Protestant, while the part-time volunteer force, the 'B-Specials' were exclusively so. As Moloney surmises: "Anti-Catholicism was built into the state ideology and promoted by its leaders". Moloney: *A Secret History of the IRA* (2<sup>nd</sup> ed.), p. 42.

<sup>180</sup> Ever since Sinn Féin had been banned in Northern Ireland in 1958, the political body of the republican movement north of the border coalesced around a number of *ad hoc* "Republican Clubs". The NICRA was first proposed at a meeting in Derry, 1966. Liam McMillen, Commanding Officer of the IRA's Belfast Brigade and Vice-President of the Republican Clubs, sat on the NICRA's first steering committee. See: <https://cain.ulster.ac.uk/events/crights/nicra/nicra781.htm> (last accessed 31 July 2019). Roy Johnston was also a key figure in the early stages of the civil rights movement. See: English: *Armed Struggle*, pp. 90–91. Niall Ó Dochartaigh notes that: "At the peak of its influence the civil rights movement was identified with two goals: reform of the franchise ('one man, one vote') and an end to discrimination in housing and employment". See: Niall Ó Dochartaigh: "What Did the Civil Rights Movement Want? Changing Goals and Underlying Continuities in the Transition from Protest to Violence" in Lorenzo Bosi, Gianluca de Fazio (eds.): *The Troubles in Northern Ireland and Theories of Social Movements*, Amsterdam, Amsterdam University Press, 2017, pp. 33–52 (quote on p. 35).

If the US civil rights campaign had provided an additional external prism through which republicans, as part of the NICRA, could frame their struggle, in May 1968 Paris became the latest epicentre for what would be considered *ex-post* as a major revolutionary period.

Events in Paris 1968 encouraged a greater understanding and appreciation of some of the common transnational denominators of revolt (e.g., anti-authoritarianism, anti-imperialism, anti-capitalism) across the western world. It also provided a broader revolutionary frame to the increasingly tense situations in Northern Ireland and the Basque Country.<sup>181</sup>

These were the macro trends that formed the backdrop to an international congress held in 1968 on the mother of all contemporary national liberation movements: Vietnam. Held in Berlin, West Germany, both ETA and the IRA sent representatives to the congress. This is the first documentary evidence of likely IRA and ETA contact, notwithstanding the real possibility that this may have occurred earlier.<sup>182</sup>

On the occasion of the 1968 Aberri Eguna, ETA published a new manifesto. Surveying the situation in the Basque Country and lamenting the “violencia cotidiana” and “tortura” of the Spanish police, the organisation remarked ominously: “para nadie es un secreto que dificilmente saldremos de 1968 sin algún muerto”.<sup>183</sup>

In June, ETA’s hitherto mainly propaganda-led war against the Francoist regime turned violent when the police officer José Pardines and ETA member Francisco Javier (*Txabi*) Etxebarrieta (José Antonio’s younger brother) were killed in related incidents within a matter of hours.<sup>184</sup>

Another action followed two months later. In August, a police superintendent known for his cruel and torturous interrogations, Melítón Manzanás, was gunned down as he entered his living quarters in Donostia. As one contemporary British newspaper put it, the killing of Manzanás “brought the pot to the boil”.<sup>185</sup>

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<sup>181</sup> Chris Reynolds: “The Collective European Memory of 1968. The Case of Northern Ireland”, *Etudes irlandaises*, 36-1, 2011, pp. 73–90. Muro: *Ethnicity and Violence: The Case of Radical Basque Nationalism*, pp. 102–103; Treacy: *The IRA, 1956–69. Rethinking the Republic*, p. 6, p. 132.

<sup>182</sup> Manuel Seitenbecher: “The movement of 1968 in Germany between National Revolution and European Identity”, available at: [https://www.academia.edu/1639368/The\\_movement\\_of\\_1968\\_in\\_Germany\\_between\\_National\\_Revolution\\_and\\_European\\_Identity](https://www.academia.edu/1639368/The_movement_of_1968_in_Germany_between_National_Revolution_and_European_Identity) (last accessed 30 July 2019).

<sup>183</sup> “Manifiesto”, *Documentos Y*, vol. VII, pp. 471–475.

<sup>184</sup> Casquete: “Etxebarrieta, Txabi”; Fernández Soldevilla, Domínguez Iribarren (coords.): *Pardines. cuando ETA empezó a matar*.

<sup>185</sup> “Why we kill – by Basque terrorists”, *Sunday Times*, 11.08.1968.

States of exception and the suspension of *habeus corpus* in the already “traitorous” provinces of Bizkaia and Gipuzkoa ensured that not only suspected ETA militants but vast swathes of the Basque people would be subject to the heavy-handed response of the regime.<sup>186</sup> In the meantime, ETA cells in Hegoalde were swiftly broken up by Spanish police and the organisation’s leaders detained or exiled. By April 1969, every key ETA leader based on the Spanish side of the border had been neutralised one way or another. Moreover, sixteen militants accused of implication in Manzanar’s murder faced collective trial by military jury.<sup>187</sup> Almost as soon as it had been initiated, ETA’s much-theorised strategy of action-repression-action had ground to a shuddering halt.

In Northern Ireland, simmering tensions rose sharply when a planned civil rights march through Derry was broken up and baton-charged by the Royal Ulster Constabulary (RUC) in October 1968. Belatedly recognising the need for structural reform, the Northern Ireland Prime Minister Captain Terence O’Neill unveiled a series of proposals that he hoped would ameliorate the civil right movement’s demands. “Ulster” he said, “stands at the Crossroads”.<sup>188</sup>

On New Year’s Day 1969, a planned four-day “Long March” from Belfast to Derry, inspired by the famous “Selma to Montgomery” marches in America, was attacked by loyalist forces as it entered the “Maiden” city of Derry.<sup>189</sup> In the meantime, O’Neill’s reform agenda was being bitterly resisted by a significant minority of the Ulster Unionist Party (UUP). His decision to face down this internal opposition by calling a snap election in February 1969 would prove to be a fateful one. While 23 “Pro-O’Neill” unionist candidates were returned, 13 “Anti-O’Neill” unionists scuppered the prime minister’s ability to implement his reform agenda. In the prime minister’s own constituency, a young firebrand named Ian Paisley only narrowly failed to take his seat. O’Neill resigned soon after, to be replaced by James Chichester-Clark.<sup>190</sup>

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<sup>186</sup> A state of emergency was declared in Gipuzkoa and a “Decree on Military Rebellion, Banditry and Terrorism”. See: Woodworth: *Dirty War, Clean Hands*, p. 38. In the wake of Txabi Etxebarrieta’s death, *Zutik!* attributed to “Xabi” (presumably the fallen *etarra*), a slightly modified version of the aforementioned excerpt of ETA’s Aberri Eguna statement: “Para nadie es un secreto que no saldremos de 1968 sin algun muerto”. See: *Zutik!*, no. 49, *Documentos Y*, vol. VII, p. 251.

<sup>187</sup> Irvin: *Militant Nationalism*, pp. 68–69.

<sup>188</sup> Joseph Ruane, Jennifer Todd: *The Dynamics of Conflict in Northern Ireland: Power, Conflict and Emancipation*, Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, 1996, p. 128. “The Derry March Chronology of Events surrounding the March”, <https://cain.ulster.ac.uk/events/derry/chron.htm> (last accessed 04 September 2019).

<sup>189</sup> “The People’s Democracy March — Chronology of Main Events”, <https://cain.ulster.ac.uk/events/pdmarch/chron.htm> (last accessed 04 September 2019).

<sup>190</sup> Prime Minister of Northern Ireland since 1963, O’Neill had hoped that to mollify Catholic/nationalist grievances through their economic betterment, and not necessarily through political reform. Still, his

August 1969 was the month when the escalating “Troubles” in Northern Ireland, eventually spilled onto the streets in the form of open major violence. On the 12<sup>th</sup>, clashes broke out in Derry at the culmination of an Orange Order Apprentice Boys march. Pitched battles between loyalists, the RUC and residents from nationalist areas ensued. The “Battle of the Bogside” resulted in the barricading of a large nationalist area of the city and the realisation of a “Free Derry”, which the RUC were unable to enter. On the 13<sup>th</sup>, protests in Belfast that had aimed to draw heat away from Derry similarly descended into a melee of inter-communal and RUC violence.<sup>191</sup> Attacks by loyalist groups on vulnerable nationalist areas of the city, most notably the burning down of Bombay Street, have since been characterised by some as a pogrom.<sup>192</sup> Scrambling to defend nationalist areas of Belfast and armed with only a small arsenal of weapons, the IRA re-emerged over the next few days, exchanging gunfire with the RUC.<sup>193</sup> At the end of an extraordinary week, 8 people lay dead; over 750 people had been injured (including 133 gunshot wounds); the Irish government had publicly threatened to intervene north of the border, and the British Army had been deployed to the region’s streets.<sup>194</sup>

As Northern Ireland and the Basque Country entered into largely congruent periods of political violence circa 1968/1969, a resolution of “solidarity with the Basque and Breton Peoples in their struggle against French and Spanish Imperialism” was passed at the 1968 Sinn Féin Árd Fheis.<sup>195</sup> Moreover, at a Sinn Féin Coiste Seasta (Standing Committee) meeting held in August 1968, one speaker noted that: “There was some contact with the Basques”. A week after this Basque “contact” was discussed, an update was provided at the next Coiste Seasta. Indicative of the often-confusing nature of radical Basque nationalist-Irish republican relations to come over the following decade, the update read: “No action on the Basques, due to splits”.<sup>196</sup>

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“reformism” had “provoked vociferous and trenchant resistance from within the unionist community”. See: Bew, Frampton, Gurruchaga: *Talking to Terrorists: Making Peace in Northern Ireland and the Basque Country*, pp. 21–23. “Stormont General Election, 1969”, <https://cain.ulster.ac.uk/issues/politics/election/rs1969.htm> (last accessed 17 April 2020).

<sup>191</sup> “A Chronology of the Conflict — 1969”, <https://cain.ulster.ac.uk/othelem/chron/ch69.htm> (last accessed 04 September 2019).

<sup>192</sup> Jonathan Tonge: *Northern Ireland: Conflict and Change*, Harlow, Pearson Education, 2002. p.39.

<sup>193</sup> Treacy: *The IRA, 1956–69. Rethinking the Republic*, p. 14.

<sup>194</sup> Peter Taylor: *The Provos: The IRA and Sinn Féin*, London, Bloomsbury, 1998, pp. 45–55; White: *Out of the Ashes*, pp. 56–61.

<sup>195</sup> “Sinn Féin Árd Fheis Clar 1968”. Tony Heffernan Papers. P108/3. UCDA.

<sup>196</sup> “Century of Endeavour”, <http://www.rjtechno.org/century130703/1960s/sfmins67.htm> (last accessed 30 May 2019). Johnston: *Century of Endeavour*, p. 233.

### 3.4. Conclusion

“We started it in 1916. We put the first crack in the British Empire. It was the start of the anti-colonial movement, and they all had their noses up for freedom — black men, yellow men and so on. We showed the way; [now] we’re at the end of the queue. Why don’t we finish the job? We were the indomitable Irish that started all this off, when they [the British] controlled a quarter of the world. And now our question isn’t finished and all these people have passed us by”.<sup>197</sup>  
(Ruairí Ó Brádaigh, 2009).

This chapter has sought to account for radical Basque nationalist-Irish republican relations and contacts in the post-World War II era, up until the onset of sustained periods of political violence in both contexts circa 1968/1969. As the reader will recall, the Irish republican movement and Basque nationalism more generally struggled to make any headway in terms of their respective strategic objectives in the immediate aftermath of World War II. In the Basque context, the systematic repression of political and cultural expression outside of that which rigidly adhered to Franco’s authoritarian and integrationist brand of Spanish nationalism, rendered the Basque government-in-exile impotent and the radical Aberri/Jagi-Jagi line virtually irrelevant. Meanwhile, in Ireland, the Irish republican movement continued to largely adhere to its own self-imposed “exile” from the main parliamentary bodies of the southern and northern states.

Outside of these domestic contexts, a number of macro international trends throughout the 1950s and 1960s prised open alternative ideologies, strategies, forms of resistance and/or revolution for Irish republicans and more radical forms of Basque nationalism to engage with, analyse and debate — if not necessarily utilise: anti-colonialism/anti-imperialism, revolutionary leftism, European stateless nationalism, civil rights.<sup>198</sup>

For Basques, successful contemporary anti-colonial/anti-imperialist cases such as Israel, Algeria, Tunisia, and Vietnam offered the post-war generation of the *interior* fresh impetus. Standing alongside the “hombres nuevos” of the “Third World”, the heroes and martyrs of the Irish Revolutionary Period were also (re)discovered and utilised in the discourse of Ekin and later, ETA. While contemporary struggles offered tangible models, Ireland served, primarily, as an epic and heroic example of the nation-versus-nation dichotomous prism that would come to dominate ETA’s thinking.

Eduardo ‘Teo’ Uriarte, a young member of ETA at the time, recalls the resonance of Ireland within this international schema:

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<sup>197</sup> Cited in: White: *Out of the Ashes*, p. 34.

<sup>198</sup> Núñez Seixas: *Patriotas Transnacionales*, pp. 111–118.

“De Irlanda, teníamos poco conocimiento, aunque ese poco conocimiento se convertía en algo mítico, que es muy importante, ¿no? Posiblemente si hubiéramos tenido un mejor conocimiento, ¡no se hubiera convertido en algo mítico!”<sup>199</sup>

On a tactical level, the Irish Revolutionary Period also offered initial guidelines on clandestine underground resistance. Furthermore, (revolutionary) Ireland’s inability to complete its cultural and political objectives served to underline the urgent need to address the contemporary decline of Euskara and warn against any retreat to more autonomous *jeltzale*-like positions. And finally, as tensions between more Marxist- and nationalist (ETA-V)-guided strategic priorities emerged within ETA throughout the 1960s, the Irish Revolutionary Period occasionally offered the latter tendency a historic and galvanising touchstone reference.

Perhaps the most influential ETA-centric ideologue who attempted to square these nationalist and socialist tendencies was Federico Krutwig. Heavily influenced by contemporary theories of ethno-linguism, Krutwig’s “Vasconia” presented Spain as akin to an imperial central state, colonising the Basque Country from the inside out.<sup>200</sup> As we have seen, the thrust of Krutwig’s thesis chimed with contemporary analysis of the stateless “Celtic” nations in *United Irishman*.

A similar battle for the hearts, minds and control of the Irish republican movement was waged throughout the 1960s. While both the traditionalist and modernising tendencies of the movement drifted leftwards throughout the decade, this general trajectory was matched by an increasing external interest and within some quarters — advocacy— for leftist revolutionary models. In September 1968, an IRA Army Convention instructed that “contact be made with international Socialist underground revolutionary groups and Socialist Governments anywhere, to investigate the possibility of obtaining arms and finance unconditionally”.<sup>201</sup> The same year, the first documented expressions of “solidarity” and “contacts” were made by Sinn Féin with Basque elements.

While the shared macro international trends documented in this chapter drew Irish republicanism and radical Basque nationalism into closer orbits, incremental engagement (through movement publications) and flitting contacts and relations were also the product of more micro-oriented personal and circumstantial factors. For instance, the Iker Gallastegi-led training expedition to Ireland in 1960 stemmed from opportunities inherent

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<sup>199</sup> Author interview with Eduardo “Teo” Uriarte (Vitoria-Gasteiz, 2016).

<sup>200</sup> Conversi: “Domino Effect or International Developments?”; Mees: *The Basque Contention*, p. 103.

<sup>201</sup> Hanley: “‘The needs of the people’: the IRA considers its future, 1967/68”.



to his own (and possibly his father's) contacts in Ireland, rather than as the result of any shared transnational anti-colonial/anti-imperial thesis or objective. Similarly, Deasún Breatnach's references to the Basques and their language in *United Irishman* owed much to his own personal and familial circumstances. Indeed, Breatnach's interest and ETA's torture dossier of 1963 aside, there is practically no evidence of any other republican discursive engagement with the Basque case in *United Irishman* throughout this period. In this respect, the transnational nexus between radical Basque nationalism and Irish republicanism remained steadfastly asymmetric — and still focused on the events of the Irish Revolutionary Period, half a century ago.<sup>202</sup>

Events in 1968 and 1969 provided the first inklings of a new *contemporary* reciprocal Basque-Irish transnational interest. Irish republican statements on the situation in Spain, mutual IRA-ETA attendance at the International Vietnam Conference in Berlin, and direct contact with “the Basques” discussed at consecutive Sinn Féin Coiste Seasta, were small but notable signs of a convergence around the notion of transnational “solidarity” in the face of “imperialism”.

Over the following years, the confluence of political violence in the Basque Country and Northern Ireland, with ETA and the IRA to the fore, would lead to the crystallisation of this new *contemporary* transnational prism around the premise of armed struggle for “National Liberation”. Indeed, with the emergence of relatively congruent self-described National Liberation Movements (BIA and IRM) led by armed wings in both contexts, many more opportunities would arise in the 1970s for the development of transnational (meso) organisational relationships across different nexus strands.

Nothing about this process was inevitable. On the contrary, as we shall see, the development of radical Basque nationalist-Irish republican relations was as contingent as ever on individual personalities, circumstances, unforeseen events and the broader vagrancies of the political situations in the Basque Country, Northern Ireland, and beyond.

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<sup>202</sup> In the 1970s, Deasún Breatnach subsequently, became editor of the “Provisional” movement's *An Phoblacht* on two occasions (1973–1974 and 1977–1979). See: English: *Armed Struggle*, p. 409 (footnote 98).



## CHAPTER FOUR

### 4.0. Introduction

“After 1969 things will never be the same in Ulster”.<sup>1</sup>

“¿Estamos solos? Seguimos siendo perseguidos, torturados, encarcelados. Y seguimos estamos solos y desunidos. ¿Estamos solos? En cierto sentido, sí, en otro sentido no”.<sup>2</sup>

For most of the 1960s, the “modernising” (Goulding-Mac Giolla) leadership of the Irish republican movement had preoccupied itself with a difficult and divisive reorientation of the organisation across the “southern” twenty-six county state. As we have seen, this process was resisted by a “traditionalist” tendency within Sinn Féin and the IRA. The explosion of violence on the streets of Derry and Belfast in August 1969 suddenly demanded that all attention rapidly pivot towards the North.<sup>3</sup>

When the dust finally settled on the events of August 1969, accusations that the southern-based leadership had left nationalist Belfast defenceless in its hour of need, further exacerbated tensions between the two broad factions.<sup>4</sup> An IRA Convention was called for December.

Pre-empting the Convention, Cathal Goulding made a pivotal move. Goulding attempted to convince a majority of the IRA leadership to approve a major shift in policy that would see Sinn Féin drop its long-held stance of abstentionism from the Dublin, Belfast, and London parliaments. Although such a move would arguably discard the republican principle of IRA legitimacy emanating directly from the *de jure* Irish Republic, Goulding and his closest supporters nonetheless appealed for the change on tactical grounds. Put to a vote at the convention, the motion was passed by 39 votes to 12. Crucially, however, a sizeable minority walked out in protest at the outcome.<sup>5</sup>

Those who rejected the shift immediately set up a “Provisional” Army Executive. Seán Mac Stiofáin, an English-born former army corporal, became the “Provisional” IRA’s

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<sup>1</sup> “Festival of Hate”, *United Irishman*, September 1969.

<sup>2</sup> “¿Estamos Solos?”, *Zutik!* (Caracas), no. 94, *Documentos Y*, vol. VIII, pp. 484–485.

<sup>3</sup> Treacy: *The IRA, 1956–69. Rethinking the Republic*, p.1, pp. 6–7.

<sup>4</sup> Moloney: *A Secret History of the IRA* (2<sup>nd</sup> ed.), p. 8.

<sup>5</sup> For details of the 1969 IRA Army Convention, see: Moloney: *A Secret History of the IRA* (2<sup>nd</sup> ed.), p. 71. Previous attempts to do away with the policy of abstention were defeated at Sinn Féin Árd Fheiseanna [plural of Árd Fheis] in 1965 and 1967. See: Hanley: “‘The needs of the people’: the IRA considers its future, 1967/68”.

first Chief of Staff. A similar schism occurred the following month in Sinn Féin between a “Provisional” sector, which opposed Goulding’s proposals, and an “Official” tendency that backed the tactical shift. Following this second split, Ruairí Ó Brádaigh became the first president of the soon-to-be known “Provisional” Sinn Féin (PSF). Meanwhile, Tomás Mac Giolla continued in his role as president of what would become “Official” Sinn Féin (OSF).<sup>6</sup>

Akin to the republican movement, ETA faced significant challenges maintaining its organisational and ideological coherency at the turn of the decade. In August 1970, in the Lapurdian town of Itsasu (Itxassou), the group convened its first assembly since the bloodletting of Pardines, Etxebarrieta, and Manzanas two years previously. Echoing many of the same issues that had prefaced ETA’s first major split in 1966, factions once again emerged again along similar lines: a “mili” contingent committed to armed struggle and led by the exiled Juan José Etxabe; an anticolonial “tercermundista” front, grouped around Madariaga and Krutwig; and a more communist “obrerista” sector of the *interior* (“españolista” to its opponents) that sought to construct a revolutionary Marxist party as part of a Frente Nacional Vasco (Basque National Front). A fourth strand—the exiled Células Rojas (Red Cells)—argued that the construction of a Frente Nacional Vasco would subordinate ETA to the Basque petty-bourgeoisie (the PNV).<sup>7</sup>

We have already seen how emulative lessons from the Irish Revolutionary Period were occasionally referenced by ETA at times during the 1960s. Shortly prior to the Sixth Assembly, the recent split in the republican movement between the “modernisers” and “traditionalists” was referenced by the “españolista”-critical F. Sarrailh Ihartza [Federico

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<sup>6</sup> In a propaganda boon to the “Provisionals”, the last surviving anti-Anglo-Irish Treaty TD of the Second Dáil Éireann, Thomas Maguire, rejected the move away from abstentionism. Maguire declared that the mandate of the *de jure* Irish Republic “now resides in the Provisional Army Council and its lawful successors”. See: “Comdt.- General Thomas Maguire’s Statement”, *An Phoblacht*, February 1970. Cited in: Kevin Bean: *The New Politics of Sinn Féin*, Liverpool, Liverpool University Press, 2007, p. 69. While both republican factions continued to use the terms “Sinn Féin” and “IRA”, the media began to distinguish between the two by using the “Official” and “Provisional” labels, as well as “Sinn Féin - Gardiner Place” and “Sinn Féin - Kevin Street”, respectively. Throughout the 1970s, “Provos” and “Stickies (or Sticks)” also became a shorthand (and often-pejorative) way for distinguishing affinity to one or other of the two factions. “Stickies” and “Sticks” were used in reference to the “Officials” on account of them wearing adhesive-backed commemorative Easter Rising lilies. See: Hanley: *The IRA. A Documentary History 1916–2005*, p. 159. In order to avoid confusion between the two movements, the “Provisional” movement, mainly consisting of the PIRA and PSF, will hereafter be usually collectively referred to as the IRM. In contrast, the “Official” movement, mainly consisting of the OIRA and OSF, will be usually referred to as the “National Liberation Front” (NLF) given that a motion to form an NLF with other radical groups was passed by a large majority at the 1970 “Official” Sinn Féin Árd Fheis. See: Patterson: *The Politics of Illusion* (2<sup>nd</sup> ed.), pp. 141–142.

<sup>7</sup> Sullivan: *ETA and Basque nationalism*, pp. 80–88; Gaizka Fernández Soldevilla: “The origins of ETA: between Francoism and democracy, 1958–1981” in Leonisio, *et al.*(eds.): *ETA’s Terrorist Campaign. From Violence to Politics, 1968–2015*, pp. 19–34 (specifically, pp. 26–27).

Krutwig] and P. Zugasti. Drawing parallels from Quebec, Puerto Rico, and Ireland, the two men warned of traitorous elements who deceive with their “revisionist” and “conceptualist” ideas:

“En todos los movimientos de Liberación Nacional se han incrustado... y siguen incrustándose elementos ‘traidores’, es decir, elementos extraños que intentan apoderarse de la fuerza revolucionaria que representan dichos movimientos nacionales para desviarlos en favor de sus teorías. Quieren servirse de los movimientos nacionales, como los colonialistas franceses se servían de los senegaleses. En Argelia los hubo... y los hay en la actualidad, no solo en ETA, sino en el FLQ (Quebec), en el YOUNG LORDS (Puertorriqueños), IRA (Irlanda), etc... Escisiones entre una ala Nacionalista y Revolucionaria y otra revisionista y conceptualista. Estas escisiones ‘internacionalistas’ de hombres incapaces de concebir nada nuevo que lo que vienen predicando desde hace medio siglo sus ‘ideólogos’ sin tener ningún éxito, quieren hacer triunfar sus ‘ideas’ cueste lo que cueste, aunque para ello tengan que destruir la naturaleza de los movimientos de liberación. Son como un virus [...]”.<sup>8</sup>

Crippled by its ideological tensions, ETA split at the Sixth Assembly in Itsasu. Unlike “the walkout” that had occurred within the Irish republican movement only months earlier, the decisive moment in ETA’s schism lacked any adversarial drama. Citing the “españolismo” of the “obrerista” sector, the “milis” and “anti-colonial tercermundistas” simply decided not to attend the assembly, apart from Julen Madariaga, who acted as an “antenna”.<sup>9</sup> Subsequently labelled as factionalists, the “milis” and “tercermundistas” were officially expelled from ETA by the Sixth Assembly participants. Responding in kind, the “milis”/“tercermundistas” dismissed the Sixth Assembly adherents via ETA’s *Biltzar Txikia* (Little Assembly) — an entity that had been elected during the Fifth Assembly to provide political oversight of the Executive. For their part, the “Células Rojas” left the organisation of their own accord.

Emerging from this multi-layered splinter, the “milis”/“tercermundistas” regathered, and alongside the “culturalistas” of *Txillardegi’s Branka*, vowed to uphold the principles of the Fifth Assembly. This earned them the moniker “ETA-V”. Accordingly, the Sixth Assembly participants, who still represented the majority of ETA militants (although now minus the departed “Células Rojas”), became known as “ETA-VI”.<sup>10</sup>

Among the adherents to ETA-VI were those accused of implication in the 1968 killing of Melítón Manzanás. With a military trial pending in late 1970s, the defendants, their

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<sup>8</sup> “Comentarios y Proposiciones ante la Próxima Asamblea”, *Documentos Y*, vol. XII, pp. 109–110.

<sup>9</sup> Garmendia: “ETA: Nacimiento, Desarrollo y Crisis (1959–1978)”, (specifically pp. 151–153).

<sup>10</sup> Garmendia: “ETA: Nacimiento, Desarrollo y Crisis (1959–1978)”, (specifically pp. 151–153); Irvin: *Militant Nationalism*, p. 74.

families, and the Basque public, were keenly aware that those found guilty of the more serious charges would very likely face execution. Tensions were high.

ETA-V raised the stakes further still by kidnapping the West German Honorary Consul, Eugen Beihl in Donostia. In the words of one analyst: “el mundo entero vuelve sus ojos hacia el pueblo vasco y ETA”.<sup>11</sup>

The “Burgos Process” (or “Burgos Trial”) was a watershed moment in the history of ETA. Internationally, the hitherto largely unknown organisation would become synonymous with the Basque Country. As we shall see, the Burgos Process would also prove to be a catalyst in drawing radical Basque nationalists and Irish republicans into closer orbit. As this nexus developed throughout the 1970s and early 1980s, the exact nature and scope of radical Basque nationalist–Irish republican relations —particularly those of a military kind— became the source of much speculation in the media and within government circles. By the end of the decade, ETA and the IRA, and the Basque Country and Northern Ireland, had themselves, become synonymous with each other.

#### **4.1. The Burgos effect. Belfast ablaze**

##### *The Burgos effect*

Akin to most western European capitals, the unfolding Burgos Process/Beihl kidnapping was played out in London and Dublin in various ways. In London, British diplomatic papers reveal an attempt to interject in the Beihl kidnapping via the good offices of a British agent who had worked closely with the Basques during World War II. At street level, a series of Basque nationalist/Spanish republican protests that began outside the Spanish Embassy in November grew steadily into December. At their height, Spanish flags were set alight and live ammunition even fired at the building from a passing car. Two British-based ETA militants: Jon Etxeberria, who was being tried *in absentia* at Burgos, and Pedro Ignacio Pérez Beoteguaia (or Beotegui) (*Wilson*), took up a hunger strike at St. Martin’s-in-the-Fields on Trafalgar Square. Both men had been given suspended sentences the previous year for having thrown Molotov cocktails at the embassy.<sup>12</sup>

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<sup>11</sup> “Prologo al Volumen X”, *Documentos Y*, vol. X, p. 3.

<sup>12</sup> “Confidential letter titled ‘The fate of Herr Beihl’”. Dated 15 December 1970. Activities of Basque nationalism. FCO 9/1280. NA; “Confidential report titled ‘Demonstration at the Spanish Embassy’”. Dated 25 November 1970. Activities of Basque nationalism. FCO 9/1280. NA; “Confidential report titled ‘Demonstrations at the Spanish Embassy’”. Dated 07 December 1970. Activities of Basque nationalism. FCO 9/1280. NA; “Secret trial and torture for Franco’s Basque ‘rebels’”, *The Observer*, 08.11.70; “The World This Week”, *The Observer*, 06.12.1970; “Portrait of a Revolutionary”, Thames Television.



These London protests were mirrored and amplified internationally when, despite Beihl being released unharmed by his ETA-V captors on Christmas Day, six of the Burgos Process defendants were sentenced to death 72 hours later.<sup>13</sup> Not necessarily *au fait* with the schisms that had recently split the hitherto almost completely unknown Basque paramilitaries into “V” and “VI” factions, the generic label of “ETA” tended to prevail in the ensuing international coverage.

Within days of the sentences, official complaints were lodged by western states, hundreds of EEC employees staged protests against links with Spain, and demonstrations and riots occurred in several major European cities. ETA (or at least the Burgos condemned) were seemingly “not alone”, as the above militant had pondered (“¿Estamos solos?”). Through the heavy-handedness of the regime, “ETA” had managed to garner the attention and moral support of those opposed to Francoism, prominent figures of the international left, and democrats more broadly in Spain and elsewhere.<sup>14</sup>

Back in London, on the same evening that the death sentences were announced, a 4-km “night march” and vigil outside the Spanish Embassy took place. As songs were sung in Basque, English and Spanish, some of the marchers “armed with cans of soup” reportedly “barred themselves in[to] the flat of Bernadette Devlin”, which was situated close to the embassy on Belgrave Square. Devlin, a political activist from Derry who had won a seat at Westminster in 1969, had apparently “given permission by telephone for her flat to be used as the headquarters for the demonstration”. Also among the marchers were members of the Irish National Liberation Solidarity Front, a campaign group set up by the Communist Workers League of Britain (Marxist-Leninist) in 1969.<sup>15</sup>

Using slightly more conventional protest methods than “cans of soup”, Manuel Irujo sent a telegram on behalf of “Basques in England” to the former British Prime Minister and current Secretary of State for Commonwealth and Foreign Affairs, Alec Douglas-Home. The Navarrese requested that the British government plead clemency for the Burgos condemned.<sup>16</sup>

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Screened on British TV, October 1975. See also: Joseba Zulaika: *That Old Bilbao Moon. The Passion and Resurrection of a City*, Reno, University of Nevada, 2014, pp. 86–92.

<sup>13</sup> Michael Newton: *The Encyclopaedia of Kidnappings*, New York, Facts on File, Inc., 2002, p. 21.

<sup>14</sup> “Franco may show mercy”, *Irish Press*, 30.12.1970; “Note titled ‘EEC Employees in Brussels in silent protest’”. Dated 21 December 1970. Activities of Basque nationalism. FCO 9/1280. NA; Sullivan: *ETA and Basque Nationalism*, p. 92.

<sup>15</sup> “Letter to FCO”. Dated 30 December 1970. Activities of Basque national movement. FCO 9/1450. NA; “Storm over Basque protests”, *Irish Press*, 29.12.1970.

<sup>16</sup> “Telegram from Manuel Irujo to Alec Douglas-Home”. Dated 29 December 1970. Activities of Basque nationalism. FCO 9/1280. NA.

In Dublin, an “Irish Basque Committee” (occasionally referred to as the Irish Basque Society) was formed following a meeting at Liberty Hall that was attended by an assortment of “trade unionists, Republicans, socialists, students and youth leaders”.<sup>17</sup> Among the notable members of the committee were the aforementioned Breton nationalist Yann Goulet, Michael O’Riordan, a prominent Irish communist and Spanish Civil War veteran, and Con Lehane, a member of the IRA’s Army Council in the 1930s and former Clann na Poblachta TD.<sup>18</sup> The committee duly published a statement calling on “all Irishmen and women who have freedom and human rights at heart” to write to their elected representatives demanding that they support an appeal to the Minister of External Affairs, Patrick Hillery, to intervene. The government subsequently released a statement indicating that “an approach concerning the death sentences is being made to the Spanish authorities through diplomatic channels”.<sup>19</sup> Meanwhile, Official Sinn Féin President, Tomás Mac Giolla, reportedly sent a telegram to Enbata (the “Basque Socialist Party” in Iparralde), which read:

“Sinn Féin pledge their solidarity with you in your struggle for justice for Basque patriots in Spanish jails. The Irish people who have suffered injustice and oppression from British imperialism look forward to the day when the Basque and Irish peoples have achieved full nationhood”.<sup>20</sup>

The double-crises of Consul Beihl’s kidnapping and the Burgos death sentences came to a *relatively* positive climax when the convicted prisoners had their death sentences commuted to lengthy incarceration on 31 December. As a *United Irishman* opinion piece on the military trial accurately noted, “tremendous world pressure” had ultimately swayed Franco to overturn the death sentences. Incidentally, the British *Daily Express* ran a story the following month claiming that the real “Basque assassin” of Manzananas was, in fact, “safe and studying in Britain”.<sup>21</sup>

At a meeting of the British cabinet in early January 1971, Douglas-Home noted how the Foreign and Commonwealth Office (FCO) “had been under heavy pressure [...] to intervene on behalf of [the Burgos] prisoners but had judged it wise to do so only at the

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<sup>17</sup> “New Vatican treaty with Franco goes to bishops”, *Irish Independent*, 19.12.1970.

<sup>18</sup> “Storm over Basque protests”, *Irish Press*, 29.12.1970; “Basque struggle”, *Waterford News and Star*, 22.01.1971.

<sup>19</sup> “Deeply shocked by trial”, *Irish Examiner*, 11.12.1970; “New Vatican treaty with Franco goes to bishops”, *Irish Independent*, 19.12.1970; “Ireland’s pleas for the Basques”, *Irish Independent*, 29.12.1970.

<sup>20</sup> “Appalled at unjust sentences”, *Irish Examiner*, 30.12.1970.

<sup>21</sup> “Basques fight oppression”, *United Irishman*, January 1971; “Safe and studying in Britain, the Basque assassin”, *Daily Express*, 29.01.1971.

last moment and then in guarded terms”. It was felt that this restraint “would pay dividends in terms of Anglo-Spanish relations”. A planned British trade mission to Spain, which had been postponed, could now go ahead.<sup>22</sup>

In the bowels of the FCO itself, a sort of Burgos post-mortem and its future implications for Spain was undertaken by British officials. A key source for the FCO officials in this endeavour was one Javier Ayesta — an Opus Dei spokesperson. In private conversation with a British official, Ayesta divulged his impressions of the struggle that was already apparently underway within the regime for the control of post-Franco Spain. As one British official noted, Ayesta’s inside disclosures “read like something from *Private Eye*”. Other reactions to Ayesta’s insights, more tellingly, were to prove indicative of Britain’s long-term strategic approach to Spain and its issue of “separatism”. One official wrote: “When Franco goes, the prospects for civilian, let alone democratic government in Spain, are uncertain”.<sup>23</sup> A colleague noted in response:

“Insofar as ‘separatism’ is likely to be one of the main threats to the stability of a future Spanish regime [...] HMG [Her Majesty’s Government], like other Western Governments are going to have to take up some sort of a position about Basque and Catalan irredentism. [...] I think we are bound to view it with disfavour; and we shall have to be careful to resist the efforts of those concerned to *cash in* on the aftermath of the Burgos trials”.<sup>24</sup>

In addition to these brief snapshots of FCO thinking *vis-à-vis* Burgos and its likely fallout, there are two other interrelated Burgos “effects” relevant to this study that are worth briefly reflecting on at this juncture.

First, as shall be dealt with in the following section (4.2. Active solidarity), the coming to international prominence of ETA during the Burgos Process precipitated a more active phase in radical Basque nationalist-Irish republican relations, and the gradual construction of a macro-narrative of seemingly analogous dynamics across both cases (Northern Ireland and the Basque Country) and their leading protagonists.

Second, in lighting a touchstone to these Basque-Irish analogies, Burgos and its aftermath complicated efforts by diplomats, officials and political representatives in

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<sup>22</sup> “Conclusions of a Meeting of the Cabinet held at 10 Downing Street, S.W.1. on Tuesday, 5 January 1971, at 10.30 a.m.”. CAB 128/49/1. NA.

<sup>23</sup> “Letter titled ‘Burgos’”. Dated 01 March 1971. Activities of Basque national movement. FCO 9/1450. NA; “Confidential report titled ‘Spanish situation post-Burgos (Points made in London on 5 February by Opus Dei spokesman, Sr. Javier Ayesta)’”. Activities of Basque national movement. FCO 9/1450. NA; “Letter titled ‘The Burgos Trial’”. Dated 28 January 1971. Activities of Basque national movement. FCO 9/1450. NA. “Private Eye” was a fortnightly British satirical magazine that began publishing in 1962.

<sup>24</sup> “Untitled confidential note”. Dated 01 February 1971. Activities of Basque national movement. FCO 9/1450. NA. My use of italics for *cash in*.

London and Madrid to square their state's strategic and territorial interests with those of the other. For instance, with the Burgos Process at its height, the FCO had decided to take, in its own words, an "official attitude of somewhat cold-blooded propriety" towards the accused and the possible lodging of official complaints with Madrid. The reasons cited were twofold. Firstly, the British reasoned that an assertive position regarding the prisoners' plight would only serve to antagonise the Spanish regime and aggravate the situation.<sup>25</sup> Secondly, and of more relevance here, are two separate dispatches which evidence British concern that:

"[...] the Spanish government's annoyance could spill over into their Gibraltar policies, where we have at the moment an uneasy truce and the possibility of improving the situation for the Gibraltarians; and the Spanish Government could counter by drawing false parallels with the situation in Northern Ireland".<sup>26</sup>

"There is also the situation in Northern Ireland to be bore in mind. While the circumstances are very different, we have been under some criticism at the United Nations and the Spanish Government would certainly draw this up as a misleading parallel".<sup>27</sup>

Whether actually "misleading" or not, the parallel that the British evidently feared in their approach to the Burgos Process and any potential scope for criticism of Spain, was that the Spanish could retort by utilising Gibraltar's disputed status and the emerging Northern Ireland "Troubles" in tandem: to berate British imperialism/colonialism on the one hand, and retaliate against criticism of Spanish policy in the Basque Country on the other. There was already evident cause for this British concern. For example, in April 1968, a daily mouthpiece of Franco's regime, *Arriba*, accused Britain of creating and fermenting Basque separatism. This, according to the paper, was simply a way "to weaken Spanish national unity [and] to distract attention from Gibraltar".<sup>28</sup> The same paper, in a January 1969 article, also suggested that "Between Ulster and our Gibraltar one could establish a parallel: the 'invaders' are those who continue to impose their law on the 'invaded'".<sup>29</sup>

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<sup>25</sup> Untitled confidential report. Dated 21 December 1970. Activities of Basque nationalism. FCO 9/1280. NA.

<sup>26</sup> "Confidential report titled 'Trial of Basque Separatists in Spain'". Dated 15 December 1970. Activities of Basque nationalism. FCO 9/1280. NA.

<sup>27</sup> "Confidential report titled 'Mr. Vic Feather's Call: The Basque Trials'". Dated 15 December 1970. Activities of Basque nationalism. FCO 9/1280. NA.

<sup>28</sup> Cited in: "Letter titled 'Attempted Basque Demonstration in San Sebastián'". Dated 19 April 1968. Spain: Political Affairs. FCO 9/143. NA.

<sup>29</sup> "El Noticiero Universal", *Arriba*, 17.01.1969. Cited in: Partition of Ireland. DFA/IP 2/3 Madrid Embassy. NAI.

This type of criticism was not all one way. Speaking in the British House of Lords in December 1969, Lord John Monson noted how the general thrust of international criticism against the British government's policies in Northern Ireland had been:

“[...] taken up by the [Spanish] Press which is controlled by General Franco's regime, whose attitude to the Gibraltarians, Spanish Protestants, Basque priests and others, needs no describing to your Lordships”.<sup>30</sup>

With the increasingly perceived analogies drawn between the “struggles” of radical Basque nationalism and Irish republicanism over the coming decade, one could tentatively identify a sort of UK-Spanish *diplomatic whataboutery* regarding their respective credentials in Northern Ireland, the Basque Country, and Gibraltar — even if available primary source evidence for this hypothesis is thin on the ground.

### *Belfast ablaze*

It is a matter of historical fact that the events of August 1969 provided the catalyst for the (re-)emergence of the IRA onto the streets of Belfast. As such, the primary motivation for “Provisional” Irish republicanism was, *initially*, defence of local Catholic/nationalist communities from local Protestant/unionist (or “loyalist”) attacks. And while many of those who become leaders of the PIRA had their roots in the city's republican core, pre-“Troubles” Belfast itself was categorically *not* a hothouse of Irish republicanism.<sup>31</sup> Post-1969, this began to change.

With the presence of the British Army and RUC in nationalist neighbourhoods, the Provisional IRA would gradually seek to harness mutual hostility between these forces and the local populace in order to leverage for traditional Irish nationalist political demands. Ergo, a reunified and independent Ireland. To this end, more immediate precursive northern objectives were earmarked by the “Provisional” movement. These were, in no particular order, the “smashing” of the unionist-dominated parliament at

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<sup>30</sup> “Northern Ireland”, <https://api.parliament.uk/historic-hansard/lords/1969/oct/15/northern-ireland> (last accessed 01 October 2019).

<sup>31</sup> Coogan: *The IRA*, pp. 365–366; English: *Irish Freedom*, pp. 361–371; Moloney: *A Secret History of the IRA* (2<sup>nd</sup> ed.), p. 37, p. 83. There are many nuances to consider and overlaps between the terms, “unionism” and “loyalism” in Northern Ireland. Generally speaking, however, one could say that while unionists support Northern Ireland's continued place within the UK, loyalists have (notably since the outbreak of the “Troubles”) historically advocated for and participated in different forms of direct action (including violence) to ensure this. In terms of class, unionism is more associated with middle-class Protestantism and British culture. Loyalism is usually more associated with working-class Protestantism and British culture.

Stormont Castle in Belfast, and the forcing of Britain into a “withdrawal” (or at least a commitment to one) from Ireland.<sup>32</sup>

Somewhat ironically, it was often the heavy-handed approach of the British security forces (mainly the RUC and British Army) in the early 1970s, encapsulated in a number of significant incidents, that regularly swelled the ranks of both the “Provisional” and “Official” IRA beyond a republican core.<sup>33</sup> The first of these major incidents occurred in the summer of 1970.

The “Falls Curfew”, or “Rape of the Falls” in republican parlance, led to gun battles along the main artery of west Belfast through a cloud of CS gas between the “Official” and “Provisional” IRA on one side, and the British Army on the other. Amidst the chaos and confusion, four civilians were killed by the British Army, exacerbating an already rapidly deteriorating situation between Catholics/nationalists in Belfast and a force that had been ostensibly dispatched to protect the wellbeing of the minority community.<sup>34</sup>

Likewise, the introduction of “Internment without Trial” in August 1971, which disproportionately targeted the Catholic/nationalist community, also backfired spectacularly against the British government and led to another spike in recruitment.<sup>35</sup>

Perhaps most significantly in this series, the killing of 13 unarmed civilians in Derry in January 1972 (“Bloody Sunday”) provoked widespread outrage at the British government from every shade of Irish nationalism and republicanism, North and South.<sup>36</sup>

During this same period (1970–1972), the Provisional IRA gradually moved from a defensive position in its heartlands of Belfast, to a more offensive posture across Northern

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<sup>32</sup> At the 1971 PSF Árd Fheis, Ruairí Ó Brádaigh declared that the most desirable prelude to Irish unification would be to make Northern Ireland ungovernable by destroying the unionist-dominated Stormont administration. See: Irvin: *Militant Nationalism*, p. 59. For a comprehensive account of the republican movement’s objectives at various stages, see: English: *Does Terrorism Work? A History*, pp. 42–91.

<sup>33</sup> Robert W. White pinpoints four main “events” that stimulated mass mobilization and PIRA recruitment: August 1969; Internment without Trial in 1971; “Bloody Sunday” in 1972; and the Hunger Strikes of 1981. See: Robert W. White: “‘I’m not too sure what I told you the last time’. Methodological notes on accounts of high-risk activists in the Irish republican movement”, *Mobilization: An International Quarterly Review*, 12(3), 1993, pp. 287–305. See also: Feeney: *Sinn Féin. A Hundred Turbulent Years*, pp. 270–271.

<sup>34</sup> Moloney: *A Secret History of the IRA* (2<sup>nd</sup> ed.), pp. 90–91.

<sup>35</sup> In the words of Bowyer Bell: “At a single stroke internment had produced another generation of martyrs —the Men Behind the Wire— and destroyed, even in many British eyes, any remaining legitimacy in the institutions of Stormont”. Bowyer Bell: *The Secret Army. The IRA, 1916–1979* (Rev. ed), p. 383. See also: English: *Does Terrorism Work?*, pp. 136–138; Hanley: *The IRA. A Documentary History 1916–2005*, p. 166; White: *Out of the Ashes*, p. 84.

<sup>36</sup> In the immediate aftermath of “Bloody Sunday”, the Irish government called for a UN peacekeeping force to be dispatched to Northern Ireland. On 02 February, the British Embassy in Dublin was burned to the ground. A fourteenth “Bloody Sunday” victim, John Johnston, later succumbed to his injuries in June 1972.



Ireland. It did so in the belief that by ratcheting up political pressure —and body bags— one or both of the group’s aforementioned immediate objectives could be achieved (“smashing” of Stormont and/or a British commitment to withdrawal). For the PIRA, this meant the deliberate targeting of the British Army and RUC.<sup>37</sup>

On 12 August 1970, officers Samuel Donaldson and Robert Millar became the first members of the RUC killed by the PIRA when both men died as a result of injuries sustained by a booby-trapped car bomb that had exploded the previous day in Crossmaglen. On 06 February 1971, 20-year-old Robert Curtis from Newcastle upon Tyne was the first British soldier to be killed by the PIRA when he died during a gun-battle in New Lodge, Belfast. Following Curtis’ death, Northern Ireland Prime Minister James Chichester-Clark announced on television that “Northern Ireland is at war with the Irish Republican Army Provisionals”.<sup>38</sup>

By the end of 1972, over 30,000 British Army personnel were stationed in Northern Ireland to fight this “war”. Moreover, as many as 725 people had already died since the start of the “Troubles” as a result of deliberate shootings, stray bullets, bombings, beatings, and inter-communal sectarian violence carried out by the “Provisional” and “Official” IRA, the British Army, the RUC, the Ulster Defence Regiment (UDR) and the loyalist groups of the Ulster Volunteer Force, and Ulster Defence Association (UDA). 496 people lost their lives in 1972 alone — historically the most violent year of the conflict. Citing the increasing spectre of full-scale sectarian civil war, in May 1972 the Official IRA declared a ceasefire, whilst maintaining a right to self-defence.<sup>39</sup>

Amidst the carnage of 1972, the PIRA achieved one of its main preliminary objectives. In March, the British government suspended the unionist-dominated Parliament of Northern Ireland in Belfast and introduced direct rule from London. In the summer, the PIRA demand for “withdrawal” was reiterated in face-to-face talks between the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland, William Whitelaw, and a republican delegation in London. Accompanying Seán Mac Stiofáin to the English capital were senior PIRA figures Dáithí

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<sup>37</sup> Patrick Bishop, Eamonn Mallie: *The Provisional IRA*, London, Corgi, 1988, p. 165–190. For a contemporaneous synopsis of this strategy from the PIRA itself, see: Provisional IRA: *Freedom Struggle*, Irish Republican Publicity Bureau, 1973.

<sup>38</sup> David McKittrick, Seamus Kelters, Brian Feeney, Chris Thornton: *Lost Lives*, Edinburgh, Mainstream Publishing, 1999, pp. 56–57, pp. 64–65. Chichester-Clark quote in: Irvin: *Militant Nationalism*, p. 58.

<sup>39</sup> For British army personnel statistics, see: “Security and Defence”, <https://cain.ulster.ac.uk/ni/security.htm#03>; <https://cain.ulster.ac.uk/othelem/chron/ch72.htm> (last accessed 01 October 2019). For statistics on victims, see: McKittrick *et al.*: *Lost Lives*, pp. 1473–1475; “Statement issued by the Executive of the Northern Republican Clubs announcing the suspension of all armed military actions by the IRA”: [https://cain.ulster.ac.uk/nai/1972/nai\\_DFA-2003-17-300\\_1972-05-29.pdf](https://cain.ulster.ac.uk/nai/1972/nai_DFA-2003-17-300_1972-05-29.pdf) (last accessed 21 December 2019).

Ó Conaill, Seamus Twomey and Ivor Bell, alongside two young upcoming republicans from Belfast and Derry, respectively: Gerry Adams and Martin McGuinness.<sup>40</sup>

Shortly after the London talks had broken down and a temporary truce between the two sides lapsed, the PIRA detonated at least twenty bombs in the space of 75 minutes in the heart of Belfast on 21 July 1972, killing nine civilians. “Bloody Friday” was the first major indiscriminate attack by the PIRA. It provoked a significant public backlash. The PIRA’s promised “Year of Victory” (1972) ultimately failed to materialise, and the “Troubles” grimly wore on.<sup>41</sup>

## 4.2. Active solidarity

“En el mundo actual, la lucha revolucionaria es esencialmente la lucha de los pueblos y naciones oprimidos por arrancar a sus opresores el derecho a la autodeterminación e independencia, y esta lucha toma en la mayoría de las veces la forma de lucha armada o de guerra popular, bien sea en Viet Nam, Kurdistán, Palestina, Irlanda o Euskadi. Esta lucha concierne igualmente a los pueblos que combaten el colonialismo militar clásico, como Angola, Mozambique y otros”.<sup>42</sup>

The Burgos Process of December 1970 prised open a new international vista for “ETA” or, what was in reality, two separate organisations: ETA-V and ETA-VI. Having become associated internationally with Basque “separatism” and resistance to Francoism, could ETA really “cash in” on its newfound attention, as one British FCO official suggested in the previous section? Moreover, could ETA emulate its anti-colonial/anti-imperialist contemporaries as the above quote references?

Post-Burgos, the numerically superior ETA-VI focused its attention on the more pressing task of building a mass revolutionary left-wing political movement. Yet, despite some modest success in establishing a presence in Basque factories and local assemblies, ETA-VI quickly fractured into Trotskyist and communist tendencies. ETA-V—bolstered by an influx of radical EGI militants and former ETA-VI comrades— would prove far more resilient.<sup>43</sup>

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<sup>40</sup> Moloney: *A Secret History of the IRA* (2<sup>nd</sup> ed.), pp. 112–114. Prior to the suspension of Stormont, the newly formed moderate nationalist party, the Social Democratic and Labour Party (SDLP), had already withdrawn from the institutions. See: Bew, Frampton, Gurruchaga: *Talking to Terrorists: Making Peace in Northern Ireland and the Basque Country*, p. 35.

<sup>41</sup> “Bloody Friday”, <https://cain.ulster.ac.uk/events/bfriday/sum.htm> (last accessed 19 December 2019); “1972 The Year of Victory”, *Republican News*, 02.01.1972.

<sup>42</sup> “Lucha Internacional - Comentario al Hautsi-2”, *Documentos Y*, vol. XVI, p. 402.

<sup>43</sup> Garmendia: “ETA: Nacimiento, Desarrollo y Crisis (1959–1978)”, (specifically pp. 162–166); Sullivan: *ETA and Basque Nationalism*, pp. 113–127.

Prior to ETA's divisive Sixth Assembly, Krutwig and a "P. Zugasti" had made a proposal: "en vista de que los investigadores serios del socialismo y de la política nos acuerdan hoy que nuestra lucha de liberación general de los pueblos del mundo", ETA should attempt to develop a suitable international front. Among the proposed "maxims" for this initiative were that "ETA y Euskalherria consideran que tienen derecho a aceptar la ayuda que les sea ofrecida para dicho combate, cualquiera que sea su origen". In addition, the two men suggested that:

"ETA debe expresar su completa solidaridad con los demás movimientos de liberación auténticos (nacionales que luchan con las armas por su liberación a saber: Viet Nam, Camboya, Laos, Bengala Desh, Dhofar, Somalia, Colonias portuguesas, IRA, FLQ)".<sup>44</sup>

Similarly, within a month of the Burgos Process, another proposal to "[i]niciar una política internacionalista [...] auténtica a ambos lados de la frontera, entrando concretamente en contacto con todas las fuerzas que aceptan hoy nuestro Derecho a la Autodeterminación" was suggested in a document that emanated from a group of "Milis izquierdistas" within ETA-V.<sup>45</sup>

On 15 January 1971, a statement was issued by the "Central Command of the Iraqi Communist Party" from the Yemeni city of Aden. Reproduced here for the first time, one of the signatories to this statement was a group calling itself "The Basque National Liberation Movement". This "movement", alongside a number of other revolutionary groups, affirmed the following in somewhat clunky English:

"In view of the fact that the following organisations consider the present struggle in Northern Ireland as a struggle for liberation and progressivism, and not a sectarian struggle as described by imperialist news agencies. Moreover, they consider the Irish cause as that of a persecuted people struggling against British imperialism and its allied ruling classes, as analysed by Lenin in his well known essay about the right of nations to decide their own fates. That is why these organisations: (1) Strongly denounce the means of suppression and terrorism used by the British occupation forces and the Fascist British organisations in Northern Ireland against Irish citizens (2) hail the Irish Republican Army which is launching an armed struggle for the completion of the national democratic revolution in the South and the liberation of the occupied Northern Ireland. These organisations appreciate the attitude of the [Irish Republican] army in connection with its support of the revolution in Southern Yemen, Palestine and the Arab occupied Gulf and (3) express their full cooperation with the struggle of the Irish people for the liquidation of the old British imperialism in the North and the new colonialism in the South, and the establishment of a unified, socialist, independent Irish Republic".<sup>46</sup>

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<sup>44</sup> "Comentarios y Proposiciones ante la Próxima Asamblea", *Documentos Y*, vol. XII, pp. 114–115.

<sup>45</sup> "Euskadi – Enero – 1971", *Documentos Y*, vol. XII, pp. 284–287.

<sup>46</sup> "Letter from UK Embassy in Beirut to FCO". Dated 30 January 1971. IRA. Political activities of Sinn Féin of Republic of Ireland. FCO 33/1593. NA. The other signatories were: The Popular Front for the

Representing almost an A to Z of contemporary liberation movements, the Aden statement was, as hinted at in part “(2)” above, more than likely motivated by the PIRA’s recent “attitude” regarding the aforesaid Arab revolutions.<sup>47</sup> And while it is difficult to assert with absolute certainty which “Basque National Liberation Movement” (presumably “ETA-V” or “ETA-VI”) signed the statement, or which IRA (“Provisional” or “Official”) is being referred to, this statement nonetheless represents, to this author’s knowledge, the very first public comment from “ETA” regarding the “Troubles” and the IRA’s role in that conflict. Others would soon follow.<sup>48</sup>

Four months later, on the occasion of May Day 1971, a combined three-way communique was penned by an “ETA – Delegación Exterior”, a Breton “FLB/ARB – Delegación Exterior” and the “IRA – P. O’Neill, Runai”.<sup>49</sup> As mentioned in the previous chapter, the self-styled “Delegación Exterior of the FLB/ARB” was Yann Goulet, the Breton nationalist who lived just outside Dublin, and whose “letterbox” operated as the *de facto* hub of the FLB’s international relations. Goulet, it should be noted, had a rather wild imagination when it came to his supposed command of Breton revolutionary activities.<sup>50</sup>

As the reader will recall, Goulet was also involved in the “Irish Basque Committee” that had formed around the Burgos Process. Unlike the previous Aden statement in January, there is no doubt that the IRA referred to in the May Day communique is that of the “Provisional” IRA, given that the signatory “P. O’Neill” has long been used by the “Provisionals” as a sort of collective *nom de guerre*. For these reasons, one could tentatively suggest that the communique was probably put together in Ireland and Goulet, who maintained close contacts with republicans,<sup>51</sup> its most likely coordinator/facilitator.

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Liberation of the Arab Occupied Gulf; The Front for the Liberation of Eritrea; The Front for the Liberation of Quebec; The Front for the Liberation of the Occupied Somali Coast; The Front for the Liberation of Western Occupied Somaliland; The Popular Front for the Liberation of Palestine (PFLP).

<sup>47</sup> The previous September, the PFLP had carried out five high-profile airplane hijackings bound for New York and London.

<sup>48</sup> ETA-V will hereafter be simply referred to as ETA.

<sup>49</sup> “Comunicado conjunto ante el 1 de Mayo, E.T.A. – I.R.A. – F.L.B.”, *Zutik!*, no. 63, *Documentos Y*, vol. XII, p. 351. The Irish word “Runai” translates to “Secretary” in English.

<sup>50</sup> In Brittany, where the word “republic” denotes Jacobinism, the Armée Républicaine Bretonne (ARB) was instead usually understood and referred to as the Breton *Revolutionary Army*. For this detail, plus a short overview of Goulet’s exaggerated claims, see: Leach: *Fugitive Ireland*, p. 204–205. The ARB has been described by one historian as the “paramilitary wing” of the FLB. See: Schrijver: *Regionalism After Regionalisation: Spain, France and the United Kingdom*, p. 213.

<sup>51</sup> Brendan Anderson: *Joe Cahill: A Life in the IRA*, Dublin, O’Brien Press, 2002, pp. 263–264.

Where ETA's "Delegación Exterior" fit into this equation is harder to read. Prior to ETA's Sixth Assembly in August 1970, tenuous contacts and links between ETA and Breton nationalists seemed to have primarily centred around the UDB.<sup>52</sup>

Regardless of exactly how the PIRA, ETA, and the FLB/ARB ended up collaborating on the May Day communique of 1971, the text itself presented a united front in condemning the "national" and "social" oppression of the administrations in Madrid, London and Paris, respectively, as well as the forces of European capitalism. As a means of resistance, the three organisations called for mutual "active solidarity".

"[...] esta represión afecta en particular los movimientos socialistas de liberación nacional ETA, FLB e IRA que son la vanguardia de lucha. Ante la unión del capitalismo europeo en el Mercado Común para reprimir la lucha de todos los trabajadores, pequeños comerciantes, intelectuales, etc., hacemos un llamamiento de SOLIDARIDAD ACTIVA de todos los pueblos oprimidos, así como a los militantes y organizaciones revolucionarios y democráticas de Europa para apoyar nuestras justas aspiraciones de liberación nacional y social, por la lucha de masas y la lucha armada hasta la victoria total".<sup>53</sup>

In addition to the notion of "active solidarity", analyses of the Basque, Irish and Breton cases could perhaps provide indicative lessons for each of the three signatories. For instance, in March 1972, a dossier on the emerging "Troubles" in Northern Ireland and the IRA's role in that conflict was:

"[...] publicado por ETA para todos sus militantes como medio para su conocimiento del problema irlandés y para la comprobación de sus semejanzas y diferencias con el problema vasco".

Consisting of two articles written by a Belgian author Nathan Weinstock and an interview with a former Saor Uladh (Free Ulster) volunteer Gerry Lawless, the dossier essentially outlined a pro-republican analysis of the conflict in Northern Ireland.<sup>54</sup>

On 03 April 1972, "P. O'Neill", the fictitious "Secretary" of the Irish Republican Publicity Bureau (IRPB), alongside representatives of ETA and the FLB/ARB, issued another communique, written in French, and signed in "Irlande du Nord".<sup>55</sup> This second communique called for a boycott of an upcoming referendum that was due to take place

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<sup>52</sup> In addition to the reciprocal discursive solidarity referred to in the previous chapter, ETA and the UDB were also co-signatories to a December 1969 statement in support of Kurdish revolutionaries. See: "Comuniqué d'ETA, décembre 1969", *Documentos Y*, vol. VIII, p. 303.

<sup>53</sup> "Comunicado conjunto ante el 1 de Mayo, E.T.A. – I.R.A. – F.L.B.", *Zutik!*, no. 63, *Documentos Y*, vol. XII, p. 351.

<sup>54</sup> See: *Documentos Y*, vol. XV, pp. 65–75. Weinstock's two articles were titled: "Irlanda: una colonia en Europa" and "La burguesía del Sur al servicio del Imperialismo Británico". Saor Uladh was a minor 1950s offshoot of the IRA. Lawless' membership cited in: Hanley: *The IRA. A Documentary History 1916–2005*, p. 148.

<sup>55</sup> "Communiqué (Irlande du Nord, 03.04.72)", *Documentos Y*, vol. XII, p. 396.

in France on enlargement of the EEC. There is indirect evidence to suggest that the aforementioned Pérez Beotegua (*Wilson*) may have signed this statement on behalf of his organisation. *Wilson*, as we shall see, would become a key figure in radical Basque nationalist-Irish republican relations.<sup>56</sup>

Presumably on the basis of the joint statement, two months later, a French left-wing political periodical *Politique Hebdo* claimed that the PIRA, ETA and FLB had established an alliance.<sup>57</sup>

Before the year had ended, a more concise and updated version of the January 1971 Aden statement was printed in Paris. This time, the Basque signatory was clearly stated as “The Revolutionary Basque Movement for National Liberation ETA”. In this new “Manifeste de soutien à l’IRA”, ETA, alongside thirteen other groups including the FLB, sent their:

“[...] military greetings to the glorious Irish Republican Army (IRA), which is waging armed struggle to carry through the tasks of the national democratic revolution in Southern Ireland and liberate the North [...]”.<sup>58</sup>

Despite the jointly issued Irish-Basque-Breton communiqués of 1971 and 1972 and the ETA-signed statements of solidarity issued in support of the PIRA’s “liberation” campaign, none of the above were ever carried in the IRM’s main propaganda organs (*An Phoblacht* in Dublin, *Republican News* in Belfast), nor had either periodical reported on, or even referred to the Burgos Process of December 1970. In fact, from the beginning of 1970 to the end of 1972, there were only two brief mentions of the Basques across the IRM’s entire international coverage: one, in connection to an article on Scottish Gaelic; the other, in dual condemnation of left- and right-wing dictatorships in Poland and Spain, respectively.<sup>59</sup> There was clearly little store, at this stage, put into communicating the type of “SOLIDARID ACTIVIA” called for in the 1971 May Day statement. This is, of course, not to suggest that more covert relations were not incrementally developing between the PIRA and ETA throughout this period.

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<sup>56</sup> According to former editor of *Egin*, José Félix Azurmendi, the London-based Manuel Irujo was, at the time, concerned about *Wilson*’s activities in the English capital: “Por razones personales, le preocupa especialmente la actividad de Pérez Beotegui en Londres, le preocupan los comunicados conjuntos que ETA ha firmado con la Delegación del Movimiento de Liberación Nacional Palestino Fatah y con el Partido Democrático del Kurdistán (Irán) en Bucarest; y el que ha rubricado en Irlanda Norte junto al Ejército Republicano Bretón (FLB-ARB) y el Ejército Republicano de Irlanda [...]”. See: José Félix Azurmendi: *PNV-ETA. Crónica oculta (1960–1979)*, Donostia, Tarttalo, 2012, p. 141.

<sup>57</sup> “Nortre Lutte Nationale Est Revolutionnaire”, *Politique Hebdo*, no. 35, 29.06.1972.

<sup>58</sup> “Manifeste de soutien à l’IRA”, *Documentos Y*, vol. XII, pp. 465–469.

<sup>59</sup> “Ireland’s Problems in Scottish Eyes”, *An Phoblacht*, November 1970; “Spain and Poland: Dictatorship Condemned”, *An Phoblacht*, January 1971.



Following the republican movement's split across December 1969 and January 1970, the PIRA had immediately looked to arms and funding via long-standing connections with sympathetic Irish diasporic communities in the USA and Britain. However, in moving their operations onto a more offensive footing, the "Provisionals" would require new lines of arms procurement. As early as 1971, PIRA leaders were already scouring continental Europe in search of high-calibre weaponry.<sup>60</sup>

In early 1972, a meeting was apparently held between a group of Bretons and a "Provisional" delegation at an unknown location. According to the veteran journalist and "Troubles" analyst, Ed Moloney, the Bretons suggested that Colonel Muammar Gaddafi's Libyan regime could perhaps be of some assistance in meeting the military needs of the PIRA campaign.<sup>61</sup> Indeed, only a few months earlier, Gaddafi had publicly voiced his support for the Irish revolutionaries. As Moloney explains in "A Secret History of the IRA", thus began a long and fruitful PIRA-Libyan relationship.<sup>62</sup>

Later that summer, the "Provisionals'" search for arms expanded to Algeria, where a consignment of RPG 7 rocket launchers was apparently secured. The investigative journalist Martin Dillon suggests that "the crucial connections [for this deal] were initially made with the Basque separatist movement ETA, which already had a well-established arms-supply route to the Middle East".<sup>63</sup> As with the above Breton/"Provisionals" meeting, Dillon's claim are difficult to substantiate.

Another regularly cited source for PIRA-ETA military contacts and relations during the early 1970s comes from a former "Provisional" republican, Maria McGuire. McGuire "spent a year working with the Provisional IRA" before leaving in the summer of 1972, disgusted at the aforementioned "Bloody Friday" attacks in Belfast and Mac Stiofáin's supposed ruthless control over the organisation.<sup>64</sup> In her memoir, McGuire recalls a

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<sup>60</sup> NORAID or INAC (Irish Northern Aid Committee) was founded in 1970 by representatives of the Provisional IRA and long-standing Irish republican activists in New York. In its early days, NORAID "more or less openly canvassed for funds for arms". See: Brian Hanley: "The Politics of NORAID", *Irish Political Studies*, 19, 1, 2004, pp. 1–17 (quote on p. 2); Bishop; Mallie: *The Provisional IRA*, pp. 293–301; Martin Dillon: *The Dirty War*, London, Arrow Books, 2001, p. 388, pp. 427–430. In November 1971, four and a half tons of small arms destined for Ireland were seized at Amsterdam's Schiphol Airport in the Netherlands.

<sup>61</sup> Moloney: *A Secret History of the IRA* (2<sup>nd</sup> ed.), pp. 8–9. In *Joe Cahill: A Life in the IRA*, the Breton nationalist Yann Goulet is named as a go-between Gaddafi and the PIRA. See: Anderson: *Joe Cahill: A Life in the IRA*, p. 263.

<sup>62</sup> Moloney: *A Secret History of the IRA* (2<sup>nd</sup> ed.), pp. 3–34. See also: O'Brien: *The Long War. The IRA & Sinn Féin* (3<sup>rd</sup> ed.), pp. 133–153; "Sinn Féin in Gaddafi U-turn: Despot who backed IRA denounced by republicans", *Belfast Telegraph*, 23.02.2011.

<sup>63</sup> Dillon: *The Dirty War*, pp. 426–432.

<sup>64</sup> Maria McGuire: *To Take Arms. My Year with the Irish Provisionals*, London, MacMillan, 1973, pp. 9–10. Mac Stiofáin rejected McGuire's claims as "simply another attempt to discredit the leadership and

meeting that purportedly took place in Ireland between a republican delegation and “two groups, one French and one Spanish, from the Basque resistance movement ETA”. According to McGuire, the Basques’ offered 50 revolvers in exchange for training in the use of explosives, which can be inferred as gelignite from her account.<sup>65</sup>

Although McGuire does not specify when this meeting took place, given the timeline of her PIRA activity and a contemporary newspaper interview in which she states: “Just before I left, I was translating some business correspondence between ourselves and a Basque underground group who wanted to give us revolvers in exchange for training”,<sup>66</sup> it is likely to have occurred during the first half of 1972. McGuire’s memoir has since been cited heavily in the media and academia as evidence of early 1970s ETA-IRA collaboration.<sup>67</sup>

It was probably McGuire’s claims which led Sean O’Callaghan, a former PIRA volunteer turned undercover intelligence agent, to state in his own memoir:

“[...] [t]he links between ETA and the IRA run deep; the two organizations have often cooperated and pooled ideas, technology and training. As far back as 1972, ETA supplied the IRA with weapons. The accounts of what was supplied differ but not the fact of it”.<sup>68</sup>

Other claims of IRA-ETA cooperation from this period stem from their inferred mutual attendance of an October 1971 “Guerilla International”, organised in Florence by the Italian businessman-cum-revolutionary Giangiacomo Feltrinelli.<sup>69</sup> Meanwhile, a 1984 Spanish government dossier on ETA’s international contacts refers to an ETA-IRA meeting held in 1972 “en el Centro Español de Londres”, during which:

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encourage disunity in the movement”. He also stated that “she was empathically never a member of the IRA, except in her own dramatic imagination”. Mac Stiofáin: *Revolutionary in Ireland*, pp. 306–308.

<sup>65</sup> McGuire: *To Take Arms*, p. 71, p. 110. An extract from a 1988 publication by the “Institute for the Study of Terrorism” stated: “According to McGuire, Jose Echebarrieta [José Antonio Etxebarrieta], one of ETA’s senior commanders, had made the deal with Sean MacStiofan, the then chief IRA Chief of Staff during two secret visits to Dublin”. As we shall see, Etxebarrieta did indeed reportedly make two visits to Dublin in 1972; however, McGuire does not specify any ETA member in *To Take Arms* – although she may well have done so in a subsequent interview. See: Institute for the Study of Terrorism: *IRA, INLA: Foreign Support and International Connections, IRA, INLA: Foreign Support and International Connections*, London, 1988, p. 41.

<sup>66</sup> “My gun-running bid for the Provisionals”, *Irish Independent*, 11.09.1972.

<sup>67</sup> For example, see: “Adams urges ETA towards peace”, <http://news.bbc.co.uk/2/hi/europe/176082.stm> (site last accessed 01 November 2019). Alonso: “The International Dimension of ETA’s Terrorism and the Internationalization of the Conflict in the Basque Country”. Michael McKinley: “The International Dimensions of Terrorism in Ireland” in Yonah Alexander, Alan O’Day (eds.): *Terrorism in Ireland*, New York, St. Martin’s Press, 1984, pp. 3–31 (specifically p. 8). At the time of writing, Maria McGuire (Gatland) is a Conservative Party Councillor in Croydon, London.

<sup>68</sup> Sean O’Callaghan: *The Informer*, London, Corgi Books, 1999, p. 143.

<sup>69</sup> Claire Sterling: *The Terror Network*, New York, Berkley Books, 1981; “Terrorism tracing the international network”, *The New York Times*, 01.03.1981.

“[...] se toma el acuerdo de enviar cuatro militantes de ETA a entrenarse en campos del Ulster y un representante permanente en Irlanda encargado de mantener contacto con el IRA”.<sup>70</sup>

Finally, a London-based “Institute for the Study of Terrorism”, again possibly echoing McGuire’s claims, published a report in 1988 which asserted that in 1972:

“[...] a number of ETA terrorists visited Ireland to update themselves on IRA tactics and bomb-making techniques. Further arms deals were arranged and shortly afterwards ETA supplied a consignment of explosives to the Provisional IRA in exchange for M-16 rifles”.<sup>71</sup>

Piecing through the above information, one may suggest 1971/1972 as a likely starting point for any *possible* working relationship that may have existed beyond joint statements.

Finally, while the Burgos Process and the congruent emergence of political violence in both contexts may be said to have grounded these initial contacts and relations, this transnational nexus would become highly conditioned by the vagrancies of intra-movement splits, and personal circumstances.

### **Revolutionaries on tour (part I)**

“We needed international contacts to counter the British saying it was a Catholic versus Protestant medieval conflict. It wasn’t. It was colonial”.<sup>72</sup>

As the PIRA’s military campaign moved on to the front foot in the early 1970s, the nascent “Provisional” Sinn Féin party (illegal in the North, and still maintaining its long-held policy of abstention in the South) was putting the finishing touches to a comprehensive policy document. Launched in 1971, “Éire Nua” (New Ireland) articulated a political, social, and economic vision around radical participatory forms of local government, and cooperative ownership of natural resources and industry — a sort of halfway house between the excesses of the capitalist West and socialist East. Éire Nua also proposed a new federal solution to Irish unity.<sup>73</sup> Given the party’s position on

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<sup>70</sup> “Un comando de ETA intentó asesinar en 1983 al ministro de Defensa de El Salvador, según un informe del Gobierno”, *El País*, 13.01.1984. On reading this report in 1984, a British FCO official from the Information Department stated in a letter to a colleague: “We cannot name the ETA member who is alleged to have been appointed ‘permanent representative in Ireland responsible for maintaining contacts with the IRA’, but the links with the two groups are such that the reference could be true”. “Document titled ‘ETA’s international links’”. Dated 20 January 1984. The IRA overseas. FCO 87/1869. NA.

<sup>71</sup> Institute for the Study of Terrorism: *IRA, INLA: Foreign Support and International Connections*, IRA, *INLA: Foreign Support and International Connections*, p. 41.

<sup>72</sup> Author interview with Richard Behal (conducted by phone, 2015).

<sup>73</sup> White: *Ruairí Ó Brádaigh*, pp. 192–194. Work on what would become *Éire Nua* actually began in the 1960s. See: Treacy: *The IRA, 1956–69. Rethinking the Republic*, p. 116. Addressing the key constitutional

abstention and the Provisional IRA's ongoing armed campaign, PSF's domestic agenda was, in many ways, almost completely defined by Éire Nua during Ruairí Ó Brádaigh's tenure as party president (1970–1983).

Provisional Sinn Féin was also keen to externalise the “struggle”. At the party's 1973 Árd Fheis, an “International Office” was unanimously backed by delegates. Richard Behal, a republican of some lore, was tasked with running international affairs from a base in Brussels. Behal's brief, as the above quote illustrates, was to primarily counter prevailing perceptions of the “Troubles” as an *intra*-Irish conflict.

With “a small amount of money”, Behal became “a sort of roving ambassador” for the “Provisional” movement on the continent. Alongside Ó Brádaigh and another republican, Seán Keenan, Behal would subsequently establish connections with Basque, Breton, Catalan, Kurdish, Palestinian, Scottish, and Welsh nationalists. In the view of White, it was Ó Brádaigh's long-held affinity towards the stateless nations of Europe that did much to guide the party's initial approach on international matters.<sup>74</sup>

Dovetailing with the creation of PSF's “International Office”, Eli Karmon pinpoints 1973 as a key year in radical Basque nationalist-Irish republican relations. Citing a 1979 report compiled by the Spanish government, Karmon suggests that:

“[...] cooperation attained a peak in 1973, when ETA militants trained in Northern Ireland, IRA specialists in explosives came to the Basque Country and the two organizations published a common statement in September attacking the European Common Market, NATO, and the ‘capitalist states’”.<sup>75</sup>

While this dossier suggests an advanced level of reciprocity in military matters, only the last of these claims can be conclusively verified here. The September 1973 joint statement, published in *Hautsi* and signed by the Provisional IRA and ETA, strongly

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issue of Northern Ireland, *Éire Nua* proposed its *de facto* replacement with a nine-county autonomous Ulster Parliament (Dáil Uladh), further broken up into autonomous district councils. Under the proposals, it was envisaged that the Protestant/unionist community would still hold a slim overall majority in Ulster and have effective autonomous control of unionist and loyalist heartlands via the district councils. In total, four provincial Dáil would send representatives to a new federal parliament to be located in Athlone (Baile Átha Luain) in the geographical centre of the island.

<sup>74</sup> White: *Out of the Ashes*, p. 107; White: *Ruairí Ó Brádaigh*, pp. 210–211. As an IRA volunteer, Richard (sometimes Risteárd) Behal was arrested and charged for his involvement in an attack on a British ship, *Brave Borderer*, in 1965. Having escaped from prison, Behal was involved in a number of unsanctioned republican incidents of sabotage around the Irish midlands. Deemed to have gone “rogue”, Behal was court-martialled by the IRA and sentenced to death. His death sentence was subsequently lifted on condition that he cease his unsanctioned activities. See: Bowyer Bell: *The Secret Army. The IRA, 1916–1979* (Rev. ed), pp. 342–343; Treacy: *The IRA, 1956–69. Rethinking the Republic*, pp. 92–93. “Roving Ambassador” cited in “Joint FCO-NIO paper titled Irish terrorist contacts in Europe and the Third World”. Dated May 1982.

<sup>75</sup> Karmon: *Coalitions Between Terrorist Organisations*, p. 232 (footnote 65). The 1979 Spanish governmental document cited by Karmon is titled: *La organización revolucionaria y terrorista ETA*.

condemned the EEC and its alignment with capitalism. Equally as strong was the unity of purpose expressed by ETA and the PIRA in the final passage:

“[...] Pretendemos llevar adelante una lucha armada directa contra el aparato de ocupación y explotación de los Estados opresores como única vía para el logro de nuestros objetivos. Lo único que nos mueve a ello es la convicción plena de que de otro modo no obtendremos la repuesta al problema que nos plantea nuestra existencia concreta como pueblos nacional y socialmente oprimidos.  
POR UNA SOCIEDAD EUROPA DE PUEBLOS LIBRES Y SIN CLASES.  
POR UNA EUROPA UNIDA Y SOCIALISTA”.<sup>76</sup>

Notwithstanding these kinds of PIRA-ETA statements (the third in as many years), and the potential military links referred to thus far in this chapter, the *real* catalyst for increased speculation regarding radical Basque nationalist-Irish republican relations was ETA’s assassination of Spanish Prime Minister, Admiral Luis Carrero Blanco, on 20 December 1973.

Killed instantly by a car bomb in the Spanish capital, Carrero Blanco was Franco’s most trusted right-hand man and anointed successor. Within hours of his death, the Irish Embassy had received a phone call from a Madrid-based newspaper. The journalist wanted to know whether the ambassador, Brian Gallagher, had granted asylum to a wanted Irish man. Writing to his superiors in Dublin three days later, Gallagher remarked:

“We replied of course that there was no truth whatsoever in this rumour. I suppose the thing must have been due to some crazy idea that the IRA, the Embassy and ETA were likely to be working together”.<sup>77</sup>

Within a week of the assassination, an “Irish” hypothesis around the assassination had already emerged in the media. On 27 December, *The Times* reported that representatives of the IRA had sold a quantity of plastic explosives to ETA. Apparently sourced from Sweden, these explosives were allegedly transported to an ETA cell in Toulouse and then smuggled over the border. Other reports speculated that explosives had been exchanged between the two groups in Andorra a few months earlier in September — incidentally, the same month that the joint PIRA-ETA statement was published in *Hautsi*.

Days after these newspaper reports, ETA held a clandestine press conference in Bordeaux in the south of France. During the media gathering, an ETA spokesperson reportedly confirmed that the organisation had been in contact on more than one occasion with both the “Provisional” and “Official” IRA. Meanwhile, on 08 January, the Breton

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<sup>76</sup> “IRA/ETA Elkarrekin Komunikatua” *Hautsi*, no. 4, *Documentos Y*, vol. XVI, pp. 447–448.

<sup>77</sup> “Letter from Brian Gallagher to Department of Foreign Affairs”. Dated 23 December 1973. Political situation in Spain. 2005/4/31. NAI.

FLB chipped in with its own statement expressing “solidarity with the ETA and IRA fighters, which we help and which help us, and with other oppressed ethnic groups in France and the world [...]”.<sup>78</sup>

Given the speculation of ETA-PIRA cooperation, and rumours circulating in the British press of relations between ETA and Libya, the Spanish Minister Counsellor in London, Gómez Acebo, put his concerns to an FCO official in London. The British official reported his response to Gómez Acebo as:

“I replied that I did not know [about Libya’s links with ETA], though I believed it to be true that Col Qaddafi had assisted the IRA. I would see whether HMG had any information on the subject. If we had, it might be preferable to pass it to the Spaniards through intelligence, rather than diplomatic channels”.<sup>79</sup>

On 20 January, an article written by Irish journalist Dermot Keogh appeared in the Madrid daily *Informaciones*. In the piece, Keogh reported “an important member of the Military Council of the IRA” as confirming the organisation to be “in continuous and ever more important contacts with ETA”. The senior PIRA member was not prepared to divulge details of these contacts. He did, however, reportedly state that the PIRA’s links also extended to “many other organisations engaged in the struggle against imperialism”.

Keogh himself speculated that contacts between ETA and the PIRA may have been established by the PIRA volunteer Dolours Price during an “international revolutionary socialist conference” held in Milan in early 1972. Of more immediate relevance to the assassination of Carrero Blanco, the journalist suggested that “ETA probably received instructions from the “Provos” in handling explosives. The car bomb is a ‘Provo’ speciality and this technique has been used already in the Basque provinces”.<sup>80</sup>

A week later, there was a new angle to the ETA-IRA rumours. The *Irish Press* reported that ETA may have paid 10 million pesetas to a former member of the French Legion and explosives expert to mastermind the Carrero Blanco assassination. Impressed by the

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<sup>78</sup> “IRA ‘supplied explosives for Madrid assassination’”, *The Times*, 27.12.1973; “IRA linked with Premier’s killers”, *Daily Mail*, 27.12.1973; “‘Assassins Group’ had contact with IRA”, *Sunday Independent*, 30.12.1973; “French to keep close eye on IRA”, *Evening Herald*, 05.01.1974; “Irish help from separatists in Brittany”, *Irish Times*, 09.01.1974. Another contemporaneous hypothesis suggested US Central Intelligence Agency (CIA) involvement in the attack. See: “Dos conspiraciones menos: la CIA no mató a Carrero Blanco ni participó en el 23-F”, *El Confidencial*, 16.11.2014; “Asesinato de Carrero: golpe al búnker”, *El Mundo*, 05.05.2018.

<sup>79</sup> “Letter titled ‘Libya and the Basques’”. Dated 10 January 1974. The Basque Problem. FCO 9/2090. NA.

<sup>80</sup> A report of Keogh’s article, which appeared on 23.01.1974 in *Informaciones*, appears in: “Unclassified letter titled ‘IRA-ETA Contacts’ sent from the British Embassy, Madrid, to FCO”. Undated. The Basque Problem. FCO 9/2090. NA.



clinical nature of the attack, the PIRA had allegedly decided to enlist the shadowy figure for their own military operations.<sup>81</sup>

Various other reports attesting to PIRA-ETA relations continued to do the rounds throughout the year. In January, *The Daily Telegraph* pinpointed a British-based Basque monk, Elias Jauregui, as a possible “contact between the IRA and ETA”. Jauregui had been living at St. Gregory’s School, Kent, when he was apparently forced to leave after his lodgings were raided by detectives. An article that appeared in the Spanish right-wing periodical *Fuerza Nueva* is what seems to have sparked the focus on the monk and his purported ETA-PIRA connections.<sup>82</sup>

On 11 April, an interview published in the German newspaper *Der Spiegel* quoted an ETA spokesman as stating that his organisation had “good, very good relations with the IRA”.<sup>83</sup> In July, an article in the *Irish Times* referred to a planned meeting in Edinburgh between three members of ETA and two members of the PIRA’s Belfast Brigade. Ostensibly arranged by the Fourth International, the ETA-PIRA rendezvous was said to have been cancelled at the last minute when, somewhat bizarrely, ETA came under pressure from “Left-wing leaders of the British National Union of mineworkers”.<sup>84</sup>

On more solid factual ground, Ruairí Ó Brádaigh and Richard Behal crossed paths with a “Basque delegation” the same month at an International Conference of Minorities that took place in the Italian alpine region of Trieste.<sup>85</sup> More than likely related to this conference, a joint statement of solidarity signed by Provisional Sinn Féin, ETA, and a number of other European nationalist organisations emerged three months later. Originally written in the Piedmontese and Italian languages, the statement read:

“We, assembled representatives of oppressed nations and peoples of western Europe, declare that we have the same aims and hopes: the complete liberation — political, cultural and social— of our peoples in a new co-operating Europe. We declare our solidarity with each other and hereby resolve to exchange with each other all information relating to our struggle, and to assist each other in the fight”.<sup>86</sup>

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<sup>81</sup> “Carrero’s ‘assassin’ hired by IRA?”, *Irish Press*, 28.01.1974.

<sup>82</sup> “Ex-Monk’s Room Searched”, *The Daily Telegraph*, 26.01.1974.

<sup>83</sup> Cited in: “ETA’s ‘good relations’ with IRA”, *Irish Press*, 12.03.1974.

<sup>84</sup> “Basque Guerrilla Fight Influenced By IRA”, *Irish Times*, 18.07.1975.

<sup>85</sup> White: *Ruairí Ó Brádaigh*, p. 211.

<sup>86</sup> This excerpt is taken from an English translation which appeared in *An Phoblacht*. According to the same source, the original statement was published in a Piedmontese paper, *La Voce Comunista*. Apart from PSF and ETA, other signatories to the statement reportedly included a Sardinian newspaper, *Su populu sardu*; Groep Sonde (Frisian); “the Harpeitan movement ALPA”; Were Di (Flemish); and *La Voce Comunista* itself “on behalf of the Piedmontese liberation movement”. See: “Shaping the New Europe”, *An Phoblacht*, 06.09.1974.

Lastly, a Spanish radio report on 11 October claimed that a consignment of ETA's arms had been loaded on board two ships in the French-Basque town of Baiona. The arms were apparently bound for Cork (Corcaigh) in the south of Ireland. A subsequent police search of the ships proved negative.<sup>87</sup>

Despite all the above speculation regarding ETA-PIRA links, and the latter's possible role in the assassination of Carrero Blanco, there was no trace of any "Irish" hypothesis in the most-detailed account of the Madrid attack: "Operación Ogro. Cómo y por qué ejecutamos a Carrero". Written by Eva Forest, a Partido Comunista España (PCE) dissident, and published under the pseudonym Julen Aguirre in 1974, "Operación Ogro" provided a first-hand and (mostly) factual account of the planning and execution of the entire operation. In short, ETA's assassination of the premier was carried out by a commando cell (*Txikia*) operating in the Spanish capital with no outside assistance.<sup>88</sup>

That the PIRA seemingly had no hand in ETA's most spectacular attack, in a sense, mattered little. There was already enough speculation, innuendo, claims and joint statements (May Day communique 1971, Irlande du Nord statement 1972, *Hautsi* declaration 1973, Piedmontese statement 1974) between 1970 and late 1974 to have built up the perception of a symbiotic relationship between ETA and PIRA in the minds of many radical Basque nationalists, Irish republicans, the Irish, British and Spanish media, and arguably within the diplomatic and political hubs of each of the states involved. Even General Franco himself had shown a keen interest in the IRA during a meeting with the new Irish Ambassador to Spain, Charles V. Whelan, in July 1974.<sup>89</sup>

It is certainly true that ETA and the PIRA developed an undetermined (and arguably *undeterminable*) level of contacts and cooperation, circa 1970/1971 to late 1974, somewhere along the spectrum from fraternal statements of solidarity to exchanges of weaponry and training in explosives.

It is also true that this was not quite the full story.

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<sup>87</sup> Cited in: "Points which may arise in the Anglo-Irish context in discussions with the Spanish Foreign Minister". Spanish Foreign Minister – Visit to Dublin, 1976. 2008/148/335. NAI.

<sup>88</sup> Julen Aguirre (pseud. Eva Forest): *Operación Ogro. Cómo y por qué ejecutamos a Carrero Blanco*, Hendaie, Ediciones Ugalde, 1974. Forest changed some of the core details in order to protect those who were involved in the attack.

<sup>89</sup> "Letter from Charles V. Whelan". Dated 01 January 1974. Confidential reports from Madrid. 2005/4/64. NAI.

## Revolutionaries on tour (part II)

In 1972, José Antonio Etxebarrieta, the former EGI comrade of Iker Gallastegi, ETA ideologue, and defence lawyer for the Burgos accused, reportedly visited Ireland on two occasions. Perhaps wishing to demonstrate equal sensitivities to the bitter republican rivals, or simply hedging his bets, Etxebarrieta apparently held meetings at the offices of *both* the “Provisional” and “Official” factions of Sinn Féin.<sup>90</sup>

Speaking to the respective republican groups, Etxebarrieta would have learned that, unlike the “Provisionals”, the “Officials” believed Northern Ireland’s institutions and security apparatus could be reformed. Guided by an explicitly Marxist “stageist” theoretical analysis, reform was seen by the NLF as the first step towards the creation of a cross-community working-class alliance. Only when sectarianism was overcome could the working-class, North and South, mobilize towards a united Ireland and socialist revolution.<sup>91</sup> On international matters, Etxebarrieta may have noticed one other difference between the “Provisionals” and “Officials”: the latter’s increasingly explicit support for the socialist East.<sup>92</sup>

In April 1972, a full year before the establishment of the PSF’s “International Office”, an “International Secretariat” was set up by Official Sinn Féin. According to *United Irishman*, which had remained in OSF hands post-split, the duty of the newly-formed international body was “to keep in touch with fraternal organisations throughout the world and to keep them informed of developments in the Irish situation”.<sup>93</sup> Malachy McGurran, Seán Ó Cionnaith and Eoin Ó Murchú formed the first Secretariat. All three had sat on an extended OIRA Army Council in 1970, with McGurran holding the position of Northern Commander of the Army and Vice President of Official Sinn Féin.<sup>94</sup>

Of the original Secretariat, Ó Murchú is the only surviving member. Born and raised in London, he became a prominent activist of the British-based Irish republican “Connolly Association”, before going on to study at Trinity College, Dublin. At Trinity, he was a co-founder of the university’s Republican Club.

In interview with this author, Ó Murchú recalls the OSF’s International Secretariat as driven by two interrelated focal points. The first: “to establish links with militant leftist

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<sup>90</sup> “Basque Guerrilla Fight Influenced By IRA”, *Irish Times*, 18.07.1975.

<sup>91</sup> Hanley; Millar: *The Lost Revolution*, p. 220; Irvin: *Militant Nationalism*, p. 56

<sup>92</sup> Hanley; Millar: *The Lost Revolution*, pp. 264–268.

<sup>93</sup> “Far & Near”, *United Irishman*, April 1972.

<sup>94</sup> Hanley; Millar: *The Lost Revolution*, p. 149.

nationalist movements in Western Europe”. The second was to develop relations with the “socialist countries” of eastern Europe and beyond.<sup>95</sup>

By establishing and maintaining relations with “leftist nationalist movements in western Europe”, the NLF sought to, in the words of Ó Murchú, “illuminate the denial of Irish national self-determination”. Targeting the EEC on this issue —its “soft underbelly”— would go some way to exposing and undermining the community’s “undemocratic” nature and “supposed progressiveness”.<sup>96</sup> The successful dissemination of this analysis into mainstream political discourse would then feed into the second strand of the NLF’s international approach: advocating for and developing links with the only realistic alternative to capitalist western Europe: the socialist states of the East.

A month after the formation of the “Official” International Secretariat, in May 1972 *United Irishman* carried a report of a UDB conference held in Brittany, at which Ó Murchú spoke. Also in attendance were “observers” from ETA and the Galician Unión de Povo Galego (UPG) — a leftist revolutionary party that sought Galician self-determination:

“International solidarity with the Irish struggle continues to grow. Recently Eoin Ó Murchú, editor of the ‘United Irishman’ visited Brittany where he spoke at a conference organised by the Unveniez Demokratel Brezhoneg / Union Democratique Bretonne. This organisation is engaged upon building in Brittany a movement of national liberation extremely similar to that being undertaken by radical forces here. The conference of the UDB was held in the South of Brittany and was attended by observers from the Basque liberation movement, ETA, from the UPG of Galicia as well as by representatives of the Irish revolutionary movement. Extreme interest was shown in the events that are taking place in Ireland and money was given for the Prisoners’s Fund. This forging of deep-rooted international contacts is seen as very important by the Republican Movement because we recognise that the fight for national liberation against imperialism is a worldwide one. Victory for Ireland means victory for all subject peoples, just like victory for the Vietnamese is a victory for us”.<sup>97</sup>

The same month that this article was published, Ó Murchú was, as he recalls, “on other business” in Beirut.<sup>98</sup> Was there any “business” to be conducted with ETA in 1972?

“We met Basque people from time to time, but we never established, if you like, an organisational link in the sense that we did with the other organisations that we met. That wouldn’t have been because of any disagreement as such. It’s just that we didn’t get around to doing that, in that sense, at least not in my time”.<sup>99</sup>

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<sup>95</sup> Author interview with Eoin Ó Murchú (Dublin, 2017).

<sup>96</sup> Ibid.

<sup>97</sup> “International Solidarity”, *United Irishman*, May 1972.

<sup>98</sup> Author interview with Eoin Ó Murchú (Dublin, 2017).

<sup>99</sup> Ibid.

While 1972 proved to be a “year of increasingly vicious repression” on the domestic front for the NLF,<sup>100</sup> a resolution passed at the OSF Árd Fheis in January 1973 called for “the oppressed and colonised of the world”, including the Irish and Basques, to rise up together to smash imperialism:

“For us all, oppressed and colonised of the world — Basques, Bretons, Angolans, people of Asia, Latin America and Africa, the oppressed and colonised negroes of America, the native American Indians still being shot, as recently in Philadelphia, and hunted in the reservations and big cities of America — our struggle is one. We fight for the rights of humanity, for the only way to human progress; the right of self-determination for all subject and colonised peoples in a peaceful world. That peace can only be born when we have risen up together and smashed Imperialism”.<sup>101</sup>

Later in the year, a “number of Basque students” reportedly travelled to Dublin “as guests of Official SF”. Akin to José Antonio Etxebarrieta’s “Official” and “Provisional” 1972 trip to the Irish capital, there would appear to be little or no information available on these comings and goings.<sup>102</sup>

In February 1974, representatives from the UDB, UPG, and the “[Official] Irish Republican Movement”, signed a text known as the “Brest Charter” (or “Charter of Brest”) in the Breton town of the same name. The Brest Charter essentially advocated for the construction of a Europe of independent socialist states, whilst affirming “the right of the oppressed people to respond to counter-revolutionary violence with revolutionary violence”.<sup>103</sup> The representative who signed the charter on behalf of the “Irish Republican Movement” —in reality on behalf of the “Official” movement, or NLF— was Eoin Ó Murchú.

It should be noted that there is conflicting information regarding the exact year of the first Brest Charter. Some authors and media organisations have cited 1972. Speaking to this author, Ó Murchú himself was unsure.<sup>104</sup> The fact, however, that all extant copies of the charter available online only go back as far as 1974, and that this year is cited in most

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<sup>100</sup> “The year of Whitelaw”, *United Irishman*, January 1973.

<sup>101</sup> “Their Victory is our Victory”, *United Irishman*, January 1973.

<sup>102</sup> “Basque Guerrilla Fight Influenced By IRA”, *Irish Times*, 18.07.1975.

<sup>103</sup> Núñez Seixas: *Patriotas Transnacionales*, p. 116. This author’s translation from the French original: “affirmation absolument le droit du peuple opprimé de répondre à la violence, contre-révolutionnaire par la violence révolutionnaire”.

<sup>104</sup> Author interview with Eoin Ó Murchú (Dublin, 2017). See: Carles Sastre, Carles Benítez, Pep Musté, Joan Rocamora: *Terra Lliure. Punto de partida (1979–1995). Una biografía autorizada*, Tafalla, Txalaparta, 2013, p. 34 (footnote 18); Miquel Albamur Lleida: *La voz callada de Cataluña*, LuLu, 2013, p. 107 (footnote 36). “Un encontro internacional debate en Compostela e Coruña sobre os dereitos dos pobos de Europa”, <https://www.nosdiario.gal/articulo/social/dereitos-pobos-europa/20180417171422067931.html> (last accessed 29 April 2020).

secondary texts, probably makes February 1974 more likely.<sup>105</sup> This is a point that needs to be clarified with further research.

Regardless of when it was first signed, we can definitively say that the Brest Charter started out with Breton, Galician, and Irish signatories. It would soon have a Basque representative on board.

In early 1974, ETA's cultural front formed an alliance with dissident members of the Basque labour union Solidaridad de Trabajadores Vascos (Basque Workers' Solidarity) (STV), leading to the creation of an underground political party called Euskal Alderdi Sozialista (Basque Socialist Party) (EAS). Running almost concurrently on the French side of the border, members of the cultural front also helped to form an equivalent political party from the remnants of the now, largely defunct, Enbata. This party would be called: Herriko Alderdi Sozialista (Popular Socialist Party) (HAS).<sup>106</sup> On the occasion of Aberri Eguna 1974, only a few short weeks after the 1974 Brest Charter had been affirmed (most probably) for the first time, HAS signalled its "adhesion" to the charter.<sup>107</sup>

Akin to the joint communiqués issued by the PIRA and ETA (in conjunction with other European nationalist organisations), the Brest Charter, while big on rhetoric, carried little weight within the NLF. *United Irishman* did not publish or report on it, nor did the "Official" movement view the charter as anything other than a declaration of broad revolutionary principles. As Ó Murchú admits himself:

"It was really a declaration of support for the right of nations to self-determination [...]. I would have to be honest and say while I was involved, I don't think the movement here itself was too... how would I put it... they wouldn't have put a lot

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<sup>105</sup> For example, see: Gaizka Fernández Soldevilla: "Matar por la patria. Nacionalismo radical y violencia terrorista en España (1975–2016)" in Isidro Sepúlveda Muñoz (ed.): *Nación y nacionalismos en la España de las autonomías*, Madrid, Agencia Estatal Boletín Oficial del Estado, 2018, pp. 293–326 (specifically p. 300); Jacob: *Hills of Conflict*, p. 200; Núñez Seixas: *Patriotas Transnacionales*, p. 116. See also: "H.A.S.I. ETA HERRI ZAPALDUAK CON LOS PUEBLOS OPRIMIDOS", *Egin*, 11.11.1977; "Las naciones oprimidas de Europa, por la independencia y el socialismo", *Egin*, 13.11.1977; "La Carta de Brest", <https://homenatgecala.wordpress.com/2013/05/01/la-carta-de-brest-lalianca-entre-el-pais-basc-galicia-i-els-paisos-catalans/#>; "Hai 40 años: la carta de Brest", <https://ateneuacebal.wordpress.com/2014/02/03/hai-40-anos-la-carta-de-brest/> (sites last accessed 08 November 2019). A commonly cited source for the Brest Charter first being signed in 1974 is an article written by the French journalist (and Irish republican sympathiser) Roger Faligot, which was published in the political periodical *Hibernia* in January 1978. See: "Basques, Sinn Féin and the Brest Charter", *Hibernia*, 20.01.1978.

<sup>106</sup> Irvin: *Militant Nationalism*, pp. 73–74; Watson: *Modern Basque History*, p. 390.

<sup>107</sup> For evidence of HAS's "adhesion" to the Brest Charter in 1974, see: "La Carta de Brest", <https://homenatgecala.wordpress.com/2013/05/01/la-carta-de-brest-lalianca-entre-el-pais-basc-galicia-i-els-paisos-catalans/#>; "Hai 40 años: la carta de Brest", <https://ateneuacebal.wordpress.com/2014/02/03/hai-40-anos-la-carta-de-brest/> (sites last accessed 08 November 2019).



of energy into it. A bigger focus was to establish links with eastern Europe, with the Russians”.<sup>108</sup>

The NLF was certainly looking to broaden its horizons. The previous November, notice had given of an upcoming international “Anti-Imperialist Festival”, to be held in Belfast and Dublin across late July/early August:

“Through the work of the International Affairs Bureau we now have groups actively supporting the Movement’s policies in Germany, France, Brittany, Holland and Sweden as well as branches of the organisation in the U.S. and Britain. The Bureau is at present discussing the possibility of holding an international anti-imperialist seminar in Ireland next year [1974] which we are hopeful will involve people from all over the world. We are confident that international support for the struggle in Ireland and for our organisation will continue to grow due to the work of the International Affairs Bureau”.<sup>109</sup>

Organised in the main by Seán Ó Cionnaith, the stated objective of the upcoming festival was to explain to the attendees “the contribution of the Irish struggle to the general fight against imperialism throughout the world” and to counter prevailing international narratives around the “Troubles”:

“There is the impression abroad in particular, that the fight in Ireland is solely a fight against British troops in the North whereas we have continuously emphasised that it must be a struggle of the whole Irish Nation against imperialism”.<sup>110</sup>

Given the tinderbox political climate in Northern Ireland in the summer of 1974, the NLF’s festival was an unwelcome additional headache for the British and Irish governments.<sup>111</sup> In the British House of Commons, the Minister of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs, Roy Hattersley, informed the chamber that his office was: “in touch with the authorities in the [Irish] Republic with a view to forestalling possible attempts by undesirable aliens to attend this meeting [...]”.<sup>112</sup>

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<sup>108</sup> Ibid. Indeed, the previous year, OSF had sent its first official delegation to Moscow. See: Hanley; Millar: *The Lost Revolution*, pp. 266–268.

<sup>109</sup> “Report of the Árd Fheis”. Tony Heffernan Papers. P180/008. UCDA.

<sup>110</sup> “Draft document titled ‘Official Sinn Féin Anti-Imperialist Festival in Dublin and Belfast, 1974’”, International Marxist Conference in NI, 1974. FCO 95/1682. NA; “Irish Festival”, *United Irishman*, February 1974; “International Event”, *United Irishman*, April 1974; “Anti-Imperialist Festival”, *United Irishman*, June 1974.

<sup>111</sup> The Sunningdale Agreement, signed in December 1973 by the Irish and British governments, as well as a new Northern Ireland Executive (designate), were brought down in the summer of 1974 by an alliance of loyalist workers who were deeply unhappy with the terms of the agreement. The “Irish Dimension” of the Sunningdale Agreement envisaged a Council of Ireland, made up of a Council of Ministers with executive powers and a Consultative Assembly. “The Sunningdale Agreement”, <https://cain.ulster.ac.uk/events/sunningdale/> (last accessed 05 April 2020).

<sup>112</sup> “Irish Republican Army (International Guerrilla Festival)”, [https://hansard.parliament.uk/commons/1974-06-27/debates/4bff186e-2cc5-4c7b-aaa1-866c9914b4c2/IrishRepublicanArmy\(InternationalGuerrillaFestival\)](https://hansard.parliament.uk/commons/1974-06-27/debates/4bff186e-2cc5-4c7b-aaa1-866c9914b4c2/IrishRepublicanArmy(InternationalGuerrillaFestival)) (last accessed 14 October 2019).

On 13 June, *The Guardian* reported that 105 people had already sent a £10 registration fee. A Basque delegation was expected.<sup>113</sup> One FCO official doubted whether the NLF's particular brand of republicanism would be attractive to the prospective Basque guests:

“Up to now the contacts of some of the other potential delegates to the Festival — notably the ‘separatists’ from France and Spain have been mainly with the Provisionals, and they may not therefore agree so readily with the line of the conference organisers”.<sup>114</sup>

Another speculated that:

“[...] the real aim of the organisers (apart from publicity and embarrassment to us [London] and the Dublin Government) may well be to attract back to the Official Sinn Féin those extremists of the Left who have been transferring their support to the Provisional IRA”.<sup>115</sup>

In the end, despite a hostile press, and reports of attendees being harassed by authorities, the recent lifting of a ban on Sinn Féin in Northern Ireland meant that there was little the UK or Irish governments could do to stop the festival going ahead.<sup>116</sup> According to the NLF's own estimations, approximately 230 delegates attended discussions, workshops and lectures in Dublin and Belfast, under the slogan: “Our fight is your fight. Your fight is our fight”.<sup>117</sup>

Considering the festival to have been an “outstanding success”, a reflective editorial published in *United Irishman* noted that it was in the homes of those who provided accommodation to the international attendees that “the real down to earth lectures and discussions took place”.<sup>118</sup> Another *United Irishman* article stated: “In particular, we were pleased to welcome our comrades from Wales, Brittany and Euzkadi”.<sup>119</sup>

Despite references to a Basque delegation, there is no conclusive evidence as to who may have represented “Euzkadi” in Dublin and Belfast. However, given HAS's recent

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<sup>113</sup> “Sinn Féin's ‘international festival’ alarms unionists”, *The Guardian*, 13.06.1974.

<sup>114</sup> “Draft document titled ‘Official Sinn Féin Anti-Imperialist Festival in Dublin and Belfast, 1974’”, International Marxist Conference in NI, 1974. FCO 95/1682. NA.

<sup>115</sup> “Report titled ‘Anti Imperial Festival organised by the Official Sinn Féin’”. International Marxist Conference in NI, 1974. FCO 95/1682.

<sup>116</sup> “Telegraph from Seán Ó Cionnaith to Garret FitzGerald”. Undated. Garret FitzGerald Papers. P215/722. UCDA; “Report titled ‘Anti Imperial Festival organised by the Official Sinn Féin’”. International Marxist Conference in NI, 1974. FCO 95/1682. NA. For a collage of negative press coverage, see: “Anti-Imperialist Festival”, *United Irishman*, August 1974. For some individual examples, see: “Garda bid to prevent extremist summit”, *Irish Independent*, 14.06.1974; “Guerrilla think-in storm”, *Daily Mirror*, 13.06.1974; “A world festival of fear”, *Daily Mail*, 13.06.1974.

<sup>117</sup> “Mac Giolla's message to the festival delegates”, *United Irishman*, August 1974; “Festival”, *United Irishman*, September 1974.

<sup>118</sup> ‘Festival’, *United Irishman*, September 1974.

<sup>119</sup> ‘Festival’, *United Irishman*, August 1974.

“adhesion” to the Brest Charter, it is likely to have been a member of the French-based Basque party, or perhaps simply a member of ETA.

Two months later, on 13 September 1974, a bomb planted by ETA in a Madrid café (Cafetería Rolando) killed 13 people and injured scores more. Apart from one police officer, all the mortal victims were civilians.<sup>120</sup> Within the organisation, the bomb proved decisive in accelerating a growing rift between those who advocated for the building of a combined political-military movement in anticipation of Franco’s impending death, and those who maintained that ETA should focus on developing as a streamlined military organisation. ETA suffered its final major split along these lines (ETA-pm “Polimilis” and ETA-m “Milis”) in November 1974.<sup>121</sup>

Coinciding with an increasingly competitive battle for precedence on the international stage between the NLF and IRM (as alluded to in the British official’s quotations above), ETA’s 1974 split bookmarked the beginning of perhaps the most complicated and opaque period of radical Basque nationalist-Irish republican relations.

### 4.3. Transitions

In December 1974, the Irish National Liberation Army (INLA) was formed from a disparate group of “Officials” who had become disillusioned with the OIRA’s ceasefire. When the Irish Republican Socialist Party (IRSP) subsequently became identified as the INLA’s political wing, there were now at least three identifiable republican movements competing on both the domestic and international front.<sup>122</sup>

Putting their domestic differences temporarily to one side, a European political tour involving the IRM, IRSP and Peoples’ Democracy (a radical socialist group which emerged from the NICRA) was organised in 1975. Now in his third year of “roving” the continent, Richard Behal’s correspondence back to Dublin demonstrates his concern that the PSF’s analysis of the conflict was being undermined through association with his tour peers.<sup>123</sup> Worse still, Behal warned that the IRM was struggling to compete with the NLF

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<sup>120</sup> Garmendia: “ETA: Nacimiento, Desarrollo y Crisis (1959–1978)”, (specifically p. 168). As the establishment was situated close to the Dirección General de Seguridad, ETA had supposed that it would be full of security personal.

<sup>121</sup> Irvin: *Militant Nationalism*, pp. 76–77; Jáuregui: “ETA: Orígenes y evolución ideológica y política”, (specifically pp. 264–265); Sánchez-Cuenca: “The Dynamics Of Nationalist Terrorism: ETA and the IRA”.

<sup>122</sup> A fourth republican group, “Saor Éire”, (Free Ireland) was disbanded in the mid-1970s.

<sup>123</sup> “Letter from Richard Behal”. Dated 31 May 1975. Sean O’Mahony Papers. MS 44,177/4.

International Office, who “pump endless propaganda out to Europe, having greater resources and time”.<sup>124</sup>

While Behal had travelled around Europe from his Brussels base since 1973, he had seemingly avoided the Basque Country. There were two reasons for this. Firstly, under an authoritarian Spanish regime, the Basque Country was not exactly a welcoming prospect for an Irish republican advocating armed revolution. Secondly, Behal had close family living in the Basque Country. As a result, he “took a conscious decision to make as little contact as possible with the Spanish scene” for the duration of his time working in the PSF’s international relations.<sup>125</sup> As we shall see, his stated stance was, in reality, more flexible.

As for ETA, José Miguel Beñaran Ordeñana (*Argala*), the *etarra* who was a central figure in the group’s assassination of Carrero Blanco, headed up ETA’s (and later ETA-m’s) international relations for most of the 1970s. Working in tandem with José Luis Ansola Larrañaga, *Argala*’s “Aparato Internacional” focused on the twin objectives of developing political and diplomatic contacts, whilst pursuing arms and explosives on the black market.<sup>126</sup>

One of *Argala*’s comrades during the planning of “Operación Ogro” was the aforementioned Pédro Ignacio Perez Beotegua (*Wilson*). Born in Vitoria-Gasteiz in 1948, Perez Beotegua moved to London in the mid-1960s, hence his English alias. As we have seen, it was likely he who signed ETA’s 1972 “Irlande du Nord” statement with the PIRA and FLB/ARB. In late 1972, *Wilson* made his way to Madrid to prepare for the assassination attempt on Carrero Blanco.<sup>127</sup>

Post-“Operación Ogro”, and at the height of speculation regarding some sort of IRA involvement in the attack, a *Guardian* article from May 1974 reported that:

“[...] Beotegui, in a taped interview with journalist Keith Chalkley [...] made plain—though he was discreet on the tape—that the ETA maintained very close connections with the IRA. Officials of both movements meet with some regularity in Algiers, Paris, and Brussels, and Beotegui claims that the IRA have provided the ETA with technical expertise on bomb construction”.<sup>128</sup>

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<sup>124</sup> “Letter from Richard Behal to Irish Republican Information Service (IRIS)”. Dated 21 February 1975. Sean O’Mahony Papers. MS 44,177/3. NLI.

<sup>125</sup> Author interview with Richard Behal (conducted by phone, 2015).

<sup>126</sup> Florencio Domínguez Iribarren: *ETA: Estrategia Organizativa y Actuaciones 1978–1992*, Bilbao, Servicio Editorial de la Universidad del País Vasco, 1998, p. 128; Domínguez Iribarren: *Josu Ternera: Una Vida En ETA*, p. 89.

<sup>127</sup> Iker Casanova: *ETA 1958–2008. Medio Siglo de Historia* (5<sup>th</sup> ed.), Tafalla, Txalaparta, 2014, p. 144.

<sup>128</sup> “Open File”, *The Guardian*, 22.05.1974.

If the general thrust of what *Wilson* said was reported accurately by *The Guardian*, then this represents the first acknowledgement by an ETA figure, and a senior ETA figure at that, of a working relationship between the two paramilitary groups. It is worth noting that in addition to the above sources, a former senior representative of the ETA-pm aligned revolutionary party Euskal Iraultzarako Alderdia (EIA) earmarked *Wilson* as a key broker with the “Provisional” wing of Irish republicanism during interview for this study.<sup>129</sup> Others have also highlighted the same connection.<sup>130</sup>

When ETA split in late 1974, *Wilson* sided with ETA-pm, heading up that organisation’s “Komando Bereziak”.<sup>131</sup> It would appear as though Perez Beotegua probably took his Irish contacts with him.

The following year, *Wilson* was the focus of a British Thames Television documentary titled “Portrait of a Revolutionary”. Perhaps the most striking aspect of this documentary, however, was an interview with *Wilson*’s wife “Esti”, who, by her own admittance, was also a member of ETA. “Esti” had apparently “travelled all over Europe”, including Ireland. In France, she had been jailed for 3 months for possession of 3,000 rounds of ammunition. “Esti” was asked in the documentary of her contact with the IRA:

“Interviewer: Have you had contact with the IRA?  
‘Esti’: Yes, but I’m not going to answer any other question on this subject.  
Interviewer: Why did you contact the IRA?  
‘Esti’: Because we think that the Irish struggle is very similar to our one, and because we have sympathy for them.  
Interviewer: Have the IRA given you any assistance?  
‘Esti’: I think that we gave them an assistance.  
Interviewer: You gave the IRA assistance? In what way?  
‘Esti’: I’m not going to answer this question.  
Interviewer: Have the IRA helped you get any weapons?  
‘Esti’: I’m not going to answer this question.  
Interviewer: It’s possible?  
‘Esti’: No comment.  
Interviewer: Have they given you any money?  
‘Esti’: No comment.  
Interviewer: Have you given the IRA any money or weapons?  
‘Esti’: No comment”.<sup>132</sup>

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<sup>129</sup> Anonymous source.

<sup>130</sup> “El acoso de Francia obliga a la dirección etarra a trasladar su infraestructura al resto de la UE”, <https://www.libertaddigital.com/nacional/el-acoso-de-francia-obliga-a-la-direccion-etarra-a-trasladar-su-infraestructura-al-resto-de-la-ue-1276206630/> (last accessed 14 October 2019).

<sup>131</sup> Casanova: *ETA 1958–2008. Medio Siglo de Historia* (5<sup>th</sup> ed.), p. 176. Meanwhile, Eduardo Moreno Bergaretxe (*Pertur*) headed up the “Oficina Política”. Iñaki Mujika Arregi sat at the top of ETA-pm. See: Gaizka Fernández Soldevilla: *Héroes, heterodoxos y traidores. Historia de Euskadiko Ezkerra (1974–1994)*, Madrid, Tecnos, 2013, p. 73.

<sup>132</sup> “Portrait of a Revolutionary”, Thames Television. 1975.

In July 1975, *Wilson* was captured in Barcelona by Spanish police. At the same time, two other ETA-pm comrades, Juan Paredes Manot (*Txiki*) and Ángel Otaegui Etxeberria, faced charges in relation to separate incidents in which police officers had died.<sup>133</sup> Subsequently found guilty, the latter two men were set to be executed. International attention again turned towards Franco's regime.

Official Sinn Féin wrote to the Spanish Ambassador in Dublin on 23 September:

“We who have endured long years of repression in Ireland show our solidarity with Spaniards and Basques who are struggling for democracy and freedom. We know that your ruthless hearts will not be moved by humanitarian pleas for clemency for those condemned to death, but we believe that when the strength of international feeling against you is made clear you will hesitate lest your whole crumbling regime be put in jeopardy”.<sup>134</sup>

In the end, despite protestations of this kind aimed at the Spanish government from various international quarters, Franco's regime did not “hesitate” in carrying out the death sentences.

On 27 September 1975, Paredes Manot and Otaegui Etxeberria, as well as three members of Frente Revolucionario Antifascista y Patriota (José Luis Sánchez Bravo, Ramón García Sanz, and Humberto Baena), were all executed by Spanish state forces.<sup>135</sup>

In Dublin, pickets were organised outside the headquarters of Iberian Airlines on Grafton Street. Moreover, a communique signed by Official Sinn Féin President Tomás Mac Giolla, the Communist Party of Ireland's Michael O'Riordan, and the Celtic League's Yann Goulet, demanded that the Irish government withdraw its ambassador from Madrid.<sup>136</sup>

At European level, the executions sparked a major diplomatic row — with Ireland at the very centre. Unlike every other member of the EEC 9, Liam Cosgrave's Fine Gael-led government refused to withdraw its ambassador from Madrid. This stance earned the government a stinging rebuke from the EEC Commissioner for Industry and Entrepreneurship Altiero Spinelli, who stated that Ireland “was guilty of breaching

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<sup>133</sup> Gaizka Fernández Soldevilla, Raúl López Romo: *Sangre, Votos, Manifestaciones: ETA y el nacionalismo vasco radical, 1958–2011*, Madrid, Tecnos, 2012, p. 78.

<sup>134</sup> “Fascist Spanish regime condemned”, *United Irishman*, October 1975. As a result of the 1975 executions, a number of “Comités Vascos de Europea” were established in Germany, Netherlands, Belgium, and France. See: “Los Comités Vascos de Europa se definen como abertzales”, *Egin*, 10.08.1978.

<sup>135</sup> *Wilson* was released in 1977 as part of the amnesty process. Having been initially expelled to Norway, he later returned to the Basque Country. See: “Fallece Ignacio Pérez Beotegui ‘Wilson’, histórico dirigente de ETA”, *La Vanguardia*, 12.03.2008.

<sup>136</sup> “Call for Ambassador to return”, *Irish Times*, 30.09.1975.



community solidarity”.<sup>137</sup> Even an ETA spokesperson made his “disappointment” with the Irish government known.<sup>138</sup> The Irish Minister for Foreign Affairs Garret FitzGerald explained his controversial decision to Dáil Éireann in the following way:

“[...] [the government] considered that consultation with the ambassador in person was not necessary since he had been in Dublin a short time previously; and in the second place, because they considered that his recall, as a symbolic gesture, would not have been the most appropriate or useful response, in the current situation in Spain”.<sup>139</sup>

Via private letter, FitzGerald subsequently explained the government’s decision in less guarded terms. It was a decision:

“[...] influenced primarily by the belief that such a recall would be likely to be counter-productive both because it would enable the Right-Wing in Spain, through playing on traditional Spanish xenophobia, to strengthen its position at a critical point before the death of General Franco, and also because we felt that the inevitable decision to return the [other EEC] Ambassadors immediately afterwards would strengthen the Right still further, by enabling them to claim a victory”.<sup>140</sup>

“Mildly puzzled” by Dublin’s attitude, the British government closed ranks with its European partners and withdrew its ambassador.<sup>141</sup>

Analysing the available contemporary documentation from this episode in British archives, one can detect, similar to the Burgos Process of 1970, a delicate dynamic at play *vis-à-vis* the Basque Country-Spain, Northern Ireland-UK, and the thorny (British-Spanish) issue of Gibraltar. For instance, less than three weeks before the executions were carried out, an FCO official noted that:

“Official talks on Gibraltar are due to begin in Madrid (9 September), designed to keep the temperature of this problem down as far as possible. If we applied too much pressure on them [the Spanish] over the Basques, these talks might be made more difficult and could break down completely”.<sup>142</sup>

In October, one month after the executions, the Spanish Ambassador to the UK Manuel Fraga Iribarne offered his frank views on recent Spanish-British relations in a meeting with British officials. According to a British minute-taker, Fraga Iribarne, who

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<sup>137</sup> “E.E.C. split charge on Irish plan over envoy to Spain”, *Irish Times*, 03.10.1975.

<sup>138</sup> “Recalled Ambassadors to return to Madrid”, *Irish Times*, 03.10.1975.

<sup>139</sup> “Withdrawal of Ambassador”, <https://www.oireachtas.ie/en/debates/debate/dail/1975-12-11/27/> (last accessed 01 November 2019).

<sup>140</sup> “Letter from Garret FitzGerald to Professor Seamus O’Cleireacain. Professor of Economics at State University, New York”. Dated 12 February 1976. Garret FitzGerald Papers. P215/725. UCDA.

<sup>141</sup> “Letter from British Embassy, Dublin to Republic of Ireland Department, FCO”. Dated 02 October 1975. Internal Situation (including Trial of Basques). FCO WSS 1/7. NA.

<sup>142</sup> “Confidential letter titled ‘Trial of Basque Terrorist’”. Dated 08 September 1975. Internal Situation (including Trial of Basques). FCO WSS 1/7. NA.

would shortly be returning from the overseas posting, communicated his annoyance at London for poking its nose into Madrid's internal affairs — something which he claimed Spain had refrained from doing in regard to Northern Ireland:

“Sr. Fraga said that he had spent two very interesting years here. Perhaps it was right that they should end on a sour note. It ensured that he experienced the rough water as well as the smooth. He had come to London with the conviction, which he still retained, that it was important, and in our common interests, to get on well with each other, and not to interfere in each other's affairs. Spain did not like interference, and never indulged in it herself. The Spanish Government might feel tempted to express an opinion about an internal United Kingdom question, for example that of Northern Ireland, but they never did so. The British authorities traditionally prefaced remarks about internal Spanish questions with a disclaimer to the effect that they were not seeking to interfere, but interfere they did”.<sup>143</sup>

The September 1975 executions provided a grisly, yet sadly fitting coda to four decades of Franco's brutal authoritarian regime. On 25 November 1975, he died quietly in his bed from Parkinson's disease. With the dictator's death, a new era in Spanish politics looked set to emerge. “Reform” or “rupture” quickly became the central question.

Franco's anointed successor was Juan Carlos Alfonso Víctor María de Borbón y Borbón, a grandson of the last reigning Spanish monarch, Alfonso XIII. Juan Carlos became Juan Carlos I, King of Spain, on 22 November 1975. The following summer he dismissed the incumbent Prime Minister Carlos Arias Navarro and replaced him with Adolfo Suárez. Although Suárez was himself a prominent figure in the regime's “Movimiento Nacional”, he was open to structural changes.

Under Suárez's premiership, a suite of reforms was introduced. For instance, in 1977, the Francoist Cortes effectively voted itself out of existence, to be replaced by a state-wide parliamentary democracy. Full state elections, which Suárez's Unión de Centro Democrático (UdeCD) won, were held on 15 June 1977. A gradual amnesty for all political opponents of the regime, including ETA, was rolled out across 1976 and 1977.<sup>144</sup>

In 1978, a new Spanish Constitution was drafted and accepted by popular referendum — although results, as we shall see, were not as clear cut in the Basque Country. Within the confines of the new Spanish *Magna Carta*, “autonomous” governments began to wield local power across the state's “comunidades” — including, from 1980, in the Basque Autonomous Community. This period of political reform, with Suárez at the helm

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<sup>143</sup> “Confidential record of conversation between the Permanent Under Secretary and the Spanish Ambassador at 11 30 AM on 17 October 1975”. Internal Situation (including Trial of Basques). FCO WSS 1/7. NA.

<sup>144</sup> The last ETA prisoner left jail on 09 December 1977. Cited in: Fernández Soldevilla: “The origins of ETA: between Francoism and democracy, 1958–1981” (specifically, p. 30).

and the regime's opponents keeping up the pressure, would ultimately become known as Spain's "Transition".<sup>145</sup>

Going hand in hand with the changing domestic circumstances in Spain, from 1976 to 1980, a number of reciprocal diplomatic visits took place between Irish, British and Spanish Ministers and Prime Ministers (or "Presidentes"). The available records of these meetings offer both a useful gauge of radical Basque nationalist-Irish republican relations at this juncture, and a glimpse of (Spanish, Irish and British) state views of this nexus and the level of seriousness that each state seemingly took of the issue.<sup>146</sup>

Dealing with the Irish-Spanish dynamic first (and the British-Spanish element a little later in this chapter), the prospect of ETA-IRA links was earmarked as a potential discussion point when the Spanish Minister for Foreign Affairs, and former Francoist Mayor of Bilbo, José María Areilza y Martínez Rodas, met his Irish counterpart Garret FitzGerald in February 1976.<sup>147</sup> In a briefing document prepared for the meeting, an Irish official reminded the Irish Minister that:

"On the general question of ETA-IRA links, we have up to now taken the line that police contact through Interpol has been a satisfactory channel for dealing with such incidents as may arise. The Department of Justice have indicated, however, that they have informed the Spanish Ambassador that they would have no objections to direct police-to-police contact on the matter (outside the Interpol framework)".<sup>148</sup>

During a reciprocal visit to Spain by FitzGerald the following March, the Irish Minister met with his new Spanish counterpart Marcelino Oreja Aguirre, Prime Minister Adolfo Suárez, and King Juan Carlos. According to a report of these encounters drawn up by the Irish Ambassador in Madrid, Charles Whelan:

"In the course of the various conversations, particularly with the Foreign Minister [Oreja Aguirre] and the King, the subject of Northern Ireland was raised. The Foreign Minister was interested mainly from the viewpoint of possible lessons to be learnt in relation to the Basque problem, while the King enquired about possible links between the IRA, ETA and other terrorist organisations. On the latter point the Minister [FitzGerald] indicated that we had no evidence of any significant cooperation between the IRA and ETA, although there may have been some links

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<sup>145</sup> See: Paul Preston: *The Triumph of Democracy in Spain*, London, Methuen, 1986.

<sup>146</sup> Spain's "Presidente" is the equivalent of a British Prime Minister or Irish Taoiseach. Unlike the example of "Taoiseach", however, the Spanish "Presidente" is nearly always referred to as "Prime Minister" in English-language media. For this reason, all Spanish "Presidentes" will hereafter be referred to as "Prime Minister".

<sup>147</sup> Irish-Spanish exchanges from this period began with the visit of a group of Irish parliamentarians to Madrid in September 1976. See: Visit of Irish Parliamentarians to Spain – September 1976. 2009/81/111. NAI.

<sup>148</sup> "Points which may arise in the Anglo-Irish context in discussions with the Spanish Foreign Minister". Spanish Foreign Minister – Visit to Dublin, 1976. 2008/148/335. NAI.

in the past between individuals which seemed however to be of little importance”.<sup>149</sup>

Incidentally, Oreja Aguirre, himself of Basque extraction, referred to Ireland and Spain’s shared Catholic heritage and the long-standing historical myths of Jaun Zuria during a reception dinner held for FitzGerald in Madrid:

“Your country, with its legendary past, reflected even in some of the ancient legends of my own Basque Country, such as the one of Jaun Zuria, ‘the white chieftain’, who arrived mysteriously in a small boat coming from the distant North; with the staunch and unblemished Catholicism of its people and their open and expansive character [...]”.<sup>150</sup>

On a more serious note, during a meeting between Suárez and Taoiseach Jack Lynch in October 1977, the former:

“[...] gave a review of the Basque problem — which he said was not of the same proportions as that of Northern Ireland but could well lead to extremely tense situations in the not too distant future”.<sup>151</sup>

As reflected above in its increasingly close relations with Ireland (and other western and liberal international states), Franco’s death heralded a sea change in Spain’s international approach and internal democratisation. Running concurrently to these changes, from 1975 onwards, both main branches of ETA (ETA-m, and ETA-pm) rapidly escalated their armed campaigns. What can be deduced of the machinations of radical Basque nationalist-Irish republican relations as this “extremely tense” period escalated follows accordingly across the next sections.

### **My people tell me your people are traitors to your nation**

From 16 to 18 January 1976, Official Sinn Féin held its annual *Árd Fheis* at the Mansion House, Dublin. In the wake of Francisco Franco’s recent death, a motion was passed in “support for the Democratic forces in Spain, in their demand for free election and for greater political and cultural freedom for the Basques, Catalonians and

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<sup>149</sup> “Confidential letter from Charles Whelan to the Department of Foreign Affairs”. Dated 05 April 1977. PR’s from Madrid. 2010/19/592. NAI. The third item on the agenda for the meeting between FitzGerald and Oreja Aguirre was the subject of “Northern Ireland and Terrorism”. See: “Garret FitzGerald’s trip to Spain – March 1977”. Garret FitzGerald Papers. P215/390. UCDA.

<sup>150</sup> “Speech delivered by the Minister for Foreign Affairs, D. Marcelino Oreja, at the dinner offered to the Minister for Foreign Affairs of Ireland, Mr. Garret FitzGerald”. Visit of Irish Foreign Minister to Spain. 2009/81/131. NAI. In 1979, the Basque-oriented Milesian myth surfaced in popular culture with the publication of the following book: Julio-César Santoyo: *Irlandeses y vascos: Evolución histórica de una leyenda*, Bilbao, Durango Zugaza, 1979.

<sup>151</sup> “Meeting between the President of the Spanish Government, Mr. Adolfo Suárez and the Taoiseach in Iveagh House, Dublin, Thursday, 20<sup>th</sup> October 1977”. Spanish Prime Minister Visit to Dublin, October 1977. 2007/116/666. NAI.

Galicians”.<sup>152</sup> At the same conference, OSF announced details of a second “Anti-Imperial Festival” to take place during the summer of 1976.

In June, one month before the start of this second “Anti-Imperialist Festival”, the NLF’s *United Irishman* carried an open letter written by the “signatory parties of the CHARTER OF BREST”. Since Herriko Alderdi Sozialista had signalled its “adhesion” to the charter in the spring of 1974, it had subsequently joined forces with Euskal Alderdi Sozialista in 1975 to form Euskal Herriko Alderdi Sozialista (Socialist Party of the Basque Country) (EHAS). From the moment of the party’s founding, ETA-m established relations with EHAS and progressively increased its influence.<sup>153</sup>

In the *United Irishman* letter, Euskal Herriko Alderdi Sozialista (EHAS), alongside the Breton UDB, the Galician UPG, and three other signatories: the Welsh Cymru Goch, and the Catalan, Esquerra Català dels Treballadors, and El Partit Socialista d'Alliberament Nacional dels Països Catalans, affirmed the following:

“[...] we the signatory parties of the CHARTER OF BREST deplore the spread of sectarian violence which is tearing the Irish people apart. We recognise that the phenomena of sectarian conflict is the direct result of the creation in Ireland of two sectarian reactionary states in the interests of Anglo-American Imperialism. We recognise also that both states are propped up by a gombeen bourgeoisie of different but convergent interests”.<sup>154</sup>

Much of the same rhetoric underpinned the festival when it commenced the following month in Dublin and Belfast.<sup>155</sup>

Clearly seeking to undermine the NLF’s second “Anti-Imperialist” gathering in three years, Provisional Sinn Féin’s Belfast periodical, *Republican News*, published an article which portrayed the festival organisers as both deeply hypocritical and ‘soft’ on armed struggle. To illustrate the point, the IRM organ referred to the PIRA’s recent assassination of Christopher Ewart-Biggs (the British Ambassador to Ireland), which had drawn criticism from their republican rivals in the NLF. *Republican News* questioned what ETA would make of such criticism, given that the Basque group had killed Carrero Blanco in a similar manner:

“All those genuine anti-imperialists’ groups attending conferences in Belfast this week have been advised by Cathal Goulding to stay away from the Provisional[s].

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<sup>152</sup> “Sinn Féin Árd Fheis”, *Eolas*, no. 39 - 40, February-March 1976.

<sup>153</sup> ; Watson: *Modern Basque History*, p. 390. Fernández Soldevilla; López Romo: *Sangre, Votos, Manifestaciones: ETA y el nacionalismo vasco radical, 1958–2011*, p. 80.

<sup>154</sup> “Letter”, *United Irishman*, June 1976. EHAS would later form the core of Herri Alderdi Sozialista Iraultzalea (HASI), itself a future constituent part of the izquierda abertzale electoral coalition Herri Batasuna.

<sup>155</sup> See: “Anti-Imperialist Festival ‘76”, *United Irishman*, August 1976.

They should ask themselves why this is so. How did the ETA (Basque Nationalists) feel when Thomas MacGiolla condemned the assassins of the British Ambassador as ‘terrorists and the enemies of the people of Ireland’, when they themselves killed Admiral Carrero [Blanco] by exactly the same method in November 1973?’<sup>156</sup>

The *Republican News* article went on to lambast the NLF “sticks” as counter-revolutionaries and collaborators, before provocatively warning that “genuine [international] revolutionaries” would be “tarred with the same reformist brush” through their association with the NLF. Finally, an alternative proposition was then offered to the international delegates, who were, at that precise moment, attending the NLF’s two-legged festival in Dublin and Belfast:

“Should any genuine revolutionary group in attendance at these hoodwinking conferences wish to dissociate [sic] themselves from the sticks, then the Belfast Republican Press centre will certainly be pleased to provide alternative meetings and discussions with people who will show them what the revolution is all about”.<sup>157</sup>

Notwithstanding EHAS’s signature to the pro-NLF letter in June and the insinuations in *Republican News* alluding to ETA’s likely participation at the second “Anti-Imperialist Festival”, there appears to be no concrete evidence of Basque attendance in Belfast or Dublin.

A few months later, in the autumn of 1976, ETA-pm’s Sixth/Seventh Assembly gathered.<sup>158</sup> Given the rapidly changing political landscape in Spain at the time, there were some within the organisation who sought a clean break from the established dual “political-military” strategy, and who instead sought the formation of a party that would have final say on military campaigns and operations. From the assembly, a new revolutionary party named Euskal Iraultza Alderdia (Basque Revolutionary Party) (EIA) emerged precisely in this mould.<sup>159</sup>

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<sup>156</sup> “Offer to genuine revolutionaries”, *Republican News*, 31.07.1976. The British Ambassador to Ireland Christopher Ewart-Biggs was killed the previous week in Dublin when his travelling car triggered a land mine that had been planted by the PIRA. In an article that was later published in the current affairs periodical *Hibernia*, the journalist Roger Faligot noted how “nobody failed to witness the resemblance, in the technical field, in the killing of both Carrero Blanco, in December 1973, and [the] British Ambassador in Dublin, Christopher Ewart-Biggs, three years later”. See: “Basques, Sinn Féin and the Brest Charter”, *Hibernia*, 20.01.1978.

<sup>157</sup> “Offer to genuine revolutionaries”, *Republican News*, 31.07.1976.

<sup>158</sup> Given that ETA-VI dissolved soon after the (first) Sixth Assembly of 1970 and that those who went on to carry the ETA label (ETA-V) did not recognise ETA-VI, ETA-pm’s assembly of 1976 was viewed by that organisation to be its sixth.

<sup>159</sup> Jáuregui: “ETA: Orígenes y evolución ideológica y política”, (specifically, pp. 265–266). Those who advocated for the continuation of a joint political-military strategy were known as “Berezi Commandos”. A majority of “Berezis” would ultimately end up joining the ranks of ETA-m.



Partly mirroring the ideological and strategical positions of the NLF in the Irish context, EIA saw the construction of a unified working-class struggle for social and national liberation as a necessary precursor to a reunified, independent, and socialist Basque Country. The militant wing would, theoretically, serve as an armed “rearguard for the masses”. The party presented itself to the Basque public in April 1977 at an event in the Bizkaian town of Gallarta.<sup>160</sup> With the first democratic elections in more than forty years slated to take place in June, big decisions would soon have to be made by all Basque actors in regard to their respective positions.

Since 1975, a number of Basque leftist nationalist parties and organisations had agglutinated around *Koordinadora Abertzale Sozialista* (KAS) — a body initially set up to coordinate protests against the death penalties imposed on *Txiki* and Ángel Otaegui. In the fluctuating political landscape, KAS sought to find a common platform for Basques of the nationalist left.<sup>161</sup> Various members of KAS, including EIA, EHAS, ETA-m, and ETA-pm, held discussions along with the PNV, on six occasions across April and May 1977. Presided over by Telesforo Monzon and named after the Lapurdian hotel in which they were held, the “Txiberta” talks exposed major differences of opinion between the protagonists. Given that total amnesty had still not been granted, ETA-m and EHAS indicated that they would not participate in the upcoming elections. The PNV, by contrast, decided to run. As did EIA.<sup>162</sup>

Still technically illegal, EIA decided to run in the elections alongside the small communist party, EMK, which as the reader will recall, had been borne out of ETA-Berri. Together, EIA and EMK formed *Euskadiko Ezkerra* (EE) (Basque Left). Francisco Letamendia (*Ortzi*), an intellectual heavyweight of EIA, won a seat for the coalition in Gipuzkoa. Meanwhile, Juan María Bandrés, a lawyer from Donostia, was elected to the Senate.

In the immediate aftermath of the elections, members of EHAS, *Eusko Sozialista* (Basque Socialists), and *Euskal Komunista Abertzaleen Batasuna* (Basque Nationalist

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<sup>160</sup> Quote in: Murua: *Ending ETA's Armed Campaign*, p. 19. See also: Fernández Soldevilla; López Romo: *Sangre, Votos, Manifestaciones: ETA y el nacionalismo vasco radical, 1958–2011*, p. 84; “Euskal Iraultzarako Alderdia”, <http://aunamendi.eusko-ikaskuntza.eus/eu/euskal-iraultzarako-alderdia/ar-43107/> (last accessed 16 October 2019). EIA only became a legal party in January 1978. “Ayer fue legalizado EIA”, *Egin*, 19.01.1978.

<sup>161</sup> Sullivan: *ETA and Basque Nationalism*, p. 163. The role of KAS as a coordinating body was to evolve into a tool that was used by ETA to maintain primacy within the *izquierda abertzale*. Florencio Domínguez Iribarren: “El Enfrentamiento de ETA con la democracia” in Elorza (coord.) *et al.: La Historia de ETA*, pp. 277–420 (specifically pp. 341–342).

<sup>162</sup> Fernández Soldevilla; López Romo: *Sangre, Votos, Manifestaciones: ETA y el nacionalismo vasco radical, 1958–2011*, pp. 97–112; Murua: *Ending ETA's Armed Campaign*, pp. 19–20.

Communist Union), came together to form Herri Alderdi Sozialista Iraultzalea (People's Socialist Revolutionary Party) (HASI).<sup>163</sup>

In April 1978, the *izquierda abertzale* coalition Herri Batasuna emerged from a series of discussions that took place in the town of Alsasua ("La Mesa de Alsasua"). Consisting of an alphabet soup of organisations: HASI, ANV, Euskal Sozialista Biltzarrea (Basque Socialist Assembly) (ESB), Langile Abertzale Iraultzaileen Alderdia (Party of the Revolutionary Patriotic Workers) (LAIA), Abertzale Sozialista Komiteak (Patriotic Socialist Committees) (ASK), and a number of prominent independents, Herri Batasuna presented itself to the Basque electorate the following year.<sup>164</sup>

With the formation of EIA in 1976 (presented in 1977) and Herri Batasuna (HB) in 1978, the 1974 split that had created (-pm, "Polimili") and (-m, "Mili") factions of ETA was now also clearly reflected in the new political dispensation. While the "Polimilis" backed EIA and its electoral coalition, the "Milis" backed HB, who reciprocated by supporting the armed struggle of ETA-m.<sup>165</sup> How did these changes within radical Basque nationalism throughout the early Transition period square with the hitherto transnational contacts and relations established with the "Provisional" (IRM) and "Official" (NLF) Irish republican movements?

One man who had a unique insight into these dynamics was Paddy Woodworth. Born in Dublin in 1954, like many Irish people, Woodworth was deeply affected by "Bloody Sunday" in 1972. When Bernadette Devlin called for southerners to defend the Catholics of the North, Woodworth set off with a friend on what he would later dub his "Northern Campaign". The 18-year-old Woodworth never actually made it to the border. He did, however, subsequently join Official Sinn Féin<sup>166</sup>

In 1974, Woodworth moved to Bilbo to work as an English teacher. He recalls the period:

"I was in Official Sinn Féin. And so, you know, I was kind of asked to make contact when I was living out there... I wasn't sent out there to do it. In fact, to be honest, there was very little interest in the 'Officials' anyway, because they kind of —I think, this would have been around 1975— they were just a little bit chary of being

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<sup>163</sup> "Herriko Alderdi Sozialista Iraultzailea"

<http://aunamendi.eusko-ikaskuntza.eus/artikuluak/artikuluak.php?id=eu&ar=53028&ep=43037> (last accessed 08 October 2019).

<sup>164</sup> "Herri Batasuna"

<http://aunamendi.eusko-ikaskuntza.eus/eu/herri-batasuna/ar-59231/> (last accessed 08 October 2019). It should be noted that not all of the above-named constituent parts of HB took part in the coalition's inauguration.

<sup>165</sup> Irvin: *Militant Nationalism*, p. 115.

<sup>166</sup> Hanley; Millar: *The Lost Revolution*, pp. 131–132.

associated with nationalist groups, even with left nationalist groups. They were moving much more kind of into the Moscow mainstream kind of thinking”.<sup>167</sup>

Notwithstanding Dublin’s reluctance/disinterest in pursuing in engage with any Basque organisation, Woodworth was nevertheless asked to “keep [his] eyes open and report back”.

Having a greater appreciation than most of the competing ETA factions and their different ideological positions, Woodworth believed that if the “Officials” *were* to engage with any Basque actor, then it would make sense for those contacts to be “with ETA-pm and with EIA, which was emerging”. Seeing obvious parallels between the Irish “Officials” and the Basque “Polimilis”, Woodworth made indirect contact via a female “Polimili” activist who was “within their support group”. He recalls her response:

“When she came back to me from the ‘Polimilis’, she said: ‘my people tell me that your people are traitors to the Irish nation’. So they were clearly getting the ‘Provisional’ line from the ‘Polimilis’, which was so weird!”<sup>168</sup>

### **Reciprocal visits**

The links suspected by Woodworth between the IRM and the “Polimilis” slowly began to surface.

In October 1976, an international motion passed at the PSF Árd Fheis offered support to the “captive nations” of Europe — singled out by Ruairí Ó Brádaigh to be the Bretons, the Basques, the Corsicans, the Catalans, the Welsh and the Scottish.<sup>169</sup> Notwithstanding the already existing “International Office” led by Richard Behal, a resolution was also passed to create a “Foreign Affairs Bureau” (FAB) under the direct control of the party Executive. The FAB would “institutionalise the relationships established with the liberation groups in other parts of the world”.<sup>170</sup>

At the following year’s PSF Árd Fheis, two EIA representatives, José Ramón Peñagarikano (occasionally Peñagaricano), and A.N. other, attended the party’s annual congress in Dublin. This, it would seem, was the first time that a Basque political actor had ever attended a Sinn Féin Árd Fheis — or at least in any sort of an official party

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<sup>167</sup> Author interview with Paddy Woodworth (Dublin, 2015).

<sup>168</sup> Ibid.

<sup>169</sup> “Report sent from British Embassy Dublin to Republic of Ireland Department titled Provisional Sinn Féin Árd Fheis”. Dated 27 October 1976. Provisional Sinn Féin. CJ4/2376. NA.

<sup>170</sup> “Report sent from British Embassy Dublin to Republic of Ireland Department titled Provisional Sinn Féin Árd Fheis”. Dated 27 October 1976. Provisional Sinn Féin. CJ4/2376. NA. In the words of Richard Behal: “The Sinn Féin Foreign Affairs Bureau officially was set up during the 1976 Árd Fheis but as far back as the early 1970s members of the Republican Movement have been travelling abroad on lecture tours”. See: “Republican external links”, *An Phoblacht*, 10.08.1977.

representative capacity. According to a subsequent report in *An Phoblacht*, the two men received:

“[...] a standing ovation from the Árd Fheis after reading out the EIA message to the Irish revolution: ‘A revolutionary greeting from our country, from our freedom fighters, to yours, to you in support in the struggle against the same enemy — imperialism. We are a young party, born a year ago, at the last national assembly of ETA. Our party fights for the independence of Euskadi and socialism fundamental and essential for the real solidarity between oppressed nations, towards true internationalism. Euskadi knows what it is to be oppressed, to lose its best men and women, torture, prisons, and also to be divided in two; but we all know that when there is the will to obtain freedom, liberty comes. A Nation can overcome all the options. You will always find the support of our party and our country for you to obtain a reunited and socialist Republic and we are sure that this congress will help you to achieve this. Long live Ireland. Gora Euskadi askatuta ta sozialista. Iraultzaile agur bero bat zuei eta Irlandako Herriari! [Up the free and socialist Basque Country. A warm greeting to you and the people of Ireland!]”<sup>171</sup>

On their return via London, both EIA representatives were held and questioned by Scotland Yard detectives under the Prevention of Terrorism Act.<sup>172</sup>

One month later, at the end of November 1977, this first EIA visit to Ireland was reciprocated when the PSF President Ruairí Ó Brádaigh and another PSF representative embarked on a three-day tour “under the sponsorship of our good comrades of EIA” to the Basque Country. During the visit, Ó Brádaigh conducted interviews with local press and spoke to audiences in Vitoria-Gasteiz and Iruñea (Palma).<sup>173</sup> An EIA press release stated:

“La delegación irlandesa se ha reunido con miembros del partido para la Revolución Vasca, reuniones en las que se han avanzado proyectos de relación y solidaridad más estrecha, basadas en el respeto a las tácticas e independencia de los partidos de las naciones respectivas [...]. EIA quiere dejar patente su solidaridad con la lucha del pueblo irlandés y con el Sinn Fein (Provisional) en particular hasta la construcción de una república irlandesa reunificada y socialista en el camino de una sociedad universal sin clases y solidaria de todas las naciones oprimidas”.<sup>174</sup>

Akin to the EIA attendees at the PSF Árd Fheis, it would appear as though Ó Brádaigh’s visit to the Basque Country in late 1977 represented the first of its kind by a senior Sinn Féin figure.

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<sup>171</sup> “Third World messages to Ardfeis ‘77”, *An Phoblacht*, 26.10.1977.

<sup>172</sup> “An Ardfeis Ab Fhearr”, *An Phoblacht*, 26.10.1977; “How greatly Scotland Yard fears the Irish truth”, *An Phoblacht*, 02.11.1977.

<sup>173</sup> See: ‘Presidential Address of Ruairí Ó Brádaigh’. Provisional Sinn Féin. CJ4/2376. NA; “Rory O’Bradaigh, presidente del Sinn Fein (provisional), en Euskadi”, *Egin*, 30.11.1977; “Basques, Sinn Féin and the Brest Charter”, *Hibernia*, 20.01.1978. “Joint FCO-NIO paper titled Irish terrorist contacts in Europe and the Third World”. Dated May 1982.

<sup>174</sup> “Comunicado de EIA”, *Egin*, 30.11.1977.

Shortly after Ó Brádaigh’s trip, the Consejo General Vasco (CGV) —a sort of pre-autonomy Basque organ— came into being on 04 January 1978. Unlike Herri Batasuna, EIA did not reject this nascent body.

Demonstrating the warm fraternal relations between EIA and PSF —and in addition, Ó Brádaigh’s own long-held interest in the Spanish Civil War and Irish involvement in that conflict— PSF “sent a message to [EIA] for the Basque people” extending its “good wishes to the Basque people on the establishment of a Basque General Council”. The message read:

“The republican movement in Ireland extends good wishes to the Basque people on the establishment of a Basque General Council. Irish republicans have long admired the unrelenting struggle and great sacrifices made for the freedom of Euskadi [...]. Forty years ago, Irish men and Basques fought and died as comrades for the liberty of both our countries. Forward now to independence and reunification with full social, economic, and cultural freedom for Euskadi and Ireland [...]. A Europe of people, not of States! Gora Euskadi Askatasuna [sic]”.<sup>175</sup>

If Provisional Sinn Féin was demonstrating an increasingly public fraternal relationship with EIA, what, if anything, of the “Official” NLF’s *de facto* alignment with HAS (later EHAS, HASI, and by extension, ETA-m) via the Brest Charter?

Woodworth’s recollection of how this notional alignment came about, and the relative unimportance of the charter, squares with that of Eoin Ó Murchú. Indeed, testimony to this is the Dubliner’s similar (understandable) doubts over some of the details of when exactly the charter was signed and the identity of its Basque adherent:

“The contact between the ‘Officials’ and the ‘Milis’ came about because of a meeting in the French town of Brest in 1973. Someone there from the ‘Officials’... I don’t know who... was there. And someone was there from HASI... probably Santi Brouard [later the President of HASI], I simply don’t know... and they were joint signatories to what was called the Brest Letter [...]. Nobody could remember who had been to the meeting. There were lots of radical meetings in Europe at the time, and God knows whoever went there for the ‘Officials’ could have been in the INLA the next year, you know? This meeting was kind of forgotten about”.<sup>176</sup>

Notwithstanding this general overview, the NLF’s “involvement” in the Brest Charter, which in reality seemed to amount to very little, was not quite “forgotten about” — or not quite yet.

The final episode of the NLF’s involvement in the Brest Charter centres on Gerry McAlinden, an “Official” republican from Newry (An tIúr). Having moved to France in

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<sup>175</sup> “Good wishes extended to Basques”, *Irish Examiner*, 03.01.1978.

<sup>176</sup> Author interview with Paddy Woodworth (Dublin, 2015). As we have seen, Eoin Ó Murchú was the “Officials” representative in regard to the Brest Charter, which he most likely signed in 1974.

the early 1970s, McAlinden became “Secretary of the French Irish Solidarity Committee”, which campaigned against British policy in Northern Ireland and organised talks and lectures across France. Finding himself increasingly identifying with the NLF’s analysis of the “Troubles”, McAlinden had got in touch with Official Sinn Féin headquarters in Gardiner Place, Dublin, in order to offer his “help, if they needed me to do anything”. In McAlinden’s own words, both he and the aforementioned Seán Ó Cionnaith came to:

“[...] a fairly tentative arrangement. They knew they had this guy out in France, who, you know, could, you know... get around. And I had a job that allowed me to get around and talk to different people in Brittany, in Paris, Bordeaux, etc. I would have been in touch with all the big socialist organisations”.<sup>177</sup>

McAlinden was asked by Ó Cionnaith to represent the NLF in respect of the Brest Charter. He recalls this conversation taking place “possibly as far back as 1973”. Asked as to what membership of the charter may have entailed, McAlinden surmises that, similar to Ó Murchú and Woodworth: “[The charter] just seemed so small and fragmented. It didn’t seem to add up to anything as far as I was concerned. And I didn’t really pay a lot of attention to it”.

In November 1977, McAlinden found himself at “a big meeting in the hills over San Sebastián [...] bringing together all the members of the Charter of Brest”. According to McAlinden, an argument over the issue of “armed struggle” and the limits of its (il)legitimacy dominated the meeting in the Gipuzkoan capital:

“When it came to the discussions, I found myself very much [on the] outside [...]. The Basques had written a concluding statement that very much emphasised the rights to take armed action. [...] I can’t remember what the form of words was, but I do remember the resistance coming from the people on the... I think it was Herri Batasuna at the time”.<sup>178</sup>

In fact, two Basque parties were represented at the Brest Charter re-affirmation of 1977: EHAS and HASI. They were represented by Manex Goihenetxe (EHAS), and Patxi Zabaleta, Alberto Figeroa and Txomin Ziluga (HASI), respectively.<sup>179</sup> Herri Batasuna would not be officially established until 1978. According to McAlinden:

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<sup>177</sup> Author interview with Gerry McAlinden (Louth, 2017).

<sup>178</sup> Ibid.

<sup>179</sup> The 1977 Brest Charter was reportedly signed by HASI and EHAS “como partidos confederados por Euskadi”. In this confederation, HASI represented Hegoalde, while EHAS represented Iparralde. The main meeting took place at the Velodromo de Anoeta on 12 November 1977. See: “H.A.S.I. ETA HERRI ZAPALDUAK CON LOS PUEBLOS OPRIMIDOS”, *Egin*, 11.11.1977; “Las naciones oprimidas de Europa, por la independencia y el socialismo”, *Egin*, 13.11.1977.



“There was no way I could go home signing this declaration that talked about the freedom, or the rights, or the inalienable right or whatever it was [to take armed action]... and so I objected, and there was a bit of a standoff”.<sup>180</sup>

After some modifications to the text, McAlinden signed the updated charter “on the basis that I would be able to go back to Dublin and live with it”. The participants agreed to hold a follow-up congress in Brest for the spring of 1978.<sup>181</sup>

Neither McAlinden nor any other representative of “Sinn Féin. The Workers’ Party” —the new political moniker of Official Sinn Féin— went to Brest the following spring. Sensing that the NLF and the other Brest Charter signatories had diverged significantly in their fundamental outlooks regarding armed struggle, when McAlinden returned to Dublin in November 1977, he seemingly held a frank conversation with Seán Ó Cionnaith about the situation:

“My recommendation was that this wasn’t our game from here on in. Seán Kenny [Ó Cionnaith] accepted that, and I think it was tabled at an *Árd Comhairle* meeting some time after. And I think that marked the end [of the ‘Officials’] involvement with the Charter of Brest”.<sup>182</sup>

#### 4.4. The long wars

“The answer to why ETA persists is quite simple. It is because Euskadi is not Spain. Until Spain accepts that and agrees to allow the Basque people themselves to choose the form of relationship, if any, they wish to retain with the Spanish state, then ETA will continue to be the voice of those who rejected the Spanish constitution in 1978 and who continue to deny Spain’s right to dictate the politics of our country. You ask why we don’t participate in parliament? I would ask you, how can you think that Basques could expect justice at the hands of Spain? Has any country willingly dissolved itself? Look at Ulster, the Irish must fight like us because the political system is loaded against them”.<sup>183</sup>

“We can’t give up now and admit that the men and women we sent to their graves died for nothing. The struggle must continue now until victory is achieved and we are determined to do that. [...] I don’t accept that we have no mandate. I could return to the mandate derived from the 1918 election but we see our mandate deriving from the injustices of the present system of the imperialist controlled six county state. We have the same right to fight injustice as the blacks in South Africa or the Palestinians in the Middle East. It is the objective injustice of our circumstances that gives us the mandate and a secure knowledge that the people in

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<sup>180</sup> Author interview with Gerry McAlinden (Louth, 2017).

<sup>181</sup> “Las naciones oprimidas de Europa, por la independencia y el socialismo”, *Egin*, 13.11.1977.

<sup>182</sup> Author interview with Gerry McAlinden (Louth, 2017).

<sup>183</sup> Excerpt from an interview conducted by Cynthia L. Irvin with a member of Herri Batasuna in 1989. See: Irvin: *Militant Nationalism*, p. 35.

the repressed areas support us day in day out with their spontaneous help and encouragement”.<sup>184</sup>

While Spain’s Transition to a liberal parliamentary (monarchic) democracy has been generally appraised by historians as a successful —if not perfect— model of internal regime change, the issue of Basque consent to the new political framework was, and remains, a far more contested issue.<sup>185</sup> Indeed, to borrow Ludger Mees’ concept of a three-pronged “Basque Contention”, one could argue that this contention reached a historical apogee during the Transition years.<sup>186</sup>

Firstly, as the campaigns of both ETA branches reached unprecedented levels in the late 1970s, so began the first “Dirty War” by the extreme right-wing groups Guerrilleros de Cristo Rey (Warriors of Christ the King) and the Batallón Vasco Español (Spanish Basque Battalion).<sup>187</sup> Secondly, the results of the 1977 elections in the Basque Country clearly evidenced (for the first time in over four decades) both the continuity of a heterogeneous plurality of political opinion within Hegoalde in respect of the Basque Country’s future relationship with Spain, and on the thorny issue of intra-Basque provincial unity (i.e., Nafarroa Garaia).<sup>188</sup> And thirdly, set against the backdrop of escalating violence on the streets (ETA-m/ETA-pm campaigns, frequent police brutality in Basque town centres) and the reactionary pressure of the old regime’s “bunker” to even a hint of Basque “separatism”, the Basque Country’s legal relationship with Spain was hammered out during intensive late-night negotiations in Madrid *without* a Basque representative.<sup>189</sup>

The new proposed constitution affirmed Spain to be “indissoluble” and “indivisible”. As such, the prospect of Basque self-determination, at least for the foreseeable future, seemed to be effectively closed off. Given that throughout the 1970s, both of the major

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<sup>184</sup> Excerpt from an interview conducted by the Irish journalist Vincent Browne with a “member of the Provisional IRA leadership”. See: “There will be no more ceasefires until the end”, *Magill*, August 1978.

<sup>185</sup> For a comprehensive text that marries both of these aspects, see: Paul Preston: *The Triumph of Democracy in Spain*, London, Methuen, 1986.

<sup>186</sup> Mees: *The Basque Contention*. Mees’ conception of what he refers to as the “Basque Contention” is essentially that of three historical and overlapping issues: 1). The issue of ETA’s long campaign of political violence, which has now ceased to be a factor. 2). The internal Basque debate regarding preferred political preferences within (or outside) the Spanish state; pluralities of national identity; and the disputed relationship and status of Nafarroa Garaia with the Basque Country. 3). The historical issue of Euskal Herria’s relationship with Spain, and to a lesser extent, France.

<sup>187</sup> ETA (-m and -pm)’s number of mortal victims, pre- and post-Franco range from 43 (1968 to 1975), to 270 (1976 to 1980). Figures cited in: Mees: *The Basque Contention*, pp. 119–120. For the first “Dirty War”, see: Woodworth: *Dirty War, Clean Hands*, pp. 44–59.

<sup>188</sup> In Bizkaia, Gipuzkoa and Araba, PNV won 8 seats; PSE-PSOE (the Basque PSOE affiliate: 7; UdeCD: 4; Alianza Popular: 1; EE: 1. In Nafarroa Garaia, UdeCD won 3 seats and PSOE, 2.

<sup>189</sup> Mees: *The Basque Contention*, pp. 128–129.

left-wing blocs opposed to Franco's regime, Partido Socialista Obrero Español (PSOE) and PCE, had publicly supported the principle of a Basque right to self-determination, this was a particular bitter pill for Basque nationalists (and for many Basque democrats more generally) to swallow.<sup>190</sup> A second blow was the decision to exclude Nafarroa Garaia from a Basque autonomous statute — although provisions were made for such a merger in the future. Notwithstanding these setbacks, the PNV managed to secure a reference to Basque “historical rights” in the final text of Spain's new *Magna Carta*. And while this aspect gave the PNV some political cover, it was not enough to convince the party to actually support the proposed constitution. When the document was finally put to the Spanish citizens for ratification in December 1978, the *jeltzales* advocated “abstention”. For their part, Herri Batasuna called for an “active rejection” of the document.<sup>191</sup>

In the run up to the historic vote, a broad constellation of *izquierda abertzale* forces, including ETA-m and the constituent parts of Herri Batasuna, had put forward an alternative proposal: “KAS Alternativa”. “KAS Alternativa” set out minimum requirements for the political normalisation of the Basque Country. Considered by its proponents as the “*única vía democrática para conseguir el armisticio*”, it was nevertheless generally given short shrift by Adolfo Suárez and his UdeCD government.<sup>192</sup>

As the results of the constitution referendum started to come in, it quickly became apparent that a massive majority of Spanish citizens supported the new legal framework. Yet, while the final tally (87.9% in favour on a turnout of 67.1%) was naturally a huge success for the major Spanish political parties (now all legalised), the scale of this endorsement inadvertently served to highlight a disparity with results in the Basque (Araba, Bizkaia and Gipuzkoa) electorate's deviation from the state-wide norm: 69.1% in favour on a turnout of 44.7%.<sup>193</sup>

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<sup>190</sup> Cited in: Whitfield: *Endgame for ETA*, pp. 46-47.

<sup>191</sup> Mees: *The Basque Contention*, pp. 128–132.

<sup>192</sup> “KAS Alternativa” is reproduced in Santiago de Pablo, José Luis de la Granja, Ludger Mees (eds.): *Documentos para la historia del nacionalismo vasco. De los Fueros a nuestros días*, Barcelona, Editorial Ariel, S.A., 1998, pp. 153–155. The “KAS Alternativa” demands included the “establecimiento de las libertades democráticas sin restricción alguna”, an “amnistía total”, “disolución de cuerpos represivos” in the Basque Country, “reconocimiento de la soberanía nacional de Euskadi”, and the “establecimiento inmediato, y a título provisional, de un régimen de autonomía para Euskadi Sur”. For the above quote, see: “La Alternativa KAS, única vía democrática para conseguir el armisticio”, *Zuzen*, no. 37, November 1983.

<sup>193</sup> In Nafarroa Garaia, 75.7% voted in favour on a turnout of 66.6%. See: “Referendum Constitución Española en otros ámbitos. 6 diciembre 1978”, <https://www.bcn.cat/estadistica/angles/dades/telec/ref/ref78/r22.htm> (last accessed 11 January 2020).

These results and their implications *vis-à-vis* Basque consent (or a lack thereof) to the new legal framework have been debated at length in practically every book written on Basque nationalism since the 1980s. Of more relevance here, and against what most analysts had predicted, ETA-m set course for a long war of attrition against the newly re-consecrated Spanish state.<sup>194</sup> This would be the overarching dynamic of political violence in the Basque Country until the mid-1990s.

A similar sea change towards a “Long War” schema also occurred in Northern Ireland in the mid- to late-1970s.<sup>195</sup> How had this come about?

As referred to earlier, in the aftermath of the failed PIRA-British talks of 1972, the PIRA’s armed campaign was renewed with vigour on “Bloody Friday”. Within days, however, “Operation Motorman”, Britain’s largest military operation since the Suez Canal Crisis of 1956, resulted in the British Army and RUC retaking control of the republican heartlands in Belfast and Derry that had become *de facto* “no-go areas”.<sup>196</sup>

In February 1975, secret talks led by PSF President Ruairí Ó Brádaigh and the British Secretary of State for Northern Ireland Merlyn Rees resulted in a new Provisional IRA ceasefire being called while further discussions continued. This ceasefire officially held until January 1976. It has been widely suggested that, in the intervening period, the PIRA was severely weakened by British infiltration and recruitment of informers, leading to the near collapse of the entire campaign in 1976.<sup>197</sup>

That same year, Rees was replaced as Secretary of State by Roy Mason, a man who proved to be more interested in defeating the PIRA militarily than appealing to their political sensibilities. Under Mason, a policy known as “Ulsterisation” moved the burden of security onto the local RUC and Ulster Defence Regiment (UDR). Dovetailing with the “Ulsterisation” shift, “criminalisation” of politically-motivated prisoners sparked organised counter-protests in Northern Ireland’s jails against the loss of Special Category

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<sup>194</sup> Fernández Soldevilla: “The origins of ETA: between Francoism and democracy, 1958–1981, p. 30.

<sup>195</sup> For the origin of the “Long War” doctrine in Irish republicanism in the mid-1970s, see: Moloney: *A Secret History of the IRA* (2<sup>nd</sup> ed), pp. 150–151. For a comparative analysis of ETA and the IRA’s “war of attrition” against the Spanish and British states, see: Sánchez-Cuenca: “The Dynamics Of Nationalist Terrorism: ETA and the IRA”.

<sup>196</sup> Moloney: *A Secret History of the IRA* (2<sup>nd</sup> ed), p. 117.

<sup>197</sup> Patterson: *The Politics of Illusion*, p. 10. While the prevailing view is that the PIRA was weakened, some maintain that the organisation was, in fact, strengthened. For a nuanced discussion of this issue and the talks themselves, see: Niall Ó Dochartaigh: “‘Everyone Trying’, the IRA Ceasefire, 1975: A Missed Opportunity for Peace?”, *Field Day Review*, vol. 7, 2011, pp. 50–77. On the failure of the talks, Ó Dochartaigh concludes that they “failed to a great extent because of active opposition to government policy by powerful forces within the British state and the intensification of loyalist violence. It looks very much like a missed opportunity for peace”.

Status. Meanwhile, outside the prison gates, a new PIRA organisational structure saw the paramilitaries move away from conventional army units to smaller discriminate cells, c. 1977.<sup>198</sup>

British “withdrawal” may have looked likely in 1972 — even pending. By 1977, this was a distant prospect. Following two unsuccessful series of negotiations with the British government, the PIRA hunkered down for a “Long War”. This time, there would be no ceasefires or negotiations until the enemy had stated its intention to “withdraw”.<sup>199</sup>

In contrast to the unambiguous war footing of the PIRA, their erstwhile comrades in the OIRA were at a very different stage. Having explicitly rebranded towards class politics in 1977, the “Official” Republican Clubs now distanced themselves from any association with political violence.<sup>200</sup> As we have seen, similar sentiments had seemingly served to motivate the NLF’s defection from the Brest Charter — and by extension, the “Official” movement’s relevance to this study.<sup>201</sup>

As for the “Polimili” wing of radical Basque nationalism, we have already noted how reciprocal statements of solidarity and visits by EIA and PSF delegations in late 1977 and early 1978 had paved the way for warm relations between the two movements.

The evolution this “Polimil-Provo” relationship, coupled with a surge of media and government speculation regarding “ETA-IRA links”, is explored in what follows.

### The “Cuadrilla”

“Sin lugar a dudas el pueblo vasco tiene un amigo en el irlandés y Euskadiko Ezkerra un compañero en el Sinn Féin”.<sup>202</sup>

In May 1978, the EIA political representatives Juan María Bandrés and Francisco Letamendia (*Ortzi*) arrived in Dublin as part of an “International Tribunal on Britain’s Crimes against the Irish People” [Bertrand Russell Tribunal]. Bandrés, despite being a

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<sup>198</sup> Von Tange Page: *Prisons, Peace and Terrorism. Penal Policy in the Reduction of Political Violence in Northern Ireland, Italy and the Spanish Basque Country, 1968–97*, pp. 58–61. First established in 1970, the UDR was a British Army regiment, recruited directly from Northern Ireland. For the reorganisation of the PIRA, see: Moloney: *A Secret History of the IRA* (2<sup>nd</sup> ed.), pp. 156–158.

<sup>199</sup> Hanley: *The IRA. A Documentary History 1916–2005*, p. 188; Moloney: *A Secret History of the IRA* (2<sup>nd</sup> ed.), pp. 150–151.

<sup>200</sup> As cited in Hanley; Millar: *The Lost Revolution*, p. 381.

<sup>201</sup> Despite the “Officials” withdrawal from the Brest Charter, HASI were apparently invited to an “IRA-Oficial” congress in 1978. As cited in: Domínguez Iribarren: *ETA: Estrategia Organizativa y Actuaciones 1978–1992*, p. 116. It is likely that this was actually a Sinn Féin – Workers’ Party congress. Regarding the “Official” movement’s rejection of violence, in reality the OIRA continued to exist well into the late 1980s with members becoming involved in criminality and racketeering. See: Hanley; Millar: *The Lost Revolution*, pp. 401–421.

<sup>202</sup> “Euskadi Ezkerra junto al Sinn Féin”, *Hitz*, no. 5, January 1980.

member of the Spanish Senate, was subsequently stopped and “quizzed” by British police on his return to Spain via London. Furthermore, his personal luggage mysteriously disappeared in transit, never to be seen again.<sup>203</sup> Evidently, the British authorities already had a handle on EIA’s nascent relations with Provisional Sinn Féin.

Five months later, for the second successive year, two EIA representatives attended PSF’s annual *Árd Fheis*. They were Mario Onaindia and Mikel Etxeberria.<sup>204</sup> According to a report compiled by the British Embassy in Dublin, “the overall mood of the conference was uninspired”.<sup>205</sup> The Basques, at least, managed to rouse a scathing comment from the British source that was present:

“One illustration of the comparatively low morale of PSF was their pathetic attempts to emphasise their international connections. A Basque separatist was introduced amid loud applause, but it turned out that he was not a member of ETA”.<sup>206</sup>

Short excerpts of Mikel Etxeberria’s intervention, during which he reportedly stated that “Ireland has been the Alamo against imperialism in Europe”, even made their way into *The Times* (London). Interestingly, the journalist Christopher Walker noted how Etxeberria’s address had been received with a “standing ovation from all but one section [of the *Árd Fheis*], who apparently found his message too left wing”.<sup>207</sup>

On 28 January, a story appeared in the Spanish daily *El País* alleging major links between “ETA and the IRA”. Repeated in the British and Irish press a day later, the article centred on claims of joint ETA-IRA training in a Middle East country; IRA involvement in attacks in the Basque Country; evidence of ETA commandos operating in the UK; mutual exchanges of arms and explosives, and security service infiltration of ETA.<sup>208</sup> Responding to an enquiry in the House of Commons regarding these sensational press reports (even by ETA-IRA standards), Secretary of State for Northern Ireland, Roy Mason, remarked:

“The hon. Gentleman may know that at the Provisional Sinn Fein *ardheis* that was held recently in the Republic of Ireland, representatives of the Basque terrorists were present. Undoubtedly, there is a tenuous link. We keep in touch with our

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<sup>203</sup> “Spaniard Quizzed”, *Irish Press*, 23.05.1978; “Bandrés, interrogado en el aeropuerto de Londres”, *Egin*, 23.05.1978.

<sup>204</sup> “Solidarity Groups Attend Convention”, *Irish Republican Information Service (IRIS)*, vol. 3, no. 52, 25.10.1978.

<sup>205</sup> “Restricted report from British Embassy, Dublin to Republic of Ireland Department, FCO”. Dated 26 October 1978. Provisional Sinn Féin. CJ4/2376. NA.

<sup>206</sup> Ibid. The same British source remarked that “the most striking feature of the conference was the extent to which it was dominated by Gerry Adams”.

<sup>207</sup> *The Times*, 23.10.1978.

<sup>208</sup> “Comandos del IRA detectados en el País Vasco”, *El País*, 28.01.1979; *The Daily Mail*, 29.01.1979; “IRA men are helping Basques – Madrid report”, *Irish News*, 29.01.1979.



embassies and consulates abroad and warn them if we think that there is anything developing from that link”.<sup>209</sup>

Owing to the extensive nature of the claims, the Information Officer of the British Embassy in Madrid contacted the “Head of the international Section of *El País*” to investigate the veracity of the story. In a subsequent British Embassy report, the *El País* “Head” was said to have been:

“[...] rather embarrassed. He [of *El País*] suggested lamely that the story might have originated in the Basque Country but it was clear from his remarks that he regarded it as entirely without foundation and that he considered that it should never have been printed. We discount that it was an official plant as we cannot think of any purpose. It looks as if some fanciful ultra right wing gossip somehow found its way into print, which is a poor reflection on the professionalism of *El País*”.<sup>210</sup>

Seeing the potential benefit in stories of this kind for British propaganda interests, a (presumably London-based) colleague who had evidently read the embassy report from Madrid, remarked in handwriting underneath: “I don’t see why we should be unduly bothered by [sic] if ETA, PIRA and other similar terrorist organisations become generally linked in the international public’s mind”.<sup>211</sup> Fraternal relations between EIA and PSF were increasingly fostering this image anyway.

From 26 to 28 January 1979, for the second time in little over a year, a Ruairí Ó Brádaigh-led PSF delegation visited the Basque Country. This time, Sinn Féin was to participate in a three-day trilateral meeting with EIA and the Portuguese Organização Unitária de Trabalhadores (OUT), which had supported the former left-wing Colonel Otelo Nuno Romão Saraiva de Carvalho in the 1976 Portuguese presidential election. Each of the three parties put forward their respective ideas for the “development of a revolutionary strategy in Ireland, Euskadi and Portugal”.<sup>212</sup>

On the third day of the trip, party representatives held a public gathering in the small Gipuzkoan town of Ormaiztegi. At the event, the PSF President made a lengthy statement on his party’s relations with EIA and the “milestone” sacrifices of the Irish and Basque peoples on their respective journeys to freedom. A year after congratulating EIA on the formation of the Consejo General Vasco, Ó Brádaigh’s statement now struck a markedly

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<sup>209</sup> <https://api.parliament.uk/historic-hansard/commons/1979/feb/01/terrorism> (last accessed 02 November 2019).

<sup>210</sup> “Letter titled ‘ETA/IRA Links’”. Dated 02 March 1979. IRA Activities Overseas. FCO 87/946. NA.

<sup>211</sup> Ibid.

<sup>212</sup> “Ruairi O’ Bradaigh’s speech in Basque Country”, *An Phoblacht/Republican News*, 24.02.1979. In January 1979, the Dublin-based *An Phoblacht* and Belfast-based *Republican News* merged together as *An Phoblacht/Republican News (AP/RN)* under the editorship of Danny Morrison.

different tone in congratulating the Basque people in recently “defeating” the Spanish Constitution, and by extension, Madrid’s writ north of the River Ebro:

“Sinn Féin wishes to congratulate the people of Euskadi on their action in defeating the constitution proposed by Madrid. You have declared in the most striking fashion and the whole world knows now that the Spanish government has no mandate to govern you. But you must now demonstrate your capability and your responsibility in governing yourselves. The world is watching your struggle and is waiting for you to show that you are well able to organise the self-government of the Basque people. We in Ireland also admire your efforts to restore your historic Basque language and culture and respect and support the objectives of EIA in seeking control of the wealth of Euskadi by its people and for the benefit of its people and not by the international imperialists and pirates of the EEC and NATO. Power to the working people! [...] For our prisoners in England who have bravely carried the war to the heart of enemy territory, we demand repatriation to Ireland, pending a general amnesty. For their true comrades, the Basque prisoners in Soria prison, we make a similar demand -- repatriation to Euskadi pending an amnesty with the Statute of Autonomy. You are facing a new test of your determination in the coming elections. Sinn Féin in Ireland calls for unity of the revolutionary forces on the concrete political basis of autonomous self-government now with the right to self-determination. We support the action of EIA in putting forward candidates in Madrid and Barcelona [...]. At home in Ireland [today] is called Bloody Sunday — the anniversary of the shooting dead of 13 people marching in demonstration in the Irish city of Derry. [...] You have known similar atrocities – the deaths of German and Yoseba last July come to mind. The blood of Irish and Basque patriots mingles in the common struggle for liberation. Such sacrifices act as milestones for the struggling peoples. Long live the struggles of the Irish and Basque peoples. Independence and Socialism! Unity is Strength! Victory is certain! Gora Euskadi eta Irlanda askatuta!”<sup>213</sup>

Another Irishman in the vicinity of Ormaiztegi was Paddy Woodworth. Doing some freelance journalism at the time, Woodworth recalls Ruairí Ó Brádaigh’s intervention vividly:

“Ó Brádaigh proclaimed in Irish: ‘Níor cheart go mbeadh Madrid i nEuskadi ní anois na ariamh’ [Madrid has no right to be in the Basque Country, neither in the past nor the present]. And the second thing I remember was they all got up to sing ‘The International’... Ó Brádaigh was directly and explicitly anti-communist and yet here he was, because he was friends with the ‘Polimilis’... he kind of awkwardly raised his left fist for ‘The International’”<sup>214</sup>

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<sup>213</sup> “Joint FCO-NIO paper titled Irish terrorist contacts in Europe and the Third World”. Dated May 1982; “Ruairi O’ Bradaigh’s speech in Basque Country”, *An Phoblacht/Republican News*, 24.02.1979. Note: Although this trip was reported as having taken place from 26 to 28 January, Ó Brádaigh’s reference to the anniversary of “Bloody Sunday” (30 January) means that there is probably some slight discrepancy in the dates. “German” and “Yoseba” refer to the death of Germán Rodríguez, who was controversially killed by Spanish police during the San Fermines festival of 1978, and Joseba Barandiaran, who was also killed in a solidarity protest only days later. See: “40 años del crimen impune de los sanfermines”, *El País*, 08.07.2018, [https://elpais.com/politica/2018/07/02/actualidad/1530550271\\_091992.html](https://elpais.com/politica/2018/07/02/actualidad/1530550271_091992.html) (last accessed 05 April 2020).

<sup>214</sup> Author interview with Paddy Woodworth (Dublin, 2015). See also: “The Saturday Column”, *Irish Times*, 17.02.1979.

The following month, in February, representatives of EIA and PSF met on the fringes of a conference on “the national question and the class struggle”, held in Cagliari, Sardinia.<sup>215</sup> Three months later, a Portuguese newspaper *Voz de Povo* reported on May Day that a joint communique had recently been signed in Lisbon by the PSF-EIA-OUT triumvirate, alongside 11 other revolutionary organisations, including, most noticeably, Herri Batasuna.<sup>216</sup> The joint communique asserted:

“[...] [N]ational liberation struggles, taking power and putting an end to colonialism, do not of themselves alone guarantee the liberation of oppressed peoples, unless there is a clear socialist option to put an end to capitalism and all forms of exploitation. [...] it is becoming increasingly clear that the definitive overthrow of capitalism and smashing of reactionary forces, as well as the exercise of power by the popular masses, are impossible unless the latter, organised, have the power of arms”.<sup>217</sup>

In step with this analysis, the organisations reportedly pledged “an exchange of information and closer contact [...]”, whilst also agreeing in principle to another meeting that would take place in December.

Various individual motions were passed among the attendees, including the right to Basque self-determination, and support for the Irish republican struggle “to put an end to the British occupation of their territory”.<sup>218</sup>

In July, the firebrand unionist MP for North Antrim, Ian Paisley, asked the new Secretary of State for Northern Ireland, Humphrey Atkins, in the House of Commons “whether he has any evidence that the Provisional IRA had a recent conference with the Basque terrorists in Spain?”. Atkins responded:

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<sup>215</sup> “National and Social Liberation are two sides of the same coin”, *An Phoblacht/Republican News*, 31.03.1979.

<sup>216</sup> “Joint FCO-NIO paper titled Irish terrorist contacts in Europe and the Third World”. Dated May 1982.

<sup>217</sup> The other signatories to the joint communique were cited in a British document as: OUT (Portugal); Fretelin (East Timor); FAI (Indonesia); FLPLE (Eritrea); FLA (Arabic); SWAPO (Namibia); PS (CNR) – (Chile); MPLN (Bolivia); MIR (Dominican Republic); FSLN (Nicaragua); PVP (Uruguay). See: “Report titled ‘Translation of article from *Voz de Povo*, 1 June 1979 (abridged)”. Undated. The Basque Problem. FCO 9/2876. NA.

<sup>218</sup> Ibid. At the follow-up meeting in December (again held in Lisbon), the following statement was signed by EIA and HB, among others: “This conference fully supports the demands of the Irish people, expressed through the Irish Republican Movement, for a total British withdrawal, militarily, politically, and from economic exploitation of the whole island of Ireland. We also support them in rejecting reformist solutions which would thwart [sic] the unity of Ireland based on national liberation and socialism. Finally, pending that British withdrawal, that the international scandal of the H Blocks be ended and prisoner of war status restored”. See: “International support for total British withdrawal from Ireland”, *Irish Republican Information Service*, vol. 4, no. 5, 19.01.1980.

“No, Sir. I cannot tell the House that we have any direct evidence of that. However, there is considerable co-operation between the Governments of the countries affected. All evidence is carefully studied and acted upon where possible”.<sup>219</sup>

The rumours continued. One report in the British media (*News of the World*) speculated that a meeting between “ETA”, the IRA and the Red Army Faction (RAF/“Baader Meinhof”) had recently taken place on a yacht anchored off the island of Jersey.<sup>220</sup> Another claimed that:

“Basque separatists who conducted a half-hearted campaign on the Costa Brava this summer were actually trained at a farm outside Dublin. It was by way of repayment for a supply of plastic bomb [illegible] which the Spanish provided for the IRA”.<sup>221</sup>

Perhaps stimulated by escalating radical Basque nationalist violence and the prospect of operational links between ETA-m and/or ETA-pm, the PIRA (and even the Portuguese OUT), there is evidence to suggest that the Spanish government was beginning to take the potential security threat seriously.

According to the British Ambassador in Madrid, Acland, British-Spanish communications in regard to ETA-IRA links usually extended to:

“[...] information [...] exchanged through intelligence liaison (though I understand that, at least in relation to the IRA and ETA, we [the British] have had more from the Spaniards on that channel than we have been able to give in return). There have also been exchanges of security equipment, and Spanish visitors have several times gone to Britain for technical discussions”.<sup>222</sup>

In June 1979, the Secretario del Estado de Asuntos Exteriores, Carlos Robles Piquer, made a personal request to Acland for information on “any links that might exist between the IRA and the Basque terrorist organisation ETA”.<sup>223</sup> Other “ETA-IRA” enquiries were made to the embassy “by a number of senior Spaniards, including King Juan Carlos”.

As a direct result of these requests, various papers on the IRA and “ETA/IRA links” were provided to the Spanish authorities. Additionally, it was proposed that Major General Young, the Director of Infantry, and former Commander of Land Forces in

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<sup>219</sup> “Irish Republican Army (Terrorist Conspiracy)”, [https://hansard.parliament.uk/commons/1979-07-05/debates/22979d2f-548a-4ca7-9de1-fddc29927569/IrishRepublicanArmy\(TerroristConspiracy\)](https://hansard.parliament.uk/commons/1979-07-05/debates/22979d2f-548a-4ca7-9de1-fddc29927569/IrishRepublicanArmy(TerroristConspiracy)) (last accessed 25 October 2019).

<sup>220</sup> Cited in: “Letter from Sir. Antony Acland (British Embassy, Madrid) to M.J. Newington, Republic of Ireland Dpt., FCO”. Dated 03 July 1979. Madrid. Irish Activities Overseas. FCO 87/946. NA.

<sup>221</sup> “Summit Meeting of Terror”, *Sunday Mirror*, 12.08.1979. ETA-pm conducted a tourist bombing campaign in 1979. See: Fernández Soldevilla: “The origins of ETA: between Francoism and democracy, 1958–1981” (specifically p. 31).

<sup>222</sup> “Letter from Antony Acland to Republic of Ireland Department FCO”. Dated 2 July 1979. IRA activities overseas. FCO 87/946. NA.

<sup>223</sup> “Confidential report from Antony Acland to FCO”. Dated 05 June 1979. Irish Activities Overseas. FCO 87/946. NA.

Northern Ireland (1975–1977) be sent on a briefing visit to Spain. This specific idea came from Spanish Deputy Prime Minister General Gutierrez Mellado, who was said to be interested in Britain’s successful employment of “psychological counter-measures” in Northern Ireland. A “joint visit [to Spain] by the [British] Security Service and the Irish Garda Special Branch”, and a proposal to invite the head of the new Spanish “Dirección de la Seguridad del Estado” to Britain were also earmarked.<sup>224</sup>

While Britain and Spain were evidently moving into a new closer phase of collaboration with respect to their mutual adversaries, was this based on genuine security concerns around “ETA-IRA links”?<sup>225</sup> An indicative reference may be found in a letter sent from the British Embassy in Madrid to the FCO in London, in September 1979. Outlining the findings of a recently compiled British intelligence report (possibly on foot of the above Spanish requests), the Madrid-based British official states that intelligence had found no hard evidence of any “operational links” between “ETA” and the IRA. On the contrary, the security report:

“[...] [fell] well short of validating the Spanish belief, which is increasingly voiced here [Spain], that there are operational links between ETA and the IRA. I think this conclusion in itself would justify our re-classifying the paper Confidential for our Spanish readers, particularly given its authorship. We propose to pass it initially to the Ministry of Foreign Affairs”.<sup>226</sup>

Similarly, a British report compiled in June had stated that:

“There has been regular contact between the Provisional Sinn Féin and the ETA or EIA (its political wing) for some time. It is however very difficult to prove that weapons are exchanged in either direction, and we have no hard evidence from our own or other sources that such a supply exists”.<sup>227</sup>

In short, precisely at the time that Spanish officials were growing increasingly concerned in regard to advanced “ETA-IRA links”, the British Embassy in Madrid, acting off its intelligence reports, seemed largely content that such links did not amount to anything substantial.

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<sup>224</sup> “Anglo-Spanish cooperation in counter-terrorism”. Dated 28 August 1979. IRA Activities Overseas. FCO 87/946. NA. “Letter from British Embassy, Madrid to FCO, titled ‘ETA/IRA Links’”. Dated 03 September 1979. IRA Activities Overseas. FCO 87/946. NA.

<sup>225</sup> Even in official diplomatic papers, ETA-m and ETA-pm were rarely differentiated in correspondence. Hereafter, for the remainder of this chapter, I will continue to put “ETA” in parenthesis when the original source does not differentiate between the two.

<sup>226</sup> “Letter from British Embassy, Madrid to FCO, titled ‘ETA/IRA Links’”. Dated 03 September 1979. IRA Activities Overseas. FCO 87/946. NA. The same document also refers to a similar report compiled by Britain’s Joint Intelligence Committee (JIC).

<sup>227</sup> “Confidential Letter”. Dated 06 June 1979. IRA Activities Overseas”. FCO 87/946. NA.

Running somewhat contrary to the gist of British intelligence findings, one anonymous contributor to this study stated:

“La relación Otelo [Nuno Romão Saraiva de Carvalho], o el mundo de Otelo con el mundo de Sinn Féin y con el nuestro [ETA-pm/EIA] fue... prácticamente formábamos un triunvirato... sí, sí, en un momento dado, bueno, hubo intercambio de todo, incluido de armas”<sup>228</sup>

On 27 August 1979, the British royal and last Viceroy of India, Louis Mountbatten, was assassinated by a PIRA bomb in the west of Ireland. According to the Irish Ambassador in Spain, this reportedly “increased the tendency [in Madrid] to speculate on the possibility of technical cooperation between the two organisations [...]”<sup>229</sup>

Other reports from 1979 place the ETA-m leader Domingo Iturbe Abasolo (*Txomin*) in Ireland, “donde entró en contacto con el IRA”.<sup>230</sup> Lastly of note, the former IRA volunteer turned informer, Sean O’Callaghan, claimed in his memoir that a number of ETA militants received training from the PIRA in the use of mortars in the late 1970s.<sup>231</sup>

In early 1980, Ruairí Ó Brádaigh made another trip to the Basque Country. At an EIA rally in Bilbo, the PSF leader referred to the contentious constitutional issue of Nafarroa Garaia, and in doing so, drew analogies with Ulster and the partition of Ireland: “We say to you: do not let Madrid divide Navarre from you as the English divided the north of Ireland from us, and so prolonged the conflict”. The PSF President also attended a “H-Block” (Long Kesh/Maze prison) display in the Bizkaian capital.<sup>232</sup>

In addition to such evident conjoining of the Basque and Irish cases, expressions of empathic solidarity, and the apparent mutual political and ideological affinity between both movements, PSF-EIA contacts and relations were also underpinned by the personal relationships between the leading brokers.

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<sup>228</sup> Anonymous source. Here it is worth noting that even in the UK, where state archival material is relatively easy to access, there is still a dearth of *intelligence* sources for historians to work off. See: “Where The British Hide Their Secret Files...”, <https://thebrokenelbow.com/2019/11/26/where-the-british-hide-their-secret-files/> (last accessed 19 April 2020).

<sup>229</sup> “Confidential report titled Terrorism and Tourism”. Dated 06 September 1979. PR’s from Madrid. 2010/19/592. NAI.

<sup>230</sup> “Los años de ‘Txomin’ y ‘Josu Ternera’”, [http://especiales.ideal.es/2006/eta/historia/1977\\_etas02.html](http://especiales.ideal.es/2006/eta/historia/1977_etas02.html) (last accessed 27 October 2019).

<sup>231</sup> O’Callaghan: *The Informer*, p. 196. In interview with the author Rogelio Alonso, O’Callaghan claimed that these training activities took place in the southern county of Ciarraí (Kerry). Cited in: Alonso: “The International Dimension of ETA’s Terrorism and the Internationalization of the Conflict in the Basque Country”, p. 88.

<sup>232</sup> “Sinn Féin President Visits Basque Country”, *An Phoblacht/Republican News*, 29.03.1980; “Joint FCO-NIO paper titled Irish terrorist contacts in Europe and the Third World”. Dated May 1982.



At the centre of *political* links between the movements was José Ramón Peñagarikano. A fluent French, Italian, German and English speaker, Peñagarikano naturally gravitated towards the international relations department of EIA. As we have seen, Peñagarikano was one of the two EIA representatives that first attended a Sinn Féin Árd Fheis (in 1977). Peñagarikano recalls meeting Ruairí Ó Brádaigh and Richard Behal in Donostia the same year:

“El primer contacto que yo recuerdo es de Ruairí Ó Brádaigh y Richard Behal que aparecían en un pueblo del país vasco y querían contactar, por referencias, etc., etc., con contactar el mundo ese, y es cuando lógicamente yo entonces entro en contacto... en contacto con el Sinn Féin. Inevitablemente, desde mi punto de vista, el contacto Sinn Féin con Euskadiko Ezkerra trae a un contacto con ETA Político Militar y con el IRA.”<sup>233</sup>

From c.1977 to c.1983, Peñagarikano developed what he describes as a warm personal relationship—a “cuadrilla” of sorts—with senior figures in PSF. Across the same six-year period, Ruairí Ó Brádaigh, Richard Behal, and Ted Howell, the latter of whom would go on to head up Sinn Féin’s international office in the 1980s, all visited the Basque Country.<sup>234</sup>

Reflecting on his understanding of the broader *non-political* strands of radical Basque nationalist-Irish republican relations at this juncture, Peñagarikano remarks:

“La gente del IRA pues tenía su problemática que correspondía con la gente de ETA – Político Militar. Es decir, tenían necesidades logísticas, digamos, y entre ellos se entendían... por qué decía... a bueno vosotros tenéis necesidad de esto y de eso, y de lo demás y de lo demás allá... efectivamente, oye, pues eso os podemos dar, esto sí, esto no, este lo que... el proceso fue muy participativo en el sentido de que como entendían el mismo idioma, no había grandes problemas. Así surgió esa dimensión logístico-no sé cuántos, porque entonces fue cuando entre ellos se buscaban acomodo. Es decir, bueno, ‘pues oye, si nosotros en estos momentos tenéis necesidad logística para no se qué, no se cuántos, y patatin y patatan, pues nosotros os aportamos esto y vosotros a ver, ¿que nos dais?’ Claro porque, era un intercambio de toma y daca... yo te doy, tú me das”.<sup>235</sup>

### **The changeover**

In August 1978, *Punto y Hora de Euskal Herria* conducted an interview with a PIRA volunteer. During what was a somewhat spikey exchange, the Irish militant drew direct links between ETA’s assassination of Carrero Blanco in December 1973, and the PIRA’s assassination of Ewart-Biggs in July 1976. Moreover, the volunteer spoke to a broader

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<sup>233</sup> Author interview with José Ramón Peñagarikano (Nafarroa Garaia, 2017).

<sup>234</sup> Author interview with José Ramón Peñagarikano (Nafarroa Garaia, 2017). Ó Brádaigh, Behal and Howell cited in: White: *Ruairí Ó Brádaigh*, p. 262.

<sup>235</sup> Author interview with José Ramón Peñagarikano (Nafarroa Garaia, 2017).

level of reciprocal learning and imitation behaviour taking place between ETA, the PIRA, and other contemporaneous armed groups:

“Creo que nuestro movimiento ha sido el más revolucionario de los últimos años en Europa —nos dice con cierta dosis de orgullo— Otras organizaciones han seguido luego nuestros métodos de guerrilla, pero la contribución ha sido mutua. Mantenemos contactos con organizaciones revolucionarios de Alemania, Italia, España y países de África, como son las Brigadas Rojas, el Frap o ETA. Ejemplos de que nosotros también aprendemos de los demás, lo tenemos en el sistema que utilizamos el pasado año para eliminar al embajador de gran Bretaña e Dublín: nos basamos para ello en el atentado que acabó con Carrero. Creo que a ustedes los vascos las semejanzas entre ambas acciones no se les pasarían desapercibidas”.

Questioned on the exact level and type of collaboration between the PIRA and “estas organizaciones”, the militant replied by simply stating: “Vamos a decir que las enseñanzas mutuas han sido teórico-prácticas en muchas ocasiones”.<sup>236</sup>

Three years later, in an interview published by the German magazine *Der Spiegel*, a slightly more discerning “senior figure” in the PIRA’s “high command” made the following remarks:

*Der Spiegel*: Have you German help? It is said that remnants of the Red Army Faction (RAF) support your ASUs [Active Service Units].

Patrick: If you are implying that we receive material or physical support from the RAF or similar organisations, the answer is categorically no. We are a freedom army, which is supported only by the suppressed people of Ireland. As a matter of principle, we have nothing to do with such groups, who pursue aims different to our own. We are nonetheless allied to such groups who, as we do, attempt to free their own people from oppression.

*Der Spiegel*: For example, the Basques, ETA.

Patrick: Yes, and with some others”.<sup>237</sup>

The above press comments by the unnamed PIRA volunteer, and by “Patrick” (and others of this ilk), naturally fed into the widely held view (as outlined throughout this chapter) that the PIRA and ETA(-m and/or -pm) were “allied” in some shape or form.

These rumours continued into the new decade. When ETA-m stole over 7000 kilos of explosives from an industrial company outside the Cantabrian city of Santander in 1980, British and Irish authorities reportedly stepped up their vigilance out of fear that some of the materials would end up in the PIRA’s hands.<sup>238</sup> There was a rationale for this concern.

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<sup>236</sup> “Irlanda del Norte. Entre las armas y el parlamento (I)”, *Punto y Hora de Euskal Herria*, 04–10.08.1977.

<sup>237</sup> *Der Spiegel*, 07.04.1980. English translation of the above excerpt is taken from an untitled report in: FCO 87/1041. IRA activities overseas. NA.

<sup>238</sup> “Report titled ‘Basque Developments (II)’”. Dated 29 July 1980. Political situation in Spain. 2010/19/85. NAI.

As the 1970s wore on, it had become more difficult for the PIRA to gain access to gelignite due to Irish government restrictions on its commercial use. Consequently, the IRA's Engineering Department had to resort to home-made explosives and fertiliser-based bombs.<sup>239</sup> And while this, of course, does not necessarily mean that the PIRA ever sought explosives from either of the two main ETA factions (-m and -pm), various reports have, indeed, linked radical Basque nationalists and the PIRA with semtex and goma 2.<sup>240</sup>

Two additional suggestions of active PIRA-“ETA” cooperation from the early 1980s are worth noting. In 1981, an internal Spanish police magazine, *Policía Española*, included Ireland among a number of countries in which ETA militants had reportedly “trained”. Finally, in 1982, the Spanish Minister of the Interior, Juan José Rosón Pérez, reportedly stated that there were exchanges of weapons between the IRA and “ETA”, and in some cases, between “ETA” and the Italian Red Brigades.<sup>241</sup>

Given the overarching cold-war context and the constant suggestions of contacts between “ETA”, the IRA, and a plethora of other European and Middle Eastern revolutionary organisations throughout the 1970s and early 1980s, it was perhaps inevitable that, in the West, Moscow would be pinpointed as the phantom power at the heart of this “international terror network”. This thesis entered the mainstream in 1981 with the much-publicised (and much-criticised) *The Terror Network*, by Claire Sterling. And while there was nothing radically new regarding Basque-Irish connections in Sterling's treatise, the author nonetheless earmarked the IRA and “ETA” as two of many organisations that had received the backing of USSR-backed proxies in South Yemen.<sup>242</sup>

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<sup>239</sup> Gearóid Ó Faoleán: “Ireland's Ho Chi Minh trail? The Republic of Ireland's role in the Provisional IRA's bombing campaign, 1970–1976”, *Small Wars & Insurgencies*, 25:5–6, 2014, pp. 976–991.

<sup>240</sup> See: “The Rifles of the IRA”, *Magill*, March 1978. A 1998 article on the BBC website claimed that: “ETA has also been named in the past as the link organisation which helped the IRA acquire the devastating plastic explosive semtex”. See: “Adams urges ETA towards peace”, <http://news.bbc.co.uk/2/hi/europe/176082.stm> (site last accessed 01 November 2019).

<sup>241</sup> “Joint FCO-NIO paper titled Irish terrorist contacts in Europe and the Third World”. Dated May 1982. “Message from HQ [Dublin] to Madrid”. Dated 09 July 1982. References to alleged IRA links with foreign terrorist organisations. 840/1985. NAI.

<sup>242</sup> Sterling: *The Terror Network*. Sterling's central thesis that groups such as the IRA and ETA were under the control of international communism was, in general, rejected. For example, Conor Cruise O'Brien dismissively remarked that Sterling's thesis was “the equivalent of the theory [that] the men of 1916 were in the pay of Berlin”. See: Conor Cruise O'Brien: *Herod: Reflections on Political Violence*, London, Hutchinson, 1978, p. 98. On Yemeni connections, see: “Broadcast excerpt of interview with Claire Sterling on the radio show Patricia McCann (New York)”. 13 April 1981. Sinn Féin. The Workers' Party. FCO 87/10180. NA. “Terrorism tracing the international network”, *The New York Times*, 01.03.1981. From as early as May 1972, there are reports of Provisional IRA volunteers travelling to South Yemen for training. See: Raymond J. Raymond: “The United States and Terrorism in Ireland, 1969–1981” in Alexander; O'Day (eds.): *Terrorism in Ireland*, pp. 32–52. As many as twelve ETA-m *etarras* trained in South Yemen in the early 1980s. Casanova: *ETA 1958–2008. Medio Siglo de Historia* (5<sup>th</sup> ed.), p. 266; Domínguez Iribarren: *Josu Ternera: Una Vida En ETA*, pp. 122–123.

Despite the aforementioned statements of solidarity and joint communiques outlined earlier in this chapter, continued suggestions of PIRA-ETA-m links in the media, and elements of the PIRA and ETA-m apparently moving in similar “terror network” circles, there was still little sign of any *party* political nexus between Provisional Sinn Féin and the izquierda abertzale coalition, Herri Batasuna.

As we have seen, the principle factor in this regard was the heretofore existence of a PSF-EIA political nexus. Other potential contributing factors are worth considering. For instance, when Jose Antonio Urrutikoetxea Bengoetxea (better known as “Josu Ternera”) took over ETA’s “Aparato Internacional” following the assassination of *Argala* in 1978, Ternera was apparently “muy recelos[o] a la hora de hacer contactos con organizaciones europeas”.<sup>243</sup> It has also been suggested that the “Provisionals” were perceived as being too “right-wing” by some elements within the izquierda abertzale.<sup>244</sup>

One of the principal catalysts that aided a more conducive relationship between Herri Batasuna and Provisional Sinn Féin in the early 1980s was the republican Hunger Strikes of 1980 and 1981 at the Long Kesh Detention Centre (“Maze” or “H-Blocks”) in Northern Ireland.

Having lost Special Category Status in 1976, throughout the late 1970s, republican prisoners steadily ramped up a campaign of non-cooperation at Long Kesh and at the (all-women) Armagh Prison. These issues eventually crystallised around five key demands.<sup>245</sup>

When the prisoner demands were resisted, seven Long Kesh prisoners began a joint hunger strike in October 1980 — perhaps the most emotive tactic in Irish nationalist and republican tradition.<sup>246</sup>

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<sup>243</sup> Domínguez Iribarren: *Josu Ternera: Una Vida En ETA*, p. 90.

<sup>244</sup> Cited in: Domínguez Iribarren: *ETA: Estrategia Organizativa y Actuaciones 1978–1992*, p. 115. Whitfield also states that “[e]arly connections to the republican movement had been managed by the *polimilis*. In the late 1970s, ETA-m had no interest in maintaining them [...]”. Whitfield: *Endgame for ETA*, p. 65.

<sup>245</sup> “The Hunger Strike of 1981 – A Chronology of the Main Events” <https://cain.ulster.ac.uk/events/hstrike/chronology.htm> (last accessed 07 January 2019). The five demands were: 1. The Right not to wear a prison uniform; 2. The Right not to do prison work; 3. The Right of free association with other prisoners, and to organise educational and recreational facilities; 4. The Right to one visit, one letter and one parcel per week; 5. Restoration of remission lost during the strike. “Timeline of the 1980 Hunger Strike”, *Irish Times*, 18.12.2015, <https://www.irishtimes.com/culture/books/timeline-of-the-1980-hunger-strike-1.2468633> (last accessed 07 January 2020).

<sup>246</sup> Although certainly not exclusive to Irish culture, hunger strikes have a long-established and emotive resonance within the history of Irish nationalism and republicanism. See: Begoña Aretxaga: *States of Terror*, Reno, University of Nevada Press, 2012, pp. 36–37. The scholar Michael Biggs notes: “From 1916 to 1923, about 10,000 Irish Republican prisoners went on hunger strike (counting multiple hunger strikes by the same individual multiple) [...] this is not matched by any comparable episode”. Cited in: Michael Biggs: “Hunger Strikes by Irish Republicans, 1916-1923”. Paper prepared for Workshop on Techniques of Violence in Civil War Centre for the Study of Civil War, Oslo, August 2004.

The five demands also chimed with similar issues affecting Basque prisoners during the Transition. For instance, on the weekend of 21–23 April 1979, advocates for Irish, Basque, and other European politically-motivated prisoners had converged in Dublin at a PSF-organised “European Political Prisoners Conference”.<sup>247</sup> According to a subsequent report in the republican organ *IRIS*:

“A large delegation from Euskadi (the Basque Country) attended [...] including representatives from EIA and Herri Batasuna, two Basque political organisations, as well as Senator Juan M. Bandres, a member of the Spanish Parliament for the Basque Country”.<sup>248</sup>

Focusing out for a brief moment, by the early 1980s the conflict in Northern Ireland was now a mainstay of international news for over ten years. In this context, the propaganda war between Britain and the PIRA was increasingly seen by both sides as of fundamental importance. In what follows, one small snapshot into this battle for the international “narrative” may be observed in regard to the Basque Country and the 1980 strike.

In November, José Ramón Peñagarikano attended the PSF Árd Fheis in Dublin, where he reportedly “presented a petition signed by many members of the Basque and Spanish parliaments”, including “seven MPs, four Deputies, two city councillors and several provincial councillors [...]”.<sup>249</sup>

Only days later, Richard Behal, alongside Eileen McConville (a former Armagh Prison protestor) arrived in the Basque Country on the first leg of an “extensive tour including Catalonia, Spain, Portugal and Italy”.<sup>250</sup> In Vitoria-Gasteiz, the capital of the new Basque Parliament, Behal and McConville subsequently held a meeting with Lehendakari Carlos Garaikoetxea.<sup>251</sup>

On 08 December, *An Phoblacht/Republican News* reported that EIA, as well as thirteen other European left-wing groups, had demanded that the British government grant prisoner-of-war status to the H-Block inmates.<sup>252</sup>

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<sup>247</sup> “European Political Prisoners Conference”, *An Phoblacht/Republican News*, 07.04.1979; “Special branch harass European delegates”, *An Phoblacht/Republican News*, 21.04.1979.

<sup>248</sup> “Basque Revolutionaries Attend Conference”, *Irish Republican Information Service*, vol. 3, no. 74, 28.04.1979. Among the Basque attendees were Juan María Bandrés Molet and the former ETA-pm militant, Ángel Amigo. See: “Special branch harass European delegates”, *An Phoblacht/Republican News*, 21.04.1979; “Irish prisoners lead the struggle”, *An Phoblacht/Republican News*, 28.04.1979.

<sup>249</sup> See: “International Solidarity”; “Hunger Strike Protests Abroad”, *An Phoblacht/Republican News*, 08.11.1980. See also: “Irlanda, la lucha que nunca acaba”, *Hitz*, no. 9, November 1980.

<sup>250</sup> “Hunger Strike Protests Abroad”, *An Phoblacht/Republican News*, 15.11.1980

<sup>251</sup> See: “Euskadi”, *An Phoblacht/Republican News*, 22.11.1980; “Abroad”, *An Phoblacht/Republican News*, 16.05.1981.

<sup>252</sup> “European support”, *An Phoblacht/Republican News*, 08.12.1980.

Ten days later, on 18 December, a twenty-five strong “Grupo Parlamentario Nacionalistas Vascos”, led by the PNV deputy Josu Bergara Etxebarria, wrote to the British monarch, Queen Elizabeth II, requesting that she grant improvements to the prisoners’ basic conditions. The five conditions outlined by the Basque representatives were, to all intents and purposes, the exact same as those demanded by the hunger strikers.

In response to Bergara Etxebarria’s lobbying, the British Ambassador to Spain assured the Basque parliamentarian “that the prison conditions are in many respects better than those demanded by the hunger strikers”. He also enclosed a “booklet on the Maze prison and the background to the protest”. Naturally, and in direct contrast to the republican narrative, the ambassador’s booklet was favourable to the British government’s perspective of conditions in the prisons.<sup>253</sup>

Believing wrongly that all the prisoners’ demands had been met, the strike was called off after 53 days by the IRA prisoner Brendan Hughes on 18 December 1980<sup>254</sup> — coincidentally the same day that the Basque parliamentary group had written to the British sovereign.

The prisoners prepared for a second strike. This time, they would stagger their strikes in order to slowly ratchet up pressure on the British government and maximise publicity. Moreover, as one “comm” smuggled out of Long Kesh and addressed to “The ETA” vowed: this second strike “will be to the death”.<sup>255</sup>

The second hunger strike began on 01 March 1981 when the IRA volunteer Bobby Sands refused food. Four days into the strike, Frank Maguire, an Independent Republican MP for Fermanagh (Fir Manach) and South Tyrone (Tír Eoghain) died suddenly of a heart attack. When a by-election was subsequently called to fill Maguire’s old seat, Sands presented himself as an “Anti H-Block/Armagh Political Prisoner” candidate.

After a highly charged campaign, Bobby Sands was dramatically elected as the MP for Fermanagh and South Tyrone on 09 April 1981. Not only did Sands’ victory send shock waves through the British and Irish establishments, it also marked a watershed

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<sup>253</sup> “Letter titled To Your Majesty Queen Elizabeth from Grupo Parlamentario Nacionalistas Vascos”. Dated 18 December 1980; “Translation of ambassador’s reply to Josu Bergara”. Undated. The Basque Problem. FCO 9/3300. NA.

<sup>254</sup> “Rethinking the 1980/1981 Hunger Strikes”, *Irish Times*, 27.10.2015, <https://www.irishtimes.com/opinion/rethinking-the-1980-1981-hunger-strikes-1.2406449> (last accessed 07 January 2020).

<sup>255</sup> “Letter written by Raymond McCreesh and addressed to ‘The ETA’ in the ‘Basque Country’”. Dated 09.02.1981. Long Kesh. Letter kindly made available to this author by Danny Morrison. A “Comm” was a handwritten communication smuggled out of prison that was later transcribed, typed up and sent to the appropriate recipient. Raymond McCreesh subsequently died on hunger strike on 21 May 1981, aged 24.



moment for Sinn Féin's gradual entrance into electoral politics — as has been discussed at length elsewhere.<sup>256</sup>

Despite Sands' sensational victory, a compromise agreement between the strikers and the British government remained elusive. On 05 May 1981, Bobby Sands died after 66 days on hunger strike, aged 27. Nine of his comrades met the same fate over the following three months, ending with Michael Devine on 20 August. The funerals of the republican hunger strikers, in particular that of Sands, proved to be enormously emotive occasions for Irish nationalists and republicans.

Among the international political representatives and activists who came from far and wide to pay their respects was EIA's José Ramón Peñarikano, and the (abstentionist) Herri Batasuna representative for Araba, Iñaki Ruiz de Pinedo, and his party compatriot, Juan Okiñena.<sup>257</sup>

According to Ruiz de Pinedo, when Sands eventually passed away, it was immediately decided to send somebody to the funeral. From the HB milieu, Ruiz de Pinedo was the only political representative with a passport who could leave the next day. Together with Juan Okiñena, who could speak English fluently, the two men flew to London intending to catch a connecting flight to Belfast. In London they were stopped from boarding a flight to Belfast by security officials. They attempted to fly again the following morning. On this second occasion, they were successful, although the delay meant that, by the time they arrived in Belfast, they had missed the entire funeral. Despite this setback, the two men had the opportunity to pay their respects to Sands' family in person. They also participated in a "rueda de prensa".

Reflecting on the funeral trip more than thirty-five years later, Ruiz de Pinedo, in hindsight, recalls what was perhaps its most significant consequence: "establecimos una serie de contactos que entiendo que servirían luego para mantener las relaciones posteriormente [con Sinn Féin]".<sup>258</sup>

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<sup>256</sup> For example, see: Coogan: *The IRA*, pp. 502–511; Moloney: *A Secret History of the IRA* (2<sup>nd</sup> ed.), pp. 208–215.

<sup>257</sup> Author interview with Iñaki Ruiz de Pinedo (Vitoria-Gasteiz, 2017); Herri Batasuna: *Herri Batasuna. 20 años de lucha por la libertad*, Donostia, Herri Batasuna, 1999, p. 408. Peñarikano also attended the funeral of the second striker: Francis Hughes. Author interview with José Ramón Peñarikano (Nafarroa Garaia, 2017).

<sup>258</sup> Author interview with Iñaki Ruiz de Pinedo (Vitoria-Gasteiz, 2017).

This view is backed up by Alexander Ugalde Zubiri, a former member of HASI's Executive Committee and Herri Batasuna's Comites de Relaciones Exteriores: "Yo creo que ya, a partir de ahí [el funeral de Bobby Sands], los lazos están fijados".<sup>259</sup>

In the Basque Country itself, Sands' death was met with demonstrations in the provincial capitals. A group of Basque students also reportedly demonstrated in the reception of the British Council offices in Madrid.<sup>260</sup> Meanwhile, sympathetic coverage of the prisoners and the Irish republican movement increased exponentially in *Punto y Hora de Euskal Herria*.<sup>261</sup>

In May 1981, shortly after Sands' death, Richard Behal returned to Spain for the second time in six months. At a press conference held in Madrid, the republican refused to be drawn into making any statement on possible relations between ETA and the PIRA to the Spanish journalists present. Whilst in Madrid, Behal was also interviewed by a reporter from *Punto y Hora de Euskal Herria*, who noted that: "Hablar con Richard Behal, dada la temática de Irlanda del Norte, es como hablar de casa, es como hablar de nuestro propio país...".<sup>262</sup> Running alongside the Behal interview in *Punto y Hora de Euskal Herria* was the following editorial:

"La muerte de Bobby Sands y, probablemente, algunos más de sus compañeros cuando esto estén leyendo, supone uno de los hechos más sobresalientes de terrorismo institucional de los últimos tiempos. Un auténtico asesinato. El imperio británico se desmembra. La Gran Bretaña es en la actualidad uno de los países de Occidente con menos recursos económicos. Únicamente sus colonias le alimentan, mientras el número de parados en Inglaterra aumenta alarmantemente. Los presos políticos del IRA están siendo maltratados, torturados... y la mujer de hierro, la Thatcher —señora sería un título que no le corresponde— les deja morir con la sangre fría de quien se aprovecha de la legalidad del terrorismo de Estado. Pero la libertad siempre vence y los irlandeses están dispuestos a conseguirla. Para finalizar el tema, narraremos hasta qué punto Bobby Sands, asesinado, dejado morir, como se le quiera llamar, intentó todo para que no perdiera la vida ninguno de sus compañeros. Mientras, el Gobierno británico seguirá gastando millones de libras para intentar que en el mundo se crea que el problema de Irlanda es entre católicos o protestantes y no —como es la realidad— una lucha entre los que desean la independencia nacional y los seguidores del colonialismo británico".<sup>263</sup>

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<sup>259</sup> Author interview with Alexander Ugalde Zubiri (Leioa, 2017).

<sup>260</sup> "El Gobierno de Londres dejó morir al diputado Bobby Sands", *Egin*, 06.05.1981; "Circular letter titled 'Violent and sub-violent international reaction to the deaths of the hunger-strikers in Northern Ireland'". Dated 19 June 1981. Pro-IRA activities overseas. FCO 87/1201. NA.

<sup>261</sup> For example, see: "Entrevista con el jefe militar IRA del Seamus Twomey", *Punto y Hora de Euskal Herria*, 08–15.05.1981; "El IRA, la 'cuestión irlandesa' y 'la ejemplar democracia británica'", *Punto y Hora de Euskal Herria*, 15–22.05.1981; "La enérgica del 10 Downing Street", *Punto y Hora de Euskal Herria*, 05–12.06.1981.

<sup>262</sup> "Irlanda será libre", *Punto y Hora de Euskal Herria*, 15–22.05.1981.

<sup>263</sup> "Terrorismo de Estado. Asesinato institucional", *Punto y Hora de Euskal Herria*, 15–22.05.1981.

The impact of Sands' death would continue to resonate with Basque nationalists for some time. Writing in EIA's organ *Hitz*, José Ramon Peñagarikano invited readers to petition British diplomats in the Basque Country and to mount a campaign in support of all those still on strike.<sup>264</sup> In September, after the strike had ended, Sands' brother Sean visited the Basque Country as part of a series of "jornadas" organised in protest against the building of a nuclear reactor at Urizar (Lemóniz) in Bizkaia. Extracts of Bobby Sands' prison diaries also appeared in *Punto y Hora de Euskal Herria* the same month.<sup>265</sup>

As one of ETA's former leaders, Eugenio Etxebeste (*Antxon*), recalls:

"[...] se vivió con gran dramatismo las huelgas de hambre de Bobby Sands y sus compañeros y tal, pues eso, en nuestra percepción esas cosas sí generaban un caldo de cultivo importante para reafirmarse en la lucha, cosas que luego se han dado también en nuestro movimiento".<sup>266</sup>

Beyond the galvanising effect alluded to by Etxebeste, there is no evidence that the Hunger Strikes had any *direct* influence on the izquierda abertzale's strategy or tactics. As for José Ramon Peñagarikano and his EIA comrades, while Sands' sacrifice was heroic, it was also, at the same time, viewed as "algo distante, porque nosotros no entendíamos esa modalidad de lucha".<sup>267</sup>

In the wake of the hunger strike deaths, a sombre 1981 *Árd Fheis* welcomed the by-now-familiar face of José Ramon Peñagarikano.<sup>268</sup> This *Árd Fheis* was to be remembered mainly for Danny Morrison's "armalite and ballot box" speech, during which the Belfastman signposted the Irish republican movement's emerging macro strategy of marrying electoral gains with political violence:

"Who here really believes we can win the war through the ballot box? But will anyone here object if, with a ballot paper in this hand and an Armalite in the other, we take power in Ireland?"<sup>269</sup>

The following March, Richard Behal was back in the Basque Country to attend the re-founding of Euskadiko Ezkerra. Also in attendance was Paddy Woodworth on behalf of

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<sup>264</sup> "Irlanda al rojo vivo", *Hitz*, no. 12, May 1981.

<sup>265</sup> "Sean Sands: 'Orgullo imperial británico', *Punto y Hora de Euskal Herria*. 04–18.09.1981. ETA-m initiated hundreds of attacks, resulting in five deaths, as part of a sustained campaign against the building of the nuclear plant. This included the high-profile kidnapping and killing of an engineer José María Ryan Estrada in 1981 and the assassination of the plant director Angel Pascual in 1982. The project was suspended the same year. See: Domínguez Iribarren: "El Enfrentamiento de ETA con la democracia" (specifically pp. 307–308). "La agonía de un huelguista de hambre", *Punto y Hora de Euskal Herria*, 25.09–02.10.1981.

<sup>266</sup> Author interview with Eugenio Etxebeste (Donostia, 2017).

<sup>267</sup> Author interview with José Ramón Peñagarikano (Nafarroa Garaia, 2017).

<sup>268</sup> "International Solidarity", *An Phoblacht/Republican News*, 05.11.1981.

<sup>269</sup> Taylor: *The Provos*, p. 282.

“The Workers’ Party”, which had now erased “Sinn Féin” from its name.<sup>270</sup> Somehow, whether by accident or design, the two men, representing polar opposite positions on the Irish republican spectrum, ended up sitting beside each other. Trying to make light of the situation, Woodworth recalls wryly remarking to Behal:

“I think you’re in the wrong place, these people are giving up armed struggle. It was very funny because at the moment I said that, a group of parents of Polimili prisoners stood up, and I swear, at that very same moment, they started this [chant of] ‘Gora ETA Politika Militar!’”. And he said: ‘look, they’re still military!’<sup>271</sup>

Indeed, as Woodworth’s comments reference, a sizeable minority of ETA-pm militants were, at that exact moment, in the process of winding up their armed struggle via an amnesty brokered between EE and the Spanish government.

Richard Behal’s days at the head of PSF’s international affairs were also coming to an end. In 1983, he was replaced by Sean Halpenny as part of a broader generational shift in the party.<sup>272</sup> Of most significance in this regard was Gerry Adams ascent to the position of party president at the 1983 Árd Fheis. Having taken the reins from Ruairí Ó Brádaigh, few would have predicted that Adams would hold the position for the next three decades.

The historian Martyn Frampton has surmised the early Adams’ period as heralding “a greater effort [by PSF] to develop solidarity networks with other anti-imperialist or anti-colonial entities”. While Frampton may be correct in this regard, he is less so in suggesting that PSF’s Basque links —initiated under Ó Brádaigh— were to continue along the same lines.<sup>273</sup> In fact, it was precisely at the Sinn Féin Árd Fheis of 1983, when Adams assumed power, that the links of a *new* era in radical Basque nationalist-Irish republican political relations (Provisional Sinn Féin-Herri Batasuna) would be first clearly evidenced.

Unsurprisingly, there is no documentary evidence that provides a clear explanation of how exactly PSF’s fraternal Basque partner changed from EIA(EE) to Herri Batasuna, in the early 1980s. There are, however, four overarching factors that would appear to be highly relevant. First, with the winding down of ETA-pm in the early 1980s, the strategic

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<sup>270</sup> Author interview with Paddy Woodworth (Dublin, 2015). Behal’s attendance at this conference is corroborated in *An Phoblacht/Republican News* and in the following FCO paper: “Report titled ‘The IRA and Overseas Revolutionaries’”. Dated 03 June 1983. Spain Terrorism (ETA). FCO 9/4229. NA. “Basque Congress”, *An Phoblacht/Republican News*, 08.04.1982. 635. Addressing the conference, Behal “extended best wishes for the new party’s success and stressed the common ties between the Irish and Basque peoples”.

<sup>271</sup> Author interview with Paddy Woodworth (Dublin, 2015).

<sup>272</sup> “Report titled The IRA and Overseas Revolutionaries”. Dated June 1983. Spain Terrorism (ETA). FCO 9/4229. NA.

<sup>273</sup> Frampton: “‘Squaring the circle’: the foreign policy of Sinn Féin, 1983–1989”.

direction of EIA(EE) ran increasingly contrary to that of “Provisional” Irish republicanism. In this sense, even indirect continued associations with PSF and the “Provos” armed campaign would have raised eyebrows regarding the Basque party’s *bona fides*.

Second, and as will become more evident in the next chapter, HB quickly overtook EIA(EE) as the leading political coalition of the nationalist left in the Basque Country from the moment it began to contest elections.<sup>274</sup> This occurrence, it could be suggested, made HB a more attractive transnational “partner” for PSF.

Third: the simple fact that both HB and PSF continued to resolutely support the armed struggles of ETA-m and PIRA —whereas their erstwhile “Polimili” and “Official” comrades had accepted the established political framework— meant that both movements were effectively isolated in their respective domestic contexts. This factor, again, could be suggested as providing a more conducive context for the development of transnational relations.

And fourth, according to José Ramón Peñagarikano, and two other prominent EIA members who were interviewed for this study (Eduardo “Teo” Uriarte and Javier Olaverri Zazpe), the ideological incongruity between the “Provisional” movement and the “Polimilis” —evident from the outset— only grew with time.<sup>275</sup> Finally, one other senior EIA representative, who contributed anonymously to this study, claimed that the overarching basis of maintaining the “Provo” connection into the early 1980s had been to deprive ETA-m and Herri Batasuna of a prestigious partner.<sup>276</sup>

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<sup>274</sup> In March 1979, Herri Batasuna received more than double the votes of Euskadiko Ezkerra. “Elecciones Generales de 1 de marzo de 1979”, <https://app.congreso.es/consti/elecciones/generales/resultados.jsp?fecha=01/03/1979> (last accessed 14 January 2020).

<sup>275</sup> Author interview with José Ramón Peñagarikano (Nafarroa Garaia, 2017). Author interview with Eduardo “Teo” Uriarte (Vitoria-Gasteiz, 2016). Author interview with Javier Olaverri Zazpe (Donostia, 2017).

<sup>276</sup> Anonymous interview. As with all oral interviews of this kind, and in particular the views offered by those coming from political perspectives that are now far removed from radical Basque nationalism, one must approach the above retrospective accounts of this relationship with a healthy degree of caution. On the Irish republican side of this equation, attempts to discuss the late 1970s/early 1980s EIA-IRM relationship (and/or impressions of this relationship) with several prominent figures from this era provided little information or opinion. By and large, Irish republicans have never commented on any Basque political (or otherwise) links from this era. This is the case for both those who stayed within “mainstream” (Adams-led) Sinn Féin and those who became estranged in the 1980s. For instance, Ruairí Ó Brádaigh’s biographer, Robert W. White, notes that the former PSF President was never willing to disclose any information pertaining to Basque contacts with the author. See: White: *Ruairí Ó Brádaigh*, p. 390 (footnote 262). Ó Brádaigh left Sinn Féin in 1986, becoming the first President of Republican Sinn Féin (RSF). See chapter five.

If it is indeed true that senior figures in EIA(EE) felt that the party's relationship with PSF had run its course, Peñagarikano recalls a similar message communicated to him by those on the other side of this Basque-Irish equation:

“[...] cuando terminó eso y rompimos pues a mí me, no es que me obligaban, pero me dijeron ‘oye por ahí no podemos ya... por ahí no podemos seguir’. Y lo que hicimos es simplemente distanciamiento. No hubo ruptura, no hubo tensión, sino simplemente ‘oye esos se van por ahí, y nosotros por ahí’. Esta es la situación real”.<sup>277</sup>

With the decision seemingly taken at party level to bring EIA(EE)'s relationship with the PSF to an end, Peñagarikano sought, in his words, to “take advantage” of an upcoming *Árd Fheis* to square off this nexus in person. If Peñagarikano's subsequent account of what happened next is accurate, what followed was a highly visual representation of the pending EIA-to-HB changeover.

According to Peñagarikano, while waiting in a London airport to catch a connecting flight to Ireland, he met a Herri Batasuna delegate who was also *en route* to the same *Árd Fheis*. It immediately became apparent to Peñagarikano that Herri Batasuna would be taking up where EIA was dropping off. In his own words: “Yo conocí a este chico... yo le introduje en el mundo digamos ‘Provo’. Pero fue un proceso natural...”.<sup>278</sup> It is likely that “este chico” was Juan Okiñena, a HASI party member of Herri Batasuna, and as we have seen, an attendee of Bobby Sands' funeral alongside Iñaki Ruiz de Pinedo.

Okiñena attended the Sinn Féin *Árd Fheis* of November 1983. It was the first time, to this author's knowledge, that a HB representative had attended. He delivered a short speech to the assembled republican delegates.<sup>279</sup>

While in the years that followed, keen observers would have noted the absence of Peñagarikano — “a regular and popular visitor at *Árd Fheiseanna*”<sup>280</sup>; in the grand scheme of things, a new international Basque delegate (and party) was hardly a big deal for the Irish republican movement.

In terms of the long historical trajectory of radical Basque nationalist-Irish republican relations, however, and by extension this study, the changeover was a landmark moment.

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<sup>277</sup> Author interview with José Ramón Peñagarikano (Nafarroa Garaia, 2017).

<sup>278</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>279</sup> “International support for Sinn Féin”, *An Phoblacht/Republican News*, 17.11.1983

<sup>280</sup> “International Solidarity”, *An Phoblacht/Republican News*, 08.11.1980.



#### 4.5. Conclusion

As the reader will undoubtedly appreciate, the period from 1970 to 1983 is perhaps the most complex and factually uncertain that we have thus far encountered in the history of radical Basque nationalist-Irish republican relations. As such, the following analysis should be considered as an initial research attempt at untangling the many knotty aspects of this multi-faceted era.

Somewhat paradoxically —and in contrast to previous epochs— a number of largely congruent and concurrent extrinsic and intrinsic factors served to ground the context in which the development of radical Basque nationalist-Irish republican relations took place. Firstly, and of most significance, was the emergence and escalation of the armed campaigns of ETA (and its derivatives) and the IRA (and its derivatives). Consequently, “armed struggle” not only overarched and guided BIA-IRM relations throughout this period, but it also led, in the aftermath of the Burgos Process, to an increasing analogisation of these groups and their adjoining contexts by the media, the states involved, and by the movements themselves. In short, an ETA-IRA/Basque Country-Northern Ireland narrative loop of association was firmly established within significant public and private realms of discourse.<sup>281</sup>

Secondly, with the outbreak of the “Troubles”, and the uncertainty surrounding Northern Ireland’s constitutional position, the hitherto “Irish mirror” in radical (and moderate) Basque nationalist discourse was effectively truncated to Northern Ireland — often erroneously referred to as “Ulster”. As the political framework of the Basque Country and its relationship with Spain concurrently entered a period of uncertain and violent flux for the first time in four decades, the spectre of a “Basque Ulster” or the “Ulsterisation” of Basque society entered mainstream media and political discourse.<sup>282</sup> Furthermore, the contentious issue of Nafarroa Garaia —omitted from the post-Franco Basque Autonomous Community— brought additional parallels with Ireland’s own lost territory: the “Fourth Green Field” of Ulster.<sup>283</sup>

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<sup>281</sup> This Basque-Irish narrative loop of association even made it into “Hollywood”. For Cameron Watson’s analysis of the treatment of ETA and IRA members in the movie “The Jackal”, see: Watson: “Imagining ETA”.

<sup>282</sup> For several examples, see: Raul López Romo, Bárbara Van der Leeuw: “Forjando nación desde abajo: violencia e identidades en el País Vasco y el Ulster”, *Cuadernos de Historia Contemporánea*, vol. 35, 2013, pp. 15–39 (specifically p. 35).

<sup>283</sup> For example, see: Martin Blinkhorn: “‘The Basque Ulster’: Navarre and the Basque Autonomy Question under the Spanish Second Republic”, *The Historical Journal*, vol. 17, 3, 1974, pp. 595–613; “Ulster-Bérrí”, *Punto y Hora de Euskal Herria*, 05–11.10.1978. “Four Green Fields” is an Irish folk song written by Tommy Makem.

A third congruent factor that would scaffold radical Basque nationalist-Irish republican relations during this period was the question of democratic legitimacy and mandate. While it is true that Ireland —unlike the Basque Country— was not, in fact, a “stateless nation”, this mattered little to most republican analyses: “Provisional” republicanism ultimately sought to remove *both* the “Orange” statelet of Northern Ireland, and the illegitimate “neo-colonial” entity of the “Free State”. In this sense, the Basque *izquierda abertzale*’s rejection of the Spanish Constitution as an illegitimate legal framework imposed on the Basque nation from Madrid dovetailed with traditional republican theology *vis-à-vis* Britain’s partition of Ireland and the usurping of the *de jure* Irish Republic. Accordingly, as we shall see in the following chapter, the political demands for unitary forms of Basque and Irish self-determination would increasingly unite radical Basque nationalist and Irish republicans in discursive terms throughout the 1980s and early 1990s.

Finally, with radical Basque nationalists and Irish republicans engaged in what were perceived as seemingly analogous armed struggles for similar political demands, the asymmetry that was evident in previous eras of this transnational nexus was far less pronounced from 1970 to 1983.<sup>284</sup> The contingencies and minutia of how this nexus developed and evolved follows next.

In the wake of the 1970 Burgos Process, statements of solidarity and joint communiques between ETA and the PIRA (and often other revolutionary groups) coincided with growing speculation in the media regarding the exact extent and scope of contacts between the paramilitaries. As the IRM, “Official” NLF, and ETA spread their international reach from the early 1970s onwards, their respective international representatives operated within a heady fluctuating maelstrom of lectures, talks, statements of solidarity, joint communiques, clandestine meetings, local solidarity groups and protests, across the continent.<sup>285</sup>

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<sup>284</sup> Notwithstanding this increased symmetry, one would have to surmise that the degree of engagement, knowledge and interest in Basque issues within Irish republicanism during this period (as evidenced in Irish republican periodicals) still did not tally with the equivalent coverage in radical Basque nationalist literature. More generally, as the Provisional IRA grew in stature among its revolutionary contemporaries, “[...] more marginal militants from other countries attempted to exaggerate their significance by claiming links with them that were beyond the mere inspirational. In several cases, Ireland was reported as a site of training, finance, or even a base of operations. Such claims were readily reported in the press, suitably sensationalised for a scandalised readership”. For this quote, see: Leach: *Fugitive Ireland*, p. 187.

<sup>285</sup> For an overview of the activities of Irish solidarity groups on the continent during the 1970s, see: McKinley: “Of ‘Alien Influences’: Accounting and Discounting for the International Contacts of the Provisional Irish Republican Army”.

Following ETA's 1974 split into "Mili" and "Polimili" sectors, it would appear as though it was the latter which maintained clandestine links with the IRM. This nexus seems to have been borne out of personal contacts that sided with the "Polimilis" (mainly *Wilson*), as opposed to any rigorous ideological analysis. Meanwhile, also in 1974, HAS adhered to the Brest Charter, which had been signed by the "Official" republican movement. Accordingly, one could suggest that the Provisional IRM and ETA-pm, and the Official IRM (NLF) and HAS (and its subsequent equivalents), respectively, were notionally *aligned* from 1974 to 1977.

With the formation of EIA in 1977 and Herri Batasuna in 1978, the 1974 split in ETA now became clearly reflected in the political realm. From 1977, prominent figures in EIA and PSF began a series of reciprocal visits and spoke in solidarity of their partner's national and social struggle. These party-to-party links *may* have also served to facilitate a clandestine (military) nexus strand. We have already noted the claim made by one source regarding a trilateral arrangement of arms between the PIRA, ETA-pm and the Portuguese OUT. This suggestion notwithstanding, there is no suggestion of a military triumvirate link around these actors in any of the British, Irish, and Spanish (via British and Irish archives) state documentation that has been consulted for this investigation.

ETA (-m, and -pm)'s escalation of its armed campaign in the late 1970s evidently prompted Spanish concern, from the Spanish King to the Minister of Interior, regarding possible "ETA-IRA links". This apprehension was, in turn, conveyed to the British authorities. From what can be deduced from the available documentation, although the British suspected a certain level of mutual assistance taking place between Basque and Irish militant actors, London had found no "operational links" and was, as a result, not overly concerned. London did, however, incrementally increase cooperation with Spain in relation to their shared "separatist" threat.

An extract from a letter sent by the FCO to the British Minister of Defence, dated August 1979, provides a useful gauge of each state's respective approach to this issue:

"In general we want to demonstrate to the Spaniards that we are anxious to cooperate fully and effectively with them against the common problem of terrorism. They themselves evidently see us, with our experience of Northern Ireland, as particularly well-qualified to help and advise in this field. It is clear that they attach high importance to the offers to exchange information and cooperate in measures against terrorism made during the visit of the then Minister of the Interior, Sr Martin Villa, to London last November. Subsequent reports of contacts between the IRA

and the Basque separatist organisation, ETA, have only strengthened their desire to work more closely with us”.<sup>286</sup>

As we have seen, such “reports of contacts” between “ETA” (-m and -pm) and the IRA (“Provos” and “Officials”) cropped up regularly from 1972 to 1983. And while it is virtually impossible to determine the level and extent of cooperation that took place, one would have to assume that, at a base level, the transnational Basque-Irish contacts that were made via reciprocal visits and meetings on the continent helped to provide the scaffolding for at least intermittent mutual assistance. Speaking to this author, a former Garda Síochána Assistant Commissioner who specifically worked around these issues and occasionally had direct contact with Spanish authorities, offered the following view of “ETA-IRA links” from this period and into the 1980s:

“Naturally enough, if you’re going out to the continent to buy a load weapons, you’re looking for friends to facilitate the underground dealings. So, if you know these guys, they’re going to be your first port of call, because you can depend on them, you know? And that mostly was nurtured on the political front. They [The Basques] were coming here regularly. We had them numerous times. [...] They’d come and you’d find out who they were, but they weren’t really doing anything that would justify launching a big... you know... you could throw them out or something, but what’s the point, you know? What I’m saying is there was much bigger stuff [that] demanded the time of agencies everywhere, and this wasn’t a big deal because everyone knew it was going on. It wasn’t a big cog in anyone’s campaign. [...] If tomorrow [the IRA’s Overseas Department] gets a call saying ‘we’ve 2 fellahs going to Spain, give us the contacts’, you have to have your homework done — like any other organisation. The contacts may never lead to anything. They could have contacts that would be more ‘in case’, rather than ‘in action’. [...] There was a dormant period when you didn’t know who was contacting who at all; it’s all underground. The next thing it’s becoming public on the political side. [...] There was nobody really investigating these things. Now that may seem like a strange thing to say, but so many [other] things were happening. [...] Overall, it’s a difficult proposition. There was a lacuna in the actuality of what was happening, but [we were] pretty sure that it was going on”.<sup>287</sup>

This synopsis dovetails closely with that of the terrorism scholar Peter Yanke, who, in his study of 1970s terrorist links, stated:

“The point about these links, and one could go on adducing evidence of contacts, is that it is not at all an international revolutionary conspiracy, but rather a network of tiny groups acting illegally that comes across one another in their search for arms and are prepared to help when called upon for a meal, a night’s shelter, an overcoat, a hair dye or a railway ticket”.<sup>288</sup>

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<sup>286</sup> “Anglo-Spanish Cooperation in Counter Terrorism”. IRA activities overseas. FCO 87/946. NA.

<sup>287</sup> Author interview with a former An Garda Síochána Assistant Commissioner (Dublin, 2017).

<sup>288</sup> Cited on p. 5 of Michael McKinely: “The International Dimensions of Terrorism in Ireland” in Yonah Alexander, Alan O’Day (eds.): *Terrorism in Ireland*, New York, St. Martin’s Press, 1984, pp. 3–31.

In addition to similar nationalist and socialist outlooks, the relationship between EIA and PSF was built in discursive terms around a shared revolutionary and “anti-imperialist” analysis. Another ideological factor that seemed to have attracted the “Provisional” movement to the Basque case *per se*, as opposed to the “PoliMilis” in particular, was what Bishop and Mallie have described as Ruairí Ó Brádaigh’s “personal political fantasy of a Celtic federation on the edge of Europe composed of Irish, Welsh, Scots, Bretons and Basques”.<sup>289</sup> Indeed, as we have seen, despite not being a Celtic nation, the Basques and other European stateless nations tended to fit neatly into this type of schematic discourse.

Notwithstanding the existence of a PSF-EIA party relationship, from an objective standpoint, there was clearly far more ideological congruity between the IRM (PSF, PIRA) and the Basque *izquierda abertzale* (ETA-m/Herri Batasuna), than ETA-pm and EIA (EE).<sup>290</sup> Four separate factors have already been posited as influential in scaffolding this counter-intuitive arrangement. Here, it is worth underlining the role of personal relationships. In the view of José Ramón Peñagarikano: “Siempre ha sido una relación de ese mundo llevada por motivos que tenían, por supuesto un fondo político, pero que por encima de todo lo que había era una relación personal”.<sup>291</sup>

Personal relationships would eventually only go so far. At the turn of the new decade, any political rationale behind EIA’s maintenance of contacts and relations with the “Provisional” wing of Irish republicanism began to disintegrate. When this eventually resulted in a parting of ways c.1983, Herri Batasuna effectively occupied the space left by EIA.

This chapter conclusion has thus far accounted for radical Basque nationalist-Irish republican relations from 1970 to 1983, analysing how and why these relations came about and evolved in the way that they did. What can be said of the nexus impact on the movements themselves and their respective case contexts?

Radical Basque nationalist and Irish republican actors tended to situate their conflicts within a global narrative arc of struggle, grounded in anti-imperialist and revolutionary

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<sup>289</sup> Bishop; Mallie: *The Provisional IRA*, pp. 307–308.

<sup>290</sup> In the words of Irvin: “For ETA (pm) and its allied organizations, the new political environment represented a real democratization of the current regime. Like the Official IRA and Sinn Fein, ETA (pm) believed that the Spanish regime was reformable and that real political power for Basques could be achieved through the parliamentary process. [...] As the Provisional IRA and Sinn Fein had argued, ETA(m) also maintained that these powers would agree to their demands only at gunpoint and declared the need for *ruptura*, that is, a complete break with the Spanish regime”. Irvin: *Militant Nationalism*, p. 111.

<sup>291</sup> Author interview with José Ramón Peñagarikano (Nafarroa Garaia, 2017).

socialist rhetoric. Consequently, the alignment of Basque and Irish political, military, and social movement actors in the minds of ordinary citizens, the media, and the governments involved, elevated radical Basque nationalist and Irish republican grievances and aspirations out of their localised settings. This nexus, whether real or not, was mutually beneficial for Irish republicans and radical Basque nationalists.

For Irish republicans, associations with Basque actors (e.g., ETA, EIA) and other transnational actors helped to counter British portrayals of the “Troubles” as a fundamentally *intra*-Irish, or even religious, conflict. Consistently challenging Britain on this point, and her historical role in Ireland, was just one small way in which republicans could leverage pressure on the UK to accede to a “withdrawal” — or to at least approach a solution to the “Irish question” from a more favourable starting point. As the head of PSF’s international affairs, Richard Behal, outlined in October 1980:

“We have got, whether we like it or not, to be linked with international struggles. The Irish struggle on its own cannot, and will never, succeed in isolation because we are no longer just fighting Britain but fighting an international conspiracy of old colonial powers, who are hand in glove with Britain in trying to impose a solution upon us [...]”.<sup>292</sup>

Meanwhile, for radical Basque nationalists, associations with the much more widely known struggle of Irish republicanism brought a certain degree of attention to Basque issues in the anglophone world. In addition, the constant rumours of working links with “Provisional” Irish republicanism may have also lent a sort of latent gravitas to ETA within the broader *izquierda abertzale* milieu. The *quid pro quo* of such associations, however, meant that indiscriminate PIRA terrorist attacks such as the “La Mon” restaurant bombing (1978) probably reflected badly on ETA, both domestically and to an international audience that was accustomed to reading of “ETA-IRA links”.<sup>293</sup>

Without convincing electoral mandates, both ETA-m and the PIRA tended to present their members as heroic “freedom fighters” in their respective schemas of self-legitimation.<sup>294</sup> If there was another group in western Europe engaged in similar

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<sup>292</sup> “Sinn Féin National Education Seminar”, *An Phoblacht/Republican News*, 04.10.1980.

<sup>293</sup> Twelve people were killed on 17 February 1978 at the La Mon restaurant in Belfast when a PIRA bomb attached to an outside window exploded, triggering a massive fireball which engulfed an adjoining function room. “A Chronology of the Conflict – 1978”, <https://cain.ulster.ac.uk/othelem/chron/ch78.htm> (last accessed 07 January 2020).

<sup>294</sup> Robert G. Picard: “How Violence Is Justified: Sinn Féin’s *An Phoblacht*”, *Journal of Communication*, vol. 41, 4, 1991, pp. 90–103; Muro: *Ethnicity and Violence*, p. 11. For a *long dureé* overview of the transnational utilisation of Irish and Basque national “heroes” in the adjacent context, see: Niall Cullen: “Héroes patrios irlandeses y vascos. Una mirada transnacional” in Ludger Mees (coord.): *Héroes y Villanos de la Patria*, Madrid, Tecnos [forthcoming].



activity, all the better. As one senior figure within the izquierda abertzale movement put it:

“[...] ante una ideología que puede decir ‘oye en Europa, la lucha armada no... eso en África o en América Latina, en Europa no’—¡cómo que no! Mira los irlandeses. ¿Entiendes? No vas a decir ‘mira los corsos’. Mira los irlandeses, esos son serios, es una organización seria”.<sup>295</sup>

Even Mario Onaindia, a man who is seen as an important figure in bringing about an end to ETA-pm’s armed struggle, spoke positively of the IRA’s ‘extra-judicial’ violence after he had visited Belfast in 1978:

“[...] el IRA ha realizado numerosas acciones de apoyo al movimiento de masas, tales como el secuestro y posterior tiro en la rodilla de algunos capitalistas sin escrúpulos, violadores, ladrones, etc., denunciados por el pueblo”.<sup>296</sup>

As we have seen, the Basque Country, Northern Ireland and Gibraltar sometimes became entangled with each other, leading to occasional spouts of what this author has called, *diplomatic whataboutery*. A decade on from the outbreak of violence in the Basque Country and Northern Ireland, one could suggest that the mutual security threat of “ETA-IRA links” partly served to smooth over these British-Spanish issues.

In comparison to the British channel of cooperation around “ETA-IRA links”, Irish cooperation was of secondary importance to the Spanish. According to one Irish official’s view of this trilateral state dynamic:

“There is from time to time talk of contacts between the IRA and ETA and it seems clear that there has been some contact. Many IRA members have attended meetings, parades in the Basque country. The Spanish government is more and more inclined to look to London for advice on policing and containment and, we believe, on the information available to the [Irish] Embassy, is encouraged to do so [by the British]. The consequence of this understandable and legitimate Spanish action is to see Northern Ireland as the UK’s Basque problem and to be out of sympathy, in so far as this is of any great importance, with our analysis and policy in relation to Northern Ireland”.<sup>297</sup>

If Northern Ireland was, in general, seen by Spanish officials, diplomats and representatives as the UK’s “Basque problem”, what would that make Ireland in the same analogy? Soon after presenting his credentials in late 1983 to the Spanish King, and the

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<sup>295</sup> Anonymous interview.

<sup>296</sup> “Los independentistas irlandeses contra el imperialismo”, *Egin*, 07.11.1978. For the IRA’s use of these methods, see: Moloney: *A Secret History of the IRA* (2<sup>nd</sup> ed.), p. 153.

<sup>297</sup> “Report titled ‘Spain – Some Background Notes’”. Dated 11 April 1984. References to alleged IRA links with foreign terrorist organisations. 840/1985. NAI.

Minister for Foreign Affairs, Fernando Morán López, the new Irish Ambassador to Spain, Gearóid O Cléirigh, remarked on this very issue:

“[...] after we had discussed the topic [terrorism], the King and Morán seemed to feel that, while an exchange of experience with Ireland would be useful, our problems were different and, in a sense, more akin to France than those of Spain. I regard this conclusion as potentially serious. The next step in this type of thinking is for the Spanish to see an analogy in the cases of Spain and the UK. In that event, the endemic Spanish distrust of France, regarded as similar to Ireland, might easily be reflected in acceptance of charges made in certain sectors of the British press against us e.g. of harbouring terrorists. Already Basque terrorist separatism can be seen as analogous to the IRA’s desire to dismember the UK [...]”.<sup>298</sup>

Finally, in terms of operational, strategic and propagandistic influences that the transnational nexus had on each of the political cultures throughout this period, we have already seen evidence to suggest that ETA-m/ETA-pm may have learned from the PIRA’s “invention” of the car bomb. Going in the other direction, the PIRA may have copied the technical expertise used by ETA to assassinate Carrero Blanco. Two other possible “transfers” (imitation behaviour) not already referred to are worth noting.

First, there is evidence to suggest that the PIRA attempted to emulate ETA-pm’s tourist resort bombing campaign of the late 1970s. And second, in an attempt to emulate the propaganda success of the pro-IRA, Arthur MacCaig-directed documentary “The Patriot Game” (1979), ETA-pm militants acted as advisers to MacCaig in the production of his 1983 documentary “Euskadi hors d’État/Euskadi Estatutik at” (Euskadi at the Margins of the State). The sympathetic documentary drew strong parallels between the two cases.<sup>299</sup>

These specific examples are, of course, set against the backdrop of the many supposed meetings, arms exchanges, training in explosives, etc., that were regularly speculated upon in the media and at inter-governmental level. What may or may not have been discussed and exchanged at these nexus encounters is almost impossible to ascertain. As to the accuracy and veracity of many of these claims and reports, in many respects, it is up to the reader to decide on a case by case basis. Taken in the round, however, the sheer weight of these claims could potentially give the impression that militant radical Basque

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<sup>298</sup> “Letter from Gearóid O Cléirigh to Department of Foreign Affairs, Dublin, titled ‘Irish Conversation with the King of Spain on Fisheries, Agriculture and Terrorism’”. Dated 04 November 1983. Madrid. Political Reports from Madrid. 2014/32/911.

<sup>299</sup> In *The Informer*, Sean O’Callaghan reveals that he intended to plant 16 bombs on English beaches in 1983: “The plan was borrowed from the Basque terrorist group ETA, which had tried a similar tactic, bringing havoc to the Spanish tourist industry”. See: O’Callaghan: *The Informer*, p. 143. For information on the two Arthur MacCaig films, see: Santiago de Pablo: *Creadores de Sombras*, Madrid, Tecnos, 2017, pp. 207–214. On socio-economic issues, there is some evidence to suggest that PSF, under Ó Brádaigh’s leadership, was keen to learn from Basque co-ops. For example, see: “Basque co-op. headline for *Éire Nua?*”, *An Phoblacht*, 13.08.1976.

nationalists and Irish republicans operated in some sort of organised or quasi-structured manner. For this author, while it is evidently clear that the PIRA had *some* degree of working relationship with ETA-m and ETA-pm at various stages throughout the 1970s and early 1980s, in the absence of conclusive evidence from multiple sources to the contrary, one would instead have to characterise these nexuses, in global terms, as essentially unstructured and *ad hoc*.<sup>300</sup>

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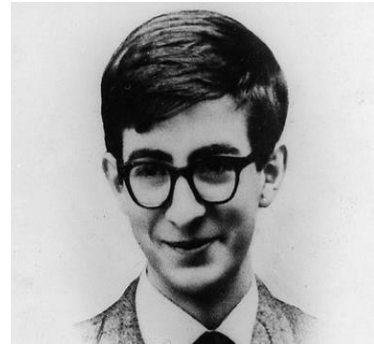
<sup>300</sup> Hereafter PSF and the PIRA will simply be referred to as Sinn Féin and the IRA unless otherwise stated. ETA-m will simply be referred to as ETA.



Éamon de Valera and his son of the same name. Zarautz, 1953  
(FOCO)







The Etxebarrieta brothers, José Antonio and 'Txabi'  
(Wikimedia Commons)



“The Battle of the Bogside”. Derry, 1969  
(RTE)



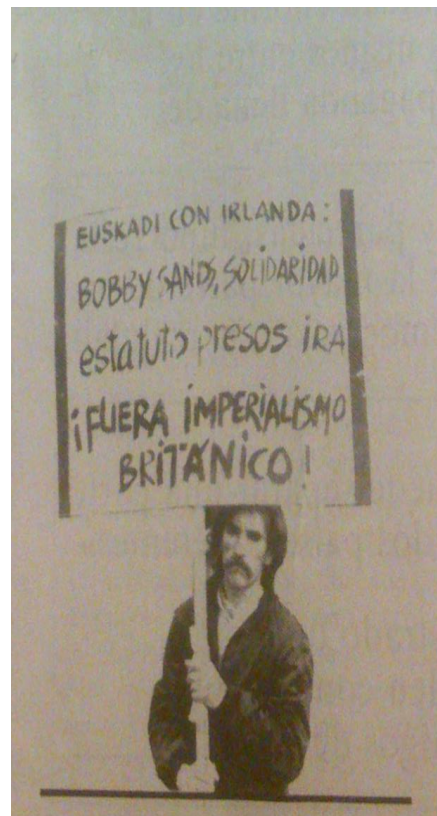
The freed “Burgos Process” prisoners in Durango. 1977  
(El Mundo)



Gerry McAlinden (second from right) at a Brest Charter meeting in Donostia. 1977  
(Gerry McAlinden)



José Ramón Peñagarikano & Richard Behal  
(An Phoblacht/Republican News)



“Euskadi con Irlanda”  
(Punto y Hora de Euskal Herria)



## CHAPTER FIVE

### 5.0. Introduction

“Sinn Féin and the IRA have the same objectives. The IRA is engaged in armed struggle. Sinn Féin would not only defend the IRA’s right to wage armed struggle but have the job, increasingly, of popularising support”.<sup>1</sup>  
(Gerry Adams, 1982)

“Nosotros estableceríamos un ‘alto de fuego’ inmediatamente después de que el Gobierno Español, de una manera pública y con los Poderes Fácticos a la cabeza —es decir, la cúpula militar con capacidad auténticamente decisoria y ejecutiva, así como la cúpula oligárquica— negociase con nosotros, en base a la Alternativa KAS”.<sup>2</sup>  
(Interview with an ETA militant, 1986)

From the moment Bobby Sands was elected as an MP in April 1981, the republican movement embarked on a long march towards what could be considered “normal” electoral politics. For some commentators, and many of the party’s political opponents, this journey is still ongoing.<sup>3</sup>

Two months after Sands’ election, the IRA volunteers Paddy Agnew and Kieran Doherty were returned as TDs on an abstentionist ticket to Dáil Éireann. As with Sands, both were incarcerated in Long Kesh and ran under an “Anti H-Block” banner.<sup>4</sup> Later that month, Bobby Sands’ election agent Owen Carron succeeded in maintaining the republican’s Fermanagh and South Tyrone seat with an increased mandate.

In 1982, Sinn Féin decided to contest elections for a new “Northern Ireland Parliament Assembly”. The republican party and the SDLP both ran on abstentionist tickets, with a 5 to 14 split in the subsequent seat tallies. Given its low base, however, Sinn Féin’s electoral gamble was deemed a major success.<sup>5</sup> More electoral gains came in 1983 when

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<sup>1</sup> Cited in: “A coming of age for the political wing”, *The Guardian*, 04.11.1982.

<sup>2</sup> “Entrevista” [interview with an ETA militant], *Zuzen*, March, 1986.

<sup>3</sup> For example, see: “Sinn Féin ‘undemocratic and still run by the IRA’ says Fiann Fáil leader Micheál Martin”, *Belfast Telegraph*, 06.02.2017; “Sinn Féin is an undemocratic Marxist clique masquerading as a political party”, *Business Post*, 13.01.2019; “The close links between Sinn Féin and IRA untangled”, *Irish Times*, 21.02.2020.

<sup>4</sup> Kieran Doherty died on 02 August 1981 after 73 days on hunger strike. “The Hunger Strike of 1981 – List of Dead and Other Hunger Strikers”, <https://cain.ulster.ac.uk/events/hstrike/dead.htm> (last accessed 14 January 2020).

<sup>5</sup> White: *Out of the Ashes*, p. 198. Without any nationalist representation, the Northern Ireland Assembly was finally abolished in 1986. For an overview of its brief existence, see: Cornelius O’Leary, Sydney Elliott, R.A. Wilford: *The Northern Ireland Assembly, 1982–1986*, London, Hurst & Company, 1988,

Alex Maskey became the first Sinn Féin representative voted onto Belfast City Council (in a local by-election). Finally, in the same year, Gerry Adams claimed victory for his party in the West Belfast constituency of the UK General Election. Owing to Sinn Féin's policy of abstention from Westminster, Adams naturally refused to take his seat.

A year after Adams' election to Westminster, the IRA narrowly failed in an audacious attempt to assassinate British Prime Minister Margaret Thatcher and her entire cabinet at a Brighton hotel. Responding to criticism that the attack had been fundamentally anti-democratic, an IRA spokesperson simply retorted: "Nobody in Ireland elected Thatcher's cabinet".<sup>6</sup>

"Spectaculars" such as the Brighton bombing went some way to assuaging those within the republican movement who were suspicious of any "slide" towards constitutional politics. Indeed, as the above quote from Gerry Adams illustrates, leading republicans often attempted to allay these fears with regular pronouncements that the IRA and its campaign were absolutely indispensable. Sinn Féin's electoral advances were to be welcomed, but there would be no ceasefire. The war would continue until Britain declared its intention to "withdraw".<sup>7</sup>

Moreover, for those "on the know" within the organisation itself, the IRA was preparing for a massive escalation of its campaign. Between June 1985 and September 1986, four shipments of arms and explosives, totalling 150 tonnes (including surface-to-air missiles and semtex), were smuggled from Libya into Ireland. A fifth shipment, containing a further 120 tonnes of military equipment, was intercepted by French authorities on board the *Eksund* in the Bay of Biscay in November 1987. With the capture of this final batch of arms, the massive planned escalation, referred to as the IRA's "Tet Offensive", ultimately failed to materialise.<sup>8</sup>

While the IRA seemed prepared, at least judging by its arsenal, to continue its "Long War" with the British state almost *ad infinitum*, by the mid-1980s, the mooted dropping

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available at: <https://cain.ulster.ac.uk/events/assembly1982/docs/oleary88.htm> (last accessed 16 April 2020).

<sup>6</sup> Five people died in the Brighton hotel bombing, including the MP, Anthony Berry. "IRA Brighton Bomb: Patrick Ryan admits links to 1984 attack", <https://www.bbc.com/news/uk-northern-ireland-49797327> (last accessed 14 January 2020). Quote cited in: Hanley: *The IRA. A Documentary History 1916–2005*, p. 195.

<sup>7</sup> For another example, see the following quote from Martin McGuinness in 1984: "Without the IRA we are on our knees. Without the IRA we are slaves. For 15 years this generation of republicans have been off their knees. We will never be slaves again". "We will never be slaves again", *An Phoblacht/Republican News*, 29.06.1984.

<sup>8</sup> For an overview of this episode, see: Moloney: *A Secret History of the IRA* (2<sup>nd</sup> ed.), pp. 21–33.

of abstention to Dáil Éireann had started to become a serious issue of contention within the republican movement.<sup>9</sup>

For some within the party, there was a clear logic to sitting in Dáil Éireann. All attempts to form parallel 32-county institutions (Éire Nua) that could perhaps one day undermine and supersede the “illegitimate” northern and southern jurisdictions had failed.<sup>10</sup> Whether the republican movement liked it or not, Dublin was not Belfast. Dáil Éireann was a sovereign parliament of a sovereign state—a republic even—with the popular consent of its citizens. There was no comparison with Britain’s hold on the “occupied six counties”. Besides, did “Standing Order No. 8” not explicitly remind IRA volunteers that “the Southern forces are not to be regarded as targets”?

The counter-argument was that in participating in the institutions of the “Free State”, the IRA’s sense of self-legitimacy, which emanated directly from the Irish Republic of 1919, would be completely undermined. Indeed, as the reader will recall, it was the retreat from this position via the Anglo-Irish Treaty of 1921 that had led directly to civil war. The “Provisionals”’ *Green Book*, a sort of guidebook for recruits, could not have made these historical connections to the present more explicit:

“Commitment to the Republican Movement is the firm belief that its struggle both military and political is morally justified, that war is morally justified and that the Army is the direct representative of the 1918 Dáil Éireann Parliament, and that as such they are the legal and lawful government of the Irish Republic, which has the moral right to pass laws for, and to claim jurisdiction over the territory, air space, mineral resources, means of production, distribution and exchange and all of its people regardless of creed or loyalty”.<sup>11</sup>

Internal tensions over abstention eventually came to a head. In September 1986, the IRA called an Army Convention. This was the first of its kind in sixteen years. A three-quarter majority of attendees passed a motion in support of Sinn Féin taking up seats in Leinster House, where Dáil Éireann sits, should any of the party candidates be elected. In

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<sup>9</sup> See: O’Brien: *The Long War. The IRA & Sinn Féin* (3<sup>rd</sup> ed.), pp. 118–128. Sinn Féin’s “kitchen cabinet” is a term that has been used by historians and commentators in regard to Gerry Adams’ close allies and associates since the late 1970s. For instance, see: Feeney: *Sinn Féin. A Hundred Turbulent Years*, Dublin, p. 383. While not always explicitly stated, the supposition of the “kitchen cabinet” term is that the real policy decisions of Sinn Féin were, more often than not, made in private by members of this “cabinet” rather than on the floor of Sinn Féin Árd Fheiseanna. Adams has also used the term to describe his close republican associates. See: Gerry Adams: *A Pathway to Peace*, Cork and Dublin, Mercier, 1988, p. 4.

<sup>10</sup> Matthew Whiting: *Sinn Féin and the IRA: From Revolution to Moderation*, Edinburgh, Edinburgh University Press, 2018, p. 37.

<sup>11</sup> “‘The Green Book: I’ from ‘The IRA’ by Tim Pat Coogan (1993)”, <https://cain.ulster.ac.uk/othelem/organ/docs/coogan/coogan93.htm> (last accessed 23 November 2019). While the representatives of the First Dáil were elected in December 1918, Dáil Éireann itself only came into being in January 1919.

November, at Sinn Féin's Árd Fheis, the Adams' leadership proposed a motion to the same effect. Opposing the motion, former President Ruairí Ó Brádaigh warned his comrades that "once you go in there [Leinster House], you sign the roll of the House and accept the institutions of the state".<sup>12</sup> It was left to Martin McGuinness, the respected hard-line commander of the IRA in Derry, to face down opposition and appeal for unity:

"They [the opponents to the motion] argue that some TDs entering Leinster House will make it impossible to conduct armed struggle against British rule in the 6 counties. They tell you that it is an inevitable certainty that the war against British rule will be run down. These suggestions deliberately infer that the present leadership of Sinn Féin and the leadership of the Irish Republican Army are intent on edging the republican movement on to a constitutional path. To bolster their arguments, they draw a comparison between a pre-1970s leadership of the republican movement which had surrendered before the war began, and the present leadership of this movement. Shame! Shame! Shame! [...] Sadly, the inference that the removal of abstentionism would lead to the demise of military opposition to British Rule has indeed called into question the commitment of the IRA to pursue the struggle to a successful conclusion. I reject any such suggestion and I reject the notion that entering Leinster House would mean an end to Sinn Féin's unapologetic support for the right of Irish people to oppose in arms the British forces of occupation. That, my friends, is a principle which a minority in this hall might doubt but which I believe all our opponents clearly understand. Our position is clear, and it will never, never, never change. The war against British rule must continue until freedom is achieved. [...] If you allow yourself to be led out of this hall today, the only place you're going — is home. You will be walking away from the struggle. Don't go my friends. We will lead you to the republic".<sup>13</sup>

McGuinness' words fell on deaf ears. A sizeable minority of delegates, including Ó Brádaigh and Dáithí Ó Conaill, walked out to immediately reconvene their own Árd Fheis at a hotel in west Dublin. Echoing the schism in Sinn Féin 16 years previously, Ó Brádaigh became the first President of Republican Sinn Féin (RSF). Akin to 1970, Thomas Maguire endorsed RSF to carry on the mandate of the *de jure* Irish Republic. Unlike the split of 1969/1970, however, RSF were unable to mount a serious challenge to the "Provisional" republican movement.<sup>14</sup>

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<sup>12</sup> "Speech by Ruairi O'Bradaigh opposing the motion on abstentionism (Resolution 162), Sinn Féin Ard Fheis, Dublin, (2 November 1986)", <https://cain.ulster.ac.uk/issues/politics/docs/sf/rob021186.htm> (last accessed 23 November 2019). Richard Behal also spoke out against the motion. See: White: *Out of the Ashes*, p. 227.

<sup>13</sup> "Speech by Martin McGuinness on the issue of abstentionism (Resolution 162), Sinn Féin Ard Fheis, Dublin, (2 November 1986)", <https://cain.ulster.ac.uk/issues/politics/docs/sf/mmcg021186.htm> (last accessed 12 November 2019).

<sup>14</sup> Hanley: *The IRA. A Documentary History 1916–2005*, p. 198; Moloney: *A Secret History of the IRA* (2<sup>nd</sup> ed.), pp. 208–209.



Running concurrently to these major shifts in the Irish case context, several significant extrinsic and intrinsic factors were to impinge on the dynamics of the Basque case over the same period.

Following Herri Batasuna's impressive 1979 electoral results, elections to the new Basque Autonomous Community in 1980 saw the coalition largely uphold its position as the dominant voice of left-wing Basque nationalism. HB won 16.5% of the vote and 11 seats. However, this relative success paled in comparison to the PNV, which gathered 38% of the electorate and 25 seats in the 60-seat chamber. With Herri Batasuna refusing to take its seats, the way was clear for the *jeltzales* to govern and —akin to the early 1930s— (re)assume its dominance of the Basque political landscape.<sup>15</sup>

The return of a Basque autonomous government in 1980 coincided with a significant increase in ETA's attacks against senior Guardia Civil, Army and National Police officers. Indeed, 1980 would turn out to be ETA's bloodiest year. Such attacks inadvertently (or perhaps, purposely) served to strengthen the convictions of a disillusioned rump within the Spanish security forces who were secretly plotting to turn the clock back on the Transition.<sup>16</sup>

On 23 February 1981, a Lieutenant Colonel, Antonio Tejero, led a dramatic coup in the Spanish Parliament. By holding Spain's political representatives as hostages, Tejero and his accomplices attempted to impose a new political order. While shots were fired in the parliament chamber and tanks deployed to the streets (most notably in Valencia), the monarch's stance would be pivotal to the eventual success or failure of the coup. Following a day of extreme tension, King Juan Carlos, dressed in military garb, eventually appeared on TV to condemn the putsch, and defend the nascent institutions of the post-Franco state. The king's intervention proved crucial. Unable to carry a critical mass of support within the military, Tejero and his allies surrendered shortly after.<sup>17</sup>

For many Spanish democrats, the *real* end to the Transition occurred the following year when PSOE won Spain's second post-Franco General Election and formed a left-wing government. Hopes were immediately raised that an agreement could be brokered

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<sup>15</sup> Both Sinn Féin and Herri Batasuna (and its successor parties) polled between 10% to 20% in every single Northern Irish (1982, 1996, 1998), Basque Autonomous Community (1980, 1984, 1986, 1990, 1994, 1998) and Navarrese (1983, 1987, 1991, 1995, 1999) regional election of the 1980s and 1990s, with the exception of the Navarrese regional election in 1995 when HB won 9.2%. During the same period of time, Sinn Féin's best result in the Irish General Election was 2.5% in 1997.

<sup>16</sup> "Víctimas mortales de ETA (1968–2010)", <https://www.arovite.com/en/portfolio-items/victimas-mortales-de-eta-1968-2010/> (last accessed 14 January 2020). Paddy Woodworth: "Ireland and the Basque Country", *History Ireland*, vol. 9 (3), Autumn 2001.

<sup>17</sup> Mees: *The Basque Contention*, p. 146.

between the charismatic PSOE leader Felipe González, and ETA. However, despite intermittent dialogue between Partido Socialista de Euskadi (PSE) [the regional affiliate of PSOE], HB, and PNV, little progress was made.<sup>18</sup>

All the while, ETA's armed campaign was increasingly complicated by the launch in 1983 of a second "Dirty War", which was secretly organised and implemented by elements within the Spanish government. In total, at least 27 people would die at the hands of the covert Grupos Antiterroristas de Liberación (GAL) between 1983 and 1987, many of whom had no connection whatsoever with ETA. GAL claimed its most high-profile victim in November 1984 when Santi Brouard, one of the most prominent political ideologues in Herri Batasuna's directorate leadership cadre, was gunned down in his paediatric clinic.<sup>19</sup>

While the "Dirty War" severely undermined the Spanish state's democratic credentials and provided a boon to ETA's thesis that nothing had changed in Spain since Franco's death, by any measure, the overriding objective of forcing the French state into disrupting ETA's "sanctuary" in Iparralde was successful.<sup>20</sup>

In 1986, Juan Okiñena was joined by the "historic" ETA leader *Txillardegui* at the Sinn Féin Árd Fheis. As observed by Cynthia L. Irvin in her comparative work on radical Basque nationalism and Irish republicanism, during his address to the republican delegates, *Txillardegui* indicated that Herri Batasuna had decided to drop its policy of abstention to the Basque Parliament.<sup>21</sup> Coincidentally, *Txillardegui's* announcement provided the curtain raiser to the republican party's own heated debate on abstention and the resulting split. Not for the first time since the early 1970s, the Irish republican movement and Basque izquierda abertzale seemed to be at similar stages of development in their respective "struggles".<sup>22</sup>

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<sup>18</sup> De Pablo; Mees: *El Péndulo Patriótico* p. 406.

<sup>19</sup> Woodworth: *Dirty War, Clean Hands*, p. 124, p. 418 (footnote 12).

<sup>20</sup> Florencio Domínguez Iribarren summarises the French response to GAL's campaign in the following way: "[...] en el trienio 1984–86 Francia pone en juego, de manera escalonada, toda la gama de recursos legales disponibles contra ETA: retirada del estatuto de refugiado, restricción de los permisos de residencia, prohibición de residencia en los departamentos fronterizos, confinamiento en lugares alejados del País Vasco, deportaciones a terceros países, extradiciones, persecución judicial y policial y expulsiones directas". Domínguez Iribarren: "El Enfrentamiento de ETA con la democracia" (specifically p. 325).

<sup>21</sup> Irvin: *Militant Nationalism*, p. 3.

<sup>22</sup> According to Iker Casanova, Herri Batasuna's decision in the late 1970s to run in elections but to abstain from taking most of its seats was inspired by Sinn Féin. See: Casanova: *ETA 1958–2008. Medio Siglo de Historia* (5<sup>th</sup> ed.), p. 245.

Okiñena and *Txillardegi*'s appearance at the 1986 Árd Fheis was the fourth year in a row that a Herri Batasuna delegation had attended and spoken. Throughout the 1980s and into the late 1990s, this public manifestation of fraternal ties would act as the central *political* plank of radical Basque nationalist-Irish republican transnational relations. In the meantime, the suspected military nexus that had been so heavily speculated upon during the 1970s became far less present in the media. Owing to the respective British and Irish embargoes on state papers, government documentation pertaining to these links from the mid- to late-1980s onwards will only be revealed with time and further investigation.

Notwithstanding this somewhat mundane outline of a “routine” political relationship, and relatively unknown military nexus, stretching from the early 1980s into the 1990s, the first signs of new transnational radical Basque nationalist-Irish republican organisational links were also beginning to emerge across prisoner, youth, women and language movement strands. In as much as the available documentation and sources allow, the emergence and development of this mostly “ground up” phenomena, in tandem with the “top down” political nexus, will be accounted for throughout the rest of this chapter.

### 5.1. One struggle

“Evidentemente, el IRA es una organización con una carácter mucho más análogo y prácticamente similar al nuestro [que otros grupos armados como CCC, la RAF o las BR italianas]. El IRA es una organización que surge, también, como respuesta a un genocidio como pueblo. Nadie dirá que los irlandeses son ingleses; todo el mundo recuerda que son irlandeses. Pero, sin embargo están bajo las botas del capital y de los militares británicos. Entonces creemos que es justificada su lucha [...] y lo han demostrado, incluso tienen más historia que nosotros y, por supuesto, que, desde aquí, también aprovechamos esta oportunidad para brindarles nuestra solidaridad política más grande”.<sup>23</sup>

The early 1980s saw a great deal of flux in Sinn Féin's international department. In organisational terms, already by late 1984, Richard Behal's replacement, Sean Halpenny, had seemingly vacated his position as Director of the Foreign Affairs Bureau (FAB). Echoing some of the frustrations aired by Behal during the 1970s, Halpenny's successor, Síle Darragh, attempted to ramp up interest in the Bureau at the 1984 Árd Fheis. She warned delegates that “the FAB cannot and should not be the responsibility of one or two individuals”. Darragh, who was Officer Commanding in Armagh Prison during the

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<sup>23</sup> “Entrevista” [interview with an ETA militant], *Zuzen*, March, 1986.

women's protests in 1980 and 1981, was replaced herself as Director of FAB in 1986 by Ted Howell, a key figure in Adams' "kitchen cabinet".<sup>24</sup>

On a strategic level, both Martin Frampton and Adrian Guelke suggest in their respective studies that from the early 1980s onwards, the FAB began to overtly ally itself more closely (at least in discursive terms) to certain international struggles: in particular those of South Africa and Palestine.<sup>25</sup> Indeed, in much of Sinn Féin's international-oriented discourse throughout the 1980s, the Irish "struggle" was often effectively asserted as "one" with the ANC and PLO.<sup>26</sup>

Conjoining the Irish struggle with South Africa, which had almost unanimous worldwide sympathy, and the Palestinians, which had less *cachet*, but was still significant, certainly made sense in base international propaganda terms. Conversely, the Basque struggle, or others such as El Salvador or Nicaragua, were lesser-known and understood among the general public, especially in the anglophone world. It is with this in mind that Gerry Adams' 1984 *Árd Fheis* speech, in which the Sinn Féin leader pledged solidarity with South Africa, Palestine and the Basque Country, in that order —while obviously a simplistic and crude example—, is also a symbolic reflection of this ranking in importance throughout most of the 1980s.<sup>27</sup>

Meanwhile, on the Basque side of this equation, Herri Batasuna tended to look more towards Latin America than Ireland for international references throughout the 1980s.<sup>28</sup> As for ETA, and as referenced earlier, Josu Ternera, the *de facto* head of the organisation's "Aparato Internacional" from the late 1970s onwards, was seemingly reluctant to develop relations with European groups. Instead, the ETA leader "se encontraba a gusto con las guerrillas americanas".<sup>29</sup>

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<sup>24</sup> "More interest needed in foreign affairs", *An Phoblacht/Republican News*, 08.11.84; "Sinn Féin in Italy", *An Phoblacht/Republican News*, 20.12.1984; "A broad outlook", *An Phoblacht/Republican News*, 06.11.1986.

<sup>25</sup> Frampton: "'Squaring the circle': the foreign policy of Sinn Féin, 1983–1989"; Guelke: "The Peace Process in South Africa, Israel and Northern Ireland: A Farewell to Arms?".

<sup>26</sup> For instance, see: "South Africa/Ireland – One Struggle", *An Phoblacht/Republican News*, 29.01.1987. An exhibition titled "Palestine, Ireland – One Struggle" was mounted in Belfast's republican social club "Felons" in July 1982 by Sinn Féin's FAB. Cited in: "Report titled 'The Provisional Republican Movement'". Provisional Sinn Féin, IRA and INLA. General. FCO 87/1570. NA. Also in 1982, a joint IRA-PLO mural with the words "One Struggle" was painted in Belfast. See: Rolston: "'The Brothers on the Walls'".

<sup>27</sup> "We have the right to be free", *An Phoblacht/Republican News*, 08.11.1984.

<sup>28</sup> Author interview with Joseba Álvarez (Donostia, 2017). Author interview with Alexander Ugalde Zubiri (Leioa, 2017).

<sup>29</sup> Domínguez Iribarren: *Josu Ternera: Una Vida En ETA*, p. 90.

The above two paragraphs notwithstanding, there was still plenty to unite radical Basque nationalists and Irish republicans throughout the 1980s in terms of analogical-led discourse and relations. Some examples from 1984 alone will suffice in illustrating this continuity. For instance, a BBC documentary titled “The Basques”, which aired in March 1984, was wryly noted in *An Phoblacht/Republican News* as exposing “many similarities” between the two contexts<sup>30</sup> — a sentiment echoed in a *Punto y Hora de Euskal Herria* review of the same programme:

“Habida cuenta de la proximidad del problema irlandés, ya es significativo que la BBC no haya rehusado tratar un tema que puede resultarle incómodo, de lo que alguna conclusión se puede extraer, si lo comparamos con la ausencia de similares programas en las televisoras del Estado español. Del programa se podrían hacer varios comentarios y no sería el menos importante la valoración que del Estatuto de Gernika hace el propio lehendakari, un estatuto firmado bajo la presión que no ha dejado de estar presente en toda la Reforma [...]”.<sup>31</sup>

In the same issue of *Punto y Hora de Euskal Herria*, a more specific comparison between the two cases was also drawn. This time, the author pointed to a recent assassination attempt on Gerry Adams’ life, and the ongoing “Dirty War” in the Basque Country:

“También en Irlanda del Norte, la guerra sucia está presente. La situación norirlandesa y la de Euskadi aunque con las diferencias lógicas, parecen caminar de forma paralela desde uno y otro rincón de Europa. Incluso esta misma semana los medios de comunicación destacaron el intercambio sostenido entre el ministro Barrionuevo y expertos británicos en la lucha contra el ‘terrorismo’ de Irlanda del Norte”.<sup>32</sup>

Having fully recovered from multiple gunshot wounds, Adams gave an “exclusive” interview to a “Rex Morrison” for *Punto y Hora de Euskal Herria* at the Árd Fheis in November. While the vast majority of the interview was standard republican fare, responding to the final Basque-oriented question, the Sinn Féin President remarked:

“Nosotros vemos con gran simpatía al pueblo vasco y su lucha, porque hay muchas características que nos unen, porque ambos pueblos sufrimos formas similares de represión, como es el caso de las extradiciones, ya que el Gobierno de Dublín entregó hace unos meses a una persona perseguida por los británicos y, más recientemente, los Estados Unidos hicieron lo mismo con otra. Ambos pueblos

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<sup>30</sup> “Compare and Contrast”, *An Phoblacht/Republican News*, 15.03.1984. According to the same source, the BBC documentary stressed that in relation to the Basque case, “there is no comparison to Ulster”.

<sup>31</sup> “Euskadi. Comentario Seminal”, *Punto y Hora de Euskal Herria*, 16–23.03.1984.

<sup>32</sup> “Mundo. Comentario Seminal”, *Punto y Hora de Euskal Herria*, 16–23.03.1984.

caminamos hacia nuestra liberación y los avances de uno dan fuerza al otro; la victoria de un pueblo, es la victoria de todos los pueblos”.<sup>33</sup>

Also appearing at the 1984 *Árd Fheis*, for the second year in a row, was Herri Batasuna’s Juan Okiñena. During his intervention, Okiñena spoke out against the French extradition of ETA militants to Spain, and the forced expulsion of others. Finally, rounding off the year, FAB representatives Denis Donaldson and Bairbre de Brún spoke at a conference on minority languages in Italy, where they were joined by a Herri Batasuna delegation.<sup>34</sup>

In 1985, Sinn Féin decided to contest local elections in Northern Ireland for the first time since proscription of the party had been lifted in 1974. In what was a successful day at the polling booth, Sinn Féin won 59 seats on a vote share of 11.8%.<sup>35</sup> Coming off the back of the previously referenced electoral advances of the early 1980s, the British and Irish governments now had to confront the fact that a party which essentially endorsed armed struggle had a not-insignificant minority of support among the electorate. It was partly in response to this reality that the two governments signed the Anglo-Irish Agreement in November 1985.<sup>36</sup>

The mass election of Sinn Féin councillors in 1985 also brought headaches for the FCO in London. As one official remarked concerning a collective Sinn Féin councillor trip to West Germany the same year, political expeditions of this kind “[raised] the larger problem of whether we might approach other Western European Governments to keep out members of Sinn Féin”.<sup>37</sup>

One of the newly-elected Sinn Féin councillors was Pat Rice. He would become a key broker in radical Basque nationalist-Irish republican relations from the mid-1980s onwards.

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<sup>33</sup> Irlanda del Norte, un acicate para las fuerzas revolucionarios de Europa”, *Punto y Hora de Euskal Herria*, 23.11.1984.

<sup>34</sup> “More interest needed in foreign affairs”, *An Phoblacht/Republican News*, 08.11.84; The same report states that Okiñena was joined at the *Árd Fheis* by an unnamed ETA member. “Sinn Féin in Italy”, *An Phoblacht/Republican News*, 20.12.1984.

<sup>35</sup> “Election results in Northern Ireland since 1973”, <https://www.ark.ac.uk/elections/gallsum.htm#lg> (14 January 2020).

<sup>36</sup> Irvin: *Militant Nationalism*, p. 2; Patterson: *The Politics of Illusion*, pp. 196–198. The Anglo-Irish Agreement of 1985, signed between the UK and Ireland, gave the Irish state a consultative role in Northern Irish affairs. It also aimed to increase cross-border cooperation in legal, judicial and security matters.

<sup>37</sup> “Northern Ireland Office Letter”. Dated 11 October 1985. FCO 87/2092. Sinn Féin Councillors Travelling Abroad. NA.



## Towards a multistrand nexus (part I)

“When I started to do a bit of work for the [Sinn Féin] international department, I remember hearing that there was some relationship with the ‘Polimilis’ and I did say that I thought our situation and their situation... the relationship would be... it would be more natural that it should be with those who were close to, or understood, the thinking of ETA-Militara. I remember saying that, but that was the way it was moving anyway, as far as I know. I don’t think I changed that or anything. I just knew that there had been some relations with the ‘Polimilis’”.<sup>38</sup>

At Sortu’s “refoundation” congress, held in September 2017, the veteran Sinn Féin republican Pat Rice was presented with an award in recognition of his solidarity with the Basque Country over many decades.<sup>39</sup> Rice, as the above quote alludes to, first became involved with Sinn Féin’s international department soon after Herri Batasuna replaced EIA(EE) as the republican party’s Basque political “partner”. His own personal connections with the Basque Country happened to go back a lot further.

Born in south Armagh in 1941, Rice developed an interest in linguistics and mastered the Irish language at a young age. He would subsequently spend most of his working life as a language teacher. In 1968 he took up an opportunity to teach in Donostia, where he lived and worked until 1971.<sup>40</sup>

During his time in the Basque Country, both ETA’s armed campaign and the Northern Ireland “Troubles” blew up. In interview with this author, Rice recalled being asked on a handful of occasions to give talks on the unfolding situation in Ireland. He spoke at local Basque schools, a “Caja de Oros”, and on one occasion, a Colegio Mayor in the University of Barcelona, where he stayed in the house of Joseba Aguirre, the former lehendakari’s son.<sup>41</sup>

Apart from these talks and translating some documents for the defence lawyer Miguel Castells Artetxe during the Burgos Process, Rice was, in his own words, wary of getting too involved in the “tense situation” that he saw around him in Donostia. Not only did he have a young family, he was also apparently going back and forth across the border (illegally) every three months in order to renew his visa. Returning home in 1971, he

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<sup>38</sup> Author interview with Pat Rice (Belfast, 2017).

<sup>39</sup> “An cara Éireannach (El amigo irlandés) -de los/as vascos/as”, *Erria*, <http://erria.eus/elkarriketak/an-cara-eireannach-el-amigo-irlandes-de-losas-vascosas> (last accessed 23 November 2019). Sortu is the latest in a chain of successor parties to Herri Batasuna.

<sup>40</sup> Incidentally, one of Rice’s students was the future ETA leader, Eugenio Etxebeste (*Antxon*). Author interview with Eugenio Etxebeste (Donostia, 2017). Author interview with Pat Rice (Belfast, 2017).

<sup>41</sup> Author interview with Pat Rice (Belfast, 2017). In the view of Rice, these talks essentially served as fora for Basque nationalists to obliquely refer to the dictatorship and their own situation.

recalls being “more radicalized than when I had gone and with maybe other ideas of what had to be done here [in Northern Ireland]”.<sup>42</sup>

In Belfast, Rice threw himself into language activism and was centrally involved in initiatives to provide education through the medium of Gaelge. His politics squared with “Provisional” republicanism and he joined Sinn Féin: “Apart from [language activism], we would have helped with whatever we could as well... eventually that led to greater involvement [in the movement]”.

As a proficient polyglot, it was somewhat inevitable that Rice would end up gravitating towards the party’s international and cultural interests. By the mid-1980s, he was working in both departments. Owing to his personal experience and interest in Basque affairs, he quickly became a sounding board for all things Basque-related within the party. Moreover, his home would become a hub for “hundreds” of Basque *izquierada abertzale* grassroots activists and political representatives who, for various reasons, found themselves in Belfast over the years.<sup>43</sup>

Elected to Lisburn (Lios na gCearrbhach) Town Council in May 1985, one of Rice’s first overseas trips was to a Conference of Western European Stateless Nations, held over three days in Barcelona that December. In the Catalan capital, 200 delegates, including Rice and an unknown Basque representative, agreed on four central points that dealt with language rights and national aspirations. According to a report that later appeared in *An Phoblacht/Republican News*:

“On the final day of the conference, in an act of solidarity with the Irish national struggle, a telegram was sent to Margaret Thatcher protesting against the arrest of 18 Sinn Féin members; and the whole international committee with the flags of the various nations, demonstrated outside the British consulate in Barcelona where the text of the telegram was handed in”.<sup>44</sup>

As envisaged by the above-cited FCO official, Sinn Féin councillors on the continent were making their presence felt.

Other contemporary European meetings caught the attention of *non*-republican media. For example, an article that appeared in the French daily conservative *Le Figaro* claimed a seminar held on university grounds in the Navarrese city of Iruñea in the summer of 1984 was essentially a political cover for Irish, Basque, and Corsican subversive organisations. Similarly, in 1985, French newspapers reported that Sinn Féin had met

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<sup>42</sup> Ibid. Rice credits the “Jesuits” for ensuring that the authorities “turned a blind eye” to his frequent border crossings.

<sup>43</sup> Ibid.

<sup>44</sup> “European Solidarity”, *An Phoblacht/Republican News*, 09.01.1986.

with and agreed a “pact” with the far-left French revolutionary communists of Action Directe in the “Basque Country”.<sup>45</sup> On more solid evidential footing, and closer to home, Sinn Féin publicly demonstrated its solidarity with “Basque political prisoners” and the “Basque people’s struggle for self-determination” when the party attempted to disrupt the state visit of King Juan Carlos to Ireland in July 1986.

As part of the king’s itinerary, a wreath laying service was planned to take place at the Irish Garden of Remembrance in Dublin. Sinn Féin took the opportunity to stage a service of their own. In what *An Phoblacht/Republican News* referred to as “a dignified tribute to the Basque people”, Sinn Féin members:

“[...] carried the national flag of Euskadi and placards in Basque, Irish and English, [and] approached the Garden of Remembrance at 8.45 on Wednesday morning, July 2<sup>nd</sup>, 15 minutes before the Spanish king’s arrival”.<sup>46</sup>

Having been denied access by Irish Gardaí, the Sinn Féin contingent waited until the royal party had left. They subsequently:

“[...] entered and laid a wreath next to that laid by the Spanish king minutes earlier. Lucilita Bhreatnach, of the Sinn Féin Foreign Affairs Bureau in Dublin, laid the wreath, which bore a tribute to all who have fought and died in the freedom struggle of the Basque people of Euskadi, in opposition to the Spanish state’s occupation of Euskadi, and in solidarity with Basque political prisoners. [...] On Monday, June 30<sup>th</sup>, Sinn Féin Councillor Christy Burke boycotted the official Dublin city reception for the king and queen in ‘solidarity with the Basque people’s struggle for self-determination’”.<sup>47</sup>

That same summer, a Sinn Féin representative Padraic Wilson partook in an “International Youth Camp” run by the French revolutionary youth organisation, “JCR”. *An Phoblacht/Republican News* reported that a Herri Batasuna delegate —or perhaps a member of Jarrai (the youth branch of the *izquierda abertzale*)— also attended.<sup>48</sup>

Returning to the Basque context, informal talks began to take place in early 1987 between an ETA representative Domingo Iturbe Abasolo (*Txomin*) and the Spanish government in the Algerian capital of Algiers. Unsurprisingly, both sides had very

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<sup>45</sup> “L’internationale nationaliste”, *Le Figaro*, 12.09.1984, as cited in “Letter from the Irish Embassy, Paris to the Department of Foreign Affairs”. Dated 14 September 1984. Paris. References to alleged IRA links with foreign terrorist organisations. 2014/32/1901. NAI; “Towards a European police state”, *An Phoblacht/Republican News*, 28.02.1985.

<sup>46</sup> “Tribute to Euskadi”, *An Phoblacht/Republican News*, 03.07.1986.

<sup>47</sup> *Ibid.* Lucilita Bhreatnach is the daughter of the late Deasún Breatnach. For the information of non-Irish readers, the spelling of surnames in Gaeilge differ according to gender. In this instance: Breatnach for a male; Bhreatnach for a female.

<sup>48</sup> “International Youth Camp”, *An Phoblacht/Republican News*, 24.07.1986. It has long been suggested that Padraic Wilson was a senior IRA figure in the 1980s. For example, see: “Wilson held power ‘over life and death of IRA volunteers if they transgressed’”, *Irish Independent*, 15.03.2015.

different expectations of how these talks would develop. Whereas ETA was keen to discuss fundamental political issues around Basque sovereignty, the Spanish government representatives would only countenance more technical issues, such as prisoners. Nevertheless, for the first time since ETA's founding, the Spanish government was dealing directly with the paramilitary organisation.<sup>49</sup>

The *izquierda abertzale* was also making progress on the electoral front. On 10 June 1987, the Bilbo lawyer, Txema Montero was elected to the European Parliament for Herri Batasuna. Montero received 360,952 votes across the Spanish state, including significant support in Catalonia.

Inexplicably, within days of this impressive electoral achievement, a bomb left by an ETA commando in the boot of a car in a Barcelona supermarket car park killed 21 people, incinerating many of the victims in a huge fireball. ETA's 'Hipercor' terrorist attack caused outrage across the political spectrum in Spain and even drew condemnation from some quarters within the *izquierda abertzale*, including the new European deputy, Montero.<sup>50</sup>

The cloud of 'Hipercor' hung over Montero's presence in the European Parliament for quite some time. Weathering this criticism, Montero brought the case for Basque self-determination to the floor of the chamber. Owing to the close ties between his party and Sinn Féin, which held no seats in the European Parliament at the time, Montero also took the opportunity to make a similar case for Irish self-determination. Indeed, in an interview conducted with Alex Maskey in 1990, the senior Sinn Féin figure referred to Montero as "nuestro representante" in Europe.<sup>51</sup>

In November 1987, Montero attended the Sinn Féin *Árd Fheis*. He took to the stage to "thunderous applause". A report of the MEP's speech in *An Phoblacht/Republican News* once again reflected mutual BIA-IRM concerns regarding extradition from the French and Irish states, respectively:

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<sup>49</sup> Whitfield: *Endgame for ETA*, pp. 70–74. *Txomin* died suddenly in an accident on 27 February 1987. He was succeeded in Algeria by Eugenio Etxebeste (*Antxon*).

<sup>50</sup> Casanova: *ETA 1958–2008. Medio Siglo de Historia* (5<sup>th</sup> ed.), p. 332; Domínguez Iribarren: "El Enfrentamiento de ETA con la democracia" (specifically pp. 343–344); Murua: *Ending ETA's Armed Campaign*, p. 164.

<sup>51</sup> According to Montero: "la primera intervención y votación en la que tomamos parte fue con motivo del atentado de 'Hipercor', lo que favoreció sobremedida la política de aislamiento, por otra parte la constatación de nuestros adversarios políticos, y lo cierto es que costó varios meses remontar aquella situación". See: "Txema Montero, un año después de las elecciones europeas", *Punto y Hora de Euskal Herria*, 22–29.09.1988. Author interview with José María "Txema" Montero (Bilbo, 2016). Sinn Féin did not win its first European Parliament seats until 2004. Maskey quote cited in: "Alex Maskey, vicepresidente del Sinn Féin de Irlanda", *Azkatzen*, No. 12, November 1990.

“Like Irish republicans, the Basque freedom movement is now threatened with the wholesale extradition of political refugees, in their case from France to Euskadi. Montero’s final message brought delegates to their feet as he told them: ‘Tiocfaidh ár lá, tiocfaidh bhur is, beirimíd bua! [Our day will come, your day will come, we will win!]’”.<sup>52</sup>

Days later, an IRA bomb placed close to a war memorial cenotaph in Enniskillen (Inis Ceithleann) killed eleven people. Akin to ETA’s ‘Hipercor’ attack, the Enniskillen atrocity resulted in widespread condemnation of the IRA across Ireland and Britain. Accentuating this anger was the IRA’s resort to blaming British troops for supposedly sweeping the area with radio signals and triggering the bomb. Gerry Adams later described the attacks as a “terrible mistake” which “they [the IRA] must not repeat”. Ironically for the Irish republican movement, as a direct consequence of the bombing, a British-Irish extradition treaty which had run aground in the Dáil, was swiftly voted through.<sup>53</sup>

Rounding off 1987 on a similarly bleak note, a huge ETA car-bomb killed eleven people, including five children, at a Guardia Civil barracks in Zaragoza on 11 December 1987. The Spanish government immediately called off the informal talks in Algiers. One month later, the “Ajuria-Enea” pact was signed in Vitoria-Gasteiz. This agreement, between all the major Basque parties, apart from HB, effectively drew a *cordon sanitaire* between those who renounced violence and strove for their political objectives within the established framework, and those who did not.<sup>54</sup>

The prevailing conflict dynamics in both Northern Ireland the Basque Country looked set to continue.

### **The end of history?**

“History never really says goodbye. History says, see you later”.<sup>55</sup>

In March 1988, three unarmed IRA volunteers, Seán Savage, Daniel McCann, and Mairéad Farrell, were controversially shot and killed close to a service station in Gibraltar by the British Special Air Service (SAS). Given the political contention over Gibraltar,

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<sup>52</sup> “The same aims”, *An Phoblacht/Republican News*, 05.11.1987.

<sup>53</sup> “After Enniskillen. Interview with Gerry Adams”, *An Phoblacht/Republican News*, 19.11.1987. Moloney: *A Secret History of the IRA* (2<sup>nd</sup> ed.), pp. 340–342.

<sup>54</sup> The “Pacto de Ajuria Enea” is reproduced in: De Pablo, De la Granja, Mees (eds.): *Documentos para la historia del nacionalismo vasco. De los Fueros a nuestros días*, pp. 178–181.

<sup>55</sup> Quote from the late Uruguayan writer, Eduardo Galeano. “Eduardo Galeano”, <https://www.newhistorian.com/2015/04/15/eduardo-galeano/> (last accessed 16 April 2019).

and the fact that the IRA operatives had been tracked by Spanish police *en route* to the British Overseas Territory, it was somewhat inevitable that a possible ETA link would be speculated upon in the international media. It was even raised in the British House of Commons. Any credible suggestion of ETA involvement, however, was immediately quashed by Spanish police sources and subsequently dismissed in *An Phoblacht/Republican News*.<sup>56</sup>

At the collective funeral of the “Gibraltar 3”, a UDA loyalist, Michael Stone, launched a gun and grenade attack against the mourners. In the course of the assault, Stone killed three people and wounded many more. Three days later, as the funeral cortège of one of Stone’s victims, Caoimhín Mac Brádaigh, was taking place, two undercover British corporals, Derek Wood and David Howes, reversed erratically into its path. The car was quickly surrounded by a hostile crowd. In the ensuing chaos, one of the corporals produced a pistol. Both men were subsequently beaten, stripped, and executed on waste ground next to Casement Park, Belfast.<sup>57</sup>

The case of the “Gibraltar 3”, the “Milltown cemetery massacre”, and “Corporals killings”, amounted to, what for many, were the most gruesome and horrifying days of the “Troubles”: a two-week nadir in a hitherto two-decade conflict that was seemingly intractable.<sup>58</sup>

Yet, despite this sense of hopelessness, there were already the first nascent signs of what would become known as the Irish “peace process” in the background. Having first established contact in 1981 during the Hunger Strikes, Gerry Adams and Taoiseach Charles Haughey (1979–1981, 1982, 1987–1992) had opened up an indirect line of dialogue in 1986 via a Redemptorist Belfast-based priest, Alec Reid. Similarly, from 1988 to 1990, secret backchannel communications not only took place between republican

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<sup>56</sup> See: “Shootings (Gibraltar)”, <https://api.parliament.uk/historic-hansard/commons/1988/mar/07/shootings-gibraltar> (last accessed 16 January 2020); “Gibraltar Bomb Sought After IRA Deaths”, *Los Angeles Times*, 03.03.1988; “British police kill ‘IRA Gang’ in Gibraltar”, *The Guardian*, 07.03.1988; “Terror network fantasy”, *An Phoblacht/Republican News*, 12.05.1988; “Gibraltar Inquest”, *An Phoblacht/Republican News*, 29.09.1988. In an interview published in a Spanish periodical at the end of March 1988, Adams dismissed suggestions of “collaboration” between ETA and the IRA. See: “No hay colaboración entre IRA y ETA”, *Interviú*, 30.03.1988. (399).

<sup>57</sup> “A Chronology of the Conflict – 1988”, <https://cain.ulster.ac.uk/othelem/chron/ch88.htm> (last accessed 16 January 2020).

<sup>58</sup> For instance, see: “On the brink of civil war. The two dark weeks that still haunt Northern Ireland”, *Irish Times*, 19.03.2018, <https://www.irishtimes.com/news/ireland/irish-news/on-the-brink-of-civil-war-the-two-dark-weeks-that-still-haunt-northern-ireland-1.3431763> (last accessed 06 April 2020).



movement figures and the SDLP, but also between senior republicans and the British security services.<sup>59</sup>

Meanwhile, in the Basque Country, the dialogue that had broken down between ETA and the Spanish government in Algiers, resumed in late 1988. When these discussions became official in January 1989, ETA declared the first (temporary) ceasefire in its history. As talks continued, ETA extended its cessation in March for a further 90 days. Despite these encouraging signs, the following month, in April 1989, the Algiers talks collapsed again — this time for good. Seemingly, ETA had demanded that the Spanish government modify a statement it had made regarding the objective of the talks. ETA's ultimatum went unheeded.<sup>60</sup>

ETA immediately resumed its armed campaign, assassinating members of the security forces, and even sending letter bombs to some of those involved in the process. For its part, the Spanish government successfully pressurised Alegria into ejecting ETA's negotiators. Moreover, the government enacted a controversial policy of dispersing ETA prisoners right across the Spanish state.<sup>61</sup>

On 20 November 1989, two masked gunmen, with suspected links to GAL, assassinated the Herri Batasuna Deputy for Bizkaia Josu Muguruza while he was having dinner with party colleagues and journalists at a Madrid hotel. With HB having dropped its policy of abstention to the Spanish Congress, Muguruza had been scheduled to attend the investiture of a new government the following day.<sup>62</sup>

While these were the main developments at play during the late 1980s in the Irish and Basque cases, seismic changes were beginning to take place in broader geopolitical terms.

Throughout the decade, the Union of Soviet Socialist Republics (USSR)'s reformist policies of *perestroika* ("listen") and *glasnost* ("openness") had gradually prised open new opportunities for individual soviet republics to pursue their own interests. When the Estonian Soviet Socialist Republic published a declaration asserting its sovereignty over the USSR's laws in November 1988, a dye was cast. Over the next few years, one by one,

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<sup>59</sup> Moloney: *A Secret History of the IRA* (2<sup>nd</sup> ed.), pp. 261–286, p. 406, pp. 677–679.

<sup>60</sup> Murua: *Ending ETA's Armed Campaign*, p. 36.

<sup>61</sup> Whitfield: *Endgame for ETA*, pp. 70–74.

<sup>62</sup> "Dos encapuchados asesinan al diputado de HB Muguruza y causan heridas graves a Esnaola", *El País*, 21.11.1989.

a slew of soviet republics behind the “Iron Curtain” became liberal parliamentary democracies. Not only had the Cold War ended — for some, so had “history” itself.<sup>63</sup>

For the main actors of this study, the fall of the socialist East presented two slightly different vistas. For the BIA, the sudden appearance of multiple independent republics across eastern Europe (and subsequently in Yugoslavia) was, naturally, a boon to democratic principles of self-determination and national sovereignty.<sup>64</sup> For Irish republicans, the same applied, but with an added question: how would the end of the Cold War affect Britain and her long-term strategic military interests, and (in the view of republicans) her presence in Ireland?<sup>65</sup>

A British military defeat and “withdrawal” from Northern Ireland along the lines of that which had been envisaged by the IRM in the early 1970s was, by now, extremely unlikely — a position seemingly accepted by senior figures in the IRA and Sinn Féin.<sup>66</sup> Nonetheless, grounds for republican optimism for what could be achieved in future negotiations were stoked by the Northern Ireland Secretary of State Peter Brooke in November 1989.

Speaking candidly on the current phase of the conflict, Brooke stated that the IRA could not be defeated militarily. He also refused to rule out comprehensive talks with Sinn Féin in the absence of violence.<sup>67</sup> While commentators differ on the motivation behind Brooke’s remarks, what is of relevance here is that his statement signalled to Irish republicans the *potential* of a new, negotiated resolution (inclusive of Sinn Féin, and by extension, the IRA) to the conflict in Ireland

Looking on at these developments, radical Basque nationalists may have wondered if a new inclusive *political* dispensation could also be achieved with Spain?

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<sup>63</sup> Edward W. Walker: *Dissolution: Sovereignty and the Breakup of the Soviet Union*, Oxford, Rowman & Littlefield, 2003, p. 63; Francis Fukuyama: *The End of History and the last Man*, London, Hamish Hamilton, 1992.

<sup>64</sup> On 15 February 1990, the Basque Parliament approved a declaration affirming a right to Basque self-determination. See: Gurutz Jáuregui: “Basque nationalism: sovereignty, independence and European integration” in John McGarry, Michael Keating (eds.): *European Integration and the Nationalities Question*, London and New York, Routledge, 2006, pp. 239–257 (specifically p. 249).

<sup>65</sup> See: Michael Cox: “Bringing in the ‘international’: the IRA ceasefire and the end of the Cold War”, *International Affairs*, 74, 3, 1997, pp. 671–693.

<sup>66</sup> Rogelio Alonso: *The IRA and Armed Struggle*, London and New York, Routledge, 2007, p. 150.

<sup>67</sup> “Irish Peace Process - Chronology of Events Leading to Peace Process (January 1988 - April 1993)”, <https://cain.ulster.ac.uk/events/peace/pp8893.htm> (last accessed 16 January 2020). Brooke’s November 1989 speech was followed up a year later by an even more significant intervention in which he stated that “the British government has no selfish strategic or economic interest in Northern Ireland”. Brooke quote cited in: Cox: “Bringing in the ‘international’: the IRA ceasefire and the end of the Cold War”, p. 682.

Within days of Brooke's remarks, *Punto y Hora de Euskal Herria* published an article titled "El Espejo Irlandés". Given the subsequent re-emergence of the "Irish mirror" in Basque/Spanish politics throughout the 1990s, and the emerging post-Cold War context in which it was written, it is worth quoting liberally from this article:

"Los últimos acontecimientos políticos ocurridos en el Reino Unido son altamente significativos y merecen una serena y seria reflexión desde todos los ámbitos de la política, tanto estatal como vasca. Peter Brooke, ministro británico para Irlanda del Norte, acaban de reconocer públicamente que 'es difícil prever una derrota militar del IRA' y manifestó su disposición a entablar negociaciones con el Sinn Féin, partido político asumido oficialmente como brazo político del IRA. Después de estas reveladoras declaraciones que cayeron, por inesperadas como una bomba en el Ulster, se han sucedido manifestaciones desde ambos lados contendientes que no hacen sino corroborar a esa gran maestra que es la Historia. [...] Lo realmente importante es que la negociación desemboque en una paz duradera y beneficiosa para todos en el Ulster y en todo el Reino Unido. Con voluntad e imaginación todo se andará en base a treguas, altos el fuego y lo que sea necesario para que acabe el torrente de sangre y sufrimiento sin vencedores ni vencidos. O mejor dicho, con una única vencedora, la PAZ. Esta Historia, presenta fuertes analogías —con distintos matices, por supuesto— con respecto al contencioso Estado español-Euskadi. [...] El espíritu de las remodelaciones está cambiando el Orbe, con la Perestroika al frente. Con voluntad, inexorablemente, muchos muros seguirán al de Berlín. La Humanidad desea Paz, condición básica para avanzar en el terreno de las conquistas materiales y espirituales. No es ninguna casualidad que el camino de la negociación esté abierto en cada vez más áreas de conflicto, Sahara-Marruecos, Palestina-Israel, FMLN-Gobierno del Salvador, FSLN-contra, Estado francés-Pueblo kánako, Gobierno inglés-IRA... Llegó la hora de solucionar por la misma vía 'la cuestión vasca' ya que la derrota política y militar de quienes en Euskadi defienden la elemental y sencilla solución de un marco jurídico-político más justo y racional es imposible".<sup>68</sup>

Speaking at the Sinn Féin Árd Fheis in February 1990 and a republican rally in Belfast one month later, HB representatives Karmelo Landa, and the aforementioned Txema Montero, both tapped into these sentiments during their respective interventions:

"In a year that is witnessing struggles for self-determination and true democracy in Eastern Europe, we want to see liberty stretch to this part of Europe as well. We are together in this struggle for national liberation and socialism throughout Europe".<sup>69</sup>

"Now everyone is a champion of self-determination with events unfolding in Eastern Europe, all wish to see people decide their own destiny, but not so in the Basque Country or in Ireland where two EC member states suppress the desire of our peoples to be free".<sup>70</sup>

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<sup>68</sup> "El espejo irlandés", *Punto y Hora de Euskal Herria*, 30.11–14.12.1989.

<sup>69</sup> "International Solidarity", *An Phoblacht/Republican News*, 08.02.1990.

<sup>70</sup> "Huge display of support", *An Phoblacht/Republican News*, 10.05.1990.

In May 1990, Montero and Landa were once again back in Ireland, this time joined by party colleague and lawyer, Txema Matanzas. At the culmination of their four-day visit, Montero affirmed his belief that resolutions to Basque and Irish issues of self-determination would be found in the near future:

“With events in Eastern Europe and South Africa grabbing headlines and becoming an issue of great debate in Europe, the question of self-determination and democracy for all peoples has come to centre stage. We are still raising the issue of Basque and Irish self-determination. I believe the 1990s will see those questions resolved”.<sup>71</sup>

Although the eventual triumph of the capitalist West in the Cold War naturally undermined the shared ideology of socialism that framed much of the IRM and BIA’s rhetoric, this was of secondary importance compared to the emerging “zeitgeist” of self-determination, fuelled by the collapsing Soviet Union.<sup>72</sup>

Not only had history not ended, but (as quoted above in “El Espejo Irlandés”) the “gran maestra que es la Historia”, was seemingly coming full circle again. Akin to the Irish Revolutionary Period seventy years beforehand, the “Irish mirror” (and its differing interpretations) was about to return as a major international reference point for radical Basque nationalists — and indeed, Basque (and Spanish) politics more generally. This “mirror” would become particularly relevant with the signing of the Downing Street Declaration in 1993, before reaching an apex in the aftermath of the Good Friday Agreement in 1998.

All the while, not only did the political party relationship between Sinn Féin and Herri Batasuna continue to strengthen, but as we shall see in the following section, it also

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<sup>71</sup> “Basque MEP applauds freedom struggle”, *An Phoblacht/Republican News*, 10.05.90.

“Many parallels between Ireland and Euskadi”, *An Phoblacht/Republican News*, 10.05.90.

<sup>72</sup> For the influence of these developments on Basque nationalism in general, see: Conversi: “Domino Effect or International Developments?”. In the view of Bean and Hayes, the Irish republican movement’s response to the post-Cold War disarray of the Left and the sense that “history was moving in other direction and that revolutionary movements were unable to shape events or effectively challenge the established order”, was: “[r]ather than being the vanguard of the Irish revolution, the Provisionals now contented themselves with being junior partners in a coalition of nationalist forces. The strategy no longer aimed to overthrow the southern state or to challenge imperialism: rather, it sought to work with these structures of power and achieve its aims through political manoeuvre and negotiation. Sinn Féin’s perspective was essentially pan-nationalist. Its strategy was diplomatic and involved working with elements of the southern political establishment, principally Fianna Fáil, the SDLP, sympathetic elements in Irish America, and the US administration. This strategy was designed to put pressure on the British government and to facilitate a compromise favourable to Irish nationalists”. Cited in: Kevin Bean, Mark Hayes: “Sinn Féin and the New Republicanism in Ireland: Electoral Progress, Political Stasis, and Ideological Failure”, *Radical History Review*, Issue 104, Spring 2009, pp. 126–142 (specifically p. 128). See also: Cox: “Bringing in the ‘international’: the IRA ceasefire and the end of the Cold War”.

became furthered enmeshed within the ancillary sectors of the broader Irish republican movement and Basque *izquierda abertzale*.

### **Towards a multistrand nexus (part II)**

“Although Sinn Féin has links with the Basque national liberation movement, in the form of the patriotic coalition, Herri Batasuna, represented now for a number of years at the *Árd Fheis*, this was the first year [1987] that a substantial Basque contingent took part in the annual international [anti-internment] commemoration. More than 50 people from Euskadi arrived in Belfast on Saturday to take part in Sunday’s parade in West Belfast in which they marched behind the green, white, and red flag of their country, the *Ikurriña*. The Falls Road echoed to the cries in Basque of support for their struggle and ours and the crowd applauded warmly. Most of the group were members of Herri Batasuna, which has the same political objectives as the Basque guerrilla army, ETA. The Basques were billeted locally, taken on a tour of points of political interest, met members of the United Campaign Against Plastic Bullets, besides attending and contributing to a number of very enjoyable social functions”.<sup>73</sup>

From the late 1970s onwards, the constellation of sectors that orbited around ETA (KAS, Herri Batasuna, *Egin*, Jarrai [youth movement], Gestos pro Amnistía [prisoner advocacy group], Askapena [international relations/outreach], etc.), tended to style themselves as forming part of a broader *Movimiento de Liberación Nacional Vasco* (MLNV).<sup>74</sup> Operating largely outside the Basque political “mainstream”, the MLNV helped to partly insulate ETA —the MLNV’s vanguard— from mounting external criticism.<sup>75</sup>

Similarly —and to borrow the Chinese revolutionary Mao Tse-tung’s famous “fish and water” analogy on guerrilla insurgents and the crucial support of the local population—, the IRA, like ETA, also required a social movement undergirding in order to survive as a relevant organisation. In fact, this was arguably even more pertinent to republicans given that blanket censorship of Sinn Féin in the Irish state completely starved the party of publicity until the 1990s.<sup>76</sup>

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<sup>73</sup> “Basques’ Solidarity Visit”, *An Phoblacht/Republican News*, 13.08.1987.

<sup>74</sup> Elorza: “Introducción. Vascos guerreros” (specifically pp. 65–68); Jesús Casquete: *En el nombre de Euskal Herria. La religión política del nacionalismo vasco radical*, Madrid, Tecnos, 2009, p. 65.

<sup>75</sup> Murua: *Ending ETA’s Armed Campaign*, p. 25. For a number of critical studies examining the internal political culture of the *izquierda abertzale*/MLNV, see: Aretxaga: *States of Terror*, (specifically, pp. 167–169); Kepa Aulestia: *HB, Crónica de un delirio*, Madrid, Temas de Hoy, 1998 (specifically pp. 92–101); Casquete: *En el nombre de Euskal Herria*; Jesús Casquete: “Epic, memory and the making of an uncivil community” in Leonisio, et al. (eds.): *ETA’s Terrorist Campaign. From Violence to Politics, 1968–2015*, pp. 87–102; Mata López: *El nacionalismo vasco radical. Discurso, organización y expresiones*.

<sup>76</sup> Mao Tse-tung: *On Guerrilla Warfare*, New York, Dover Publications, 2005, p. 93. For a short overview of the impact of the Irish state’s blanket “Section 31” ban on Sinn Féin, see: Maillot: *New Sinn Féin: Irish Republicanism in the Twenty-first Century*, pp. 74–76.

Outside the party-political (Herri Batasuna-Sinn Féin) relationship, how did the broader social movement cosmologies of radical Basque nationalism and Irish republicanism begin to interlock across the 1980s and early 1990s?

First of all, as we have seen, the 1980/1981 Hunger Strikes sparked an increasingly prominent and sympathetic interest in the Irish republican movement across radical Basque nationalist media coverage. This trajectory continued into the mid-1980s with reporters from *Punto y Hora de Euskal Herria* regularly filing articles on the Irish republican experience, especially from the republican heartlands of Belfast. Perhaps most notable in this series was a 60-page *Cuaderno* special published in December 1986.<sup>77</sup>

Secondly, in the summer of 1987, a new initiative (described in the above extract from *An Phoblacht/Republican News*) saw a large group of Basque activists arrive in Belfast to participate in an anniversary to mark the introduction of “Internment without Trial”. The following year, again in August, a similar Basque group returned. This time their visit coincided with the first ever Féile an Phobail (Festival of the Community): a week-long community celebration of west Belfast arts and culture. This second Basque contingent, consisting of a “party of 17 Basque activists, members of the KAS coalition [...] a broad front for Basque national liberation”, spent 5 days in total in Northern Ireland. During their stay, they met housing and language activists, as well as former “H-Block” prisoners, before participating in the anti-internment rally in Belfast. These successive visits, and others that would follow, signalled a new phase in the building of a multistrand Basque-Irish nexus that often blurred the lines of the party-political frameworks of Herri Batasuna and Sinn Féin.<sup>78</sup>

One of the Basque visitors to Belfast in 1988 was a young Herri Batasuna councillor named Pernando Barrena. Reflecting on this trip almost thirty years later, Barrena recalled the “tough living conditions” he witnessed in the physically divided nationalist/Catholic and loyalist/Protestant communities of west Belfast. What stayed with him was a “feeling of a very close, shared political culture between republicans and people in the Basque abertzale left”.<sup>79</sup> As we shall see, a sense of “shared political culture” between radical

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<sup>77</sup> For instance, see: “Dossier Irlanda”, *Punto y Hora de Euskal Herria*, December 1986 Cuaderno; “Balas de plástico, parte de la historia de muerte y represión en Irlanda del Norte”, *Punto y Hora de Euskal Herria*, 1–8.10.1987; “Los republicanos irlandeses no pierden la esperanza de recuperar el gaélico”, *Punto y Hora de Euskal Herria*, 19–26.11.1987; “Política de tirar a matar”, en el Ulster”, *Punto y Hora de Euskal Herria*, 3–10.03.1988.

<sup>78</sup> “Message loud and clear”, *An Phoblacht/Republican News*, 18.08.1988; “Basque Delegation”, *An Phoblacht/Republican News*, 18.08.1988. Author interview with “C”.

<sup>79</sup> Author interview with Pernando Barrena (Donostia, 2017).



Basque nationalist and Irish republican activists, especially at youth level, would become an increasingly prominent aspect of this transnational nexus.

The same year that the August trips to Belfast first began, Askapena (Freedom)— a sort of international relations/outreach wing of the *izquierda abertzale*— was formed. Not content with just reading about the likes of Belfast and other revolutionary hot spots, Askapena organised “brigades” to visit various conflictive and/or revolutionary territories such as Nicaragua, West Sahara, Cuba, and Palestine. Once in these communities, Askapena activists usually worked on local social projects. In 1990, Askapena published a 75-page dossier titled “Sinn Féin–Irlanda”. To this author’s knowledge, the international group sent its first “official” brigade to Ireland in 1993.<sup>80</sup>

Coinciding with these developments, another strand of increasing radical Basque nationalist-Irish republican interaction was around the issue of prisoners. For instance, in February 1990, a motion was passed at the Sinn Féin *Árd Fheis* in support of Basque prisoners. That summer, Brendan Hughes, a former Officer Commanding of the IRA’s Belfast Brigade and prominent leader of the hunger strikers, embarked on a ten-day trip to the Basque Country in order to “gain experience of how broad front politics translate into everyday organisational reality, and of course to offer our experience to and solidarity with the Basque struggle”. In the Winter edition of the Irish republican prisoner quarterly, *The Captive Voice/An Glór Gafa*, a lengthy “Communiqué of the Collective of the Basque Political Prisoners” was reproduced. According to the republican organ:

“The struggle of the Basque prisoners is familiar to us and, just as Thatcher failed, so too will Gonzales in his attempt to criminalise a risen people. The Irish and the Basques suffer together in the denial of sovereignty and the suppression of cultural identity”.<sup>81</sup>

Another relationship strand that also became more relevant across the late 1980s and early 1990s was that of language. According to Bairbre de Brún, a (then-)Sinn Féin activist in the international, cultural and women’s departments:

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<sup>80</sup> In the words of Askapena: “Nuestra solidaridad está dirigida a los pueblos del mundo que luchan por su liberación pero no a través de cualquier organismo, sino a través de los FRENTEs o VANGUARDIAS REPRESENTATIVOS de esos movimientos y de una forma INCONDICIONAL. La solidaridad es para ayudar en lo que nos piden”. Pamphlet titled “Askapena”. Askapena. Lazkaoko Beneditarren Fundazioa (LBF). “Sinn Féin–Irlanda”, *Herriak Aske*. P4196. Linenhall Library, Belfast (LLB). Author interview with “E”.

<sup>81</sup> See: “Basque Prisoners in Struggle”, *The Captive Voice/An Glór Gafa*. Winter 1990. The Basque prisoner piece carried in *The Captive Voice/An Glór Gafa* was subsequently reproduced in *Askatzen* — a short-lived periodical that covered the international activities of the BIA. See: *Azkatzen*, July 1991. “Euskadi visit an inspiration”, *An Phoblacht/Republican News*, 21.06.1990. See also: “News from inside out”, *An Phoblacht/Republican News*, 06.12.90.

“The language was a huge question for us. Even parallel from the work that would have happened within the political parties [Sinn Féin and Herri Batasuna], and the importance of the language within the political parties, there was also a[n Irish] language movement. So, I was involved in the Irish language movement and would have had... —quite apart from connections that you would have had made in terms of your political work— I also would have had links [with Basques] through work on minority languages in Europe. Not that Irish in the South was a minority language, but we were stuck in the state here [UK]. At that stage, we didn’t have any protection for the Irish language whatsoever — quite the opposite in fact. So, we were battling to get recognition of Irish as a minority language protected by the EU charter. So, that was an arena in which some of the other movements, in Wales and the Basque Country, were quite strongly organised and dealt with minority languages in Europe. [...] The Basques, at that stage, in those years, had an MEP, and we didn’t. So, at that stage, it would have been they who were inviting me into the European Parliament as a way of meeting with other people”.<sup>82</sup>

De Brún helped to launch a translation by Mixel Sarasketa of Bobby Sands’ prison writings into Euskara during a ten-day tour of the Basque Country in October 1991.<sup>83</sup>

By 1991, the numbers of Basques attending the annual Belfast Féile an Phobail/Anti-Internment double-header had swollen to 150, “made up of representatives from organisations in Euskadi, including cultural, political prisoners, youth and ecological groups”.<sup>84</sup> That same year, Txalaparta, the *izquierda abertzale*’s publishing house, translated and published a Spanish version of Gerry Adams’ “The Politics of Irish Freedom” — titled “Hacia la libertad de Irlanda” in Spanish. Pernando Barrena, who was working in Txalaparta at the time, recalls the importance of Adams’ book in knitting together the hitherto disparate references, landmark figures, and images of Irish republicanism in radical Basque nationalist circles:

“At the moment [2017], it’s easy to get any information in the world in two seconds; but at that time, the Irish reality —we’re talking about the early 90s— it was not so easy to know what was happening in a place 2000 kilometres from here. And you know, the references from here were so few: *Ireland, the IRA, the Hunger Strike, the ‘Troubles’, Gerry Adams*, what else? [...] When we had the opportunity to publish Gerry Adams’ book, I remember that for a small publishing house, for us, it was important [...] it was important to offer information about what was going on there [in Ireland], because the feeling of sympathy was quite significant”.<sup>85</sup>

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<sup>82</sup> “Rome Conference”, *An Phoblacht/Republican News*, 03.03.1988. Author interview with Bairbre de Brún (Belfast, 2016).

<sup>83</sup> “Heart Warming Solidarity”, *An Phoblacht/Republican News*, 03.10.91.

<sup>84</sup> “Learning about the Basque struggle”, *An Phoblacht/Republican News*, 01.08.1991; “Herri Batasunaren Kanpoko Etzinzak”, *Azkatzen*, December 1991; “West Belfast Festival”, *An Phoblacht/Republican News*, 08.08.1991; “Celebration of endurance and resistance”, *An Phoblacht/Republican News*, 15.08.1991.

<sup>85</sup> Author interview with Pernando Barrena (Donostia, 2017).

1992 continued in a similar vein. In February, HB staged a protest outside the British Consulate in Bilbo after three Sinn Féin councillors had been gunned down in their offices by a loyalist paramilitary group. Askapena also extended its solidarity with the “relatives and friends of those killed” and encouraged Sinn Féin to continue in its “struggle for Irish freedom”.

In March, the Basque women’s organisation Egizan (Do It) invited Aine Connolly of Sinn Féin’s International Department to speak in the Basque Country on the occasion of International Women’s Day. In addition to presenting Sinn Féin as the Irish political party with the “most progressive stance on the rights of women”, Connolly also met with the families of ETA prisoners dispersed in jails across Spain. Later that month, the *An Phoblacht/Republican News* editor and Sinn Féin FAB representative Mícheál Mac Donncha attended a prisoner-themed conference in Arantzazu, Gipuzkoa. Lastly of note, in June, Sinn Féin activists picketed the Spanish Embassy in Dublin in solidarity with Basque prisoners.<sup>86</sup>

Reflecting on the increasingly close relations between both movements over the previous few years, Herri Batasuna representative Karlos Rodríguez spoke to a large crowd in Belfast in August 1992:

“For many years, Ireland and the Basque Country have shown a real and sincere solidarity [from] one to each other. This solidarity between Irish and Basque people comes from the fact that our fights as nations towards freedom have many things in common. It is a natural feeling between two countries in struggle. During our stay in the north of Ireland, we the Basque people have been visiting many republican prisoners in British prisons. We have had the opportunity to learn more about the repression here, which is very similar to Spanish repression of our people. But above all we have learnt the real meaning of the word ‘strength’ and ‘morale’. With people like you, Ireland will soon be free”.<sup>87</sup>

Unlike the routine visits of HB political representatives to the Árd Fheis, which usually took place in the leafy environs of Dublin city’s Mansion House, the transnational relations and contact points outlined heretofore in this section (and in “Towards a multistrand nexus (part I)”) occurred across various loosely-organised prisoner, language, international and women’s strands. Indeed, one could suggest that the annual Basque pilgrimage to Belfast every August (from 1987 onwards) opened a far more conducive space for transnational exchanges and transfers of ideas, ideologies, strategies and tactics

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<sup>86</sup> “We will not be sold short”, *An Phoblacht/Republican News*, 27.02.1992; “Sinn Féin in Euskadi”, *An Phoblacht/Republican News* 19.03.1992; “Working for peace on 3 continents”, *An Phoblacht/Republican News* 09.04.1992; “Basque solidarity picket”, *An Phoblacht/Republican News* 11.06.1992.

<sup>87</sup> “People power”, *An Phoblacht/Republican News*, 13.08.1992.

between radical Basque nationalists and Irish republicans.<sup>88</sup> Moreover, through repetition and the building up of personal relationships, a ritualised “shared culture” may be said to have begun to emerge within the overlap of the two social movements.<sup>89</sup>

One very evident example of this was a mural painted by “members of the Basque delegation” and “Sliabh Dubh Sinn Féin cumann” —a local Sinn Féin branch— on Rossnareen Avenue, Belfast in August 1992. The mural consisted of a group of silhouetted figures standing in front of Irish and Basque flags. Written in Gaeilge and Euskara was “Dhá Chine Aon Choimhlint” and “Bi Herri Borroka Bat” [Two Peoples, One struggle], respectively. “Independence” was also written in English. Commenting on the new mural, a reporter for *An Phoblacht/Republican News* surmised its theme as:

“[...] straightforward: the Basque and Irish struggle is the same for both people. That this message is on a wall in West Belfast is testimony to the links of solidarity and respect that has built up over the years between the republican people in Ireland and the people of Euskadi”.<sup>90</sup>

Ideas shared, knowledge exchanged, and personal relationships reinforced, “grassroots” level transnational relations between radical Basque nationalists and Irish republicans also dovetailed seamlessly with the party-political nexus throughout the late 1980s and early 1990s.

For instance, one republican contributor recalls going to the Basque Country in 1988 and being “astounded” and “overwhelmed” by the vibrancy of the youth and social movement culture. Suitably impressed, “D” decided to stay. From 1989 until the late 1990s, “D” liaised as a “sort of intermediary” with another Sinn Féin figure regarding the back and forth of Askapena delegations to Ireland. These meetings, which usually brought together ex-prisoners and language activists, were always “specifically centred on Sinn Féin and Sinn Féin guidance”, with meetings and agendas typically “set out months in advance”.<sup>91</sup>

Finally, and notwithstanding the general decrease in media interest around the military strand of relations between the two movements, suggestions of ETA-IRA contacts and

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<sup>88</sup> “Celebrating resistance”, *An Phoblacht/Republican News*, 10.08.1989; “Celebrating resistance”, *An Phoblacht/Republican News*, 17.08.1989; “Welcome for international visitors”, *An Phoblacht/Republican News* 09.08.1990.

<sup>89</sup> As noted in chapter one, Pascal Pragnère puts forward the premise of a cross movement BIA-IRM “shared culture”. See: Pragnère: “Exporter la guerre – importer la paix. Dimensions transnationales de deux conflits nationalistes. Irlande du Nord, Pays Basque”. In the view of the scholar, David I Kertzer, “rituality” in political organisations serves to produce links of solidarity. Cited in: Mata López: *El nacionalismo vasco radical. Discurso, organización y expresiones*, p. 76.

<sup>90</sup> “Murals express international solidarity”, *An Phoblacht/Republican News*, 27.08.1992.

<sup>91</sup> Author interview with “D”.

cooperation still occasionally cropped up. A synopsis of the most serious of these claims appeared in an *El País* article in January 1990. Spanish security intelligence was said to have “conclusive evidence” of “close logistical collaboration” between ETA and the IRA. In particular, this collaboration had assisted in the construction of ETA’s improvised “Jo Ta Ke” mortars.<sup>92</sup>

## 5.2. The Irish mirror

“The Prime Minister, on behalf of the British Government, reaffirms that they will uphold the democratic wish of a greater number of the people of Northern Ireland on the issue of whether they prefer to support the Union or a sovereign united Ireland. On this basis, he reiterates, on behalf of the British Government, that they have no selfish strategic or economic interest in Northern Ireland. Their primary interest is to see peace, stability and reconciliation established by agreement among all the people who inhabit the island, and they will work together with the Irish Government to achieve such an agreement, which will embrace the totality of relationships. The role of the British Government will be to encourage, facilitate and enable the achievement of such agreement over a period through a process of dialogue and co-operation based on full respect for the rights and identities of both traditions in Ireland. They accept that such agreement may, as of right, take the form of agreed structures for the island as a whole, including a united Ireland achieved by peaceful means on the following basis. The British Government agree that it is for the people of the island of Ireland alone, by agreement between the two parts respectively, to exercise their right of self-determination on the basis of consent, freely and concurrently given, North and South, to bring about a united Ireland, if that is their wish. They reaffirm as a binding obligation that they will, for their part, introduce the necessary legislation to give effect to this, or equally to any measure of agreement on future relationships in Ireland which the people living in Ireland may themselves freely so determine without external impediment”.<sup>93</sup>

The Downing Street Declaration (DSD), signed by the British Prime Minister John Major and the Irish Taoiseach Albert Reynolds on 15 December 1993, effectively set out the two governments’ agreed parameters for a peace accord in Ireland. With one hand, the DSD recognised the principle of Irish self-determination; with the other, it set out the strict conditions by which this self-determination could be exercised: concurrently, North and South.

By any objective metric, the formula for Irish self-determination envisaged in the DSD fell far short of traditional/orthodox Irish nationalist and republican principles of *national* self-determination on a unitary basis. Moreover, the principle of “consent” that was at the heart of the DSD (i.e., the consent of a majority in Northern Ireland to any future change

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<sup>92</sup> “El IRA aporta a ETA material e información técnica para realizar atentados”, *El País*, 08.01.1990.

<sup>93</sup> “Joint Declaration on Peace: The Downing Street Declaration, Wednesday 15 December 1993”, <https://cain.ulster.ac.uk/events/peace/docs/dsd151293.htm> (last accessed 18 January 2020).

in the territory's constitutional status), effectively equated, in traditional republican parlance, to the maintenance of a "unionist veto" on Irish unity. Ergo, a minority community with a manufactured in-built majority in six northern counties could continue to frustrate the will of a sizeable island-wide majority in favour of Irish unity.<sup>94</sup>

Despite these inescapable factors, Sinn Féin's immediate reaction to the DSD was circumspect. The party sought clarifications on various aspects of the declaration from the British government before approaching the IRA Army Council.<sup>95</sup>

The DSD was, in fact, the culmination of nearly a decade of mostly secret backchannel talks. As referenced earlier, indirect communications between Gerry Adams and Charles Haughey were followed by public and private talks between Adams and the SDLP leader John Hume in the late 1980s and early 1990s. During their talks, Hume and Adams explored different formulations of Irish self-determination. When the two men agreed a draft document in August 1991, it was modified by Irish government officials and subsequently brought to the British as the basis for intergovernmental dialogue.<sup>96</sup>

In the meantime, talks between Hume and Adams continued, culminating in a joint proposal in April 1993. The "Hume-Adams Proposal" argued that the Irish people "as a whole" had the right to self-determination. Signed seven months later between Major and Reynolds, the DSD was effectively an inter-governmental squeeze on "Hume-Adams", ensuring that the proposal fit tightly within unionist red lines. Thus, using the type of ambiguous language that would define the process, the DSD simultaneously acknowledged the Irish right to self-determination, whilst upholding the principle of unionist (the majority community in Northern Ireland) "consent".

Following the British government's "clarifications" to Sinn Féin on various aspects of the DSD, and a fourth Hume-Adams statement (28 August) reiterating their position, on 31 August 1994 the IRA sensationally announced a "complete cessation of military operations". To the surprise of many, the organisation stated its "belief that an opportunity to secure a just and lasting settlement has been created". The statement continued: "We

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<sup>94</sup> Opinion polls have consistently shown that a large majority in the Irish state favour Irish unity. This, of course, does not mean that it has been a priority issue. English: *Irish Freedom*, pp. 421–422.

<sup>95</sup> "British Response to Sinn Fein Request for Clarification of the Joint Declaration on Peace: The Downing Street Declaration, (19 May 1994)", <https://cain.ulster.ac.uk/issues/politics/docs/nio/nio190594.htm> (last accessed 18 January 2020).

<sup>96</sup> For the intricate details of this process, see the chapter "Stepping Stones" in Moloney: *A Secret History of the IRA* (2<sup>nd</sup> ed.), pp. 261–286.



note that the Downing Street Declaration is not a solution, nor was it presented as such by its authors. A solution will only be found as a result of inclusive negotiations”.<sup>97</sup>

In the year leading up to the IRA ceasefire, inter-paramilitary tensions had resulted in some particularly gruesome atrocities. The previous October (1993), the IRA had attempted to assassinate the entire leadership of the Ulster Defence Association above a “fish & chip” shop on the staunchly loyalist Shankill Road in Belfast. The bomb exploded prematurely, killing 10 people (8 civilians, 1 UDA member, and one of the two IRA bombers). A week later, the Ulster Freedom Fighters (UFF) —a cover name often used by the UDA— carried out a “revenge” attack. Eight people were gunned down in a packed bar frequented by Catholics in Greysteel (Glas Stiall), Derry. Several “tit for tat” attacks between republican and loyalist paramilitary groups ensued. Others were of a purely sectarian nature. On 18 June 1994, the UVF killed six catholic men in a bar as they watched a televised World Cup match in the town of Loughinisland (Loch an Oileáin). As one former IRA militant put it:

“Shortly before the ceasefire [...] I think Northern Ireland was moving towards a Bosnia-type abyss. How do you respond to the slaughter of shopfuls of people buying food or old men having a pint? Bombing a street; then a whole village; and then the bloody expulsion from cities and regions. It is to the credit of both republicans and loyalists that they walked up to the edge of the abyss, peered over, gulped, then stepped back”.

On 13 October 1994, the Combined Loyalist Military Command (CLMC) —an overarching body of loyalist paramilitary groups— issued its own ceasefire.<sup>98</sup>

Details and analysis of how the republican movement ended up in the subsequent negotiations that led to the Good Friday Agreement of 1998 have been concisely dealt with elsewhere.<sup>99</sup> Here, for the moment, what is of more relevance is to gauge the impact of this crucial juncture of Irish history (DSD to GFA) on the development of relations

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<sup>97</sup> “Irish Republican Army (IRA) Ceasefire Statement, 31 August 1994”, <https://cain.ulster.ac.uk/events/peace/docs/ira31894.htm> (last accessed 18 January 2020). The fourth Hume-Adams stated affirmed: “All that has been tried before has failed to satisfactorily resolve the conflict or remove the political conditions which give rise to it. If a lasting settlement is to be found there must be a fundamental and thorough-going change, based on the right of the Irish people as a whole to national self-determination”. “Joint statement issued by John Hume and Gerry Adams”, <https://cain.ulster.ac.uk/events/peace/docs/ha28894.htm> (last accessed 13 April 2020).

<sup>98</sup> Eamon Collins: *Killing Rage*, London, Granta Books, 1997, pp. 8–9. “CLMC Ceasefire Statement”, <https://cain.ulster.ac.uk/events/peace/docs/clmc131094.htm> (last accessed 13 April 2020).

<sup>99</sup> For example, see: English: *Armed Struggle*, pp. 263–299; English: *Irish Freedom*, pp. 403–408; Feeney: *Sinn Féin. A Hundred Turbulent Years*, pp. 376–426; Moloney: *A Secret History of the IRA* (2<sup>nd</sup> ed.), pp. 284–486; O’Brien: *The Long War. The IRA & Sinn Féin* (3<sup>rd</sup> ed.), pp. 230–394.

between radical Basque nationalists and Irish republicans, and the wider Basque contention.

### **You who have inspired us for so long**

“Desde un punto de vista político, yo no tengo ninguna duda que una declaración formal hecha por un Lehendakari Vasco y por un Presidente Español reproduciendo de manera muy similar los términos del Downing Street para el caso Irlanda, resolvería en un noventa por ciento el problema de convivencia política entre Euskadi y España para el siglo veintiuno”.<sup>100</sup>  
(Juan José Ibarretxe)

“En el contexto geográfico en que nos movemos, una declaración así abriría condiciones para un futuro diferente en este país. Evidentemente, tendría que ser un Downing Street al estilo español, y hecha por el presidente del Gobierno español, en la que al final reconociera la existencia de la nación vasca y se comprometiera a respetar lo que los partidos políticos acordáramos en una mesa de solución”.<sup>101</sup>  
(Arnaldo Otegi)

The Downing Street Declaration of December 1993 brought significant *political* international attention to Northern Ireland for the first time since the Anglo-Irish Agreement of 1985. And while the 1985 agreement saw Margaret Thatcher’s British government recognise an “Irish Dimension” to what she had previously insisted was an internal UK matter, the DSD lent itself to various malleable interpretations of Irish “self-determination”. Perhaps the more green-tinged of these interpretations would prove attractive to Basque nationalists, who could, in turn, point to Spanish obstinance on the same issue?

In the days following the joint declaration, Lehendakari José Antonio Ardanza stated that the accord had, as “its point of departure [...] an acceptance of the right to [Irish] self-determination”.<sup>102</sup> Meanwhile, his *jeltzale* compatriot Iñaki Anasagasti suggested that although the “hard right” impeded the chance of any such pact in the Basque Country, “ahora, cualquier negociación con los vascos se considera, poco menos, que como una venta de la patria”. Herri Batasuna, in a mirror of Sinn Féin’s position, was initially more circumspect — an analysis that would change over the coming years. A statement issued by the party said that the agreement:

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<sup>100</sup> Author interview with Juan José Ibarretxe (Leioa, 2017).

<sup>101</sup> Iñaki Iriondo, Ramón Sola: *Mañana, Euskal Herria. Entrevista con Arnaldo Otegi*, Bilbao, Baigorri Argitaletxea, 2005, pp. 166–167.

<sup>102</sup> Cited in: “Ulster initiative gives Spain a delicate problem”, *The Guardian*, 18.12.1993.

“[...] muestra un reconocimiento de la esencia política del problema y, por tanto, de la necesidad de darle soluciones políticas, y esto es algo sobre lo que otros gobiernos deberían tomar buena nota”.<sup>103</sup>

Spanish politicians were less eager to make the same types of Irish-Basque analogies. Minister of the Interior Antonio Asunción rejected the prospect of a similar declaration, reportedly citing the different terrorist problems posed by the IRA and ETA, and the unique solutions required for each case, as major factors. Likewise, Secretary General of Partido Socialista de Euskadi-Euskadiko Ezkerra (PSE-EE), Ramón Jáuregui, brushed off analogies between the two cases.<sup>104</sup>

Despite these confident dismissals, the DSD inevitably raised questions regarding Spain’s willingness to deal with the *political* aspects—and the not just the security aspect, (i.e., ETA)—of the Basque contention. As one British journalist put it, the Downing Street Declaration had “shattered a widespread assumption that the Basque problem should be easier to solve than the Irish one and has created a delicate problem for the Madrid government”.<sup>105</sup>

For the Spanish government, resolving the “Basque problem” meant one thing: defeating ETA. Any political contention, as far as Madrid was concerned, had already been catered for in the Spanish Constitution. Moreover, for Madrid, a *major* step towards the eventual liquidation of ETA had been achieved the previous year.

On 29 March 1992, in the Lapurdian village of Bidarte (Bidart), French police arrested what amounted to ETA’s effective leadership in one fell swoop. Finding themselves surrounded at an isolated chalet, Francisco Múgica Garmendia (*Pakito*), José Luis Álvarez Santacristina (*Txelis*) and Joseba Arregi Erostarbe (*Fitipaldi*) offered no resistance to the French security forces. Coming only months before a planned escalation of attacks to coincide with the World Expo in Sevilla and the summer Olympics in Barcelona, “la caída de Bidart” was a massive blow to ETA. And although the

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<sup>103</sup> Cited in: “El PNV dice que el Ejército impide una solución para Euskadi como la del Ulster”, *El Mundo del País Vasco*, 17.12.1993.

<sup>104</sup> Cited in: “El PNV dice que el Ejército impide una solución para Euskadi como la del Ulster”, *El Mundo del País Vasco*, 17.12.1993. “El tema del Ulster reabre la polémica sobre la autodeterminación en Euskadi”, *Deia*, 18.12.1993. See also: “Críticas al PNV del PSOE y PP”, *El Diario Vasco*, 18.12.1993. PSE and EE had merged earlier in the year.

<sup>105</sup> “Ulster initiative gives Spain a delicate problem”, *The Guardian*, 18.12.1993.

organisation managed to regroup under a new leadership cadre, the broad consensus among historians and analysts is that this recovery was only ever partial.<sup>106</sup>

Shortly after ETA's forced change of leadership —although not necessarily related to it— the organisation's strategic and tactical focus began to shift. Running parallel with creating the conditions for negotiations ("KAS Alternativa") with Spain, the MLNV set itself the task of building a Basque nation across all sectors of society.<sup>107</sup>

All the while, a new tactic known as "socialisation of the suffering" saw ETA steadily increase its range of targets to include political opponents (usually PP and PSOE representatives), members of the judiciary, journalists, university professors and the local Basque police (Ertzaintza).

Dovetailing with the increase in targets, organised groups of radical nationalist youths began to engage in "Kale Borroka" (Street Struggle) across urban centres of the Basque Country. Acts of "Kale Borroka" typically involved the smashing up of bank machines, erecting street barricades, setting rubbish bins alight, and attacking the offices of political opponents and institutional buildings (post offices, train stations, etc). "Kale Borroka" continued throughout the 1990s.<sup>108</sup>

ETA also continued to replenish its coffers through a "revolutionary tax". For those who did not pay up, the consequences were grim. For instance, having failed to pay the levy, the Basque industrialist Julio Iglesia Zamora was kidnapped on 05 July 1993 by the paramilitaries. It was only after 116 days in captivity, and the payment of between 500–800 million pesetas, that he was released back to his family.<sup>109</sup>

Incidentally, on the occasion of Iglesia Zamora's 100<sup>th</sup> day in captivity, Alex Maskey was presented at a Herri Batasuna rally in Iruñea as part of an "Initiative for a Social Debate on the Right to Self-Determination". Maskey, who one journalist referred to as "the star attraction", addressed the crowd:

"You who have inspired us for so long [...] I bring Sinn Féin's best wishes to your comrades who are dispersed in various prisons [...]. The many forms of oppression used by the Spanish state are similar to those used by the British state to deny us our rights. Many of your forms of struggle, too, are similar to ours. The independence struggle in Ireland has reached a new stage of intensification. We

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<sup>106</sup> For two of many examples, see: Diego Muro: "ETA during democracy, 1975–2011 in Leonisio *et al.* (eds.): *ETA's Terrorist Campaign. From Violence to Politics, 1968–2015*, pp. 35–53 (specifically pp. 44–45); Murua: *Ending ETA's Armed Campaign*, pp. 37–38.

<sup>107</sup> Murua: *Ending ETA's Armed Campaign*, p. 39.

<sup>108</sup> Mees: *The Basque Contention*, pp. 187–188.

<sup>109</sup> "ETA seguía cobrando de la familia de Iglesias Zamora, secuestrado en 1993", *El Mundo*, 08.07.2006, <https://www.elmundo.es/elmundo/2006/07/07/espana/1152296894.html> (last accessed 03 February 2020).

have told the British state ‘we will never allow you to govern us in peace’. A negotiated settlement is the only chance for peace. Without negotiation, there will be no peace”.<sup>110</sup>

Following Maskey’s visit, the real “star attraction” of the Irish republican movement, Gerry Adams, arrived in the Basque Country for the first time seven months later. Adams’ interest in Basque affairs was apparently piqued in the late 1980s by the aforementioned Father Alec Reid. It was around this time that the Redemptorist had been approached by a Basque priest, Joseba Segura, at the behest of the (then) Bishop of Bilbo, Juan María Uriarte. Reid had subsequently organised a series of meetings between Adams and Segura.<sup>111</sup>

Landing in Bilbo on 09 May 1994, the Sinn Féin leader was met by traditional Basque dancers and presented with a Makila — a ceremonial staff used by Basque cattle-herders. Having addressed a crowd in a Bilbo cinema on the latest developments (or lack thereof) in the Irish peace process, Adams set off for a press conference in Madrid, which was followed by a visit to Gernika. According to *An Phoblacht/Republican News*, throughout the whistle-stop tour:

“[...] Adams repeatedly referred to the triumph of the African National Congress in South Africa and the swearing in of Nelson Mandela as the first democratically-elected president. He said that these events, almost unimaginable only a few short years ago, have fanned the hope that true and lasting peace will be reached in the near future in Ireland as well as in Euskadi”.<sup>112</sup>

Within weeks of Adams’ visit, a sizeable 10,000 strong “Sinn Féin/Herri Batasuna rally of solidarity” took place in Donostia. Led by Karmelo Landa and Pat Rice, the crowd marched from the city centre to Anoeta Stadium, where tributes were reportedly paid to Basque and Irish prisoners.<sup>113</sup>

When news of the IRA’s ceasefire (in response to the DSD) filtered through on 31 August 1994, a second round of diverging analyses regarding the IRA, (Northern) Ireland and Britain as suitable allegorical references for ETA, the Basque Country and Spain, ensued. From among the wall-to-wall press coverage, of note was an editorial in the right-wing Spanish nationalist daily *ABC*, which bluntly stated: “no existe ningún paralelismo posible entre el IRA y la banda mafiosa y asesina vasca de ETA [...]”.<sup>114</sup>

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<sup>110</sup> “Basques reveal burning desire for compromise”, *The Independent*, 13.10.1993.

<sup>111</sup> “Gerry ‘Secretos’ Adams, *Vanity Fair*, 21.11.2011. See also: Whitfield: *Endgame for ETA*, p. 87. Reid would continue his interest in Basque affairs. See chapter six.

<sup>112</sup> “Adams in Euskadi”, *An Phoblacht/Republican News*, 19.05.1994.

<sup>113</sup> “Solidarity with Basques”, *An Phoblacht/Republican News*, 09.06.1994.

<sup>114</sup> “Sin IRA”, *ABC*, 01.09.1994.

Sinn Féin-Herri Batasuna inter-party relations continued to strengthen. In October, a little less than two months after the IRA had declared its historic ceasefire, a “Declaración conjunta de las mesas nacionales del Sinn Féin y de Herri Batasuna” was signed, “[...] consecuencia de las recientes reuniones entre delegaciones de ambas formaciones políticas en Felons, Irlanda”.<sup>115</sup> Unlike the revolutionary rhetoric of the Provisional IRA-ETA declarations of the early 1970s, the “Felons” declaration was grounded in the principle of “self-determination”, conflict resolution and dialogue. It read:

“Saludamos los encuentros que han tenido lugar recientemente entre las delegaciones del Sinn Féin y Herri Batasuna como expresión de la solidaridad entre el Pueblo Vasco y el Irlandés y de la larga tradición de cooperación política entre ambas formaciones. Nos reafirmamos en la labor de búsqueda de una paz justa y duradera para los Pueblos Vasco e Irlandés basada en el reconocimiento de los principios democráticos. Comprendiendo claramente que el pilar de la democracia es el reconocimiento y ejercicio del derecho de autodeterminación sin ningún impedimento externo. Nos anima el desarrollo de la resolución de los conflictos a nivel internacional basado en acuerdos negociados. Conflictos que anteriormente parecían irresolubles han sido resueltos. Es evidente que el dialogo entre todas las partes existentes en un conflicto es un elemento llave en el desarrollo de cualquier proceso de paz. Nosotros apoyamos completamente desarrollo del proceso de paz en Irlanda y todas las medidas que supongan una contribución positiva para su consecución. Expresamos nuestro deseo de que en el conflicto que vive Euskal Herria con el Estado español se supere por la vía del dialogo”.<sup>116</sup>

Herri Batasuna was not the only Basque actor taking a serious interest in the development of the Irish peace process. A mere eight days after the IRA ceasefire, two members of the Basque peace movement, Elkarrri (Together), embarked on a fact-finding mission to Belfast in order to “conocer las claves del proceso de paz”.<sup>117</sup>

Founded by a former Herri Batasuna councillor Jonan Fernández in December 1992, Elkarrri’s stated modus operandi was based on “una idea central: la situación de conflicto y violencia que afecta al País Vasco debe encontrar una solución por la vida de un diálogo multipartidario y no excluyente”.<sup>118</sup> Gorka Espiau, one of Elkarrri’s leading figures, recalls that the movement attempted to occupy an “empty space, where most of Basque society was [...] — a majority against the use of violence, but also against the state’s approach”.<sup>119</sup> Occupying this space would be difficult. Elkarrri’s stance against ETA’s

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<sup>115</sup> “Felons” is a social club in Belfast steeped in the republican tradition. See: “The Felons of our Land”, <https://www.dannymorrison.com/wp-content/dannymorrisonarchive/171.htm> (last accessed 03 February 2020). Three flags: one Irish, one Basque and one Palestinian, have flown above Felons for decades.

<sup>116</sup> “Declaración conjunta de las mesas nacionales del Sinn Féin y de Herri Batasuna”. Dated 21 October 1994. Elkarrri. LBF.

<sup>117</sup> “Informe sobre la visita de elkarrri de Belfast”. Dated 22 September 1994. Euskal Herria. Elkarrri. LBF.

<sup>118</sup> “Sobre la situación del proceso vasco hacia la paz”. Dated 10 November 1999. Donostia. Elkarrri. LBF.

<sup>119</sup> Author interview with Gorka Espiau (Leioa, 2017).



violence meant that relations with Herri Batasuna were frosty from the outset. Conversely, owing to its founder's political background, and its advocacy for a *political* solution to the Basque contention, Elkarri was accused by HB's opponents of driving a radical Basque nationalist agenda.<sup>120</sup>

Caught between a rock and a hard place, Elkarri slowly built a network across the Basque Country in its first year. The Downing Street Declaration of December 1993 and the IRA's subsequent ceasefire of August 1994 provided a shot in the arm to the group's *raison d'être*.

An internal report of Elkarri's September 1994 trip to Northern Ireland shows that the group held interviews with Sinn Féin's National Chairperson Tom Hartley and the SDLP's Head of International Affairs, Denis Haughey. In summation, the trip to Ireland:

“[...] ha merecido la pena. El balance es realmente positivo. No sólo porque se hayan cumplido los objetivos previstos sino porque ha servido para aprender muchas cosas y para analizar el papel de Elkarri en el conflicto vasco a través de la referencia de un proceso de paz en marcha. Además, este movimiento social ha dejado canales de comunicación abiertos con todos los agentes con los que se ha entrevistado. El proceso de paz en Irlanda va a tener en Euskadi mucha más influencia de la que es posible imaginar ahora. Se sugiere, por eso a la militancia que siga de cerca el desarrollo del proceso. Se recomienda también evitar las comparaciones miméticas, sin despreciar las enseñanzas de aquella experiencia”.<sup>121</sup>

Yet another Basque actor made a noteworthy visit to Ireland in 1995. Breaking with tradition, HB's Karmelo Landa was joined at the Sinn Féin Árd Fheis by Begoña Lasagabaster of Eusko Alkartasuna (EA). According to Pat Rice:

“We consulted with Batasuna. I don't think the initiative came from them. I think the initiative came from us [...]. But certainly, Batasuna was happy about that. She [Lasagabaster] wasn't so happy at the event because [although] she was a Basque, the 'real' Basques were Batasuna! I mean, they were the ones who were getting the ovations and who were obviously a more important partner than they [EA] were, so we didn't renew”.<sup>122</sup>

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<sup>120</sup> For example, see: Alonso: “Pathways Out of Terrorism in Northern Ireland and the Basque Country: The Misrepresentation of the Irish Model”; “La otra vía irlandesa”, *El País*, 31.98.1995.

<sup>121</sup> “Informe sobre la visita de Elkarri de Belfast”. Dated 22 September 1994. Elkarri. LBF.

<sup>122</sup> Author interview with Pat Rice (Belfast, 2017). See: “Ireland high on international agenda”, *An Phoblacht/Republican News*, 02.05.1995. The EA representative Lasagabaster did in fact return to the Árd Fheis the following year. On this second occasion, the other Basque figure in attendance was HB's Karlos Rodríguez. See: “International support for Sinn Féin”, *An Phoblacht/Republican News*, 28.03.1996.

In July, Basque prisoner advocates from Semideak (Relatives) highlighted the “common plight” of Basque and Irish “POWs” whilst attending a conference in Ireland. A picket was also organised outside the Spanish Embassy in Dublin.<sup>123</sup>

Almost a year on from the IRA ceasefire of 31 August 1994, the inclusive all-party talks that this move was supposed to herald had still not materialised. As documented by Moloney, with Sinn Féin no closer to the negotiating table, there were considerable rumblings within the IRA Executive (from which the Army Council was selected), and among local IRA brigades regarding the Adams-led strategy.<sup>124</sup>

Approaching the first anniversary of the cessation, Sinn Féin organised protests against the impasse. Additionally, the party called upon:

“[...] support groups internationally to join with us in any way they can to publicly highlight the situation and to demand all-party talks now. We hope that you can assist us and please let us know details of any pickets, vigils or protests mounted”.<sup>125</sup>

Judging by a print date on a copy viewed by this author, the above communication from Sinn Féin seemingly reached Elkarri on 10 August 1995. Within days, the peace movement had organised a conference to be held on 01 September in the Carlton Hotel in Bilbo. A demonstration was also planned for the following day through the streets of Donostia under the banner: “Irlandako Bake Prozesoren alde. Diálogo sin exclusions”. For Elkarri, the upcoming double-header event would have two interrelated objectives:

“Estos actos están centrados en la solidaridad con el proceso de paz de Irlanda, pero tienen al mismo tiempo una repercusión directa en la situación política vasca y, fundamentalmente, en la esperanza de solución dialogada. Irlanda es, ahora, sobre todo, un horizonte de esperanza para los vascos. Por eso, este pueblo no es ajeno a lo que ocurra en Irlanda. De esta manera, estas convocatorias son un llamamiento directo a todas aquellas personas y sectores que aprecian en el proceso de paz de Irlanda una referencia de esperanza y de solución al conflicto vasco”.<sup>126</sup>

Invitations to the Bilbo conference were subsequently sent by Elkarri to Sinn Féin, the SDLP, and all the major Basque and Navarrese parties.

Karlos Rodríguez confirmed that HB would attend the conference, but would decline to participate in the planned march, stating that Elkarri “no favorece el proceso de paz”. Furthermore, Rodríguez stated: “no vamos a desfilar con gentes como Atutxa [Interior

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<sup>123</sup> “Basque and Irish POWs have common plight”, *An Phoblacht/Republican News*, 06.07.1995.

<sup>124</sup> Moloney: *A Secret History of the IRA* (2<sup>nd</sup> ed.), pp. 438–439.

<sup>125</sup> “Letter from Laurence McKeown, Sinn Féin Foreign Affairs”. Undated. Sinn Féin, Belfast. Elkarri. LBF.

<sup>126</sup> “Rueda de prensa: ‘Euskal Herria es el pueblo del mundo con mayor atención sigue el proceso de paz irlandés’”. Dated 21 August 1995. Donostia. Elkarri. LBF.

Minister of the Basque Country], que son responsables directos de la represión y de colaborar con las bandas de la Guardia Civil”.<sup>127</sup> Perhaps relatedly, Sinn Féin also gave notice of its absence from the conference — although the official reason communicated to Elkarri was the party’s heavy workload on the anniversary of the IRA ceasefire.<sup>128</sup>

Given that the conference had come about on foot of a Sinn Féin appeal, it was somewhat ironic that it was left to Denis Haughey of the SDLP to provide the only Irish angle on the developing peace process at the Bilbo conference. Haughey recalls:

“[Elkarri] wanted John Hume to come over for the first anniversary of the ceasefire [...]. John was a wee bit apprehensive about Elkarri because some of his colleagues in the European Parliament, whom he had asked about Elkarri, said: ‘be wary of those guys, some of them are ex-ETA’. So, John asked me to go over in his place, convey his good wishes to them, and just to keep my eyes and ears open, and to determine what kind of people they were. Were they the kind of people we wanted to have a connection with?”<sup>129</sup>

Reports from the Bilbo conference indicate a broad convergence of opinion among the PNV, HB and EA protagonists regarding the need for a Basque political initiative similar to that of the British-Irish Downing Street Declaration.<sup>130</sup>

Arriving into the Basque Country, Denis Haughey had expected there to be minimal interest in the conference and “only half a dozen journalists, or so” in attendance. He was, in his own words, “stunned at the level of interest”, both in Bilbo and at the demonstration in Donostia the following day. Newspaper reports put the total number of marchers in the Gipuzkoan capital at approximately 3,000.

When, according to Haughey, some of Elkarri’s adherents were allegedly attacked by “ETA/Herri Batausna supporters” on the streets of Donostia, any lingering doubts he had about an Elkarri connection with radical Basque nationalism were quickly dispelled. Haughey: “That convinced me that most of them were not in any way sympathetic to Herri Batasuna, or vice versa. [...] I found Elkarri to be entirely genuine, entirely decent”.<sup>131</sup>

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<sup>127</sup> “HB dice que Elkarri crea confusión”, *Deia*, 01.09.1995. Representatives from PNV, HB, EA and Izquierda Unida attended the conference in Bilbo. PSE-EE, Partido Popular (PP) and Unión del Pueblo Navarro (UPN) attended neither event. “La paz del Ulster reúne a políticos en Bilbao”, *Deia*, 01.09.1995.

<sup>128</sup> “Reflexión sobre el proceso de paz irlandés, hoy en Bilbo”, *Egin*, 01.09.1995.

<sup>129</sup> Author interview with Denis Haughey (Cookstown, 2018).

<sup>130</sup> See: “HB no acudirá a la manifestación de Elkarri en apoyo al proceso de paz irlandés”, *El Mundo*, 01.09.1995; “PNV, EA y HB piden una solución política al conflicto vasco”, *El Mundo*, 02.09.1995; “Hacia la paz desde la autodeterminación”, *Egin*, 02.09.1995.

<sup>131</sup> In later years, Haughey subsequently made two visits to the Basque Country as a Minister of the Northern Ireland Executive. Speaking to this author, he revealed that on one of these occasions, he held a private meeting with Arnaldo Otegi — much to the chagrin of the British Embassy in Madrid. Author

Coinciding with the first anniversary of the IRA ceasefire, the Elkarri conference/demonstration triggered another wave of Basque-Irish comparative pieces and editorials in the Spanish press. Suffice to say that the majority of mainstream Spanish dailies —whether right-wing, left-wing, or “constitutionalist” (ergo, pro-Spain/Spanish nationalist)— did not share the same analyses or allegorical implications as the Basque nationalists.

Most criticism of Irish-to-Basque analogies at this juncture may be said to have centred around three broad points: (1). In Northern Ireland, there existed two mutually hostile communities within the same society. This was not the case in Euskal Herria. (2). In the Basque Country and Navarre, there existed functioning autonomous institutions. This was not the case in Northern Ireland. (3). The Irish conflict as an “intergrupual” and interstate conflict was qualitatively different from the “intragrupual” Basque, which was situated in one historic sovereignty: Spain. In the same thrust of analysis, the crunch issue of the right of Irish and Basque self-determination (the main discursive terrain for Basque nationalists) tended to be sidestepped.<sup>132</sup>

A fortnight after the Elkarri conference/demonstration, on 13 September Herri Batasuna reportedly “occupied” the British Consulate offices in Bilbo “en solidaridad con el proceso de pacificación de Irlanda de Norte”. Simultaneously, a petition signed by HB elected representatives which called on the British government to unblock multiparty talks, was handed in to the British Embassy in Madrid.<sup>133</sup>

As Elkarri had predicted the previous year: “El proceso de paz en Irlanda va a tener en Euskadi mucha más influencia de la que es posible imaginar ahora”. Just like any physical mirror, the “Irish” one in the Basque/Spanish context was increasingly viewed from whatever angle the observer preferred to illustrate a certain reflection of their own political position.

### **At different stages**

“Que son [nuestros] párrafos? Podrían ser textos basados en la Alternativa Democrática que ETA dio a conocer en 1995, pero concretamente es lo siguiente: una remodelación del texto que se conoce como la Declaración de Downing Street, firmada en diciembre de 1993. La remodelación es simple: En el lugar de Irlanda

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interview with Denis Haughey (Cookstown, 2018). Attendance figure cited in “Elkarri difundió la referencia irlandesa”, *Egin*, 03.09.1995.

<sup>132</sup> For instance, see: “Ulster: perspectiva o espejismo”, *El País*, 25.08.1995; “Claves de un paralelismo”, *El País*, 31.08.1995; “El PP dice que el diálogo con HB sólo sirve para dar un balón de oxígeno a ETA”, *ABC*, 02.09.1995; “El diálogo como método”, *El Correo*, 03.09.1995.

<sup>133</sup> “Kanpoko Ekimenak”, *Herria Eginez*, November 1995.

hemos puesto Euskal Herria y en el lugar de Reyno Unido, Gran Bretaña o Gobierno Británico hemos puesto España y Francia. Eso es todo”.<sup>134</sup>

By the mid-nineties, the five “Alternativa KAS” demands that had guided the izquierda abertzale for almost two decades were still no closer to being achieved. Reflecting on this situation, ETA launched a new proposal in April 1995. Without negating its desire for eventual independence and a socialist Basque society, the new “Alternativa Democrática” initiative proposed that ETA negotiate with the Spanish state the recognition of Euskal Herria, the right to Basque self-determination, and Basque territorial unity. This “proceso democrático sin límites” would allow Basque citizens to choose their own future from a number of different options.<sup>135</sup> As the above quote from the self-proclaimed “Revista de ETA” *Zutabe* bears testimony to, the new process was also fundamentally about securing a “Downing Street”-type declaration from the Spanish government in respect to the Basque Country.

The following year, in the lead up to the March 1996 Spanish General Election, Herri Batasuna released a video containing images of ETA militants presenting their latest proposal. When public TV companies refused to screen the campaign video, a political and legal storm ensued. Jon Idigoras, a leading HB figure and Deputy for Bizkaia, was subsequently arrested by Spanish police in relation to the controversial video.<sup>136</sup>

In Dublin, pickets took place outside the Spanish Embassy in support of Idigoras. Sinn Féin leader Gerry Adams also released a statement:

“In my long association with Herri Batasuna I have known them to be committed and courageous in the search for peace. The arrest of their leader Jon Idigoras at this sensitive time will do nothing to advance peace. Sinn Féin calls on the Spanish government to release him immediately”.<sup>137</sup>

Following inconclusive election results that saw neither PSOE nor PP gain an overall majority in Madrid, Karlos Rodríguez spoke at the Sinn Féin Árd Fheis. According to Rodríguez’s analysis, the make-up of the next government would matter little either way: “Repression is likely to continue as before because the main elements of the state —the military, judiciary, police, and so on— will remain after the government is formed”.<sup>138</sup>

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<sup>134</sup> “Reflexiones sobre el comunicado del IRA”, *Zutabe*, no. 93, December 2001.

<sup>135</sup> “Alternativa Democrática” is reproduced in De Pablo, De la Granja, Mees (eds.): *Documentos para la historia del nacionalismo vasco. De los Fueros a nuestros días*, pp. 182–183.

<sup>136</sup> “Garzón encarcela a Jon Idígoras”, *El País*, 21.02.1996.

<sup>137</sup> “Concern at arrest of Basque leaders”, *An Phoblacht/Republican News*, 29.02.1996;

“Basque solidarity protest”, *An Phoblacht/Republican News*, 07.03.1996.

<sup>138</sup> “Basque struggle remains vibrant”, *An Phoblacht/Republican News*, 28.03.1996.

In the end, José María Aznar of the right-wing Partido Popular managed to gain a slim majority in parliament for his investiture. He did so through the support of the Christian Democratic/Conservative forces in Catalonia (Convergència i Unió), the Canary Islands “Coalición Canaria”, and notably, the Basque PNV. Notwithstanding Rodríguez’s seeming indifference to the identity of the new Spanish Prime Minister, Aznar in power was bad news for the izquierda abertzale.

The previous year, ETA had attempted to assassinate the Madrileño when he was still in opposition. Only extensive body armour on the car that he was travelling in saved his life.<sup>139</sup> Once in power, Aznar appointed his party compatriot, the Basque-born Jaime Mayor Oreja as Minister of the Interior. During his stint in office, and his unsuccessful attempt to become lehendakari in 2001, Oreja would go on to become somewhat of a *bête noire* figure, not only for ETA, but for Basque nationalism in general.<sup>140</sup>

In September 1996, the by-now-familiar face of Karmelo Landa, and Joseba Álvarez, son of *Txillardegí*, travelled to Dublin in an attempt to raise awareness of the legal threat that now hung over Herri Batasuna’s entire “Mesa Nacional” following the ETA video controversy. In addition to holding meetings with their comrades in Sinn Féin, the two men reportedly met with representatives from Fianna Fáil, Fine Gael and the Irish Green Party. A proposed meeting with officials from the Department of Foreign Affairs was “cancelled at the last minute”, provoking a minor furore.<sup>141</sup>

In March 1997, the worst for Herri Batasuna came to pass when the remaining members of the “Mesa Nacional” were arrested on charges related to collaboration with terrorists. During the subsequent trial in Madrid, Sinn Féin’s Alex Maskey acted as an international observer. In November, he was quoted in *Herria Eginez* as stating:

“Sólo el diálogo y la negociación son el camino para resolver los conflictos políticos y todos debemos trabajar para conseguirlo porque un solo elemento no puede conseguir la paz. El Gobierno español debería tomar ejemplo del británico y abrir negociaciones con todas las partes implicadas”.<sup>142</sup>

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<sup>139</sup> Mees: *The Basque Contention*, pp. 182–183.

<sup>140</sup> Koldo San Sebastián: *Enderezando El Bucle. Crónica Del Antinacionalismo Vasco Y Memoria Incompleta De Una Transición Inconclusa*, Irun, Alga, 2002.

<sup>141</sup> See: “Basque leadership faces arrest”, *An Phoblacht/Republican News*, 05.09.1996; “Basques meets Irish parties”, *An Phoblacht/Republican News*, 12.09.1996; “Basque group’s claim on meeting with Mitchell denied”, *Irish Times*, 07.09.1996. In December 1996, Bertie Ahern, leader of Fianna Fáil, whilst in opposition, raised the issue of the dispersal of Basque prisoners in a Dáil question to Minister for Foreign Affairs, Dick Spring. See: “Treatment of Basque Prisoners”, <https://www.oireachtas.ie/en/debates/debate/dail/1996-12-17/82/> (last accessed 10 February 2020).

<sup>142</sup> “Alex Maskey...”, *Herria Eginez*, November 1997.



The Spanish judiciary clearly had other ideas. The following month, on 01 December 1997, 23 members of Herri Batasuna's "Mesa Nacional" were sentenced to seven years in prison.<sup>143</sup>

An editorial in *An Phoblacht/Republican News* lambasted the Spanish state:

"The Spanish state this week declared war on the political representatives of the Basque Independence Movement. The jailing of the entire leadership of Herri Batasuna in a blatantly political show trial is an outrageous attack on freedom of speech. The Spanish right-wing government, in the finest tradition of Franco, is making it clear that they will meet demands for Basque self-determination with repression. History has shown that the Basque people's desire for freedom will not be crushed by such repression. Instead, these jail sentences will only make more difficult the achievement of a peace settlement. The Spanish government must immediately grasp the need for dialogue and release all their political prisoners".<sup>144</sup>

Meanwhile, in Northern Ireland, inclusive all-party talks remained as elusive as ever. On 09 February 1996, the IRA gave notice of the suspension of its ceasefire. Hours later, a massive bomb exploded on London's South Quay (close to Canary Wharf), resulting in the deaths of two newsagent workers and millions of pounds worth of damage to the financial district.<sup>145</sup>

Analysis of the effectiveness of the "Canary Wharf" bomb can be cut both ways. On one hand, within weeks, all-party talks to be chaired by the US Senator George Mitchell were penned in for the summer. On the other hand, prior to participating in the talks, all parties would have to sign up to the "Mitchell Principles" — a pact which pledged those involved "to democratic and exclusively peaceful means of resolving political issues", "to the total disarmament of all paramilitary organisations", and "to agree to abide by the terms of any agreement reached in all-party negotiations". Sinn Féin had reached a fork in the road. In May, the party Sinn Féin signalled its *intention* to abide by the principles.<sup>146</sup>

The obvious problem for Sinn Féin was that some of its most senior figures, including Adams, McGuinness, and another leading party member, Pat Doherty, were also dual members of the IRA's Army Council. Acceptance of the "Mitchell Principles" could see the three men technically expelled from the IRA. As we have seen, within the organisation itself, not everybody was convinced of the merits of Adams' strategy.

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<sup>143</sup> "Siete años de cárcel para los 23 dirigentes de HB", *El País*, 02.12.1997.

<sup>144</sup> Author interview with Alex Maskey (Belfast, 2018). "Spain declares war", *An Phoblacht/Republican News*, 04.12.1997.

<sup>145</sup> Although the bomb did not actually explode in Canary Wharf, the "Canary Wharf" adjective nonetheless stuck.

<sup>146</sup> "Sinn Féin ready to accept Mitchell principles", *The Independent*, 21.05.1996.

Eventually an agreement was reached between the IRA Army Council and Executive to call a General Army Convention. At the subsequent 1997 convention, the views of Adams and a majority of the council prevailed. Adams and co. were given permission to sign up to the “Mitchell Principles” without being expelled. The outcome of the convention would lead to senior IRA resignations, and ultimately, the founding of the “Real IRA”.<sup>147</sup>

By spring 1998, a second IRA ceasefire was in effect, and under Tony Blair’s new British Labour Party government, all-party talks, including Sinn Féin, were entering a crucial stage. Would there be an agreed outcome? Would Sinn Féin be boxed into a final deal that had not moved greatly from the parameters set out by the British and Irish governments in the Downing Street Declaration? If so, how would Gerry Adams and his “kitchen cabinet” be able to sell such a deal to Sinn Féin “grassroots” and the IRA? In public, senior Sinn Féin representatives insisted that there would be “No Return To Stormont”. In the end, however, the party would have to “eat its words”.<sup>148</sup>

How and why did the IRA’s “war” against the British state in Northern Ireland come to an end? While this question falls outside the scope of this study, prior to looking at the main provisions of the GFA text, it is worth very briefly referring to some of the broad lines of thinking in this regard.<sup>149</sup>

First, some have pointed to the effective political and/or military defeat of the republican movement.<sup>150</sup> This school of thought tends to equate (mistakenly in this author’s opinion) the republican movement’s inability to achieve its ultimate political objectives in negotiations with a defeat. Even after more than two decades, gauging a *political* defeat of the IRM seems premature. This will ultimately depend on whether a united Ireland emerges from the architecture of the Good Friday Agreement.

*Military* defeat is easier to objectively quantify. After a quarter of a century of “armed struggle”, it is clear that the IRA was unable to force a British “withdrawal”. Nor was the organisation able to sustain enough pressure on the British political class that it would

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<sup>147</sup> For these two paragraphs, see: Moloney: *A Secret History of the IRA* (2<sup>nd</sup> ed.), pp. 473–479. On 15 August 1998, The “Real IRA” was responsible for the Omagh (An Ómaigh) bombing, which killed 29 people, including a pregnant woman carrying twins. “The Omagh Bomb”, <https://cain.ulster.ac.uk/events/omagh/events.htm> (last accessed 08 April 2019).

<sup>148</sup> Quoted in: “Brexit: will we know it’s not butter”, available at <https://eamonnmallie.com/2017/12/brexit-will-know-not-butter-brian-rowan/> (last accessed 21 February 2020).

<sup>149</sup> It should be stressed that the following brief overview does not claim to be comprehensive. Nor should the broad schools of analyses that are outlined be considered as rigid or mutually exclusive.

<sup>150</sup> Alonso: *The IRA and Armed Struggle*, pp. 1–4; Anthony McIntyre: *Good Friday: The Death of Irish Republicanism*, Dublin, Ausubo Press, 2008.

cave in to most republican demands. Towards the end of its campaign, as many as half of the IRA's planned operations were being thwarted by British security intelligence. Infiltration of agents at senior level was also a debilitating issue for the organisation. Moreover, having emerged in late 1969 to defend the Catholic/nationalist community in Northern Ireland, an increase in loyalist paramilitary attacks in the early 1990s against republican figures and the wider nationalist community kept the IRA on the backfoot. As Frampton summarises, between loyalist paramilitaries and the British security forces, the IRA was effectively "contained".<sup>151</sup> And while the British state was similarly unable to defeat the IRA militarily, it did not have to do so. Whereas the IRA needed to "win", the British state just needed to "draw" in order to maintain something approaching the *status quo*.<sup>152</sup>

This analysis feeds into a second school of thought: that the prospect of long-term "stalemate", and a favourable international context, encouraged the republican movement to "cash in its chips" at the negotiating table.<sup>153</sup> Subsequently, in negotiations, the movement then achieved sufficient gains to *thenceforth* pursue its goals by purely political means in a "new phase" of struggle, rather than returning to war for "another twenty-five years". As was mentioned in chapter one, the "*thenceforth*" clause of this analysis is essentially what undergirds the republican movement's view of the Irish peace process.<sup>154</sup>

Rather than the product of a conscious strategic shift in republican thinking, some analysts, most notably Ed Moloney, have highlighted Gerry Adams and his "kitchen cabinet's" role in skilfully steering (and at times, manipulating) political and military *majorities* of the movement into acquiescing to the outcome of the process — even if this meant accepting what had previously been considered completely unpalatable:

"An IRA split had been a virtual certainty from the moment that Adams embarked on the peace process, such was the scale of the departure from traditional IRA

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<sup>151</sup> English: *Does Terrorism Work? A History*, pp. 124–125; Frampton: *The Long March: The Political Strategy of Sinn Féin: 1981–2007*, p. 84. Links and collusion between loyalist groups and British security services have been discussed in a number of texts. For a short overview, see: "Britain's Dirty War in Ireland", <https://www.counterpunch.org/2018/01/03/britains-dirty-war-in-ireland-revisited/> (last accessed 06 February 2020).

<sup>152</sup> See: Thomas Hennessey: *The Northern Ireland Peace Process: Ending the Troubles?* Dublin, Gill & Macmillan, 2000, p. 219–220.

<sup>153</sup> For the "stalemate" theory, see: English: *Armed Struggle*, p. 280, p. 307, 321; Taylor: *The Provos*, pp. 298–312. For the influence of the ending of the Cold War on Irish republicanism, see: Cox: "Bringing in the 'international': the IRA ceasefire and the end of the Cold War".

<sup>154</sup> "A new phase of our struggle" cited in: "IRA Easter Message 2008", *An Phoblacht/Republican News*, 20.03.2008. For a very similar analysis of Sinn Féin's narrative around the peace process, see: White: *Out of the Ashes*, pp. 342–343. "Cash in [our] chips" and "another twenty-five years" are direct quotes from two senior republicans who were interviewed for this study.

ideology that the enterprise implied. The only questions at issue were the timing, scale, and damage that the split would cause. The fact that it took so long to occur, that the fracture came after two cease-fires had been called, irreversible changes made to republican beliefs, and the scene set for a potentially definitive settlement, not just of the Troubles but of the ancient and historic Anglo-Irish conflict, was testimony to the skill and determination of Gerry Adams and his allies. By the time the dissidents decided to move against Adams, it was already too late. And as the IRA delegates made their way home from the 1997 [General Army] Convention, Adams had, after fifteen long years, finally taken the Provisionals beyond the point of no return”.<sup>155</sup>

Finally, Kevin Bean has suggested that Sinn Féin’s was effectively “institutionalised” by the British state in the party’s republican heartlands. Coupled with the economic and social empowerment of northern nationalists *en masse*, Sinn Féin gradually came to reappraise the nature of the conflict, and thus, pivoted towards a negotiated accommodation with Irish/British unionism.<sup>156</sup>

Regardless of the individual merits of these broad analyses, one indisputable factor in the republican movement’s acceptance of the new dispensation was the IRM’s subtle redefining of the concept of Irish “self-determination” and a revision of the traditional demands of what a British “withdrawal” would entail.<sup>157</sup> While some have analysed the IRM’s failure to secure an orthodox form of “national” self-determination as evidence of republican “defeat”, others read the GFA as finally resolving Irish pan-nationalist grievances around the historic denial of Irish self-determination and the unilateral partitioning of the island by Britain in 1920.<sup>158</sup> On such malleable and flexible interpretations was the peace process built.

The Good Friday Agreement was signed by the British and Irish governments on 10 April 1998. The agreement rested on three central strands: a “power-sharing” assembly, North-South bodies, and a British-Irish intergovernmental forum. The new Northern Ireland Assembly (NIA) would be proportionally weighted with an Executive divided accordingly between representatives who self-designated as either “Nationalist” or “Unionist”. A joint office of First Minister and Deputy First Minister would be filled by a representative from each side of the political divide. Policing and justice would also be

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<sup>155</sup> Moloney: *A Secret History of the IRA* (2<sup>nd</sup> ed.), p. 479.

<sup>156</sup> See: Bean: *The New Politics of Sinn Féin*, pp. 67–71. See also: “Genesis of ‘new Sinn Féin’”, *Weekly Worker*, 22.02.2018, available at <https://weeklyworker.co.uk/worker/1191/genesis-of-new-sinn-fein/> (last accessed 06 February 2020).

<sup>157</sup> For a detailed analysis, see: Moloney: *A Secret History of the IRA* (2<sup>nd</sup> ed.), pp. 251–255, pp. 297–299.

<sup>158</sup> For examples of these opposing analyses, see: Alonso: “Pathways Out of Terrorism in Northern Ireland and the Basque Country: The Misrepresentation of the Irish Model”; Brendan O’Leary: “Mission Accomplished? Looking Back at the IRA”, *Field Day Review*, Vol. 1, 2005, pp. 217–246.

reformed. Significantly, for Irish republicans (and Ulster loyalists), all paramilitary prisoners to the conflict would be released within two years.<sup>159</sup>

The final parameters of the constitutional question differed little from the Downing Street Declaration. While the principle of Irish self-determination was upheld, a majority in Northern Ireland would have to accede to any proposed change to the territory's status. For republicans and nationalists, the agreement effectively replaced the Government of Ireland Act of 1920, which had given Westminster full sovereignty over Northern Ireland's affairs, with a "binding obligation" on both governments, ratified in international treaty, to implement any future change in constitutional preference (i.e., Irish reunification).

For unionists, the agreement ensured Northern Ireland's position within the UK for as long as this view remained in a majority. Whereas a huge majority of nationalists and republicans endorsed the agreement, exit polls indicate that the unionist/loyalist community was far more divided on its merits.<sup>160</sup> For many unionists and loyalists, the prospect of power-sharing with Irish nationalists, let alone Sinn Féin, had long been anathema. Indeed, the second largest unionist party, the Democratic Unionist Party (DUP), completely boycotted the talks and formal institutions when they first came on stream. With no prospect of a return to majority unionist rule, the only other favourable option—direct rule from London—was also a non-starter. "Power-sharing" at Stormont, and "parity of esteem" between the two communities, would have to form the bedrock of the new Northern Ireland.<sup>161</sup>

While republicans and northern nationalists historically regarded Stormont as the bastion of the "Orange" state, ever since the suspension of the Parliament of Northern Ireland in 1972 the SDLP had always been open to an internal northern power-sharing

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<sup>159</sup> For a full-text of the GFA, see: "The Agreement", <https://cain.ulster.ac.uk/events/peace/docs/agreement.htm> (last accessed 05 February 2020).

<sup>160</sup> See chapter six.

<sup>161</sup> In the view of John McGarry: "an important reason why unionists refused to share power with nationalists was not because they were committed normatively to the Westminster model of government but because, as British nationalists, they preferred the default of direct rule from Westminster to the risk of power-sharing with Irish nationalists. [...] London paid the costs of the conflict, and the British army helped to prevent it reaching Bosnian levels of violence. Even if unionists had embraced consociationalism, this would not have sufficed for nationalists, who also demand institutions linking Northern Ireland with the Irish Republic. Agreement was reached in 1998 on a consociational government and North-South institutions in part because London made it clear to unionists that the default to a settlement was no longer unalloyed direct rule from Westminster but, instead, deepening Anglo-Irish cooperation in the governance of Northern Ireland. Unionist flexibility was facilitated by an IRA decision to declare a ceasefire and by the Irish government's preparedness to drop formal irredentist claims in return for settlement". McGarry: "The Comparable Northern Ireland", (specifically p. 16).

arrangement as part of a broader agreement.<sup>162</sup> Hume's party enthusiastically embraced the new institutions.

Conversely, *any* return of a northern parliament, even in its newly reformed NIA guise, was far more difficult for Sinn Féin to stomach. Had the Provisional IRA not been instrumental in “smashing Stormont” in the first place? Mindful of this sensitive issue, as soon as Stormont was up and running, Sinn Féin explicitly stated that it saw “this institution and the new Executive as transitional”.<sup>163</sup> For some within the republican movement, this qualification was missing the point. After so much struggle and sacrifice, Sinn Féin ministers would now end up effectively administering British power in the “occupied” 6-county entity. Disillusioned with the party, many departed to form various “dissident” republican organisations. Republican Sinn Féin, which had split from the party in 1986, also rejected the Good Friday Agreement. In general, for this cohort of disaffected republicans, the GFA meant only one thing: “Got Fuck All”.<sup>164</sup>

Pending the outcome of concurrent referenda to be held on 22 May 1998 North and South, it appeared that an accord had finally been reached that would put an end to three decades of the “Troubles” — a most bitter conflict that had resulted in the loss of some 3,635 lives, not to mention the scarring of many multiples more.<sup>165</sup>

When news of the GFA broke internationally, there was broad support across the political spectrum in Spain. Spokespeople for the two Spanish main parties, however, were quick to pour cold water on any suggestion of a parallel process occurring in respect to the Basque Country. For instance, Finance Minister and Second Deputy Prime Minister, Rodrigo Rato, remarked:

“Creo que las circunstancias son distintas claramente, porque una cosa es que nos alegremos, como europeos, de que en el Norte de Irlanda se pueda alcanzar un acuerdo político, y otra cosa es que no seamos conscientes de que los problemas que se derivan de la violencia etarra no están basados en problemas políticos [...] el autogobierno y la capacidad de expresión del País Vasco es muy superior a cualquiera que haya existido en Irlanda del Norte”.

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<sup>162</sup> The “Nationalist Party”, a sort of *de facto* successor to the Irish Parliamentary Party, boycotted the Parliament of Northern Ireland from 1930 to 1965. See: Moloney: *A Secret History of the IRA* (2<sup>nd</sup> ed.), p. 62.

<sup>163</sup> See: “A new arena of struggle”, *An Phoblacht/Republican News*, 17.10.1998.

<sup>164</sup> For analysis of anti-GFA republican responses, see: English: *Armed Struggle*, pp. 315–321; White: *Out of the Ashes*, pp. 373–386. “Got Fuck All” quote on p. 303 of White.

<sup>165</sup> McKittrick *et al.*: *Lost Lives*, pp. 1551–1554. 3,635 is the figure provided by McKittrick *et al.* for the period: 1966–1998. The same work cites 3,720 as the figure for the period, 1966–2006. Across the various studies that have been conducted on “Troubles” deaths, there is quite a lot of discrepancy in regard to the categorisation and responsibility of deaths. A general rule of thumb from the literature is that the Provisional IRA was responsible for almost half of all fatalities.



Similarly, the PSOE's Josep Borrell responded to the signing of the accord by affirming his belief that the situation in Ireland:

“[...] no es homologable con la del País Vasco [...]. Estamos ante una realidad radicalmente distinta, de una comunidad enfrentada por motivos incluso religiosos, que no tiene ningún papel en el caso español”.<sup>166</sup>

Unsurprisingly, the Basque *izquierda abertzale* took a different view. From a prison in France, sixteen ETA prisoners released a manifesto titled “Nos ilusiona lo de irlanda”. As well as expressing admiration for the Irish peace process, the signatories called for an accord between Basque nationalist forces and a greater role for prisoners in future debates.<sup>167</sup> Reflecting on the Irish peace process and its main “lesson” for the Basque Country, ETA stated the following:

“Por encima de similitudes y diferencias, desde el punto de vista de ETA el proceso de Irlanda se ve con un respeto total y con una solidaridad plena hacia los republicanos irlandeses. Y, cómo no, con la voluntad de aprender del mismo. Para ETA, la lección más importante es que se ha optado por una solución global a un conflicto. Que la resolución tenga una respuesta y una solución a todos los aspectos del conflicto. Esto es, que una pseudo-salida a un conflicto no siembre una mala semilla de un nuevo conflicto para mañana o pasado, que las nuevas generaciones no tengan necesidad de luchar nuevamente con las armas en la mano en favor de la resolución del mismo conflicto. Esa es la apuesta de Euskadi Ta Askatasuna, su voluntad y su compromiso, desde siempre y en todo momento”.<sup>168</sup>

A week after the signing of the GFA, Fernando Barrena, and another senior HB figure Esther Aguirre, attended the Sinn Féin *Árd Fheis* in Dublin (18–19 April). If ETA's statement had indicated the need for a holistic resolution in order to remove the “necessity” of armed struggle in the Basque Country, Aguirre's speech to the republican delegates signalled her belief that both Spain and France were unable and/or unwilling to accede to such a dispensation:

“Basque people have watched with great interest the [peace process] talks of the last months. In the Basque Country we are not at the same stage. Both governments (Spain and France) see it as a time for repression and deny the political nature of the armed conflict”.<sup>169</sup>

Regardless of one's own analysis of the GFA, or Aguirre's thesis on how and why the Basque *izquierda abertzale* found itself “not at the same stage” as its republican comrades,

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<sup>166</sup> Both quotes cited in: “El Gobierno español destaca el ‘triumfo de la razón sobre la violencia’”, *El País*, 12.04.1998.

<sup>167</sup> Cited in: Florencio Domínguez Iribarren: *Dentro de ETA. La vida diaria de los terroristas* (4th ed.), Madrid, Aguilar, 2002, p. 183.

<sup>168</sup> “Comunicado [de ETA] de Abril de 1998”, *Zuzen*, no. 68, March 1999.

<sup>169</sup> “A worldwide audience”, *An Phoblacht/Republican News*, 23.04.1998.

there can be little debate that her observation in relation to the respective advances of each movement towards its ultimate goal was essentially true.

### **Children of the revolution**

“La juventud, un sector considerado por la burguesía solamente como futura proveedora de mano de obra, tiene en JARRAI un instrumento que permite la lucha organizada contra la opresión y alienación específica a que se ve sometida en la sociedad capitalista”.<sup>170</sup>

Founded in 1979 as the youth sector of the BIA, Jarrai campaigned on a range of youth-oriented issues from an abertzale and socialist perspective. When news of the Belfast Agreement reached the Basque Country in April 1998, 17 young Sinn Féin activists were on a three-day, Jarrai-organised Gazte Topagunea (“youth encounter”), close to the Gipuzkoan town of Zaldibia. How did these 17 Sinn Féin youths end up at the Jarrai event?

In August 1995, *An Phoblacht/Republican News* contributor and playwright Brian Campbell wrote an article titled “Learning from the Basque Struggle” for the republican organ. Breaking with the usual republican coverage of the izquierda abertzale’s juridical and political “oppression”, Campbell documented the conversations that he had recently conducted with several activists in Donostia and Vitoria-Gasteiz at the offices of Alfabetatze eta Euskalduntze Koordinakundea (AEK) and Askapena. According to Campbell, there was far more for the Irish republican movement to learn from the “Basque struggle”:

“A characteristic of the Basque struggle has always been that it ranges across all aspects of political and cultural life. Organisations of women, youth, environmentalists, organisations to promote Euskera, the Basque language, to build links with foreign struggles, to campaign on behalf of political prisoners, to combat drug abuse, to organise festivals, all exist independently. Some are members of KAS, a coordinating forum which includes ETA and Herri Batasuna. But it is the large number of organisations which touch every area of life and essentially their independence, that makes for a political culture bursting with energy. [...] In the modern world the political party is only one element in a political project that touches every area of life. In the Basque Country, Herri Batasuna has a definite role but not an all-encompassing one. By having a freedom movement made up of many diverse elements, the desire to see everyone having their part to play in the struggle can be fulfilled”.<sup>171</sup>

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<sup>170</sup> “Introducción”, *Zuzen*, 22.07.1982

<sup>171</sup> “Learning from the Basque struggle”, *An Phoblacht/Republican News*, 10.08.1995.

As referenced earlier, over previous decades the twin engines of the *izquierda abertzale* (ETA, HB) had managed to gradually build up a broad, sympathetic, multi-sectoral support base in the form of the self-described MLNV. Conversely, although the Irish republican movement (essentially Sinn Féin and the IRA, with support from Cumann na mBan and Na Fianna Éireann) had a clear identifiable political culture with its own parades, symbols and rituals, etc., it had never managed to penetrate different layers and sectors of Irish society in the same way.

Structural factors played their part. To give two brief examples: the Irish language movement was (and still is) considerably weaker in both parts of Ireland than in the Basque Country. Additionally, ordinary class struggle and trade union activism in Northern Ireland were heavily conditioned by communal divisions. Speaking to this author, Pat Rice recalls Sinn Féin looking to the *izquierda abertzale* in the 1980s with a view to building up a similar “umbrella movement” to their Basque counterparts, but to no avail.<sup>172</sup> It would be in the realm of youth activism that Sinn Féin would “learn from the Basque Struggle”.

Two months after Campbell’s piece in *An Phoblacht/Republican News*, in October 1995, Barry McElduff, a Sinn Féin representative from Tyrone, organised a youth initiative known as Glór na nOg (Voice of the Youth) in the small northern town of Carrickmore (An Charraig Mhór). A follow-up debate was held in Belfast. During these gatherings, a number of republican activists voiced specific youth concerns around education, homelessness, unemployment, and drug abuse.<sup>173</sup> Among this group was a young republican from Dublin named Eoin Ó Broin.

According to Ó Broin, it became apparent that “the party was quite open to some sort of youth-led initiative”. Ó Broin and others decided to “set up a youth-led youth wing of the party”. Eager to avoid aping the likes of Young Fine Gael or Young Fianna Fáil, the young republicans looked abroad to see: “where else can we learn from that might provide us thoughts, ideas and experiences?”<sup>174</sup>

In the spring of 1996, Ó Broin unexpectedly received a phone call from a Basque activist in the international office of Jarrai. On the other end of the line was Josetxo Otegi

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<sup>172</sup> Author interview with Pat Rice (Belfast, 2017). Both Na Fianna Éireann and Cumann na mBan sided with Republican Sinn Féin following the 1986 Árd Fheis split.

<sup>173</sup> “Republican youth demand their place”, *An Phoblacht/Republican News*, 26.10.1995.

<sup>174</sup> Author interview with Eoin Ó Broin (Dublin, 2015).

Arrugaeta. He and his comrades were in the final stages of organising a Gazte Topagunea.<sup>175</sup> Ó Broin recalls:

“He [Otegi Arrugaeta] said they’d like to establish a relationship [...] it came out of nowhere, it was completely coincidental, but it was, at the same time... we were doing all this stuff ourselves [organising a youth movement], and we said ‘great’”.<sup>176</sup>

A notice published on 28 March 1996 in *An Phoblacht/Republican News* carried information on the upcoming event as well as a direct phone number to Jarrai’s office: “Jarrai has extended an open invitation to young Irish republicans. Bring your tent”.<sup>177</sup> Notwithstanding Ó Broin’s enthusiasm, the extremely short notice and a lack of money meant that no Sinn Féin youth representative was able to attend — or at least not in an official capacity. Instead, a young “American guy” who was travelling through Europe and who had become friendly with Ó Broin in Belfast, offered to go and report back on his experience.<sup>178</sup>

The “American guy” was Andrew Terranova. On his return from the Basque Country, Terranova’s experiences of the Gazte Topagunea were published in *An Phoblacht/Republican News*. Although Terranova had “attended the festival in a personal capacity”, he was, nonetheless, “welcomed with open arms by the Basque people ‘whose profound sense of solidarity and respect for the Irish struggle was truly incredible’”. Terranova described the three-day event as a “truly amazing feat... attended by some 15,000 Basque youth from all over the country [...] a political Woodstock”. Concluding the report, Terranova stated:

“Jarrai has had enormous success in organising these Gazte Topagunea[k]. They bring such an enormous number of young people together that it ultimately proves to be a very effective way of drawing more and more youth into playing a very active role in their movement. Because of the recent developments here in Ireland with the formation of Glór na nOg, there seems to be a lot which can be learned from the Basque example”.<sup>179</sup>

By the end of May 1996, Glór na nOg branches had been established in Belfast, Dublin, Tyrone, and Derry. Although “affiliated with Sinn Féin”, its membership comprised of “people within and outside of the party”.<sup>180</sup> Glór na nOg’s existence would be short-lived.

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<sup>175</sup> Author interview with Josetxo Otegi Arrugaeta (Donostia, 2016).

<sup>176</sup> Author interview with Eoin Ó Broin (Dublin, 2015).

<sup>177</sup> “A member of Jarrai...”, *An Phoblacht/Republican News*, 28.03.1996.

<sup>178</sup> Author interview with Eoin Ó Broin (Dublin, 2015).

<sup>179</sup> “Basque youth shows the way”, *An Phoblacht/Republican News*, 09.05.96.

<sup>180</sup> “Glor na nóg in Dublin”, *An Phoblacht/Republican News*, 23.05.1996.

Without a clear idea of “what it was trying to do, how it should do it, and where it was going [...] by the end of 1996, Glór na nOg had ceased to function”. In early 1997, the remnants of the youth group came together to discuss how best to progress. According to the group’s own account of what happened next:

“A Basque youth organisation called Jarrai had come to our attention and we felt that it may be appropriate for us to make contact with them to see if there was anything to be learned from them. In March 97 a delegate was sent to Euskal Herria for 3 weeks to learn as much as possible about their youth movement”.<sup>181</sup>

This delegate was Eoin Ó Broin.

Arturo “Beñat” Villanueva, a member of Jarrai at the time, recalls receiving a phone call from Ó Broin:

“[Ó Broin] wanted to contact us because some guy [Terranova] from Chicago... or Boston... who belonged to the Socialist party in America, but who had Irish roots, had come to the Basque Country [the previous year]. He was amazed with what he saw”.<sup>182</sup>

Following in the footsteps of Terranova, in March 1997 Ó Broin arrived in the Basque Country to witness the radical youth movement encounter for himself. He was, in his own words, “blown away”.<sup>183</sup> The Dubliner subsequently catalogued his experiences of a Mendi Martxa (Mountain March), the controversial death of the ETA member Jose Zabala, and radical Basque youth movement culture more generally, in a series of articles that appeared in *An Phoblacht/Republican News*:

“For three days we were completely independent, from the police, from the government, and from a culture of consumption and apathy which across Europe is working to pacify more and more young people. The Mendi Martxa was more than just an event, it was an investment in the future, the future of both the left-nationalist and Basque society as a whole”.<sup>184</sup>

On Ó Broin’s return, a strategy document combining aspects gleaned from the now-defunct Glór na nOg initiative, and new ideas picked up from Jarrai, was proposed to Belfast Sinn Féin. The proposal envisaged the city becoming a testing ground for the construction of a new a youth movement. When Belfast Sinn Féin agreed to the proposition, Sinn Féin Youth (SFY) formally came into existence in August 1997.<sup>185</sup>

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<sup>181</sup> “Sinn Féin Youth. 1<sup>st</sup> National Congress. Annual Report”. Dated 17 October 1998. PH1607. LLB.

<sup>182</sup> Author interview with Arturo “Beñat” Villanueva (Ziburu, 2017).

<sup>183</sup> Author interview with Eoin Ó Broin (Dublin, 2015).

<sup>184</sup> “Vibrancy of youth leads Basque struggle”, *An Phoblacht/Republican News*, 27.03.1997; “Fury at murder of ETA volunteer”, *An Phoblacht/Republican News*, 03.04.1997; “The youth reclaim the Basque country”, *An Phoblacht/Republican News*, 05.06. 1997.

<sup>185</sup> “Sinn Féin Youth. 1<sup>st</sup> National Congress. Annual Report”. Dated 17 October 1998. PH1607. LLB.

While the formation of Sinn Féin Youth was an internal republican initiative, it is clear that Jarrai heavily informed SFY's approach — a rare example of a BIA-to-IRM transfer. One of the chief criticisms of Glór na nOg had been that “it was focused primarily on discussion, [gaining] a reputation for being too elitist and at times too academic in approach”. Ó Broin's trip to the Basque Country in March 1997 opened up a new vista for young republicans as to how a youth movement could be organised and run.<sup>186</sup> Speaking in *An Phoblacht/Republican News*, Ó Broin remarked:

“[...] although earlier youth initiatives such as Glór na nOg have failed, we have learned from those mistakes, and are building that understanding into our work. Our focus will be on generating as much street activity as possible, whether in the form of protests, militant actions, stickers or posters. Bringing young people onto the street and using politics to reclaim those streets for ourselves will be our primary aim”.<sup>187</sup>

As one former republican activist put it: “Ó Broin went there [the Basque Country], came back, and implemented what he saw”. Three representatives from Jarrai attended the organisation's founding in Belfast.<sup>188</sup>

The following Easter, a group of 17 Sinn Féin Youth activists, including future senior representatives such as Eoin Ó Broin and Matt Carthy, visited the Basque Country. For Ó Broin: “the purpose of the trip was to give our activists the opportunity to learn some new ideas from Jarrai”, including the organisation of national events. A “core group” was also tasked with “learning the internal mechanics of Jarrai from local and provincial to national level”.<sup>189</sup>

Whilst these youths were high up in the Basque mountains, news of the Good Friday Agreement in Belfast started to filter through. Arturo “Beñat” Villanueva, perhaps the key Basque node in the development of BIA-IRM youth relations, recalls: “At that very moment we were holding an international assembly... I am very happy to have witnessed it”.<sup>190</sup>

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<sup>186</sup> Author interview with Eoin Ó Broin (Dublin, 2015).

<sup>187</sup> “Confident republican youth movement up and running”, *An Phoblacht/Republican News*, 28.08.1997.

<sup>188</sup> Author interview with “D”; “Irish and Basque youth links planned”, *An Phoblacht/Republican News*, 28.08.1997.

<sup>189</sup> “Sinn Féin Youth in Basque Country”, *An Phoblacht/Republican News*, 02.04.1998; “Report of Tour”, *An Phoblacht/Republican News*, 09.04.1998; “Doing it themselves”, *An Phoblacht/Republican News*, 30.04.1998.

<sup>190</sup> Author interview with Arturo “Beñat” Villanueva (Ziburu, 2017).



### 5.3. Conclusion

“Our stars became aligned for a period of time, and we were able to maximise that”.<sup>191</sup>

(Alex Maskey on the GFA)

Throughout the 1980s and into the 1990s, Herri Batasuna and Sinn Féin developed and consolidated a public and fraternal political relationship. Beginning with the annual attendance of HB representatives at Sinn Féin *Árd Fheiseanna* (from 1983 onwards), this nexus both intensified and diversified over the same period. Alongside the party relationship, mutual areas of interest such as prisoner advocacy, language rights and youth issues, steadily drew specific sectorial components of each movement (or party figures associated with these sectors) into more regular contact via reciprocal visits. These relationship “strands” typically fell outside the scope of the annual *Árd Fheis*.

At the same time, diffuse groups of representatives and activists from radical Basque nationalist sectors such as HB, Askapena and Jarrai began to attend the Belfast Anti-Internment Rally and *Féile an Phobail* every August from 1987. Apart from the social element of these trips, visiting Basque activists, and others who took up longer residence in the city, usually took part in republican rallies, commemorations, and political workshops. They also visited republican prisoners or were taken to see local community initiatives in areas such as language and housing.

One other new realm in which radical Basque nationalist-Irish republican relations became relevant was Europe. From 1987 onwards, successive Herri Batasuna MEPs (Txema Montero and Karmelo Landa) raised the issue of Irish self-determination in tandem with their own.

The above party political/sectorial visits and more unstructured grassroots contacts may be understood, in the first instance, as generally premised on the sharing of information, knowledge and experience. Another important underlying rationale seems to have been an impulse to break from the political isolation experienced by both movements following the Anglo-Irish Agreement of 1985 and the *Ajuria-Enea* Pact of 1988.<sup>192</sup>

There is strong evidence of a reciprocal bond of solidarity at play in this regard. For instance, senior Irish republicans noted how, as Irish republicanism moved to a different

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<sup>191</sup> Author interview with Alex Maskey (Belfast, 2018).

<sup>192</sup> For the political isolation of both HB and Sinn Féin in the late 1980s, see: Irvin: *Militant Nationalism*, pp. 133–138.

“stage” in the mid-90s, they felt a depth of gratitude and sense of “obligation” towards their *izquierda abertzale* comrades who had marched in Belfast raised Irish issues in Europe in the late 1980s.<sup>193</sup> Equally, many Basque interviewees suggested that the Irish republicans movement had provided much-needed succour and support during difficult times.<sup>194</sup>

One consequence of the increasingly closer —and more personal— relationship dynamic between Irish republican and radical Basque nationalists was the clear emergence of what Pragnère posits as a “shared culture” between the two movements. Given that there was already a great deal of symmetry in each movement’s respective nationalist political culture (ceremonies, rituals, annual events, heroes, villains and martyrs, etc.),<sup>195</sup> the fact that there was a mutually fluid and amenable exchange around similar views and normative judgments should not come as a major surprise.

The first Basque-Irish themed mural that appeared in Belfast in 1992 and others that followed in 1995 and 1997 provide evident visual expressions of this shared sentiment.<sup>196</sup> Via the annual August influx of Basque activists, Belfast may be considered as the primary social space where a radical Basque nationalist-Irish republican “shared culture” emerged from an intersection of nexus brokers and nodes. From 1997 onwards, this extended to SFY and Jarrai. As we shall see in the following chapter, the two youth movements continued to build a relationship on reciprocal visits and transnational empathic solidarity well into the 2000s.

“Shared culture” between the BIA and IRM was also occasionally complemented by a “shared history” — of sorts. This shared history centred on the supposed Irish inspiration for the Basque *Aberri Eguna* and the figure of Eli Gallastegi. It would appear that the Irish *Aberri Eguna* theory first entered the mainstream of radical Basque nationalist discourse in 1992 via the publication of “*Gudari. Una pasión útil*” by the historian and one-time member of HB’s “*Mesa Nacional*”, José María Lorenzo Espinosa.<sup>197</sup> Five years later, in March 1997, *An Phoblacht/Republican News* published

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<sup>193</sup> Author interview with Bairbre de Brún (Belfast, 2016). Author interview with Alex Maskey (Belfast, 2018).

<sup>194</sup> Author interview with “A”. Author interview with Pernando Barrena (Donostia, 2017). Author interview with Karmelo Landa (Bilbo, 2016). Author interview with Josetxo Otegi Arrugaeta (Donostia, 2016). Author interview with Arturo “Beñat” Villanueva (Ziburu, 2017).

<sup>195</sup> See: Pragnère: “Exporter la guerre – importer la paix. Dimensions transnationales de deux conflits nationalistes. Irlande du Nord, Pays Basque”. Casquete: *En el nombre de Euskal Herria*, pp. 19–21, pp. 106–108; López Romo; Fernández Soldevilla: “Dueda de sangre. La vision del pasado de ETA y el IRA”.

<sup>196</sup> See: Rolston: “‘The Brothers on the Walls’”. Author interview with “E”.

<sup>197</sup> Lorenzo Espinosa: *Gudari. Una pasión útil*, p. 62. In *Gudari*, Lorenzo Espinosa married Eli Gallastegi’s political vision with the contemporary socialist discourse of the *izquierda abertzale*. For a

what appears to be the first overview of Basque-Irish historical connections in an Irish republican publication. The piece, written by two members of an Eire/Euskal Herria Solidarity Group, “explained the connection” between the Easter Rising and Aberri Eguna in the following way:

“Co-occurrence? Not at all. The relationship between Ireland and Euskal Herria (Basque Country) goes a long way back in time, involving more than those few visitors that we exchange every year in summer time. While Irish people commemorated the Easter Rising last Sunday, 3,000,000 Basques were celebrating their National Day. At the beginning of this century, the Basque nationalists chose Easter Sunday as a day of national pride, inspired by the events of the 1916 Rising. One of the men behind the commemoration was Eli Gallastegi, *Gudari* who, through the magazine *Jagi-Jagi*, based in the Basque Country, expressed ideas of national freedom for the Basques and other nations. Impressed by the Irish struggle and in order to break the commercial embargo imposed by the British upon Ireland after the Treaty, *Gudari* established a company which maintained business between Dublin and Bilbao. Thanks to him by the ‘30s it was possible to taste Guinness in the Basque Country. The liaison with *Gudari* continued when he and his young family had to look for refuge in this country during the Spanish Civil War after the dramatic events which took place in the Basque Country. He raised his family in the Meath Gaeltacht and nowadays even those who did not settle still keep a close relationship with Ireland. *Gudari*’s son, Iker, was in Dublin just before Christmas as part of a group of Basque POWs’ relatives seeking support from the Irish people. His daughter, *Gudari*’s grand-daughter, is serving time in a Spanish prison for the same reasons that put her grandfather in jail several times during his lifetime of struggle: the right of the Basque Country to decide freely their own future”.<sup>198</sup>

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critique of many of Lorenzo Espinosa’s arguments, see Iñaki Errasti’s article “Luces y Sombras sobre Eli Gallastegi”, *Muga*, vol. IX, (84–95), 1993–1996, pp. 80–87.

<sup>198</sup> “Easter inspiration to Basque nationalists”, *An Phoblacht/Republican News*, 03.04.1997. The Easter Rising-Aberri Eguna thesis has, in fact, very little historical basis. As referred to in chapter two, the first Aberri Eguna was inaugurated to celebrate the 50<sup>th</sup> anniversary of Sabino Arana’s nationalist epiphany. See: De la Granja, José Luis; Casquete, Jesús: “Aberri Eguna” in De Pablo *et al.* (eds.): *Diccionario ilustrado de símbolos del nacionalismo vasco*, pp. 33–56. As acknowledged by De la Granja, however, there is some evidence to suggest a secondary Easter Rising influence: “[El primer Aberri Eguna] se explica básicamente por motivos internos al propio PNV. Eso no obsta para reconocer pudieron tener cierta influencia, aunque no decisiva, algunos factores externos: así la imitación al nacionalismo irlandés, que conmemoraba la Pascua sangrienta de 1916: su fracasada insurrección armada en Dublín contra Gran Bretaña, cuyo ejército la sofocó tras violentos combates, si bien empezó el lunes de Pascua y no el Domingo de Resurrección. El *ejemplo irlandés*, señalado por varios autores, fue ya apuntado por Jesús Zabala, vocal del BBB en 1932, en su discurso del *Aberri Eguna*, en el cual recordó también otra Pascua sangrienta mucho más antiguo: las *Visperas sicilianas* de 1282 (la matanza de los franceses, ocupantes de Sicilia, por los habitantes de la isla), si bien se desembarcada de ambos casos trágicos: ‘La fiesta pascual que nosotros los patriotas vascos queremos celebrar no es como las sangrientas, que los sicilianos y los irlandeses han hecho inmortales’ (álbum-revista del *Aberri Eguna* y periódico *Nación Vasca* de Buenos Aires, III-1932). Es probable que los impulsores de dicha fiesta tuviesen en cuenta el precedente irlandés, dada su inscripción al sector *aberriano*, que solía ver como modelo a imitar al nacionalismo irlandés radical (Sinn Féin) desde la Pascua de 1916 [...]”. See: De la Granja Sainz: *Ángel o demonio: Sabino Arana*, p. 305.

Linking the Aberri Eguna and three generations of Basque struggle via the Gallastegis and their Irish connections added historical depth to contemporary BIA-IRM relations.<sup>199</sup>

The granddaughter of Eli and daughter of Lander who was “serving time in a Spanish prison” was Usune Gallasetgi. She had been detained in 1994 for collaborating with ETA’s Bizkaian commando.<sup>200</sup> Three months after the above article was published, another of *Gudari*’s granddaughters and daughter of Iker, Irantzu (*Amaia*) Gallastegi Sodupe, was involved in one of the most dramatic and harrowing incidents in the history of ETA: the kidnapping and murder of a young PP councillor, Miguel Ángel Blanco, from the Bizkaian town of Ermua.

Ángel Blanco was kidnapped on 10 July 1997. When ETA’s demand for Madrid to move all its prisoners to the Basque Country within 48 hours had lapsed, the young councillor was shot in the back of the head. He died the following day on 13 July. The hostile public reaction to the killing of Miguel Ángel Blanco within the Basque Country, and the “Spirit of Ermua” that the execution provoked, is generally considered as a watershed moment in the terminal decline of support for ETA.<sup>201</sup>

Equally damaging for ETA was the case of José Antonio Ortega Lara. A member of the PP, Ortega Lara had been kidnapped by ETA in early 1996 and held in atrocious conditions for 532 days until he was found by police in a makeshift “zulo” (hovel). Having emerged seriously malnourished and distraught, the images of Ortega Lara sent shock waves through Spain.<sup>202</sup>

On the political front, the British/Irish inter-governmental dynamic around the DSD and the peace process that brought the “Troubles” to an end in 1998, became major international references for (radical and moderate) Basque nationalists throughout the 1990s. While acknowledging some of the major differences in both cases, HB and the PNV tended to focus on and draw attention to Britain’s effective granting of the *principle*

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<sup>199</sup> A similarly problematic account linking the 1916 Rising with the Aberri Eguna via Eli Gallastegi was published in *An Phoblacht/Republican News* in 2006: “During his time in Ireland, *Gudari* came to know the story of the Easter Rising, and inspired by the bravery and honour of the Irish revolutionaries, proposed that the Basque National Day should be celebrated on that same date, Easter Sunday, to honour Connolly, Pearse and the others. So on Easter Sunday, two countries and two traditions of freedom struggle draw even closer to each other. Basque and Irish join together in the common desire for freedom and independence”. See: “Basque Country and Ireland”, *An Phoblacht/Republican News*, 13.04.2006.

<sup>200</sup> “Espejo irlandés”, *El País*, 15.11.2001; “Terrorismo en familia”, *El Correo*, 20.04.2009.

<sup>201</sup> In 2006, Irantzu (*Amaia*) Gallastegi Sodupe was sentenced to 50 years in prison for her role in the kidnapping of Blanco. In total, four of *Gudari*’s grandchildren have been convicted on various charges related to ETA. See: Fernández Soldevilla: *La voluntad del gudari*, p. 110. For the “Spirit of Ermua” and its significance, see: Mees: *The Basque Contention*, pp. 186–190, pp. 192–193.

<sup>202</sup> Mees: *The Basque Contention*, p. 185.

of Irish self-determination. The exact details of how this form of Irish self-determination was to be carried out, and the objective differences of both cases, were naturally deemed to be of secondary importance.<sup>203</sup> Bookended by the DSD and GFA, this “Irish mirror” was transposed into the Basque/Spanish context and used as a tool to leverage the Spanish government towards a similar granting of the principle of self-determination. As the reader will recall, analogous patterns of discourse which compared and contrasted British and Spanish approaches (the latter unfavourably) to Ireland and the Basque Country *fin de siècle* were previously utilised by Basque nationalists.<sup>204</sup>

Confronted with the “Irish mirror”, Spanish nationalist politicians of the left, right and the mainstream Spanish media effectively ignored Basque nationalist claims for self-determination along the lines of what had been ostensibly achieved by Irish republicans and nationalists. Instead, these actors tended to point to the differing historical trajectories and contemporary social, economic, cultural, and political realities of (Northern) Ireland and the Basque Country. They also cited the lack of a violent inter-communal dynamic in the Basque Country, and the more advanced competencies and powers granted to the Basque government in comparison to Northern Ireland. Thus, rather than tackling the fundamental issue of Irish/Basque self-determination head-on, which Basque nationalists were eager to draw attention to, these Spanish actors tended to focus on alternative case factors (such as those presented above) in order to discredit the “Irish mirror” analogy.

An alternative narrative was usually presented: Ireland and the UK, as historical entities and modern EU states, were working out a mechanism to resolve the complex issue of Northern Ireland and its violent conflict. The Basque Country, by contrast, was an intrinsic realm of the historical Spanish nation and an integral part of modern Spain. This modern Spain, grounded in “constitutionalism” and a universalist “Estado de

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<sup>203</sup> Any future exercise of Irish “self-determination” will involve successive referenda held across the two jurisdictions of the island, with a first vote in Northern Ireland only granted after, in the view of a British Secretary of State for Northern Ireland: “it appears likely to him that a majority of those voting would express a wish that Northern Ireland should cease to be part of the United Kingdom and form part of a united Ireland”. Leading republicans have acknowledged that the terms of referenda provided for in the Good Friday Agreement do *not* constitute a true exercise of national self-determination. See: English: *Does Terrorism Work? A History*, p. 114. There is some evidence to suggest that, privately, ETA understood some of the limitations of the GFA *vis-à-vis* possible Irish reunification, more so than was presented in public. See: Alonso: “Pathways Out of Terrorism in Northern Ireland and the Basque Country: The Misrepresentation of the Irish Model”, p. 9 (footnotes 35 and 36).

<sup>204</sup> A number of Basque interviewees stressed the significant impact of the Downing Street Declaration on the Basque political dynamic in the 1990s. Author interview with Pernando Barrena (Donostia, 2017). Author interview with Karmelo Landa (Bilbo, 2016). Author interview with Juan José Ibarretxe (Leioa, 2016).

Derecho”, could not be threatened by way of Basque (or Catalan) self-determination lest its natural and “indivisible” character be undermined.<sup>205</sup>

Another interpretation of the “Irish mirror” was presented by the Basque journalist Iñigo Gurruchaga: namely that Basque nationalists, as “separatists” from Spain, arguably had more in common with Northern Irish unionists than they did with their Irish republican allies.<sup>206</sup>

Given the two main opposing schools of thought on the “Irish mirror”, held by Basque and pro-Spain/Spanish nationalists, it is tempting to conclude, as Paddy Woodworth neatly surmises: “The assertion that the Basque and Irish troubles have nothing in common is a political response to the opposite proposition: that the two conflicts are very similar indeed...”.<sup>207</sup> In essence —and while one must of course be careful of over-generalising— both sides in this debate tended to read, interpret and articulate contemporary events in Ireland in line with their own domestic political outlook.

The “Irish mirror” period of the 1990s may also be considered to have crystallised a fundamental difference in the overarching approaches by Madrid and London to their respective “regions”. While London could countenance the loss of its last territory in Ireland (and Scotland for that matter, as evidenced by the independence referendum of 2014), for many ordinary Spaniards and the Spanish political class, the prospect of losing the Basque Country, or Catalonia was, and *is*, a strike at the very heart and conception of Spain itself.<sup>208</sup> Indeed, one could argue that this is precisely why the “Irish mirror” was so forcibly rejected by pro-Spain/Spanish nationalist figures. For if you were to apply the UK’s recognition of Northern Ireland’s *contested* constitutional status (in the DSD and

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<sup>205</sup> Here, by “universalist”, I mean that much of the Spanish political class takes the Spanish nation almost as a given entity — a sort of natural reflection of society. This is most evident in the self-description of Spanish “constitutionalists”, who recoil from the label of Spanish “nationalists” and consider Basque (and Catalan) nationalists, by contrast, as “reactionary”. This is despite the fact that the Spanish Constitution, which underpins the “imagined” Spanish nation, contains all the orthodox trappings of nationalism (one nation, defined indivisible territory, proscribed nationality, etc). For a more advanced discussion of this issue, see: André Lecours: *Basque Nationalism and the Spanish State*, Reno, University of Nevada Press, 2007, pp. 141–146, p. 156. See also: Watson: *Basque Nationalism and Political Violence*, pp. 220–222.

<sup>206</sup> “Q & A: Northern Ireland and the Basque Conflict”, <http://news.bbc.co.uk/2/hi/europe/546371.stm> (last accessed 08 April 2020). Gurruchaga: *El modelo irlandés: historia secreta de un proceso de paz*.

<sup>207</sup> Cited in: Paddy Woodworth: “Ireland and the Basque Country”, *History Ireland*, vol. 9 (3), Autumn 2001.

<sup>208</sup> For a similar analysis, see: Bew, Frampton, Gurruchaga: *Talking to Terrorists: Making Peace in Northern Ireland and the Basque Country*, p. 245. For an insightful analysis of some of the factors that inform Spanish attitudes towards the Basque Country, see: Paddy Woodworth: “The Basque Country: the heart of Spain, a part of Spain, or Somewhere Else Altogether”, *Studies in 20<sup>th</sup> & 21<sup>st</sup> Century Literature*, vol no. 33, issue no. 2, 2009.



GFA) to the Basque context, it would require Spain having to discuss and concede something similar on the contested issue of Spanish/Basque sovereignty.

Finally, while the political strand between radical Basque nationalism and Irish republicanism was gradually enveloped within a wider multistrand nexus from the mid-1980s into the late 1990s, what of military links throughout the same period? Given the absence of relevant British and Irish state papers, unlike in the previous chapter, there is comparatively little to speculate on from this period.

Media speculation and interest in potential IRA-ETA links dwindled across the same timeframe. Whereas ETA and IRA militants had alluded to transnational links during clandestine interviews throughout the 1970s, the main *public* realm for BIA-IRM contacts and relations from the 1980s onwards was usually at the intersections of Herri Batasuna and Sinn Féin figures. Naturally, from a media perspective, the occasional pronouncements of transnational “solidarity” from Herri Batasuna and Sinn Féin representatives paled in comparison to the previous spectre of a Moscow-controlled “international terrorist network”. In short, the media simply moved on.<sup>209</sup>

Of course, this is not to suggest that a more *private* and parallel channel of communication between elements of ETA and the IRA did not exist throughout the same period. As we shall see in the next chapter, there is evidence suggesting that this was indeed the case in the 1990s. It is also worth noting that although there existed a reasonably clear organisational demarcation between membership of ETA and HB, until recently historical dual membership at the very highest echelons of the IRA and Sinn Féin has, on the contrary, been taken as a given. In this sense, a contact channel between international nodes of ETA and the IRA throughout this chapter period may well have been only one small step removed from the party-political relationship.

With this in mind, and to conclude this chapter, it is worth highlighting a senior republican’s candid remarks on potential ETA-IRA connections extending across most of this period:

“Well, without saying too much personally, there was always speculation that there were [ETA-IRA] connections and I would be very surprised —it sounds *too* political almost what I’m saying— but I would be very surprised if that were not so, you know? I mean, I think there were... yeah... there had to have been... there *were*... there were connections, yeah. I don’t know too much in detail, but yeah,

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<sup>209</sup> Press interest in Basque-Irish contacts was briefly piqued when the IRA “sleeper” Diarmuid “Ginger” O’Neill was shot dead in September 1996 during a police raid at his home in London. Survived by his Basque girlfriend, tributes were made to O’Neill from a number of Basque sources. See: “Shot London IRA activist new hero of Basques”, *Irish Independent*, 28.09.1996; “Garda security tight as IRA suspect buried”, *The Irish Times*, 04.10.1996; “Diarmuid O’Neil, el ‘inglés’ de Amorebieta”, *El País*, 27.09.1996.

there would have been military connections going way back... *way* back [...] I don't think anyone would think that that wasn't so".<sup>210</sup>

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<sup>210</sup> Anonymous interview. Italics used to denote stress on certain words by the interviewee.



## CHAPTER SIX

### 6.0. Introduction

“The Good Friday Agreement is now an example to follow for other countries. On Friday, while the referenda votes were taking place in Ireland, more than 3,000 Basques attended demonstrations organised by Herri Batasuna (HB), the Basque socialist independist party. Pickets were organised in different towns and cities of the Basque Country under the motto ‘Ireland says yes. The Basque Country says yes also’. [...] The demonstrations started at midday in Iruñea and Bilbao with members of the National Executive carrying Irish flags. Pernando Barrena, member of the HB national Executive, explained that they wanted to ‘demonstrate the solidarity of the left-wing nationalist people, and particularly of HB, with the Irish peace process and the new political scenario created by the ratification of the Agreement reached in Stormont’. Herri Batasuna also has proposed to all the political parties, trade unions and social and non-violent movements to meet at an ‘Irish Forum’ to analyse the peace process in Ireland and to try to find a way to peace for the Basque Country. HB sees the Good Friday Agreement as ‘a compromise for peace, a bet for the future’ and reinforces their hopes ‘to win back the Basque Country’s sovereignty’”.<sup>1</sup>

On 22 May 1998, concurrent referenda held in Northern Ireland and the Republic of Ireland paved the way for the ratification of the Belfast “Good Friday” Agreement. In Northern Ireland, 71.1% voted in favour of the accord.

Exit polls indicated that 96% of Catholics had voted in favour. The same data suggested Protestant support to be in the region of 55%. In the South, 94.4% supported the government’s proposed amendment to Articles 2 and 3 of the Irish Constitution. These articles had effectively claimed sovereignty over the six northern counties since 1937.<sup>2</sup>

As predicted in the *An Phoblacht/Republican News* extract above, in the decades since its signing the GFA has indeed become “an example to follow for other countries”.<sup>3</sup> Moreover, and as this chapter shall demonstrate, in no other territory were the details and implications of the GFA and the broader peace process more pored over than in the Basque Country. Two short indicative examples should suffice in demonstrating this high level of engagement from the outset. Firstly, even prior to the referenda taking place, Herri Batasuna translated and printed no fewer than 10,000 copies of the GFA in Euskara

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<sup>1</sup> “Basque support for yes”, *An Phoblacht/Republican News*, 28.05.1998.

<sup>2</sup> “The 1998 Referendums”, <https://www.ark.ac.uk/elections/fref98.htm> (last accessed 22 February 2020). Exit poll figures cited in: White: *Out of the Ashes*, p. 306.

<sup>3</sup> Bew, Frampton, Gurruchaga: *Talking to Terrorists: Making Peace in Northern Ireland and the Basque Country*, pp. 2–6.

and Spanish for its supporters to digest. Secondly, according to “G”, within days of the GFA being signed, hundreds of Irish flags were shipped from Dublin in preparation for the above-referenced HB pro-agreement “pickets”. These rallies took place in at least 44 Basque towns and urban centres.<sup>4</sup>

For the Basque *izquierda abertzale*, the Good Friday Agreement and the effective ending of the “Troubles” in 1998, had three significant implications. Firstly, as discussed in the previous chapter, the GFA, as the keystone of the “Irish mirror”, could be utilised as an indirect tool to leverage for negotiating with Spain on issues of sovereignty and self-determination. Secondly, as we shall see in the following section, it offered basic guiding principles and a kind of emulative roadmap for radical Basque nationalists to follow, or at least aspire to. Thirdly, the GFA copper-fastened the status of the Irish republican movement as the *izquierda abertzale*’s most valued transnational partner.

On this third point, the advantages for radical Basque nationalists in maintaining and developing its relationship with the Irish republicans were more discernible than ever. Not only had Sinn Féin built up an extensive network of international contacts throughout the peace process (especially in the United States), but the republican movement had also garnered the temporary goodwill and attention of the entire international community. Indeed, it would be no exaggeration to suggest that circa 1998, Gerry Adams was one of the most instantly recognisable figures in international politics. Via Sinn Féin’s “soft” international reach, the *izquierda abertzale* now had greater potential access to the main anglophone brokers in the international community — a constituency that had, for many decades, shown little or no interest in the Basque case.

The end of conflict in Northern Ireland had one other significant implication. In western Europe, ETA’s armed campaign now stood alone. For many of the group’s critics in the Basque Country, Spain and beyond, the paramilitaries’ use of violence appeared even more anachronistic and unnecessary than it had previously.

Of more direct relevance to the republican nexus, the underlying context in which radical Basque nationalist-Irish republican relations had been built up over the previous decades (mutual “armed struggle”) had now also fundamentally altered. And while it was clear that the *izquierda abertzale* could potentially benefit from the continuation of a

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<sup>4</sup> Herri Batasuna: “El Acuerdo: este acuerdo es sobre tu futuro: por favor leelo atentamente / Akordioa: akordio hau zure etorkizunari buruzkoa da: mesedez, arretaz irakur ezazu”. Fundación Sancho el Sabio (FSS). Author interview with “G”. Aulestia: *HB, Crónica de un delirio*, pp. 109–110.

relationship with Irish republicanism (as outlined above), it was not so immediately obvious what radical Basque nationalism offered the Irish republican movement in return.

Indicative of the *potential* for change in this hitherto dynamic, an *An Phoblacht/Republican News* report published only one month after the historic GFA referenda noted that:

“[...] [t]he Basque people have long shown an interest in the conflict here and consistently shown solidarity with Irish republicans. Irish republicans must take a deeper look at the situation in Euskal Herria and examine how we can show our support during this difficult period”.

In other words, not only should Irish republicans maintain solidarity towards their Basque allies, it was now beholden upon Irish republicans, post-GFA, to step up their support. If not: “without international pressure, the Spanish government will continue to terrorise the Basque people and remain reticent in its refusal to negotiate an end to the conflict”.<sup>5</sup>

In the summer of 1998, any prospect of the Spanish government engaging in a process “to negotiate an end to the conflict” seemed remote in the extreme. Since José María Aznar’s Partido Popular had come to power in May 1996, the entire *izquierda abertzale* had borne the brunt of a severe police, political, and juridical squeeze.

We have already noted the conviction of Herri Batasuna’s “Mesa Nacional” in December 1997. In July 1998, the Audiencia Nacional judge Baltasar Garzón prepared a case against Orain S.A., the parent company of the newspaper *Egin* and its affiliated radio station *Egin Irratia*. Garzón ordered the immediate closure of both entities and the arrest of the company’s directors for alleged links with ETA. Writing in *An Phoblacht/Republican News*, Teresa Toda, a long-time contributor and Assistant Editor of *Egin*, condemned the closures. She accused the Minister of the Interior, Jaime Mayor Oreja, of leading a “crusade” against the “Basque Independence Movement” with the complicity of “judges and an obliging media”.<sup>6</sup>

For the next two decades, various groups and organisations that were deemed to offer social, moral, or material support to ETA, were to become embroiled in what became known as the “18/98 macro-process”.<sup>7</sup> Meanwhile, despite the massive popular backlash

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<sup>5</sup> “Basque repression intensifies”, *An Phoblacht/Republican News*, 18.06.1998. This article was published in relation to the controversial death of the ETA member Inaxi Zeberio Arruabarrena,

<sup>6</sup> The charges against *Egin* were dropped the following year. A new daily named *GARA* became the main paper associated with the *izquierda abertzale*. For Toda’s column, see: “Spain’s mad race against Basque independence”, *An Phoblacht/Republican News*, 23.07.1998.

<sup>7</sup> “El 18/98 baja el telón dejando dolor pero sin lograr su objetivo”, *GARA*, 05.01.2018.



against ETA that had followed the assassination of Miguel Ángel Blanco in July 1997, the organisation continued to target public representatives, in particular those of the Partido Popular. Five more politicians: José Luis Caso Cortines, José Ignacio Iruretagoyena Larrañaga, Alberto Jiménez-Becerill Barrio, Manuel Zamarreño Villoria (all from the PP) and Tomás Caballero Pastor (of the UPN) were killed by ETA within twelve months of Blanco's death.<sup>8</sup> Without a change in dynamic, it looked as if ETA's armed campaign would simply continue.

It was in this context that the PNV, alongside a broad range of smaller Basque parties, social organisations, and trade unions, sensationally announced an accord with Herri Batasuna on 12 September 1998. Four days later, ETA called a ceasefire. In one fell swoop, the Lizarra (or Estella) Agreement, signed in the Navarrese town of the same name, effectively turned the dynamic of the Basque contention on its head.<sup>9</sup>

### **6.1. From Belfast to Bilbo**

The direct connection between the Irish peace process and the Lizarra-Garazi Agreement (LGA) could not have been made more explicit. Not only was the initiative that had led to the accord named the "Foro Irlanda", but the document itself opened with a seven-point analysis of the factors which had, according to its authors, "propitiated the Peace Agreement in the north of Ireland". One source has even suggested that Father Alec Reid drafted the Lizarra-Garazi Agreement.<sup>10</sup>

Analysing what had ostensibly underpinned the Irish peace process, the collective view of the LGA signatories was that: "All parties to the [Irish] conflict accepted the origins and its political nature and, consequently, that its resolution also should be political". Moreover —:

"[...] [t]he recognition of the right of the citizens of Ireland to self-determination brought depth to the content of democracy (creating new formulas of sovereignty) as well as the method (giving the citizens the last word). These political characteristics contained in the Peace Agreement appreciate the idea of negotiations, not with the intention to win but of solving the conflict, incorporating all the existing traditions of the island and placing all political projects as equals for

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<sup>8</sup> "Fallecidos por terrorismo", <http://www.interior.gob.es/fallecidos-por-terrorismo> (last accessed 22 February 2020).

<sup>9</sup> The Lizarra Agreement was later known as the Lizarra-Garazi Agreement after a number of organisations in Iparalde also signed up to the document in the Lower Navarrese town of Donibane Garazi (Saint-Jean-Pied-de-Port).

<sup>10</sup> Cited in: Alonso: "Pathways Out of Terrorism in Northern Ireland and the Basque Country: The Misrepresentation of the Irish Model", p. 16 (footnote 61).

achieving their political goals without any other limits other than the support of the democratic majority”.<sup>11</sup>

In an interview published in *An Phoblacht/Republican News* less than two weeks later, Esther Aguirre underlined, in her opinion, the weighty influence of the Irish republican movement as the main international reference for the construction of the Lizarra-Garazi Agreement:

“We tried to involve everyone in building a new way towards peace, like the Republican Movement has done. I think they have helped us very much. They have taught us the way, and it has been very useful for us”.<sup>12</sup>

For his part, Gerry Adams welcomed the LGA and urged “all those involved, and particularly the Spanish government, to learn the lessons of our experience”.<sup>13</sup>

Whereas two decades earlier, Basque nationalists had sharply diverged in response to the Transition, Lizarra-Garazi effectively demanded that it was time for Basque citizens to decide their own future collectively and independently. And while this was standard fare for the *izquierda abertzale*, it represented a bold and highly risky strategy for the PNV.

Prior to the presentation of the LGA in September, two secret meetings had taken place on 30 July 1998 between ETA and the PNV, and ETA and EA, respectively. In a document submitted by ETA, the paramilitaries demanded that the PNV and EA—the two moderate lynchpins of the pan-nationalist front—cease all cooperation with PSOE (PSE-EE) and PP. Additionally, the two parties should cooperate with other nationalist organisations to establish a seven-province Basque governmental institution. If these (and other more minor) conditions were met, ETA would publicly declare an “indefinite” ceasefire. In private, this ceasefire would be subject to revision every four months. In other words, if ETA was not happy with the progress being made, it would resume its armed campaign.

In August, the PNV and EA made suggested qualifications to ETA’s demands. These qualifications were, in turn, rejected by ETA, but not communicated back to the parties.

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<sup>11</sup> What would become the “Foro Irlanda” was first initiated in late 1997. See: De Pablo; Mees: *El Péndulo Patriótico*, p. 441. For an English version of the Lizarra-Garazi Agreement, see: [https://peacemaker.un.org/sites/peacemaker.un.org/files/ES\\_980912\\_LizarraGaraziAccord.pdf](https://peacemaker.un.org/sites/peacemaker.un.org/files/ES_980912_LizarraGaraziAccord.pdf). (last accessed 22 February 2020). For criticism of the LGA signatories’ supposed misunderstanding/misrepresentation of the fundamentals of the Irish peace process, see: Alonso: “Pathways Out of Terrorism in Northern Ireland and the Basque Country: The Misrepresentation of the Irish Model”. As referenced in the previous chapter, Alonso’s thesis regarding what he calls the “so-called peace process” in Ireland, is that the republican movement was politically and militarily defeated.

<sup>12</sup> “The Republican Movement has taught us the way”, *An Phoblacht/Republican News*, 24.09.1998.

<sup>13</sup> “Dúirt Siad”, *An Phoblacht/Republican News*, 24.09.1998.

Thus, despite the divergent positions of the parties and ETA on key aspects of the latter's ceasefire conditions, the process continued on regardless. Almost from the beginning, the stage was set for an inevitable confrontation.<sup>14</sup>

Even though the major political parties to the agreement, the PNV, HB and EA, may well have “tried to involve everyone in building a new way towards peace” —or had notions to do so—, the reality was that apart from the Basque regional sector of Izquierda Unida, all the participants to the LGA process were from a Basque nationalist perspective. Another signatory to the accord was the peace movement, Elkarri. Speaking to this author, former spokesperson for the organisation, Paul Rios, remarks:

“We were trying to replicate the process in Northern Ireland. So, for us, it was very important the first dialogue between Gerry Adams and John Hume in the nationalist community, at the beginning. So, I think Lizarra was trying to replicate that, to start a process of dialogue inside the nationalist community and to open that afterwards with the other communities. I think that's what the idea was in the beginning. The problem is that we replicated it, but not very good”.<sup>15</sup>

For the PP and PSE-EE, who between them represented a substantial minority within the Basque Autonomous Community, the LGA was anathema. Criticism from the Spanish right and left immediately rained down on the PNV for its act of “betrayal”.<sup>16</sup>

Gerry Adams flew into the eye of this storm on 05 October 1998. Given all the overarching Irish-Basque analogies surrounding the respective processes in each country, who better (from the izquierda abertzale's view) than the Sinn Féin leader to offer his views at this delicate moment? HB hired a private plane for Adams and a small republican contingent.

Arriving in Bilbo, Adams was welcomed at the airport by a huge crowd of well-wishers waving Irish flags. The Sinn Féin leader was ushered into a press gathering of more than 100 local and international journalists. To his right sat Pat Rice, providing translations of questions, and generally acting as Adams' Basque chaperone. To his left sat Arnaldo Otegi, a former ETA “Polimili” who had been elevated to Herri Batasuna's leadership cadre following the imprisonment of the party's “Mesa Nacional” in 1997.

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<sup>14</sup> Mees: *The Basque Contention*, pp. 196–197; Murua: *Ending ETA's Armed Campaign*, pp. 42–48. For an analysis of the PNV's strategic thinking in moving towards a common platform with Herri Batasuna, and for some of the broader factors that made the accord possible, see: Ludger Mees: “Nationalist Politics at the Crossroads: The Basque Nationalist Party and the Challenge of Sovereignty (1998–2014)”, *Nationalism and Ethnic Politics*, vol. 21, issue. 1, 2015, pp. 44–62. Both Mees and Murua highlight the importance of the Irish peace process in encouraging the formation of this arrangement.

<sup>15</sup> Author interview with Paul Rios (Leioa, 2016).

<sup>16</sup> Whitfield: *Endgame for ETA*, p. 91.

Otegi already had first-hand experience of Sinn Féin and the republican movement. Earlier in the year he had met with party political representatives and Father Alec Reid in Belfast. As Otegi's profile rose, he would go on to become known as the "Basque Gerry Adams" in the anglophone world.<sup>17</sup>

During the press conference in Bilbo, Otegi called on the Spanish government to state:

"[...] públicamente que esta situación de comprender, entender y articular... que la única voluntad que va a decidir el futuro de Euskal Herria es la voluntad de los vascos y el gobierno español está dispuesto de aceptarla".

Striking a note of caution, Adams spoke of the challenges that would undoubtedly arise from the Lizarra-Garazi initiative:

"There's bound to be distrust here. You've had thirty years of conflict. People have been killed. People have been hurt. There's bound to be distrust. There's bound to be suspicion. There's bound to be hatred. There's bound to be fear. And the way to resolve that is to seize the opportunity and widen the space which has been created".<sup>18</sup>

After the media gathering, a joint lunch was held with Adams, HB and PNV deputies attending. This was followed by a private meeting with the long-time PNV President, Xabier Arzalluz. Later that evening, Adams attended another meeting with all the LGA signatories, before rounding off his trip by visiting Karmelo Landa in prison.<sup>19</sup> Reflecting on the benefit of Adams' quickfire visit to the Basque Country, and other such transnational IRM-BIA initiatives from this period, Pat Rice opines:

"[...] when the Irish peace process started to happen, they [Herri Batasuna] saw possibilities —obviously they were conscious of the differences [in each process] and they were conscious of the different opposition [in each country], they were conscious of all kinds of factors— but I think they saw possible... well, they *did*, frankly, see benefits from trying to tie a kind of similar peace process modelled on nationalist unity and all that kind of thing".<sup>20</sup>

With the PNV now de facto allies of Herri Batasuna in a Basque pan-nationalist front, Adams' meeting with Arzalluz had been given the green light by HB. Indeed, according to Rice, practically all of Sinn Féin's initiatives *vis-à-vis* the Basque Country from this period were subject to Herri Batasuna's guidance:

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<sup>17</sup> "Pedagogía de la negociación", *Egin*, 29.03.1998. "The Basque Gerry Adams", <https://www.politico.eu/article/arnaldo-otegi-the-basque-gerry-adams/> (last accessed 03 May 2020).

<sup>18</sup> See: "Spain: Irish Sinn Féin leader Adams meets political leaders", footage available at <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=7pgKr2yCziw> (last accessed 22 February 2020). Juxtaposed against HB's support for ETA, Adams' words of "peace" were reportedly welcomed by a Spanish government spokesperson, Josep Piqué. See: "El Gobierno agradece las 'palabras de paz' del líder del Sinn Féin", *El País*, 07.10.1998.

<sup>19</sup> "The cry is independencía!", *An Phoblacht/Republican News*, 08.10.1998.

<sup>20</sup> Author interview with Pat Rice (Belfast, 2017). Use of italics for Rice's stress on "*did*".

“We accepted that we had a relationship with [Herri] Batasuna ... we accepted that we were dealing with decent, reliable people. We would have taken our line in Euskadi —who we talked to or who we didn’t talk to— very much from them [...]. Our relationship with any other group in the Basque Country would have been determined almost totally by [Herri] Batasuna”.

Rice gives two examples of how this exclusive relationship typically worked. For instance, Txema Montero, who had left Herri Batasuna in 1992 and moved into the orbit of the PNV, apparently contacted Rice thereafter regarding a possible Basque-Irish youth initiative. Rice, who had always maintained good personal relations with Montero, politely declined. Similarly, Rice recalls turning down invitations to several Elkarri-organised talks and events out of respect for Herri Batasuna. In short, if HB were opposed to a particular invite, Rice —having consulted with others in Sinn Féin’s International Office— would invariably decline. Rice: “Very often the approach would be made through me, but of course I wouldn’t be deciding on my own or anything”.<sup>21</sup> Rice’s overview is indirectly corroborated by Paul Rios, who notes that the *izquierda abertzale* often “blocked” Elkarri attempts to establish dialogue with Sinn Féin around the movement’s dialogue and conflict resolution initiatives.<sup>22</sup>

On 25 October 1998, the sixth elections to the Basque Parliament since the Transition were held. Herri Batasuna candidates ran under the collective banner of *Euskal Herritarrok* (Basque Citizens), alongside two smaller parties: *Zutik* (Stand Up) and *Batzarre* (Assembly). With ETA’s ceasefire and the Lizarra-Garazi Agreement in place, the HB-led coalition was rewarded by the Basque electorate, increasing its seat tally from eleven to fourteen. With the PP also increasing its representation (by five to sixteen), the new PNV *Lehendakari*-in-waiting, Juan José Ibarretxe, was forced to rely on EH deputies in order to secure his investiture.<sup>23</sup> Coming off the back of the LGA, this further ratcheted up criticism of the PNV from Madrid.

Despite the fierce public discourse that pitted Basque and Spanish nationalists against each other during the election, with the ink only barely dry on the Lizarra-Garazi Agreement, José María Aznar’s State Secretary for Security, Ricardo Martí Fluxá, sounded out the British Prime Minister Tony Blair’s Chief of Staff, Jonathan Powell, the USA Special Envoy for Northern Ireland, George Mitchell, and the UN Secretary General, Kofi Annan, on the merits of engaging in talks with ETA. Exploratory

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<sup>21</sup> Author interview with Pat Rice (Belfast, 2017).

<sup>22</sup> Author interview with Paul Rios (Leioa, 2016).

<sup>23</sup> “Resultados electorales”, <http://www.euskadi.eus/ab12aAREWar/resultado/maint> (last accessed 29 April 2020).

discussions between intermediaries of the Spanish government and ETA subsequently took place in Zurich the following May. Both sides reportedly exchanged comments on the Irish peace process.

As with the Algiers process a decade earlier, it quickly became apparent that there was an unbridgeable gap in expectations between the two sides. While Aznar would only consider “peace for prisoners” on the basis of ETA’s unequivocal will to end violence, the latter was seeking to discuss and negotiate the more structural and political issues of Basque contention. A second round of talks was agreed in principle, but ultimately never materialised.<sup>24</sup> In the meantime, the Basque pan-nationalist front that had been constructed during the “Foro Irlanda” and presented in Lizarra the previous September, was coming under major strain.

In July 1999, exactly one year after the secret discussions that preceded the LGA, another covert meeting took place in France between the PNV, EA and ETA. This time ETA presented proposals to call coordinated elections across the BAC, Navarre and Iparralde. The PNV rejected ETA’s suggestion as utopian.<sup>25</sup> The LGA was now on extremely shaky ground.

Notwithstanding the fragility of the arrangement, on 18 September 1999, 1,778 municipal representatives attended and formally established the first Basque Udaltzako at the Palacio Euskalduna in Bilbo.<sup>26</sup> Made up of elected representatives from the seven historical Basque territories, this cross-border “National” Assembly went some way towards building an institutional framework for Euskal Herria — even if, for the moment, its powers were non-existent. In the meantime, the PNV and EA still continued to operate within the existing Spanish state bodies and structures. This was too much for ETA.

On 28 November 1999, after more than a year of what the organisation perceived as a lack of progress on constructing a new Euskal Herria, ETA gave effective notice to the end of its ceasefire. In a break from the norm, the group apportioned most of the blame

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<sup>24</sup> For the above, see: Whitfield: *Endgame for ETA*, pp. 93–94; Bew, Frampton, Gurruchaga: *Talking to Terrorists: Making Peace in Northern Ireland and the Basque Country*, p. 225. “Cuando Aznar comisionó al obispo Uriarte para mediar con ETA”, available at: [https://www.eldiario.es/norte/euskadi/Aznar-comisiono-obispo-Uriarte-ETA\\_0\\_865114229.html](https://www.eldiario.es/norte/euskadi/Aznar-comisiono-obispo-Uriarte-ETA_0_865114229.html) (last accessed 11 April 2020). Powell also played a significant part in the Irish peace process. Akin to Father Alec Reid, he would attempt to channel this experience into the Basque political arena.

<sup>25</sup> Murua: *Ending ETA’s Armed Campaign*, pp. 45–48.

<sup>26</sup> Many of those involved in the Udaltzako were subsequently prosecuted. See: “2011-01-20 sentencia udaltzako”, <http://s.libertaddigital.com/doc/sentencia-de-la-an-41912086.pdf> (last accessed 11 April 2020). Sinn Féin’s Alex Maskey attended the Udaltzako inauguration. Author interview with Alex Maskey (Belfast, 2018).



for the impending collapse at the door of Basque nationalist actors, rather than the Spanish state.<sup>27</sup>

According to the journalist Florencio Domínguez Iribarren, prior to resuming its armed campaign, ETA analysed the IRA's 1996 "Canary Wharf" ceasefire breakdown. The *etarras* apparently decided to recommence with a "spectacular" of their own. Arrangements were put in place for 1,700 kilos of explosives to be moved to Madrid in anticipation of what was to come. The attack was foiled, however, when the Guardia Civil intercepted the transport vehicles shortly before the plan could be executed.<sup>28</sup>

ETA began the new millennium with a less "spectacular" —but equally, fatal— car bomb attack in Madrid on 21 January 2000. Lieutenant Colonel Pedro Antonio Blanco García died in the blast. If there was still any lingering doubt about the organisation's return to violence, ETA confirmed the end of its ceasefire with a spate of lethal attacks against politicians and Spanish security personnel over the following months.

Notwithstanding some notable exceptions, Herri Batasuna refused to condemn the renewal of ETA's campaign. The pan-nationalist front, and by extension, the entire Lizarra-Garazi process, quickly dissolved away in a storm of recriminations and bitter acrimony. Broader still, the very fabric of Basque society began to show dangerous signs of "polarised pluralism"<sup>29</sup> — a term that would usually be more fitting for Northern Ireland.

### **Brothers in arms**

Away from the difficult bedding in of the new political dispensation in Northern Ireland, and the drama of the Lizarra-Garazi process in the Basque Country, the rhythm of the republican movement–izquierda abertzale nexus carried on as normal throughout 1998. We have already noted the hive of activity at political party level around the GFA, with reciprocal visits paid by Arnaldo Otegi, Pernando Barrena, Esther Aguirre and Gerry Adams to Ireland and the Basque Country, respectively. Other nexus strands arguably became even more relevant post-GFA.

For instance, in late June 1998, a five-strong delegation from Jarrai embarked on a 9-day trip to Ireland "to make a youth orientated analysis of the Irish peace process to see if there are lessons to be learned for the ongoing conflict in Euskal Herria". The same

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<sup>27</sup> "ETA's end to ceasefire a challenge to nationalists", *Irish Times*, 07.12.1999. For ETA's statement, see: <https://www.elmundo.es/nacional/eta/tregua/ruptura.html> (last accessed 11 April 2020).

<sup>28</sup> Domínguez Iribarren: *La agonía de ETA*, p. 63.

<sup>29</sup> Muro: "ETA during democracy, 1975–2011", (quote on p. 40).

month, a video on the “struggle of the Basque prisoners”, titled with the republican slogan “Tíocfaigh ár lá” (“Our Day Will Come”), was disseminated among young republicans. In September, two delegates of the Irish republican prisoner advocacy group Saoirse (Freedom) travelled to the Basque Country where they held talks with their Basque counterparts. Discussions were also organised with “political, community and church representatives”. Finally, in October 1998, the aforementioned Jarrai representatives, Arturo Villanueva and Josetxo Otegi Arrugaeta, addressed Sinn Féin Youth’s first National Congress.<sup>30</sup> Political party, prisoner advocacy and youth links accounted for, what of the military connections between ETA and the IRA in the immediate pre- and post-Good Friday Agreement years?

In 2002, Florencio Domínguez Iribarren published “Dentro de ETA. La vida diaria de los terroristas”. At the beginning of chapter 10, Domínguez tells the story of how the aforementioned Irantzu (*Amaia*) Gallastegi and another *etarra*, Mikel Zubimendi, were arrested by French police on 09 March 1999 in Paris. They were carrying out what the group referred to as “Operación Gorris [Reds]”. This operation apparently “[...] consistente en la compra de armamento a unos traficantes alemanes”. Ten years later, in the same author’s “La Agonía de ETA”, two individuals were named as ETA’s interlocutors in Paris. They were James Monaghan and “Jenifer” — two “representantes oficiales del IRA”.<sup>31</sup>

According to Domínguez’s account, the IRA duo had been working with ETA for many years, “[...] facilitándoles contactos con otros traficantes de armas en el mercado internacional y vendiéndoles los excedentes del IRA”. These “excedentes” of the IRA had apparently included two Russian-made missiles sold to ETA only a few months previously. Separately, it was later alleged that a plot to kill Prime Minister Aznar in 2001 failed due to a “faulty IRA missile”.<sup>32</sup>

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<sup>30</sup> “Jarrai speaks of close ties with SFY”, *An Phoblacht/Republican News*, 02.07.1998; “Tíocfaidh ár lá”, *An Phoblacht/Republican News*, 18.06.1998; “Saoirse supports Basque POWs”, *An Phoblacht/Republican News*, 01.10.1998; “Young and Independent”, *An Phoblacht/Republican News*, 22.10.1998.

<sup>31</sup> See: Domínguez Iribarren: *Dentro de ETA*, p. 239. Unless otherwise stated, all information and direct quotes contained in the rest of this section (the following seven paragraphs) may be found in: Domínguez Iribarren: *La agonía de ETA*, pp. 15–36. James Monaghan was sentenced to three years in prison in 1971 by a Dublin court for possession of explosives, conspiracy, and criminal damage. He has been “identified by British and Irish authorities as the head of the IRA’s engineering department in charge of design and development of armaments such as sophisticated mortar bombs and rocket launchers”. Cited in: “Hearing before the Committee on International Relations House of Representatives. One Hundred Seventh Congress. Second Session. April 24, 2002, Serial No. 107–87”, p. 105. P14,913. LLB.

<sup>32</sup> “Spanish PM saved from assassination by faulty IRA missile”, *The Telegraph*, 18.01.2010.

Other ETA-IRA links referred to over the following twenty-one pages of Domínguez's text include: references to contacts between ETA and the IRA representatives going as far back as 1996, and previous meetings between the Parisian interlocutors in November of 1998 and January 1999.

Returning to events in the French capital in March 1999, after some confusion over the agreed location, the ETA-IRA encounter was said to have taken place in the Hotel Printania on 08 March. At the meeting, details of the previous two years of transactions were apparently discussed. ETA was in the black to the tune of \$675,000. With a consignment worth \$125,000, consisting of 50 Sig Sauer pistols, 13 (.32) calibre silencers, 28 kilos of semtex and various munition cartridges said to be already in the pipeline, the *etarras* had two choices: to purchase more arms from the IRA, or receive the outstanding balance. It was agreed that another meeting would be scheduled within the next four months, at which point ETA would have a decision for their IRA comrades. The two groups subsequently departed.

The following day, the ETA contingent, including its military head, *Kantauri* [José Javier Arizkuren], were arrested by French police after an undercover operation. As reported by Domínguez, the *etarras* immediately suspected that the IRA volunteers had been tracked by British intelligence agents, which had inadvertently led to the Basques' capture. The IRA members had no such problems with the local police.

In an undated communication discovered during a French police raid in the town of Beskoitze (Brisconsin) in 2004, and apparently sent to ETA by the IRA shortly after the Paris incident, the following message was relayed:

“En nombre de la dirección del IRA os transmitimos saludos revolucionarios [...] Debemos pedir perdón por cualquier error o falta que encontréis en esta carta. Hemos intentado contactar con vosotros. Debemos tratar ciertos asuntos en marcha y comprender qué pasó en París el 8 de marzo cuando Kantauri, Mikel y los otros fueron detenidos algunas horas después de haber tenido una reunión con dos representantes del IRA. [...] Hemos sentido un gran dolor, especialmente los que hemos tenido el honor de encontrarnos con Kantauri [...] Os pedimos que nos comunicéis todo lo que sabéis sobre su detención. Estamos igualmente muy inquietos por los cuatro hermanos vascos con los que hicimos un trabajo el pasado año. [...] Os proponemos una reunión en el momento que decidáis para profundizar los temas mencionados arriba y otros asuntos en marcha. [...] El mensajero encargado de enviaros esta carta goza de nuestra total confianza, pero no está al corriente de su contenido, aunque está listo para viajar cuando queráis para establecer los detalles de nuestra propuesta. Personalmente, yo soy quien ha trabajado más con Kantauri y Mikel y os pido, si estáis en comunicación con ellos,

enviarles [illegible] dedicados a vuestro pueblo al nuestro. Respondernos [sic], por favor.<sup>33</sup>

As has been illustrated at various points throughout chapters 4 and 5, several BIA and IRM figures have, on different occasions (including during the conducting of research for this study), either strongly alluded to or acknowledged the existence of a working relationship between ETA (-m and/or -pm) and the Provisional IRA. Naturally, information on the specifics of these relations from the same sources has either been unforthcoming or unsubstantiated. If Domínguez Iribarren's detailed account of ETA-IRA links in "La Agonía de ETA" is accurate, it puts some flesh on the bones of this military strand.

In summary, Domínguez Iribarren suggests that at an officially sanctioned, organisation-to-organisation level, the IRA helped to traffic arms for ETA on the European continent from the mid-1990s to the end of the decade.

### **Under pressure**

"Our war on terror begins with al-Qaida, but it does not end there. It will not end until every terrorist group of global reach has been found, stopped, and defeated".<sup>34</sup>

In the wake of the 9/11 attacks, US President George W. Bush declared his country's so-called "war on terror". Within 18 months, US-led forces had invaded Afghanistan and Iraq. Among the USA's traditional European allies, opinion regarding the strategic wisdom (and legality) of invading the latter was deeply divided. In this debate, Spanish Prime Minister José María Aznar quickly emerged as one of President Bush's most ardent supporters. Spain, which held a non-permanent seat on the UN Security Council at the time, subsequently deployed some 1,300 troops to Iraq despite the fact that more than 90% of Spaniards were opposed to the war.<sup>35</sup>

Notwithstanding the political divisions in Europe over President Bush's Middle East "crusade", an emerging international consensus demanded that short thrift be given to any paramilitary organisation that continued to carry out acts of terrorism, or political parties

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<sup>33</sup> Domínguez deduces that the author of this letter is the aforementioned 'Jenifer', who was apparently resident in Cuba from 1990 to 1995 as a "representante del movimiento republicano".

<sup>34</sup> "Transcript of President Bush's address to a joint session of Congress on Thursday night, September 20, 2001", available at <http://edition.cnn.com/2001/US/09/20/gen.bush.transcript/> (last accessed 02 March 2019).

<sup>35</sup> "Spanish ex-prime minister defends decision to back Iraq war", *The Guardian*, 02.11.2015, <https://www.theguardian.com/world/2015/nov/02/spain-ex-premier-jose-maria-aznar-iraq-war> (last accessed 12 April 2020).

that defended (or were seen to defend) said militant organisations.<sup>36</sup> These developments naturally spelled trouble for ETA, Herri Batasuna, and indeed the broader izquierda abertzale platform.

Already prior to the 9/11 attacks, 2001 was panning out as an *annus horribilis* for the izquierda abertzale. Baltasar Garzón, who had first initiated proceedings against *Egin* and *Egin Irratia* in 1998, spearheaded a number of new investigations against various sectors of the izquierda abertzale.<sup>37</sup> Meanwhile, the public's response to ETA's return to violence was to slash Euskal Herritarrok's tally of seats in the Basque Parliament from 14 to 7 in May. Post 9/11, on 28 December 2001, and at Spain's request, the EU (all 15 states) unanimously declared ETA to be a terrorist organisation, meaning that any assets connected with the group be frozen, and suspected members apprehended in member states.<sup>38</sup> 2002 and 2003 were to continue in much the same vein.

On 26 March 2002, the USA's Department of the Treasury Office of Foreign Assets Control published an updated list of recognised "Foreign Terrorist Organizations", including ETA, HB, Euskal Herritarrok, Batasuna (a new left nationalist coalition and *de facto* successor to HB, organised across Euskal Herria), Jarrai, Haika (a fusion of Jarrai and Gazteriak, the latter of which was Jarrai's equivalent in Iparralde), Segi (which succeeded Haika), KAS, Ekin (successor to KAS), Gestoras Pro Amnistía (an advocacy group for ETA prisoners), Askatasuna (successor to Gestoras Pro Amnistía), and Xaki (an international entity of the izquierda abertzale).<sup>39</sup>

In August, the "Superjuez" Garzón temporarily suspended Batasuna for three years owing to its apparent connections to ETA. This was a crushing blow for the izquierda

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<sup>36</sup> "The Bush Crusade", *The Nation*, 20.09.2004, <https://www.thenation.com/article/archive/bush-crusade/> (site last accessed 12 April 2020); "George Bush: 'God told me to end the tyranny in Iraq'", *The Guardian*, 07.10.2005. Nicholas Rostow: "Before and after: The Changed UN Response to Terrorism Since September 11<sup>th</sup>", *Cornell International Law Journal*, Vol. 35, Issue 3, Winter 2002.

<sup>37</sup> See: Whitfield: *Endgame for ETA*, pp. 100–105.

<sup>38</sup> "ETA", <https://baltasargarzon.org/baltasar-garzon/carrera-judicial/terrorismo/eta/>; Irwin M. Cohen, Raymond R. Corrado: "A Future for the ETA?" in: Dilip K. Das, Peter C. Kratcoski (eds.): *Meeting the Challenges of Global Terrorism: Prevention, Control, and Recovery*, Oxford, Lexington Books, 2003, pp. 271–290 (specifically p. 271).

<sup>39</sup> "Executive Order 13224 blocking Terrorist Property and a summary of the Terrorism Sanctions Regulations (Title 31 Part 595 of the U.S. Code of Federal Regulations), Terrorism List Governments Sanctions Regulations (Title 31 Part 596 of the U.S. Code of Federal Regulations), and Foreign Terrorist Organizations Sanctions Regulations (Title 31 Part 597 of the U.S. Code of Federal Regulations)". US Department of the Treasury Office of Foreign Assets Control. See: <https://web.archive.org/web/20070710174922/http://www.treasury.gov/offices/enforcement/ofac/program/s/terror/terror.pdf>. According to Garzón, Xaki "coordina la totalidad de las relaciones exteriores del MLNV con la supervisión de KAS y el control de ETA". See: "El juez Garzón procesa a 16 integrantes del 'aparato' de asuntos exteriores de ETA", *El País*, 08.08.2000, [https://elpais.com/diario/2000/08/08/espana/965685601\\_850215.html](https://elpais.com/diario/2000/08/08/espana/965685601_850215.html) (sites last accessed 26 February 2020).

abertzale. The following year, in March 2003 the Spanish Supreme Court formally proscribed Batasuna (as well as HB and EH) on the grounds that it had violated the state's new "Ley Orgánica de Partidos Políticos" — a law which had tightened regulations around the condemnation of terrorist acts. Soon after, both the US and EU declared Batasuna to be a terrorist organisation.<sup>40</sup> Reeling from these blows, and increasingly isolated both home and abroad, at least the political leadership cadre of the izquierda abertzale could still count on the solidarity and support of Sinn Féin. Or could they?

While certainly not in the same predicament as their radical Basque nationalist comrades, the republican movement had its own, not insignificant problems. On 11 August 2001, exactly one month before the 9/11 attacks, three Irish republicans with mixed historical membership of Sinn Féin and the IRA had been arrested at Bogotá airport in Colombia. The three men, Niall Connolly, Martin McCauley, and the aforementioned "Gorri", James Monaghan, were suspected of travelling on false passports. News of the "Colombia 3", as they would become commonly referred to, immediately made international headlines. Subsequently charged, acquitted, and charged again on more serious allegations related to training FARC rebels, the "Colombia 3" covertly fled the South American state in late 2004.<sup>41</sup>

Overlapping with 9/11, and coupled with domestic scandals such as the "Stormont 'spygate'" affair in 2002, and the "Northern bank robbery" in 2004, the case of the "Colombia 3" not only reflected badly on Sinn Féin, but it also called into question the credentials of the IRA ceasefire.<sup>42</sup> ETA also got dragged into the mire.

As early as October 2000, Colombian and Spanish authorities had flagged links between ETA, FARC and the IRA at an Interpol conference held in Paris. According to various sources, the link between the IRA and FARC had come about via Niall Connolly's

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<sup>40</sup> Leslie Turano: "Spain: Banning political parties as a response to Basque terrorism", *International Journal of Constitutional Law*, 1(4), October 2003, pp. 730–740; "Basque nationalist party shut down", *The Guardian*, 26.08.2002.

<sup>41</sup> Having fled the country, the three men were convicted *in absentia* and sentenced to 17 years in prison by a Colombian judge. "Fugitive IRA man 'aided Colombia escape'", *The Guardian*, 19.12.2004.

<sup>42</sup> The Stormont 'spygate' affair, which centred on allegations of a republican spy ring in Stormont, led to the collapse of the Northern Ireland Executive in 2002. For a brief overview, see: "Stormontgate: how events unfolded", *Irish Times*, 17.12.2005, <https://www.irishtimes.com/news/stormontgate-how-events-unfolded-1.1287301>. In December 2004, £26.5 million was stolen from a Belfast branch of "Northern Bank". The robbery was widely believed to have been orchestrated by the IRA. See: "Northern Bank robbery: The crime that nearly ended the peace process", *The Guardian*, 09.10.2008, <https://www.theguardian.com/uk/2008/oct/09/northernbankrobbery.background> (sites last accessed 12 April 2020).



contacts with ETA and Cuban intelligence in Havana. Connolly, a fluent Spanish speaker, had been based in Cuba since 1996 as a Sinn Féin party representative.<sup>43</sup>

In the aftermath of the first post 9/11 Árd Fheis, Sinn Féin was criticised for having invited Herri Batasuna's Joseba Álvarez to the annual gathering. While the republican party had been inviting HB delegates to Árd Fheiseanna since 1983 to little or no comment, given the pending "war on terror" and (Herri) Batasuna's travails, this line of criticism would only grow louder. For instance, soon after Batasuna was declared illegal, the UUP leader David Trimble suggested that if Sinn Féin was to maintain its "connections with ETA and with the now-illegal Batasuna party", it would be in breach of the Good Friday Agreement. Another political representative, Liz O'Donnell of the Progressive Democrats, accused Sinn Féin of "fostering ETA terrorists in a fellow EU state". Meanwhile, in the spring of 2002, her party colleague and Chair of the Dáil Foreign Affairs Committee, Desmond O'Malley, requested that Sinn Féin address issues of support for "international terrorism" arising out of the "Colombia 3" affair. Responding to O'Malley's initiative by letter, Gerry Adams and Caomhghín Ó Caoláin (Sinn Féin's first elected representative to sit in Leinster House) stated: "There is no relation between Sinn Féin and FARC or between Sinn Féin and ETA, although our party has encouraged a peace process in the Basque Country".<sup>44</sup>

In light of ETA's ongoing armed campaign, the banning of Batasuna, the macro international context post 9/11, and Sinn Féin's embroilment in the damaging "Colombian 3" affair (and its ETA connection): could the republican party really afford to maintain its relationship with radical Basque nationalism when all it seemingly brought in return was unwanted attention and easy points scoring opportunities for political rivals? Moreover, as Martyn Frampton points out, did the GFA not have major implications regarding the (non-) use of violence for the resolution of political conflicts? How could

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<sup>43</sup> "Hearing before the Committee on International Relations House of Representatives. One Hundred Seventh Congress. Second Session. April 24, 2002, Serial No. 107-87", p. 105. P14,913. LLB. See also: Domínguez Iribarren: *La agonía de ETA*, p. 27; Moloney: *A Secret History of the IRA* (2<sup>nd</sup> ed.), p. 511; Adam Ward: "The IRA's foreign links", *Strategic Comments*, vol. 9, issue. 5, 1-2, 2003. Having first denied that Connolly was a Sinn Féin representative, Gerry Adams later conceded that Connolly had served as the party's representative in Cuba. See: "Connolly was our man in Havana, admits Sinn Féin leader", *Irish Independent*, 22.10.2001; "IRA's links with Farc and Eta revealed", *The Guardian*, 25.08.2001.

<sup>44</sup> See: Maillot: *New Sinn Féin: Irish Republicanism in the Twenty-first Century*, pp. 136-137; "Sinn Fein platform for Eta angers Unionists", *The Guardian*, 26.09.2001; "Trimble challenges Sinn Féin over Basque links", *The Guardian*, 09.09.2002; "SF rejects O'Malley's summons", *An Phoblacht/Republican News*, 18.04.2002. I use (Herri) Batasuna because the time period of the above events overlaps Herri Batasuna and Batasuna. In the interests of clarity, hereafter, I will simply refer to Batasuna, even when there exists a similar overlap.

this be squared with Sinn Féin's support for a party which, depending on one's interpretation, either actively supported, or at least did not condemn, ETA?<sup>45</sup>

In 2003, rumours first surfaced in the press of a "split" in the party over its "Basque ties". Writing in the *Sunday Independent*, the journalist Jim Cusack claimed:

"A division now exists in Sinn Féin as its senior members try to distance themselves from groups such as ETA and other active foreign terrorist groups, including Colombia's FARC. Older, mainly Northern-based Sinn Féin figures who have been closely associated with the peace process for years are unhappy with the continuing relations between ETA-linked groups in Spain and some of the Party's younger figures who still enjoy flirting with foreign 'revolutionary' groups who have close associations with terrorism. [...] republican leaders are nervous about views of the relationship with ETA among their friends in the post-September 11 United States".<sup>46</sup>

According to Pat Rice, the man who had in many ways acted as a fulcrum for BIA-IRM relations since the mid-1980s, at least one senior figure in Sinn Féin did indeed question the party's wisdom in maintaining its Basque links. This concern, however, had apparently surfaced during the peace process in the 1990s. Reflecting on Sinn Féin's transnational link with Batasuna, Rice recalls how, even when concerns were raised, personal links usually trumped any blowback that the party accrued:

"Our idea was that, OK, you needed friends, you needed allies for all kinds of purposes, right? But I mean, the idea would always be: does it serve us? In a particular moment, we were kind of at a different stage; we were moving on to new ground and Batasuna, or more specifically, ETA, was maybe at a different point... and I remember a bit of a discussion about how we needed to be careful in our relationships... and that's normal. I mean, it was *our* struggle. For them, it had to be *their* struggle. But I remember... and it brought home to me the value of personal contacts, the value of knowing people, what diplomacy is all about... when that discussion was going on, a very unsentimental republican said: 'But fuck me! They're good people!' And you couldn't have known that unless you had dealings with them. And it was an important lesson to me".<sup>47</sup>

For Bairbre de Brún, it was precisely at the most difficult moments that she felt Sinn Féin's relationship with its Basque colleagues was strengthened. Speaking to this author, De Brún also referenced the advice offered to Sinn Féin by the South African ANC during the Irish peace process, and a certain onus, or feeling of obligation, to similarly act as a sounding board for Batasuna:

"After [the ANC] took political power, they were able to explain to us all of the pitfalls, things that you had to watch out for, as well as things about negotiations, getting into negotiations, and how you organise all that. And in many ways, then,

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<sup>45</sup> Frampton: *The Long March: The Political Strategy of Sinn Féin: 1981–2007*, pp. 146–147.

<sup>46</sup> "Sinn Féin split on Basque ties as Irish tourists brave bombs", *Sunday Independent*, 27.07.2003.

<sup>47</sup> Author interview with Pat Rice (Belfast, 2017). Use of italics for Rice's stress on "*our*" and "*their*".

as our struggle developed, we would have done the same in terms of the Basque Country. We would have explained to them how we developed, why we took certain decisions. I think there was a strong enough level of trust that we were very open with them in our discussions about the things we had learnt and the mistakes we had made... but also why we had taken certain decisions, why we had worked with certain groups, and even though things were very difficult, why people had decided to take specific initiatives in order to try to move things forward... *always* recognising that no two countries are the same. No more than we took a blueprint from the ANC, [Batasuna] didn't take a blueprint from us [...]. There were things that they could learn, simply by listening and discussing experiences, or they would have very specific questions. They would come and say: 'how did you do this? How did you do that?' [...]. On a good day, it's always easier to be supporting something that's moving forward, going well... but having come through a peace process ourselves, we know it's not all happy and bubbly [...]. There was never really a discussion about backing away or not [from Batasuna]. I mean, people would have their own views on what was happening at a particular time —why people did A, and didn't do B or C—, but there was never any serious suggestion that having had all this international help for our peace process, we would turn around and deny it to others that had been our friends for so long”.

As for the criticism levelled at the party by political opponents such as David Trimble, De Brún is sanguine:

“As someone who shared the [Northern Ireland] Executive table in the Assembly with David Trimble, I can say quite happily from my viewpoint that if it wasn't the Basques, it was going to be something else”.<sup>48</sup>

If some within the republican movement had, at times, questioned the wisdom of continuing contacts and relations with Batasuna, from the outside at least, relations across party and movement ancillary strands carried on as normal into the early 2000s. First, Batasuna representatives, usually Pernando Barrena, continued to address annual *Árd Fheiseanna*. Second, the scores of young radical Basque nationalist activists who arrived in Belfast every August showed no sign of relenting. And thirdly, experiences continued to be shared across different relationship strands. At the same time, coverage in *An Phoblacht/Republican News* of the juridical and police pressure (including allegations of torture) applied across the entire *izquierda abertzale* was as present as ever — even if one Basque contributor wondered why the republican periodical had ignored ETA's resumption of violence.<sup>49</sup>

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<sup>48</sup> Author interview with Bairbre de Brún (Belfast, 2016). Use of italics for De Brún's stress on “*always*”. De Brún was Minister for Health, Social Services and Public Safety in the Northern Ireland Executive from 1999 to 2002.

<sup>49</sup> For example, see: “Basques highlight unjust arrests”, *An Phoblacht/Republican News*, 30.03.2000; “International Solidarity”, *An Phoblacht/Republican News*, 13.04.2000; “Concern at arrest of Basque leaders”, *An Phoblacht/Republican News*, 14.09.2000; “Basque language activists arrested”, *An Phoblacht/Republican News*, 07.12.2000; “Basque journalist arrested”, *An Phoblacht/Republican News*,

“As a regular visitor to Belfast and your struggle’s supporter I have always been glad to read some news about our struggle from time to time. But to my astonishment, there’s nearly no news since ETA ended the year long ceasefire. After the collapsing of the ceasefire due to lack of interest by the Spanish Government in engaging in talks, ETA came back to war. Since January, there have been a number of operations but none of this appeared in your paper. During these months, ETA has attacked both Spanish Army and police forces as well as right-wing party (PP) representatives and sorrowfully, four Volunteers were blown up in a premature explosion last August”.<sup>50</sup>

Indeed, as this eagle-eyed Basque contributor had detected, much of the more bellicose rhetoric that had been a staple of *An Phoblacht/Republican News* for decades when the IRA was most active, had been gradually dialled down post-GFA. As former editor of the periodical and former Sinn Féin Director of Publicity Danny Morrison notes:

“*An Phoblacht*, post-peace process, by virtue of the new circumstances, possibly wouldn’t have been as open as we would have been in carrying stuff while the conflict was on here... it would have been no holds barred at that stage [during the “Troubles”]. There was a bit of diplomacy and tact involved, post-98, about being too explicit about other liberation struggles [...]. In the 70s and 80s you would have got much more explicit coverage, much more explicit solidarity of an ambiguous nature. Post-98, the solidarity would have been more of a political nature [...]”.<sup>51</sup>

Solidarity at youth level appeared as strong as ever. In Autumn 2000, two members of the “Basque Independence Youth Movement” attended a Sinn Féin Youth (now referred to by its Irish moniker, Ógra Shinn Féin) National Congress. A speaking tour of Irish universities was also arranged. The following year, Ógra Shinn Féin (ÓSF) held protests against the criminalisation of their Basque comrades. Finally, a new Basque-Irish themed mural appeared in Belfast in 2002. Inspired by the mutual causes of Segi (Continue) and ÓSF, the mural read: “Basque and Irish youth. Independence and Socialism” in Gaeilge, Euskara and English.<sup>52</sup>

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25.01.2001; “Basque activists freed”, *An Phoblacht/Republican News*, 22.02.2001; “Basques and Irish share experiences”, *An Phoblacht/Republican News*, 16.08.2001; “Sympathy expressed to US people. International guests and debate”, *An Phoblacht/Republican News*, 04.10.2001; “Basque prison support activists arrested”, *An Phoblacht/Republican News*, 01.11.2001; “Basque woman reveals details of torture”, *An Phoblacht/Republican News*, 08.11.2001; “Batasuna banned”, *An Phoblacht/Republican News*, 29.08.2002; “Basques march against Batasuna ban”, *An Phoblacht/Republican News*, 05.09.2002; “An alternative globalisation is possible”, *An Phoblacht/Republican News*, 04.03.2004.

<sup>50</sup> “Don’t forget us!”, *An Phoblacht/Republican News*, 21.09.2000.

<sup>51</sup> Author interview with Danny Morrison (Belfast, 2017).

<sup>52</sup> “Ógra Shinn Féin National Congress”, *An Phoblacht/Republican News*, 09.11.2000; “Spanish judge targets Basque leader”, *An Phoblacht/Republican News*, 15.03.2001. Rolston: “‘The Brothers on the Walls’: International Solidarity and Irish Political Murals”. Author interview with Damian Lawlor (Dublin, 2017).

All the while, Eoin Ó Broin, having become a Belfast City Councillor in 2001, was working away on a Basque youth-themed book titled “Matxinada”. First published in August 2003, “Matxinada” was based on Ó Broin’s personal experiences of the Basque Country and interviews he conducted with 30 Basque youth activists. In the book, Ó Broin provided a vivid insight of the coalface of radical Basque nationalism and youth culture: from occupied “Gazteteak” youth centres and pirate radio stations, to Basque “radical rock” and youth assemblies. The author also dissected some of the structural and philosophical changes within Jarrai that had seen the radical nationalist youth movement transform from a classic Marxist-Leninist entity, into a more open, participatory, and horizontal organisation. Finally, in drawing on the potential lessons for young Irish republicans, Ó Broin encouraged the application of the same core principles of self-organisation and self-management that he had witnessed in the Basque Country.<sup>53</sup>

Interviewed at the book launch in Belfast, Ó Broin spoke of the parallels he saw between the Basque and Irish cases, and the current pressure on the *izquierda abertzale*:

“In some ways, [the Basque Country] is a little like Ireland during the early 1980s. Aznar’s government is like Thatcher’s in that regard — solely focused on repression and more repression. If the political situation is going to change at all, then there needs to be more international pressure opposing the reactionary ways in which Aznar and his allies in the Spanish judicial system are dragging the Basque Country and indeed Spain into deeper cycles of conflict. There needs to be a realisation that what is going on in the Basque Country has implications for us all. So the Basques need our solidarity more than ever”.

As for his hopes for the book, the author outlined two things:

“Firstly, I hope that it enables people to understand the situation in the Basque Country a little better [...]. Secondly, I think that all struggles have something to learn from others. And we have a lot to learn from the Basques, particularly in terms of their radical youth culture”.<sup>54</sup>

As we have seen, ever since his first trip to the Basque Country in 1997, Jarrai’s ability to harness popular radical Basque youth culture into organised actions and campaigns had greatly impressed Ó Broin. And while not every young republican activist had the ways or means to visit the Basque Country and experience its radical (nationalist) youth culture at first hand, through Ó Broin’s “Matxinada”, they got the core idea.

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<sup>53</sup> Eoin Ó Broin: *Matxinada. Basque Nationalism and Radical Basque Youth Movements* (2<sup>nd</sup> ed.), Irish Basque Committees, 2008.

<sup>54</sup> “Basque nationalism and radical Basque youth movements. Interview with Eoin Ó Broin”, *An Phoblacht/Republican News*, 28.08.2003.

Neither of Ó Broin’s successors as ÓSF National Organiser, Matt Carthy (1998–2000) nor Damian Lawlor (2000–2002), were keen to let the nascent Basque relationship wither on the vine. Lawlor and another delegate joined Ó Broin at a Gazte Topagunea circa 2000. Echoing Ó Broin’s first impressions a few years earlier, Lawlor was “completely blown away by it”. As National Organiser, Lawlor sought to harness the highly visible street presence and distinctive aesthetic of radical Basque nationalism: “One of the big things for us were the skills. When we talked to them, it was ‘how [do we] get the murals’? ‘How [do we] get the banners’? All of that stuff [...]”. Another area of interest was finance: “We also would have got some of their financial people to sit down with us, and say, right — ‘how are you raising your money? Give us the ins of out of this’”.

Both Lawlor and Carthy cite Ógra Shinn Féin’s lack of resources, and its close proximity to Sinn Féin (regular promotion of emerging talent to party ranks), as key factors in why ÓSF was unable to build a radical youth movement akin to that which they witnessed in the Basque County. The same interviewees also cited the party’s chariness in allowing the youth wing to develop too independently as another significant factor.<sup>55</sup> For Carthy, Ógra Shinn Féin’s challenge was to emulate “the way [Jarrai had] managed to insert their struggle into popular culture [...]”. Ultimately, however, as Carthy acknowledges, “we never managed to figure out how we actually tie that into an Irish context”.<sup>56</sup>

In 2004, “Matxinada” was published in Spanish through Txalaparta. Reflecting the increasingly difficult terrain in which the *izquierda abertzale* was now operating, at least a dozen of Ó Broin’s interviewees were currently in prison, or had been imprisoned since he conducted his research.

Jon Salaberria, the former head of Jarrai, and at the time, Basque parliamentarian (1998–2005), wrote the prologue for the Spanish version of Ó Broin’s text. Salaberria had been part of the first three-man Jarrai delegation that visited Ireland in 1997. In his view, “Matxinada” was a beacon of truth in the increasingly important international theatre of the Basque conflict:

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<sup>55</sup> Author interview with Matt Carthy (Carrickmacross, 2017). Author interview with Damian Lawlor (Dublin, 2017).

<sup>56</sup> Author interview with Matt Carthy (Carrickmacross, 2017). A former *Eirígí* (Arise) activist also noted how “from an organisational point of view”, the group tried to learn lessons from the BIA in terms of “how to build a broad radical movement”. *Eirígí* was established in 2006 from a group of community and political activists around Dublin, many of whom had grown disillusioned with Sinn Féin. Author interview with “B”.



“[...] el conflicto entre Euskal Herria y los Estados español y francés, es un conflicto que cada vez cuenta con mayor repercusión y proyección internacional. Y en ese sentido, cuando de mentir se trata, la distorsión que imprimen los Estados opresores a cualquier aspecto relacionado con la lucha de los vascos adquiere, si cabe, dimensiones más esperpénticas todavía. Sin embargo, y pese a todo ello, la realidad es lo que cuenta. Y es precisamente esa realidad la que es narrada en este libro por el compañero irlandés Eoin Ó Broin: la realidad e historia de la lucha del movimiento juvenil desarrollada durante los últimos veinticinco años en Euskal Herria [...]”.<sup>57</sup>

Speaking to this author, both Pernando Barrena and Iñaki Soto —the latter a close friend of Ó Broin and Director of *GARA*— expressed the view that “Matxinada” captured a certain halcyon “spirit” of the Basque radical youth movement in the 1990s. Many others outside of the *izquierda abertzale* would probably take a different view, given Jarrai’s apparent involvement in the “Kale Borroka” of the 1990s.<sup>58</sup>

For the youth groups of Jarrai/Haika/Segi and the other components that constituted the radical Basque nationalist community, the early 2000s proved to be a chastising experience. Not only had the hopes of the “Foro Irlanda” and Lizarra-Garazi been dashed, but practically the entire movement, including what had once been Herri Batasuna, was now illegal — effectively disenfranchising between 10% to 20% of the Basque electorate in the Spanish state. Even the Basque language daily *Egunkaria* was closed down in February 2003 on charges of connections to ETA. Ten current and former members of staff were arrested and allegedly tortured. Consistent claims of police torture against Basque nationalists span across the pre- and post-Transition eras.<sup>59</sup>

Three months after the closure of *Egunkaria*, on 23 May 2003, provincial elections were held in Araba, Bizkaia and Gipuzkoa. Unable to partake in the vote, the electoral coalition of Euskal Herriarrok saw its combined 1999 seat tally of 29 simply vanish.<sup>60</sup> Leaving aside the moral and legal arguments for and against the banning of a political

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<sup>57</sup> Eoin Ó Broin: *Matxinada: Historia del Movimiento Juvenil Radical Vasco*, Tafalla, Txalaparta, 2004, p. 7, pp. 13–14.

<sup>58</sup> Author interview with Pernando Barrena (Donostia, 2017). Author interview with Iñaki Soto (Donostia, 2016). Whitfield: *Endgame for ETA*, p. 102.

<sup>59</sup> All those charged in connection with the *Egunkaria* case were eventually acquitted. “After seven years, closed newspaper finally acquitted of Basque terrorist links”, <https://rsf.org/en/news/after-seven-years-closed-newspaper-finally-acquitted-basque-terrorist-links> (last accessed 12 April 2020). For a short overview of torture allegations in the Basque Country, pre- and -post-Franco, see: Murua: *Ending ETA’s Armed Campaign*, pp. 26–29. A recent study undertaken by the University of the Basque Country has reported over 4,000 cases of alleged torture between 1960 and 2014, involving the Guardia Civil, National Police and Ertzaintza (Basque police force). See: “Un estudio oficial certifica la existencia de más de 4.100 denuncias de torturas en Euskadi”, [https://www.eldiario.es/norte/euskadi/estudio-denuncias-torturas-Gobierno\\_vasco-UPV\\_0\\_719878776.html](https://www.eldiario.es/norte/euskadi/estudio-denuncias-torturas-Gobierno_vasco-UPV_0_719878776.html) (last accessed 23 April 2020).

<sup>60</sup> “Resultados electorales”, <https://www.euskadi.eus/ab12aAREWar/resultado/maint> (last accessed 12 April 2020).

party in a formally liberal democratic state, EH had, objectively speaking, paid a price for its inability, reluctance, and/or unwillingness to distance itself from ETA's actions.

During the same period, from ETA's return to violence in early 2000 to May 2003, the paramilitary group killed 48 people, among them: politicians of the PP, PSE-EE and UPN, state security personnel of the National Police, Guardia Civil and Spanish Army, five Basque Ertzaintzas, one Catalan "Mosso" (Mossos d'Esquadra), and a number of citizens. The last of these victims, two National Police officers, Julián Embid Luna and Bonifacio Martín Hernández, were killed by a car bomb in Zangoza (Sangüesa), Nafarroa Garaia, on 30 May 2003.<sup>61</sup> ETA would not kill again until December 2006.

ETA's lack of mortal victims in the ensuing intermediary period was not the result of any sudden "Road to Damascus" conversion. Rather, measured crudely by the group's number of mortal victims per year (2000: 23, 2001: 15, 2002: 5, 2003: 3) a trajectory in the group's inefficacy was already clear. Through a combination of, firstly, increased coordinated police pressure on members in Spain and France; secondly, a massive spike in arrests, convictions and imprisonments; and thirdly, the first major stirrings of internal debate within the nationalist left regarding purpose of ETA's violence, the organisation's operational capacity had, by the spring of 2003, been severely reduced. Much like the rest of the *izquierda abertzale*, ETA was also, it seems, in a state of deep crisis.<sup>62</sup>

## 6.2 A window of opportunity

Both radical and moderate wings of Basque nationalism responded to the collapse of the Lizarra-Garazi pan-nationalist front by putting forward fresh —and separate— political proposals. In January 2002, Batasuna published "Un escenario para la paz en Euskal Herria". Speaking at the launch of the document in Iruñea, Arnaldo Otegi called on the Spanish and French states to recognise Euskal Herria as a political entity with the right to self-determination. Furthermore, Otegi confirmed that his party:

"[...] renuncia a imponer su proyecto político independentista. Desde un escenario democrático, nuestro proyecto contará con la adhesión popular suficiente. Renunciamos a ese proyecto y por eso exigimos a los dos Estados que renuncien a imponernos el suyo".<sup>63</sup>

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<sup>61</sup> Rogelio Alonso, Florencio Domínguez, Marcos García Rey: *Vidas Rotas. Historia de los hombres, mujeres y niños víctimas de ETA*, Madrid, Espasa, 2010, pp. 1040–1160.

<sup>62</sup> Whitfield: *Endgame for ETA*, p. 100, p. 129.

<sup>63</sup> "Batasuna presenta un nuevo documento para exigir la autodeterminación", *ABC*, 28.01.2002.

In this *quid pro quo* “escenario”, Euskal Herria would be at peace. Batasuna’s latest proposal, however, did not precipitate talks with the Spanish government. Rather, as we have seen, within months of the new initiative, Otegi’s party was suspended.

Alex Maskey attended the same event in Iruñea. In *An Phoblacht/Republican News*, he was reported as stating:

“All of us share a responsibility to address conflict and injustice and in particular Irish republicans have sought to share our experience of conflict resolution and the lessons which we have learned with others, just as we learned much from the ANC in South Africa. I welcome the initiative taken by Batasuna in launching these new peace proposals. [...] The international community also has an important role to play in this process by exercising goodwill and influence and by actively seeking and encouraging dialogue and agreement”.<sup>64</sup>

As alluded to in Maskey’s quote, and as we shall see throughout the rest of this chapter, the *izquierda abertzale* increasingly engaged in a concerted effort to stoke the “international projection of their cause”.<sup>65</sup> Unable to effect change within the Spanish state, perhaps pressure could be exerted externally?

As for the PNV’s new political initiative, in September 2002 Lehendakari Ibarretxe proposed the establishment of a “libre asociación” between the Basque Country and Spain. Aspects of the proposal consisted of a new autonomous statute that would grant the various components of Euskal Herria (BAC, Nafarroa Garaia, Iparralde) the right to decide their future, a Basque judiciary, a right to Basque (or dual Basque-Spanish) nationality, and a guarantee of Basque consultation on EU decisions. Between Batasuna’s “Escenario” proposal and the PNV’s “Ibarretxe Plan”, clear water was once again visible between the two main Basque nationalist parties.<sup>66</sup>

Finally, and also in 2002, Elkarri embarked on a new, more understated, peace initiative. At the Clonard Monastery in Belfast, the organisation’s Jonan Fernández, as well as Gorka Espiau and the Basque priest Joseba Segura, met Father Alec Reid to discuss the current Basque situation. Reid had played a significant part in encouraging dialogue and acting as a foil between various republican and nationalist (constitutionalist)

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<sup>64</sup> “Maskey in Basque Country for new peace proposals”, *An Phoblacht/Republican News*, 31.01.2002. In 1987, Sinn Féin had issued the similarly titled “A scenario for peace”. According to Ó Broin, this choice of title was a deliberate decision made by senior figures in Batasuna. See: Ó Broin: *Matxinada. Basque Nationalism and Radical Basque Youth Movements* (2<sup>nd</sup> ed.), p. 134 (footnote 150). For a copy of “A Scenario for Peace”, see: <https://cain.ulster.ac.uk/issues/politics/docs/sf/sf010587.htm> (last accessed 03 March 2020).

<sup>65</sup> See: Whitfield: *Endgame for ETA*, (quote on p. 108), pp. 113–114.

<sup>66</sup> For a copy of the “Ibarretxe Plan”, see: “Estatuto político de la Comunidad de Euskadi”, [https://web.archive.org/web/20070715174650/http://www.nuevoestatutodeeuskadi.net/docs/dictamencomision20122004\\_cas.pdf](https://web.archive.org/web/20070715174650/http://www.nuevoestatutodeeuskadi.net/docs/dictamencomision20122004_cas.pdf) (last accessed 03 March 2020).

actors during the Irish peace process. He had also piqued Adams' interest in the Basque issue in the late 1980s, prior to acting himself as a sounding board for Basque nationalists during the Lizarra-Garazi process. For the second time in a matter of years, the priest was being asked to lend his experience to the Basque case. This time, with the encouragement of Sinn Féin —although not its direct sponsorship— Reid packed his bags and effectively moved to the Basque Country. Over the next four years, he would open channels of communications and develop contacts with various Basque actors in his adopted home, including at the highest echelons of ETA.<sup>67</sup>

On the morning of 11 March 2004, a series of coordinated bombs ripped through Madrid's "Cercanías" rail network. In total, some 192 people lost their lives in the deadly attack. A further 2,000 people were estimated to have been injured. Occurring only three days before Spanish citizens were due to go to the polls to elect a new government, and with emotions running high, some sought to use the '11-M' terrorist attacks for their own political benefit.

Despite evidence quickly emerging that Islamist actors were behind the atrocity, the Partido Popular squarely laid the blame at the door of ETA. Given the deep unpopularity of Spain's involvement in Iraq, attributing responsibility to ETA —as opposed to Islamic fundamentalists— naturally deflected from the perpetrators' likely motivation.

The PP's campaign of misinformation spectacularly backfired. Having expected to top the polls, anger, and distrust around the party's handling of 11-M caused its projected share of the vote to suddenly slump, opening the door for an unlikely PSOE victory.

Running on a pledge to withdraw Spanish troops from Iraq, PSOE leader José Luis Rodríguez Zapatero unexpectedly became Spain's fifth premier of the democratic era. Another feature of Zapatero's campaign had been his apparent openness to accepting proposed changes to the Catalan statute. With a new, seemingly more flexible administration in place in Madrid, and even talk of a "Second Transition", a window of opportunity for the izquierda abertzale had been tentatively opened in the Basque Country.<sup>68</sup>

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<sup>67</sup> Imanol Murua: *El Triángulo de Loiola: Crónica de un Proceso de Negociación a Tres Bandas*, Donostia, Tartalo, 2010, p. 58; Whitfield: *Endgame for ETA*, p. 130. In the end, ETA decided not to use Reid as a mediator. See: Powell: *Talking to Terrorists*, p. 143.

<sup>68</sup> Whitfield: *Endgame for ETA*, pp. 133–139.

## A “very Irish” process

“Weapons and armed struggle are simply a way of getting to the negotiating table. And its once you’ve arrived there that the hard work actually begins. If you don’t have the military wherewithal to [achieve] an overall victory on your opponent, the *only* place that armed struggle can take you... if you’re lucky... is the negotiating table”.<sup>69</sup>

Not long after ETA’s return to violence in 2000, Arnaldo Otegi had begun to informally meet the PSE-EE representative and fellow Elgoibar (Elgóibar) native Francisco Egea at a mutual friend’s baserri just outside the town. This pair were complemented over time by Pernando Barrena, and the PSE-EE stalwart, Jesús Eguiguren. With Otegi and Eguiguren as the common denominators, the topic of conversation at these discreet gatherings usually centred on the nature of the Basque contention and analysis of why previous processes (Algiers and Lizarra-Garazi in particular) had ended in failure. It turned out that they agreed on a lot.

While the Algiers talks were deemed to have been too ETA-centric, the LGA had effectively side-lined the views of those who typically voted PSE-EE and PP in the Basque Country. According to both men’s subsequent accounts of the Elgoibar discussions, another key lesson extrapolated from the dialogue was their mutual view that, in Ireland, the principle of “consent” had supplanted a previous top-heavy focus on “self-determination”. This, they believed, could be indicative of a possible way forward in the Basque context.<sup>70</sup>

In April 2004, with PSOE now unexpectedly in power in Madrid, the Eguiguren-Otegi initiative suddenly took on a whole new significance. Eguiguren immediately disclosed the talks to Zapatero, who gave his blessing for the PSE-EE leader to continue exploring possibilities with Otegi. Almost by accident, the early sketches of a potential peace process in the Basque Country had landed on Zapatero’s desk in Madrid.

As the meetings were taking place at the Elgoibar baserri, the head of ETA’s political apparatus, Mikel Anzta, was regularly kept abreast of developments. With a window of opportunity opening up, and mindful of the common ground established between Eguiguren and Otegi, Batasuna and ETA subsequently agreed a common document named “Ponencia Udaberri”. The general thrust of this new agreement was presented by Otegi at a rally in Anoeta Stadium in Donostia, November 2004.

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<sup>69</sup> Author interview with Séanna “Breathnach” Walsh (Belfast, 2017).

<sup>70</sup> Whitfield: *Endgame for ETA*, pp. 120–121,

As Whitfield notes, “Ponencia Udaberri” was somewhat of a revolutionary landmark in the history of the *izquierda abertzale*. On paper at least, ETA had ceded its position as the chief political interlocutor with the Spanish government to Batasuna. ETA, it was envisaged, would instead deal with technical issues such as prisoners, refugees, and demilitarisation in any future negotiations. Echoing a similar political-technical division that had occurred during talks in Northern Ireland, the *izquierda abertzale*’s proposed “twin-track” process was, in the words of Otegi: “very Irish”.<sup>71</sup> Two months later, Zapatero gave his first tentative public indication that comprehensive talks could well be on the horizon. Continuing the Irish analogies, Otegi implored the Spanish Prime Minister to “go down in history as the Spanish Tony Blair”.<sup>72</sup>

Meanwhile, two years had passed since Lehendakari Ibarretxe launched his ambitious political vision for the Basque Country and its future relationship with Spain. It was time to put it to a vote in the Basque Parliament. And while it was abundantly clear that both PSE-EE and PP would reject the lehendakari’s proposals, nobody was certain of the voting intentions of Batasuna’s remaining six deputies in parliament — who despite seeing their party banned had managed to maintain their seats under the moniker of Sozialista Abertzaleak (Patriotic Socialists). When it came to the vote, on 30 Decemeber 2004, three of the Sozialista Abertzaleak deputies voted in favour and three against. The Ibarretxe plan narrowly passed and proceeded to Madrid.

Speaking in the Spanish Parliament on 01 February 2005, Lehendakari Ibarretxe defiantly gave notice that, regardless of the result of the pending vote, the Basque people would continue with their own political initiatives. To little surprise, the Ibarretxe plan was overwhelmingly rejected in Madrid.<sup>73</sup>

Two weeks later, Gerry Adams made his third public visit to the Basque Country. Officially there to promote his latest book, the Sinn Féin President held separate meetings in Vitoria-Gasteiz with Lehendakari Ibarretxe, and Arnaldo Otegi. His trip also took in promotional visits to Madrid and Barcelona. As with previous appearances of this type, Adams encouraged dialogue between the Spanish government and Basque representatives.<sup>74</sup>

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<sup>71</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 145.

<sup>72</sup> “Eta peace hopes grow as PM says he’ll talk”, *Irish Independent*, 17.01.2005.

<sup>73</sup> “Madrid rejects Basque autonomy plan”, *New York Times*, 02.02.2005.

<sup>74</sup> “Gerry Adams cree que se están haciendo 'esfuerzos por crear un ambiente de pacificación' en Euskadi”, *El Mundo*, 19.02.2005; “Adams percibe una ‘oportunidad única’ para la paz en Euskadi”, *Diario de Noticias de Álava*, 17.02.2005.



In March, Eoin Ó Broin testified at the trial of a number of Basque youths, many of whom he knew personally, who were facing up to 14 years in prison as part of the wider clampdown on the *izquierda abertzale* cosmology. In the witness box, Ó Broin was questioned for 30 minutes on the youths' supposed links with ETA. On the same day that Ó Broin was giving evidence in Madrid, a number of "Basque-Irish Committees" held coordinated demonstrations in Dublin, Belfast, Cork (Corcaigh), Galway (Gaillimh) and Derry.<sup>75</sup>

Speaking candidly at the Sinn Féin *Árd Fheis* that same month, Fernando Barrena highlighted the recent difficulties experienced by the *izquierda abertzale*. He also thanked Sinn Féin for its continuing solidarity, and pledged his own party's support in return:

"The meaning of solidarity has more importance when difficulties arise. You know who your real friends are when support is needed. And Sinn Féin has always been supportive of the Basque cause and, in return, Basques will continue to support the Irish people on the basis of solidarity".<sup>76</sup>

For Barrena and his *izquierda abertzale* comrades, who had been subject to relentless police and juridical pressure over the previous few years home and abroad, there would soon be a breakthrough.

A little over a year into the lifetime of the PSOE administration in Madrid, Zapatero made a bold political move. He would seek a parliamentary majority to formally begin dialogue with ETA if and when the organisation showed a "clear will" to give up violence. Having been briefed by Eguiguren on the outline of talks with Otegi and on the likely prospect of an ETA ceasefire, Zapatero's motion in parliament stated that "political questions must be resolved only through the legitimate representatives of the popular will". This type of language not only reflected the broad principles agreed upon by Eguiguren and Otegi in Elgoibar, but it also aligned with the new internal *izquierda abertzale* consensus that had been affirmed in "Ponencia Udaberri" and presented by Otegi at Anoeta. The stakeholders were now seemingly moving towards similar starting points.

The backlash to Zapatero's initiative was as severe as it was predictable. Already enraged by the PSOE's supposed lax approach to ETA, Prime Minister Zapatero's decision to seek a mandate in parliament was like a red flag to the Partido Popular. Under the PP's new leader, Mariano Rajoy, the party voted against Zapatero's motion and

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<sup>75</sup> "Bearing witness to criminalisation", *An Phoblacht/Republican News*, 17.03.2005.

<sup>76</sup> "International Solidarity", *An Phoblacht/Republican News*, 10.03.2005.

accused him of “betraying the dead” and “surrendering parliament”. The Vallisoletano premier would have to get used to being constantly vilified by the PP, victims’ groups, and the right-wing media for his approach towards ETA.<sup>77</sup>

Underlining the extremely difficult road ahead, before May had even ended, an ETA car bomb exploded in Madrid. Fortunately, no one was killed. Around the same time, Arnaldo Otegi was arrested on suspicion of being a leading member of the Basque paramilitaries. He was later released, subject to restrictions of movement and a sizeable €400,000 bail bond.<sup>78</sup> None of this augured well for the nascent process.

Despite these considerable challenges, Zapatero gave consent for Eguiguen to commence discrete talks with ETA. Talks subsequently began at the Centre Henri Dunant for Humanitarian Dialogue (HD Centre) in Geneva on 21 June 2005. Mindful of the political blowback that would follow from any disclosure of the discussions to the media, Eguiguen acted as a sort of interlocutor for the government. On the opposite side of the table sat Josu Ternera. This first round of talks lasted until 14 July.

A second round, again facilitated by the HD Centre, commenced in November in Oslo. During this session, a text was agreed which effectively set out an agenda and methodology for the next stage of negotiations. While the government party was given assurances on the scope of ETA’s pending ceasefire, the latter was given commitments on the *de facto* legalisation of Batasuna, an easing of police and juridical pressure, and vague promises of a “Pacto de Estado” with PP. Such a pact would, theoretically, hold all Spanish political parties to the outcome of any potential agreement.

For both sides, it was one thing to make such commitments —genuine or hollow as they may have been—, abiding by them proved to be far more difficult. For example, in January 2006, Batasuna’s ban was extended for another two years. The following month, Arnaldo Otegi and Joseba Álvarez were called to testify at the Audencia Nacional. Both men were accused of “glorifying terrorism” at the Anoeta meeting of December 2004. Meanwhile, ETA continued to carry out non-lethal attacks, intimidation, and extortion activities.<sup>79</sup>

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<sup>77</sup> Quotes cited in: “Spain clears way for peace talks with Eta”, *The Guardian*, 17.05.2005; “The F Word”, *The Guardian*, 18.05.2005, “Peace Talks”, *The Economist*, 19.05.2005. Mees: *The Basque Contention*, pp. 215–216.

<sup>78</sup> “Coche bomba de ETA en Madrid en pleno debate sobre la negociación”, *El Mundo*, 26.05.2005; “Outlawed Basque party denounces leader’s arrest”, <https://www.euronews.com/2005/05/26/outlawed-basque-party-denounces-leader-s-arrest> (last accessed 17 April 2020).

<sup>79</sup> Whitfield: *Endgame for ETA*, pp. 150–158.

Trust was brittle to non-existent. And while most analysts were reasonably sure that an ETA ceasefire was on its way, the prospects of such a ceasefire holding and/or political talks achieving a new agreed Basque dispensation looked far more precarious.

### **High hopes. Dead ends**

On 28 July 2005, the IRA Army Council announced the formal end of its armed campaign. Consciously echoing the previous statements that had called a halt to the Irish Civil War (1923) and “Operation Harvest” (1962), all IRA units were ordered to “dump arms”. The statement continued:

“All volunteers have been instructed to assist the development of purely political and democratic programmes through exclusively peaceful means. Volunteers must not engage in any other activities whatsoever. The IRA leadership has also authorised our representative to engage with the IICD [Independent International Commission on Decommissioning] to complete the process to verifiably put its arms beyond use in a way which will further enhance public confidence and to conclude this as quickly as possible”.<sup>80</sup>

Ever since the collapse of the new Northern Ireland Assembly in 2002, the issue of IRA decommissioning had dogged the prospect of a return to Stormont. Unionists, and in particular the DUP’s Ian Paisley whose party had overtaken the UUP, demanded assurances on the verification of IRA decommissioning before agreeing to enter the institutions. As anticipated in the IRA statement of 2005, this roadblock was eventually removed once the IICD completed its work.

The following year, in October 2006, the signing of the St. Andrew’s Agreement paved the way for the re-establishment of the Northern Ireland Assembly. As a direct result of the accord, signed in the Scottish town of Fife, Sinn Féin committed to supporting the Police Service of Northern Ireland (PSNI). The DUP, for its part, agreed to “power-sharing” with Sinn Féin.

Mirroring the surge in DUP support among the unionist community, Sinn Féin had, by this stage, similarly overtaken the SDLP as the largest nationalist party in Northern Ireland. This meant that Sinn Féin and the DUP were not only going to enter the Northern Ireland Executive together for the first time, but they were going to lead it jointly. On 08 May 2007, the scarcely believable image of First and Deputy First Ministers Ian Paisley and Martin McGuinness sharing a joke with Bertie Ahern, Tony Blair and Northern Ireland Secretary of State, Peter Hain, made headlines around the world. Paisley and

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<sup>80</sup> “IRA statement, 28 July 2005”, <https://cain.ulster.ac.uk/othelem/organ/ira/ira280705.htm> (last accessed 17 April 2020).

McGuinness, the unlikeliest of bedfellows, would go on to develop a warm personal relationship.<sup>81</sup>

While the IRA statement of 2005 had helped to unblock the political process in Northern Ireland, it also said a lot about how the republican movement viewed its past, present, and future. Unlike most IRA statements, it was not signed off by the fictitious “P. O’Neill”, or communicated by a masked volunteer in military garb. On the contrary, it was calmly read out by a former IRA prisoner, Séanna “Breathnach” Walsh, in civilian clothes.

Released under the terms of the GFA in November 1998, Walsh had, by that stage, spent 21 of the previous 25 years behind bars — more than half the 41-year-old’s life.<sup>82</sup> The internal message to the republican movement was clear. The great sacrifices of men and women, such as Walsh, had brought the movement to a new phase. And while the war on the streets, which had been “entirely legitimate”, was now over, a united Ireland would be won by alternative means:

“We believe there is now an alternative way to achieve this [a united Ireland] and to end British rule in our country. It is the responsibility of all volunteers to show leadership, determination and courage. We are very mindful of the sacrifices of our patriot dead, those who went to jail, volunteers, their families and the wider republican base. We reiterate our view that the armed struggle was entirely legitimate. We are conscious that many people suffered in the conflict. There is a compelling imperative on all sides to build a just and lasting peace”.<sup>83</sup>

Whilst incarcerated, Walsh had been one of the many Irish republicans who passed their solitary days learning Gaeilge in the “jailtacht” — a pun on gaeltacht. On the outside, he became aware of Herri Batasuna’s eight-year transition (1992–2000), from a party that did all its statements, press conferences and other business through Spanish; to one in which everything *could* be conducted in Euskara, even if this was not always the case. Citing the HB example, and notwithstanding the comparatively lower base of Irish speakers (especially in Northern Ireland), Walsh encouraged his party comrades to achieve something similar in Sinn Féin:

“We went over [to the Basque Country] We met with a whole series of the [Batasuna] leadership specifically on that topic [Spanish to Euskara transition]. [Then], we brought a team of their main activists over here, to the North [Northern

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<sup>81</sup> “St. Andrew’s Agreement”, <https://cain.ulster.ac.uk/issues/politics/docs/nio/bi131006.pdf> (last accessed 17 April 2020). “Paisley and McGuinness sworn in as power-sharing revived”, *The Guardian*, 08.05.2007.

<sup>82</sup> “Getting out, going on”, *Irish Times*, 04.11.1998.

<sup>83</sup> “IRA statement, 28 July 2005”, <https://cain.ulster.ac.uk/othelem/organ/ira/ira280705.htm> (last accessed 17 April 2020).

Ireland]. We did a series of meetings around the North, but we weren't able to crack it to the same extent that they had. It was something that I took on as a personal project, but we weren't able to crack it. We generally have a good will in terms of the [Irish] language within the party, but in terms of the commitment, the time, the effort that's put in to do what has to be done, unfortunately that hasn't been there".<sup>84</sup>

In the same way that Walsh looked to the *izquierda abertzale's* model of language advancement, the latter increasingly sought to learn from the republican movement's prisoner experience around the Good Friday Agreement. In Belfast, advocates for Basque prisoners regularly visited the republican ex-prisoners committee, *Coiste na hIarmchí*. According to the organisation's Director, Michael Culbert:

"We wanted to assist them. We gave them our information, our structures, our processes of trying to get things sorted, plus the explanation from our perspective of how we were able to do it [set up *Coiste na hIarmchí*]".

Culbert recalls that initial post-GFA contacts with Basque prisoner advocates were, at times, rather "disjointed": "They didn't have a central structure, there was no plan, there was no strategy [...]. It was all very unstructured, and I told them [that]". In hindsight, he appreciates that there was a significant disparity in the contexts in which Irish and Basque prisoner collectives were trying to operate. While Culbert and his comrades were able to gain limited access to EU funding:

"[...] what we didn't know was the absolute oppression [in the Basque Country and other jurisdictions] — that you could go to jail for ten years for supporting the prisoners [...] they found it very difficult to get legal representation, [even] legal people were being arrested".<sup>85</sup>

Michael Culbert and others in *Coiste na hIarmchí* have continued to support and offer their experiences to Basque prisoner collectives up until the present day. Akin to Alex Maskey and Séanna "Breathnach" Walsh, Culbert is eager to stress the qualitative difference between republicans offering *experience*, as opposed to *advice*, to their Basque comrades — the latter of which would apparently only ever be forthcoming if it were specifically requested.<sup>86</sup>

The *izquierda abertzale's* political leadership did not only look to Ireland in the early- to mid-2000s. For instance, a Batasuna delegation visited South Africa in 2003 and met

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<sup>84</sup> Author interview with Séanna "Breathnach" Walsh (Belfast, 2017). "Irish is central to republican struggle", *An Phoblacht*, 08.12.2005; "Irish must be part of republican vision for the future", *An Phoblacht*, 20.07.2006. *An Phoblacht/Republican News* was relaunched as *An Phoblacht* in September 2005.

<sup>85</sup> Author interview with Michael Culbert (Belfast, 2017).

<sup>86</sup> Author interview with Michael Culbert (Belfast, 2017). Author interview with Alex Maskey (Belfast, 2018). Author interview with Séanna "Breathnach" Walsh (Belfast, 2017).

with the lawyer Brian Currin. Considered a leading specialist in prisoner issues in South Africa and Northern Ireland, Currin, had been recommended to Batasuna by Sinn Féin. Currin spoke to the Basque delegation on how best to deal with some 700 Basque prisoners that were scattered throughout the Spanish and French states. More generally, over the following years, Currin subsequently advised Batasuna on negotiating strategies, introduced the Batasuna leadership cadre to prominent ANC figures, and served as a prominent external voice for inclusive dialogue and political resolution in the Basque Country.<sup>87</sup>

“Outside” figures such as Currin and Father Reid won few friends in Madrid, where authorities tended to be extremely sensitive to what could be perceived as outside interference in Spanish internal matters. The academic Rogelio Alonso has been particularly scathing in his assessment of the two men’s knowledge of the issues at hand.<sup>88</sup> Despite such criticism, Currin, Reid, and other international actors, were not to be dissuaded in their engagement with the emerging Zapatero-era Basque process of the mid-2000s.<sup>89</sup>

On 30 November 2005, Sinn Féin’s Bairbre de Brún, and at least 10 other MEPs, attended the presentation of a document titled “Basic Democratic Agreement” (BDA) at the European Parliament. Drafted by 53 Basque political and civil society organisations, the BDA stated that: “All citizens in the whole of the Basque Country must be consulted” on any political agreement that may be reached in future negotiations. Also present at the initiative was Father Alec Reid. According to a report in *An Phoblacht*, the priest had “played an important role as international observer in the process of reaching the BDA”. Reid voiced his approval of the document at the event. As did representatives from Batasuna and EA.

Following on from the BDA presentation, a “Basque Friendship Group” of MEPs was set up under the slogan: “Towards a peace process in the Basque Country”.<sup>90</sup> Bairbre de Brún recalls how the Friendship Group came about:

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<sup>87</sup> Whitfield: *Endgame for ETA*, pp. 143–144. See also, the Gorka Espiau-directed documentary: “Pluja Seca, mediadors internacionals” (Dry Rain). TV3 – Televisió de Catalunya. 2011. Available at: <https://www.ccma.cat/tv3/alacarta/sense-ficcio/pluja-seca-mediadors-internacionals-al-pais-basc/video/3362870/> (last accessed 01 May 2020).

<sup>88</sup> “Alec Reid and the Basques”, *Fortnight*, no. 439 (December 2005), pp. 6–7; Alonso: “The International Dimension of ETA’s Terrorism and the Internationalization of the Conflict in the Basque Country”.

<sup>89</sup> Urko Aiartza, a leading *izquierda abertzale* ‘politico’, would go on to become a key contact with Currin and ANC figures. See: Murua: *Ending ETA’s Armed Campaign*, p. 95. Hereafter, this Zapatero-era Basque “process” will be simply referred to as the “Zapatero process”.

<sup>90</sup> “Basque Table for Conflict Resolution Addresses MEPs”, *An Phoblacht*, 15.12.2005.



De Brún: “Arising from [the BDA Conference], there was a discussion around how the EU could help. At that stage I was more a joining... I was more a ‘coming in’ [member], rather than the person who set it up... although I was a founding member. It was a combination of people who were already involved in supporting the Basques, and people who were involved in supporting other groups in other countries, or who had had such experience. Between [us], [we] got together, formed the Friendship Group, and then talked to other people to see who would be willing to come in, come together”.

Interviewer: OK, so was it an initiative that came about, almost organically, from those elements that you have mentioned?

De Brún: A number of people, yeah, but obviously in discussion with people from the Basque Country... it wouldn’t have made any sense not to have had [discussions with people from the Basque Country]”.<sup>91</sup>

From 2002 to 2004, Gorka Elejabarrieta Díaz was a Brussels-based assistant to the Batasuna MEP Koldo Gorostiaga. Elejabarrieta Díaz would spend eight years in total living in Brussels as a “member of the International team of Abertzale Left”. He recalls the connection between the BDA and the Friendship Group in the following way:

“In 2005, it was clear that we were building a momentum in the Basque Country in order to promote the peace process. And at that time, there was a platform in the Basque Country which was called Oinarrizko Hitzarmen Demokratikoa (Basic Democratic Agreement). [...] As a part of that group [Oinarrizko Hitzarmen Demokratikoa], some of us were appointed to go to the European Parliament and speak to different MEPs and discuss with them which could be the role of the European Parliament in promoting the resolution of the conflict. As a result of those conversations [that] we had with different MEPs, there was a public hearing in December [30 November] 2005 in the European Parliament. Father Alec Reid spoke at that hearing and some of the MEPs that were present said it would be a good idea to create a Friendship Group to promote the resolution of the conflict in the Basque Country”.<sup>92</sup>

Given the provenance of the Basque Friendship Group, it is not surprising that the group’s first public statement in December 2005 essentially aligned with the contents of

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<sup>91</sup> Author interview with Bairbre de Brún (Belfast, 2016). In addition to Bairbre de Brún, the ten other members of the first Basque Friendship Group were: Erik Meijer (Netherlands), Jiri Mastalka (Czech Republic), Tatjana Zdanoka (Latvia), Jens Holm (Sweden), Helmut Markov (Germany), Bart Staes (Belgium), Jill Evans (Wales), Alyn Smith (Scotland), Ian Hudghton (Scotland), Gérard Onesta (France). See: “European Basque Friendship Bulletin, No. 1, November 2008”, <https://basquefriendship.files.wordpress.com/2011/06/basque-friendship-newsletter-1.pdf> (last accessed 18 April 2020). The Basque Friendship Group continues until this day, reconstituting itself after every European election.

<sup>92</sup> Author interview with Gorka Elejabarrieta Díaz (Donostia, 2016). Additional biographical information in Ioannis Tellidis, Harmonie Toros (eds.): *Researching Terrorism, Peace and Conflict Studies*, London and New York, Routledge, 2015, x.

the “Basic Democratic Agreement”, and with what ETA and Batasuna were hoping to achieve from the current process of engagement with the Spanish government:

“We share the idea that the solution entails recognition of all the individual and collective rights of everyone who lives anywhere in the [Basque] country, independently of whether they reside under the Spanish or French administrations. We believe that the only valid political solution will be one that develops out of the strengthening of democracy and justice so as to permit recognition of the Basque Country as a political subject and acceptance of the right of all the citizens of the Basque Country to decide on their future. We agree that a key to the resolution of the Basque conflict will be a multilateral agreement guaranteeing that all Basque people, anywhere in their country, shall be consulted about decisions involving their future in a manner agreed to by their social, political and union representatives. This will come about as the result of a process based on dialogue and negotiation, and in our view it is essential that such a political agreement, arrived at by democratic means, should be endorsed through referendum by the entire population of the Basque Country”.<sup>93</sup>

Presumably unbeknownst to the Friendship Group, as we have seen, two phases of discrete talks had actually already taken place in Switzerland and Norway between the Spanish government and ETA interlocutors.

On 22 March 2006, ETA finally declared a “permanent ceasefire”. In a video sent to the Basque public TV company, EITB, a hooded militant, flanked by two others, directly addressed the Basque people:

“El objetivo de esta decisión es impulsar un proceso democrático en Euskal Herria para construir un nuevo marco en el que sean reconocidos los derechos que como Pueblo nos corresponden y asegurando de cara al futuro la posibilidad de desarrollo de todas las opciones políticas. Al final de ese proceso los ciudadanos vascos deben tener la palabra y la decisión sobre su futuro. Los Estados español y francés deben reconocer los resultados de dicho proceso democrático, sin ningún tipo de limitaciones. La decisión que los ciudadanos vascos adoptemos sobre nuestro futuro deberá ser respetada”.<sup>94</sup>

In principle, the core of ETA’s statement fit within the political space that had been developed through the Otegi-Eguiguren talks, the subsequent “Ponencia Udaberri”/Anoeta Declaration, and now, the BDA: namely that *all* political possibilities should be open-ended and subject to the internal consent of the Basque people without any external impediment. Ergo, a framework almost identical to that of the Downing Street Declaration/Good Friday Agreement.

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<sup>93</sup> “Manifiesto in support of a peace process in the Basque Country, Brussels, December 2005”, [https://basquefriendship.files.wordpress.com/2011/06/manifiesto\\_ing.pdf](https://basquefriendship.files.wordpress.com/2011/06/manifiesto_ing.pdf) (last accessed 18 April 2020).

<sup>94</sup> For the full text, see: “Texto íntegro del comunicado de ETA”, *El País*, 22.03.2006.

Writing in *The Guardian*, Julian Madariaga, one of the “historic” founders of ETA, cited the “wonderful example” of the Irish peace process as “one from which we could benefit greatly”. Madariaga also called on Prime Minister Zapatero to:

“[...] draw up a solemn declaration similar to the Good Friday Agreement in Britain, recognising that the Basque question is political in nature and not a matter for the military and police. As such, it requires a political solution, one that affects all Basque people, and he should declare that he will act in accordance with our sovereign will and that our decision —taken by a democratic majority— will be respected by both French and Spanish governments”.<sup>95</sup>

Meanwhile, Sinn Féin beseeched the Spanish premier to “respond to this positive development by immediately initiating dialogue with the Basque political leadership and releasing all political prisoners”.

The statement continued:

“Sinn Féin is committed to conflict resolution around the world and will offer any assistance it can. Years of experience, driving a difficult peace process, has put the party in a position to do so. Party President Gerry Adams has been in contact with all the Basque political parties, in particular Batasuna, and has written to Spanish Prime Minister Jose Luis Zapatero”.<sup>96</sup>

In a curious role reversal, Batasuna was also apparently considering an approach to the Irish government for its assistance in the process. In an interview with *An Phoblacht*, Pernando Barrena opined:

“Apart from the help of the Republican Movement, the Irish Government could become an important point of reference to help in the advancement of the process. They have enough experience to be able to give advice to both sides. They could act as mediators or even as guarantors of future agreements. We intend to approach them and many other international agents that we consider could play an important role in this process of finding lasting solutions for the Basque Country”.<sup>97</sup>

Although ETA’s ceasefire was major international news in its own right, the part that senior Irish republicans had ostensibly played in its materialisation was an additional ‘hook’ for news media. For instance, *El Mundo* described Alex Maskey as an “architect” of the ceasefire — a description he flatly rejects:

“I think that our engagement and involvement there was positive. I am happy and content with that. I wouldn’t by any stretch [of the imagination] go as far as saying

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<sup>95</sup> “From Belfast to Bilbao”, *The Guardian*, 19.04.2006, <https://www.theguardian.com/world/2006/apr/19/spain.comment> (last accessed 18 April 2020).

<sup>96</sup> “ETA move provides historic opportunity”, *An Phoblacht*, 23.03.2006, <https://www.anphoblacht.com/contents/14984> (last accessed 18 April 2020).

<sup>97</sup> “ETA ceasefire: Interview with Basque spokesperson, Pernando Barrena”, *An Phoblacht*, 06.04.2006.

we were ‘architects’, which we weren’t. None of us were. And that’s not being modest, that’s just being truthful”.

Gerry Kelly, a former IRA volunteer turned Sinn Féin politician, was similarly credited in some quarters as being influential in ETA’s decision. Between the two men, Kelly and Maskey had reportedly visited the Basque Country up to a dozen times over the previous year. Father Alec Reid, who was living in the Basque Country more permanently, also acknowledged that he had “played a role”.<sup>98</sup> Most intriguingly, a source in *The Boston Globe* stated:

“As the Basque separatist group ETA prepared to make a videotape announcing an unconditional cease-fire, a stoic Irishman named Séanna Walsh was in the background, quietly offering encouragement and reassurance”.

As the reader will recall, the “stoic Irishman”, Walsh, had read out the IRA’s own historic declaration the year before. What was Walsh’s exact role, if any, in ETA’s ceasefire declaration?

Walsh: “What actually happened was that we knew that the Basques were moving towards that ceasefire. A number of us were in the Basque Country, we were actually looking at how they were able to reverse the language decline [...]. So, we were actually over [in the Basque Country] looking at that [the language initiative], and the next thing you know, messages started coming through that the Basques are going to make a statement. And well ‘will you do the media with this?’, you know? And I said ‘I’ll talk to the media, but the story is not about us; the story is about the Basques, and that’s where you have to keep the focus’. And, so... basically, that’s about as much as I’ve got to say about that... (laughs)”.

The same article also credited:

“a lesser-known Sinn Fein strategist, Pat Rice, who spent the most time shuttling between Belfast and Bilbao promoting the idea that what worked for Irish nationalists could work for Basque nationalists”.<sup>99</sup>

A week after ETA’s ceasefire, Bairbre de Brún travelled to the Basque Country as a representative of the Basque Friendship Group. Martin McGuinness also made a three-day trip as a guest of Batasuna at the beginning of June.<sup>100</sup>

As documented by Murua and Whitfield in great detail, almost from the very moment that ETA called its ceasefire, the “Zapatero process” was constantly on the verge of falling

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<sup>98</sup> “Sinn Féin ‘involved in Eta move’”, [http://news.bbc.co.uk/2/hi/uk\\_news/northern\\_ireland/4840514.stm](http://news.bbc.co.uk/2/hi/uk_news/northern_ireland/4840514.stm) (last accessed 20 April 2020); “Ex IRA men behind ETA ceasefire”, *Evening Herald*, 25.03.2006. Author interview with Alex Maskey (Belfast, 2018). See also: Whitfield: *Endgame for ETA*, p. 162.

<sup>99</sup> “The Irish links are strong in ending Basque conflict”, *The Boston Globe*, 26.03.2006. Author interview with Séanna “Breathnach” Walsh (Belfast, 2017).

<sup>100</sup> “McGuinness’s unlikely role as peace envoy”, *Irish Independent*, 16.06.2006. Author interview with Bairbre de Brún (Belfast, 2016).

apart (ongoing ETA activities, ongoing juridical oppression of the izquierda abertzale, massive opposition from the PP, etc).<sup>101</sup> Nevertheless, despite the many moving parts at play, two partially overlapping tracks managed to evolve over the following months. The first centred on talks between the Spanish government and ETA in Geneva, and later, Oslo. A second strand saw multilateral talks take place between representatives of PSE-EE, Batasuna and the PNV at the Jesuit monastery of Loiola

A landmark statement read out by Prime Minister Zapatero came in June. Speaking just outside the Spanish Parliament, the Vallisoletano made public the process of dialogue, and seemed to consent, in principle, to whatever political dispensation the Basque people decided among themselves in political negotiations. If Zapatero's statement was supposed to be a sort of 'Basque Downing Street Declaration', it is fitting that, akin to the text signed between London and Dublin in 1993, practically every stakeholder in the process interpreted the meaning and significance of Zapatero's words differently.<sup>102</sup>

Zapatero's statement did little to satisfy ETA. With the spectre of a return to violence on the horizon, Otegi and Eguiguren cut a deal to fast track the political phase of negotiations.<sup>103</sup> Whether by accident or design, the "twin track" process envisaged by the izquierda abertzale only a few years earlier had materialised.

Talks commenced in Loiola in September. By the end of October, after eleven meetings, a pre-agreement had been reached between the 3 party protagonists whose delegations were led by Jesús Eguiguren (PSE-EE), Iñigo Urkullu (PNV), and Arnaldo Otegi and Rufi Etxeberria (Batasuna), respectively. The Loiola pre-agreement rested on two major concessions. While the Basque nationalists, *including* Batasuna, agreed to work within the existing juridical and constitutional framework of the Spanish state, PSE-EE accepted that *all* political options, which by extension included independence, could be implemented if a majority of Basques so desired. The three parties also agreed to develop a joint Basque-Navarrese body with evolving competencies. How this proposal would, or could, be realistically squared with the constitutional "indivisibility" of Spain or agreed with the PP via a "Pacto de Estado" were issues seemingly better left for another day. For the moment, the pre-agreement of Loiola looked likely to pass through the

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<sup>101</sup> For comprehensive accounts of the "Zapatero process" and subsequent years, see: Murua: *Ending ETA's Armed Campaign*; Murua: *El Triángulo de Loiola*; Whitfield: *Endgame for ETA*.

<sup>102</sup> Murua: *Ending ETA's Armed Campaign*, p. 55; Whitfield: *Endgame for ETA*, pp. 169–170.

<sup>103</sup> Mees: *The Basque Contention*, 219–220.

Basque and Spanish Parliaments with reasonably healthy majorities. Depending on the results of upcoming elections in Navarre, there was even a chance that it could pass through the parliament in Iruñea. In short, hopes were high that a significant breakthrough had been achieved.<sup>104</sup>

Meanwhile, in Strasbourg, where the EU Parliament periodically sits, issues around the Basque Country were being discussed at the very heart of the European institutions for the first time in a generation. On 25 October, after two days of intensive debate, the European Parliament passed a resolution supporting “the fight against terrorism and the peace initiative in the Basque Country undertaken by the Spanish democratic institutions within the framework of their exclusive competences”. The resolution was passed by a slender majority of 321 to 311 (with 24 abstentions).

Going against the grain of Spain’s long-held reluctance to internationalise any political aspect of Basque (or Catalan) contention whatsoever, the architect of the 2006 resolution was none other than the Spanish government itself. Through the votes of the Socialist, Liberal, Green, and European United Left/Nordic Green Left (GUE/NGL) blocs in the parliament, Zapatero’s government had won a narrow victory. It was, however, a somewhat pyrrhic victory.

Leading up to the vote, the Partido Popular had mobilized the conservative forces of the EU Parliament to vote against the resolution. They had very nearly succeeded in delivering a major embarrassment to Zapatero, and more than likely, a hammer blow to the entire process. Speaking in the aftermath of the vote, Jaime Mayor Oreja, who was now a Partido Popular MEP, remarked:

“Today is a day of satisfaction for ETA and for Left Nationalists, who’ve now seen this vote divide Europeans, not just the Spanish people. ETA has always wanted to internationalise the conflict and today it has succeeded in doing so”.

Why had the Spanish government needlessly dragged the Basque case into the debating chambers of the EU? There are two plausible answers to this. The first is the rather benign explanation that the government simply wanted the EU’s blessing as a way of furthering the process. The second, more cynical, but perhaps more accurate theory put forward by Whitfield, is that the Spanish government’s *volte face* on internationalising the peace process, was to cover itself in the event of a collapse. In other words, if and

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<sup>104</sup> Murua: *Ending ETA’s Armed Campaign*, p. 56.



when ETA broke its ceasefire, the entire international community would know that it was the *etarras*' fault, and theirs alone.<sup>105</sup>

Back in Loiola, the PNV, PSE-EE and Batasuna reconvened on 08 November to sign off on the pre-agreement. Suddenly, the Batasuna negotiators demanded significant changes to the protocol on Navarre. These were resisted by the other parties. To those present, it seemed apparent what had happened. ETA had torpedoed the deal, and in doing so, reasserted its dominance over the *izquierda abertzale*. As revealed by Murua, however, while Otegi and Etxeberria were personally in favour of signing the accord, they had become reluctant to do so once it became clear that there was significant opposition within various sectors of the *izquierda abertzale* — and not just in ETA. In short, the *izquierda abertzale*'s desire to ensure its internal movement cohesion prevailed over what was deemed to be an enticing, yet highly risky, deal. Despite meeting again on two further occasions, the Loiola negotiators all went their separate ways for the final time on 15 November.<sup>106</sup>

The collapse of the talks in Loiola was quickly followed by a similar breakdown in Oslo. ETA and government negotiators parted ways on 14 December with the process apparently hanging by a thread. Still, speaking to reporters on 29 December, Prime Minister Zapatero confidently predicted that in a year from now, the situation with ETA would be “better than today”. Zapatero's word would come back to haunt him.

Within 24 hours, ETA had bombed the Terminal 4 car park of Madrid's Barajas airport, collapsing three of its five floors, and killing two Ecuadorian workers who were asleep in their cars: Carlos Alonso Palate and Diego Armando Estacio. The Barajas bombing was a disaster for the process. Years later, in interview with Teresa Whitfield, the late Spanish Minister of the Interior Alfredo Pérez Rubalcaba would recall a photograph of an ashen-faced Arnaldo Otegi coming to terms with what had just happened. For Rubalcaba, this picture of Otegi accurately depicted what he believed to be the main consequence of Barajas: the end of ETA.

In the wake of the attack, Rubalcaba promptly declared the process to be “broken, liquidated, and finished”. Over the following days, Otegi and others within Batasuna

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<sup>105</sup> For the above information and Oreja Mayor's quote, see: “EU MPs vote narrowly in favour of Basque peace process”, <https://www.euronews.com/2006/10/25/eu-mps-vote-narrowly-in-favour-of-basque-peace-process> (last accessed 18 April 2020). See also: Whitfield: *Endgame for ETA*, p. 162.

<sup>106</sup> Murua: *Ending ETA's Armed Campaign*, pp. 56–57.

would also make their displeasure with ETA publicly known, albeit in much more guarded and oblique terms.<sup>107</sup>

Barajas had shown that despite the Anoeta Declaration, ETA still reserved the ‘final word’ within the izquierda abertzale. Perhaps now more than ever, Batasuna would need Sinn Féin’s help. Not only in terms of solidarity and understanding of such ‘setbacks’, but also for one very final attempt at saving the “Zapatero process”.

### 6.3. Picking up the pieces

“Friends are friends. You have friends because you get on with them, and you share things in common, and you like each other, and you enjoy each other’s company, and you know, friendships are beneficial in all sorts of ways. And who do you gravitate to as a friend? The people who are doing stuff like you, thinking stuff like you and behaving like you — and that’s the same in politics. [...] And at times you take hits for your friends, so, you know, when ETA ends the ceasefire and blows up Barajas, we’ll take a hit domestically, and that’s what happened. [...] If you are real friends, [then] you take hits for your friends too. [...] Don’t think that when we meet our friends in private that we don’t tell them what we think. But equally we know that what we say about our friends in public can be used by their opponents in their own country as a stick to beat them with. So, when you’re dealing with your personal view of your friends, your political friends, you are always bearing those two things in mind. [...] Did we all have private opinions of whether the ending of the ETA ceasefire with the bombing of Barajas was the right thing to do or not? Of course, we all had private opinions, but when we’re going to comment publicly, we think very hard about what’s helpful — and what’s helpful both to our friends, and what’s also helpful to the peace process. And undermining your friends —even if you don’t think what they’ve done is right— isn’t just a bad way to treat your friends but also undermines any attempts to rebuild a peace process. So, we have all of those views, we share all of those views, we’re very upfront with our friends when we’re talking to them privately, but we are also very careful that when we say things publicly... they’re helpful. [...] Do we have a rose-tinted view of what our friends do or don’t do? No, we don’t. But are we going to jump up and down and advertise if and when we have criticism of them? Of course, we’re not. We’re gonna exchange that with them, as friends do, privately. You don’t go out and disrespect your friends publicly when they’re in a bad spot. You help them; you work with them — if that’s what they want you to do”.<sup>108</sup>

In early January 2007, the best laid plans of Otegi *et al.* appeared to be buried in the rubble of Barajas. The Batasuna leader was nonetheless resolute. Despite the fatal bombing, he affirmed that the current process need not be over. Surprisingly for some, this was also a sentiment shared by Prime Minister Zapatero who, as well as maintaining

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<sup>107</sup> The above three paragraphs rely heavily on: Whitfield: *Endgame for ETA*, pp. 179–180.

<sup>108</sup> Author interview with Eoin Ó Broin (Dublin, 2015).

close contacts with the British government, continued to draw parallels with the Irish peace process.<sup>109</sup> He was not the only one. Indeed, following a meeting with Lehendakari Ibarretxe, former Taoiseach Albert Reynolds specifically recalled the similar fallout from the IRA's "Canary Wharf" bombing of 1996.<sup>110</sup> Much like the aftermath of the London bombing, could the Basque peace process still be salvaged?

Post-Barajas, Sinn Féin invited a senior Batasuna delegation to Ireland. Having had permission to visit Ireland denied by the Audencia Nacional in 2006, Otegi's latest request to leave Spain was, this time, granted by the courts. Accompanied by Pernando Barrena, the two men arrived in Ireland on 11 February. Meetings were arranged with senior Sinn Féin figures, including Gerry Adams. Others were facilitated with unionist community figures. A private meeting was also arranged with Albert Reynolds. Writing in *An Phoblacht*, Eoin Ó Broin explained Sinn Féin's rationale in extending a second invitation to Otegi in the immediate aftermath of the Barajas bombing:

"The party's logic was simple. The Irish process collapsed in 1996 in similar circumstances. John Major's refusal to honour commitments made in previous negotiations supported by foot dragging from [former Taoiseach John] Bruton's 'rainbow coalition' undermined the conditions that brought the IRA's 1994 cessation into being".<sup>111</sup>

Akin to Reynolds' analysis outlined above, Ó Broin's article effectively drew a direct parallel between the breakdown of the IRA ceasefire in 1996 and ETA's more recent ceasefire collapse — with the caveat that, unlike Reynolds, Ó Broin appeared to apportion blame in both instances to the British and Spanish governments.

Focusing in on the method deployed to break both ceasefires, Paddy Woodworth has suggested that ETA's attack "was almost certainly modelled" on the "Canary Wharf" bombing. And while, to this author's knowledge, there is no firm evidence to support Woodworth's thesis, it does raise a valid question: Did ETA specifically have the IRA's "Canary Wharf" bombing in mind when it blew up Barajas? Was this a case of IRA-to-ETA imitation behaviour?

Notwithstanding the absence of hard evidence, one can easily see clear parallels in the rationale that may have been behind both attacks. As briefly referenced in the previous

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<sup>109</sup> Whitfield: *Endgame for ETA*, pp. 161–162, p. 184.

<sup>110</sup> "Los asesores internacionales de Ibarretxe ven en el atentado de Barajas "un desafío y una nueva oportunidad para la paz", *El Diario Vasco*, 30.01.2007.

<sup>111</sup> "Political exclusion counter-productive – Adams", *An Phoblacht*, 15.02.2007; "Batasuna representatives' whirlwind Irish visit", *An Phoblacht*, 22.02.2007. John Bruton's 'rainbow' coalition', consisting of Fine Gael, Labour, and Democratic Left, governed Ireland from 1994 to 1997.

chapter, it is difficult to tally —for this author at least— to gauge whether “Canary Wharf” represented a strategic success or not for the IRA. Regardless of its long-term implications and consequences, on an immediate tactical level, it certainly “seemed to propel the two governments into action”.<sup>112</sup>

One republican source interviewed for this study expressed no doubt that “Canary Wharf” and the June 1996 Manchester bombing, both of which specifically targeted British economic interests, had achieved more (“forcing Britain to negotiate”) than all the “body bags” that were sent back from Northern Ireland during the height of the “Troubles”.<sup>113</sup>

One wonders if a similar *perception* of the efficacy of the attack, may have provoked ETA to similarly ratchet up pressure on the Spanish government by also hitting a major economic target. Although not representative of this author’s view, at first glance, one could make the case that despite the severe public backlash that followed the Madrid bombing, ETA’s strategy had even worked — or at least temporarily.

By May, Spanish government, Batasuna and ETA representatives were back around two separate negotiating “tables” in Geneva, working out aspects of the process. Seemingly, both Gerry Adams and Tony Blair were instrumental in Zapatero’s decision to press ahead with one last effort.<sup>114</sup>

This time, however, according to Eguiguren, the process was already effectively dead — although it should be noted that Eguiguren and Otegi’s accounts of what actually took place in Geneva vary considerably. Unlike previous rounds of talks, the Basque and Spanish interlocutors were, on this occasion, joined by several international observers, including two Sinn Féin representatives, and observers from the Norwegian and British governments — one of whom was Britain’s Jonathan Powell. Gerry Kelly has been named as one of the two Sinn Féin observers.<sup>115</sup>

It is highly likely that the other Sinn Féin observer was, akin to Kelly, also a senior republican who had built up relations with the Batasuna interlocutors (Otegi, Etxeberria) over the previous years. As is his prerogative, Alex Maskey would not confirm if he was the other Sinn Féin observer present in Geneva. He did, however, offer a broad analysis of the types of discussions that were taking place, around this time, during the process:

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<sup>112</sup> O’Brien: *The Long War. The IRA & Sinn Féin* (3<sup>rd</sup> ed.), (quote on p. 356).

<sup>113</sup> Anonymous interview.

<sup>114</sup> José Félix Azurmendi: *ETA. De Principio A Fin*, Donostia, Txartalo, 2014, pp. 339–340. “Pluja Seca, mediadors internacionals”.

<sup>115</sup> Murua: *El Triángulo de Loiola*, pp. 147–148; Whitfield: *Endgame for ETA*, pp. 184–185.

Maskey: “All I will say is that there were ongoing discussions, some more substantive than others... I’ll put it that way. Some of those discussions would have been very private. [...] Our remit would have always been advising what we did here [in Ireland].

Interviewer: And in the context of those [Geneva] talks?

Maskey: We [the two Sinn Féin representatives — *but not necessarily* Maskey] would have been there as, not witnesses, but in a way, I suppose as having someone from outside, being almost like a third party. But at no time were we telling people from the Basque Country what to do”.<sup>116</sup>

After proposals and counter-proposals were put forward by both sides, the Geneva talks quickly ran aground. In response, the international observers formulated a draft proposal of their own. Their solution was largely based on what had been in the pre-agreement of Loiola, albeit with a more elaborate route towards a four-province Basque-Navarrese entity. Echoing some of Sinn Féin’s demands to the British government years previously, the *izquierda abertzale* interlocutors pushed for PSOE and its regional affiliates in the Basque Country and Navarre to become persuaders for Basque-Navarrese unity. It was at this point that Eguiguren —memorably for those involved— took to a chalkboard to suggest something more akin to an interparliamentary organ. As with the talks in Loiola, Navarre proved to be a major sticking point between the two sides.

Given the often-repeated description of the old kingdom as the “Basque Ulster”, it is somewhat ironic that Eguiguren subsequently criticised the Sinn Féin representatives on the basis that they apparently “[...] no entendían nada sobre el problema entre Navarra y Euskadi” — a criticism which those on the receiving end would surely reject.<sup>117</sup>

In the end, the lack of agreement on Navarre effectively scuppered any chance of a comprehensive deal emerging. ETA decided to walk. On 22 May 2007, after four (non-consecutive) days of negotiations, the Spanish and Basque interlocutors, HD Centre mediators, and international observers, parted ways in Geneva. They probably all knew what would happen next.

On 07 June 2007, ETA formally announced the end of its ceasefire. The “Zapatero process” had now definitively come to an end. Reflecting on recent developments, Gerry Adams stated in *An Phoblacht*:

“Everyone who has been involved in attempting to get a viable peace process operating in the Basque Country is disappointed at the breakdown in the process

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<sup>116</sup> Author interview with Alex Maskey (Belfast, 2018).

<sup>117</sup> For full details of the Geneva talks of May 2007, see: Murua: *El Triángulo de Loiola*, pp. 149–163 (quote from Eguiguren on p. 163). See also: Whitfield: *Endgame for ETA*, pp. 185–186.

over recent months and today's announcement from ETA ending its ceasefire. However, the lessons of the Irish Peace Process and indeed every conflict resolution process throughout the world tells us that it is now important to redouble efforts to put the process there back on track".<sup>118</sup>

As noble as Adams' words were, there was arguably little or no appetite for *either* side to "redouble efforts to put the process there back on track". As Murua and Whitfield have documented in their respective texts, post-Oslo, the izquierda abertzale embarked on a unilateral initiative that was as much about its own internal power dynamics, as it was about attempting to put pressure on the Spanish state to begin a new "process". Besides, ETA and Batasuna had lost hope that whatever was delivered (or deliverable) in negotiations, could actually be implemented by a government in Madrid that was under constant attack from a coalition of PP and victims' organisations.<sup>119</sup>

Given Eguiguren's representation of a Spanish government simply going through the motions in Geneva, it would appear as though the Barajas bombing had effectively killed of any serious notions within the PSOE administration that a deal could be reached, or was even desirable. The prospect of agreement with an alternative, PP-led administration in Madrid, was a complete non-starter.

If the "Canary Wharf" bombing of 1996 represented the IRA banging on the table, demanding that the British take its ceasefire more seriously, then ETA's Barajas attack—to borrow Murua's analogy—had completely broken the table in half.<sup>120</sup> Whatever genuine willingness the Spanish government had harboured to reach an agreement—and this is an open question—all but evaporated on that fateful day in Madrid. ETA had overplayed its hand.

### **"Una de cal, otra de arena"**

"A Basque solidarity rally was hold [sic] in Dublin last Sunday. [...] It started with [a] Txalaparta performance, followed by [a] Zanpantzar performance, 10 men in traditional costume, with another as the bear, led by a woman carrying the Basque flag. Supporters gathered around (40–50 people) and cheered them on. Supporters displayed a banner with the slogan "SELF-DETERMINATION FOR THE BASQUE COUNTRY". As well as Basque and Irish supporters, there were also Catalans in attendance, who displayed their own banner: "CATALONIA IS NOT SPAIN". Many passers-by, both Irish and non-Irish (tourists and foreign workers), stopped to listen and watch, or to ask questions of supporters. Over 800 leaflets were given out explaining the cultural background to the performances and the

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<sup>118</sup> "Basque Country", *An Phoblacht*, 07.06.2007, <https://www.anphoblacht.com/contents/16951> (last accessed 20 April 2020).

<sup>119</sup> Murua: *El Triángulo de Loiola*, p. 171, p. 180.

<sup>120</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 136.



historical and political background to the Basque struggle for self-determination. Many signatures were collected on petitions in favour of the involvement of [the] Spanish and French states in a process of talks and negotiations accepting the rights of all Basques to decide their own future as the key to the resolution of the conflict. During the afternoon, some songs were sung and slogans shouted, in between performances of Zanpantzar and Txalaparta. [...] Many of the supporters and performers met later that evening in a bar and enjoyed an evening of music and comradeship. The Dublin Irish Basque Committee is in the process of reorganising itself and this performance was an important first step”.<sup>121</sup>

On 10 December 2006, the above “relaunch” of the Dublin branch of the Basque Solidarity Committees (BSC) took place along Grafton Street, one of the city’s main thoroughfares. First established in February 1997, the Basque Solidarity Committees (or sometimes “Irish-Basque Committees”, or “Basque-Irish Committees”) tended to consist of a diverse mix of Basque political activists living in Ireland, Irish political activists (including “mainstream” pro-GFA, and “dissident” ant-GFA republicans), and non-affiliated members of the general public.<sup>122</sup> The BSCs were, *stricto sensu*, completely independent of any Irish political party — although in the view of some of those involved, this was not always necessarily the case. Over the years, committees were established in Dublin, Belfast, Galway, Cork, Limerick, and Kerry.<sup>123</sup>

The driving force behind the Dublin relaunch in December 2006 was Diarmuid Breatnach. Son of Deasún and brother of Lucilita, Diarmuid had worked in Britain since the early 1970s. Returning to Ireland in the mid-2000s, he was drawn to solidarity campaigns around Basque political issues: “There were a couple of Basques in Dublin

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<sup>121</sup> “Basque Solidarity protests in Dublin”, <http://irishbasquecommittees.blogspot.com/2006/12/> (last accessed 20 April 2020).

<sup>122</sup> The first evidence that this author has come across of an Irish-Basque Solidarity Committee is a protest against the “murder” of the Basque prisoner José María Aranzamendi in a Spanish jail in February 1997. Although Aranzamendi apparently committed suicide, the circumstances of his death were deemed by some to be suspicious. As well as protests taking place at the Spanish Embassy in Dublin, this group also undertook a “solidarity visit to Long Kesh to meet with Irish prisoners”. See the following Eoin Ó Broin-penned articles: “Basque POW murdered”, *An Phoblacht/Republican News*, 13.02.1997; “Basques Backed”, *Fortnight*, No. 359 (March 1997), pp. 9–10. As the reader will recall, an Irish-Basque Committee was formed in Dublin around the time of the Burgos Process in 1970 and was briefly revived in 1975. To this author’s knowledge, there was no organisational connection between the 1970s committee(s) and the one that emerged in 1997.

<sup>123</sup> Having interviewed at least a dozen Basque and Irish activists who were involved in the BSCs to varying degrees, it would appear as though diverging political viewpoints on the Irish republican movement’s strategy; personality clashes; and accusations, *by some*, that Sinn Féin was attempting to control the committees’ work, led to the effective demise of most branches circa 2012. This author has not conducted enough primary research to explore this complicated issue further, nor is it strictly relevant to this study. Notwithstanding this general overview, any aspects of the committees’ work that the author feels are relevant to the objectives of this study will be referred to in what follows.

who were supposed to be organising a Basque Solidarity Committee but it never seemed to come to anything”.<sup>124</sup>

Following a talk given by an Askapena delegate in 2006, Breatnach and others began to coordinate and organise the Dublin BSC’s work. Although the committee was an independent body, it was, as Breatnach acknowledges, “formally linked” to Askapena. On average, about ten public activities (e.g., pickets, stalls, culture nights, leaflets, collections) were arranged per year, with participation in the committee and its social milieu open to anybody who respected the Basque right to self-determination.<sup>125</sup>

The other main committee was located in Belfast. Its principal organiser was Arturo Villanueva. As the reader will recall, Villanueva was one of the Jarrai activists who had established connections in the late 1990s with the cadre of young Irish republicans that would go on to form Sinn Féin Youth. As part of the broad juridical process undertaken against sectors of the MLNV, Villanueva was imprisoned in 2001, accused of being a member of Jarrai. Remanded on bail and facing a lengthy sentence, he subsequently failed to appear at a court hearing in Madrid.

In January 2004, Villanueva turned up in Belfast. He was now “Beñat”:

“In a natural way, it was very welcoming from the beginning, for being Basque. And there were some people who knew I was an ‘on the run’, so there was complete, absolute support. I felt like at home. It’s true also that I had already been there, I had friends there, and I had always wanted to live at least for a while in Belfast to get to know better the struggle, the situation, and all”.

Over the next few years, “Beñat” focused most of his political work on the development of the solidarity committees:

“We knew there was some sort of potential in Ireland to develop solidarity with the Basque Country. First, awareness — and then the people [would act] around that. On the one hand it was to give a chance to those who wanted to organize, and then to continue developing networks and get the word out there. Even I knew that one day I could be arrested, and I thought, well, if one day I am arrested, I hope I’ll be able to take advantage of that situation, to get more awareness about the Basque Country. So that was the basic goal. And then it was also related to the Basque people who were in a struggle. To let them know that they are not alone, and their voices are heard out there. Part of the Spanish state strategy is to build thick walls of censorship around the Basque Country... and we were trying to break those walls”.<sup>126</sup>

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<sup>124</sup> Author interview with Diarmuid Breatnach (Dublin, 2017).

<sup>125</sup> Ibid. For some of the committees’ activities, see: “Irish Basque Solidarity Committees”, <http://irishbasquecommittees.blogspot.com/> (last accessed 21 April 2020).

<sup>126</sup> Author interview with Arturo “Beñat” Villanueva (Ziburu, 2017).

In addition to his BSC activism, Villanueva hosted a Basque information radio show on local Belfast radio. He also produced a two-page monthly digest/press release titled “Basque News” in coordination with Breatnach.<sup>127</sup> Speaking specifically in relation to the Belfast Solidarity Committee and its Basque and Irish organisational links, Villanueva notes:

“We would coordinate with Askapena [...]. We didn’t have any official relation with any political party in Ireland. Anyone who would recognise the Basque Country, as a country, as a nation, with the right to self-determination, that was enough to join the committees. Then, naturally, of course, we would have a close relationship with Sinn Féin and local republicans, and all that”.<sup>128</sup>

Basque-Irish solidarity events in the mid- to late-2000s often encompassed combinations of Ógra Shinn Féin, the BSCs and Askapena. For instance, in 2004 Askapena embarked on a month-long trip around Ireland, which included a joint demonstration alongside ÓSF in Dublin. In May 2006, a “Basque Week” took place in the city of Galway, organised by Ógra Shinn Féin, with the help of the “Galway-Basque community”. Askapena also regularly coordinated activities with the Galway BSC. A more ambitious International Basque Solidarity Week began in 2007. This drew elements of ÓSF, the BSCs, the Basque community in Ireland, and visiting Askapena and radical youth activist sectors together on an annual basis.<sup>129</sup>

Meanwhile, official relations continued at youth level between ÓSF and Segi, despite the latter’s juridical and police constraints. From a glut of Ógra Shinn Féin pickets and rallies that could be referred to here, of note is the participation of an ÓSF delegation to an “international meeting” hosted by Segi in April 2004, and the visit of a much larger representation to the Basque Country the following year. In September 2007, an even larger still, 20-strong, ÓSF contingent set off for the Basque Country. Before embarking, one ÓSF activist explained the group’s motivation:

“We will be primarily travelling to the Basque Country to show support for our Basque youth comrades in Segi who are currently deemed a ‘terrorist’ organisation, and whose former leadership is in jail. We want them to know that their plight is

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<sup>127</sup> Author interview with Diarmuid Breatnach (Dublin, 2017). Author interview with Arturo “Beñat” Villanueva (Ziburu, 2017).

<sup>128</sup> Author interview with Arturo “Beñat” Villanueva (Ziburu, 2017).

<sup>129</sup> Author interview with Gorka Elejabarrieta Díaz (Donostia, 2016); Author interview with “K”; “Ireland – Basque Solidarity”, *An Phoblacht*, 01.06.2006, <https://www.anphoblacht.com/contents/15303>; “International Week of Solidarity with the Basque Country”, <http://www.indymedia.ie/article/91080> (sites last accessed 21 April 2020). See also: “Saoirse do Thír na mBascadh”, *An Phoblachts*, 13.12.2007.

remembered in Ireland and that we will campaign against the constant repression”.<sup>130</sup>

Instead of flying to the Basque Country “to show support” for their Basque comrades, Ógra Shinn Féin and other activists, including the BSCs and elements of “dissident” republicanism, would soon become party to a mobilisation in defence of two radical Basque nationalists on Irish soil: one being the relatively low-key Villanueva; the other being a man with a much more notorious profile: Iñaki De Juana Chaos.

Flicking through the morning newspapers on 18 November 2008, many Irish readers would have had their first introduction to Iñaki De Juana Chaos. Alongside the basic details of his backstory, they would have seen a stern image of the ex-*etarra* arriving at a Belfast court, on foot of a European arrest warrant, the previous day. For most Spanish people, however, the identity of De Juana Chaos needed (and needs) little explanation. In 1987, he was convicted of killing 25 people, carried out whilst leader of ETA’s Madrid Commando. He was subsequently sentenced to 3,129 years in prison.<sup>131</sup>

Eighteen years after his sentence, and as a consequence of fixed prison term limits and remission for good behaviour, De Juana Chaos was set to be released. In Spain, a political storm ensued. Further charges were brought against De Juana Chaos (and later, a conviction) for allegedly making threats in two articles. In response to these developments, De Juana Chaos began the first of three hunger strikes — the second lasting 114 days, during which he was force-fed and close to death. He was eventually released from prison on 02 August 2008. As the reader will note, the political storm around De Juana Chaos’ pending release, subsequent conviction and series of hunger strikes provided the backdrop noise to the already politically-charged and high-stakes “Zapatero process”.

The drama did not end there. Within days of his release, De Juana Chaos was accused of having penned a letter that was read out at his public homecoming, in which the Basque phrase “Aurrera bolie!” (Forward with the ball!) was used. A Spanish court began to investigate whether the use of the phrase may have amounted to an incitement of violence. De Juana Chaos, who was absent from the event in question, rejected any suggestion that he had written the letter.

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<sup>130</sup> “Ógra enjoy Basque youth festival”, *An Phoblacht/Republican News*, 29.04.2004; “Ógra delegation in Basque Country”, *An Phoblacht*, 06.10.2005; “Large Ógra Shinn Féin mobilisation to the Basque Country”, *An Phoblacht*, 06.09.2007.

<sup>131</sup> “Bailed Basque separatist faces extradition”, *Irish Independent*, 18.11.2008; “ETA man appears in court in Belfast”, *Belfast Telegraph*, 18.11.2008.

The following month, on 24 September, news first broke of a Spanish request to Interpol for his arrest. It turned out that De Juana Chaos was, in fact, in Ireland. Between arriving in early August and the Interpol request, he had sought a new passport at the Spanish Embassy in Dublin. The contact address he gave to the embassy, and that which subsequently appeared on the Interpol communication, happened to be the residence of the partner of James Monaghan.

As the reader will recall, Monaghan was one of the (in)famous “Colombia 3”, and according to Florencio Domínguez Iribarren, one of the IRA’s long-standing interlocutors with ETA. De Juana Chaos later insisted that he had never met Monaghan. He had simply received the address from a Basque friend who had spent some time on an Irish language course with the owner of the house.<sup>132</sup> Either way, the optics did not look good for Sinn Féin. One republican source recalls:

“Well... Iñaki, it was agreed to take him for a month. And then things went wrong. He hoped to move on to a third country. He applied for a passport, but he wasn’t given one, so the commitment continued [...]. He couldn’t go on anywhere else, and of course, we accepted that he was here and [that we] had to do what we could to look after him”.<sup>133</sup>

Spain’s formal extradition process began against Iñaki De Juana Chaos in October 2008. In March 2009, a Belfast court decided that he was eligible for extradition. He was subsequently released on parole while a case could be prepared to contest the charges.<sup>134</sup> Two weeks later, an interview with De Juana Chaos, conducted by Paddy Woodworth, was published in the *Irish Times*. According to Rice:

“We were against him doing the interview. He wanted to justify himself [...]. They were always going to do a hatchet job on him. Paddy Woodworth wouldn’t have been unsympathetic, and he’s a kind of honest journalist and all that, but he’s the interviewer; he’s not the editor. The interview wasn’t *too* bad. It was like the vicar’s egg — it was good in parts, but the headlines were, of course, *very* bad [“Basque pariah in exile”]. And we didn’t want to draw attention. It wasn’t favourable to us, the situation with Iñaki [...]. We appreciated that drawing attention to Iñaki and our connection with him wasn’t a help to us. And above all, what he thought [the interview] was gonna do for him, that he was gonna be able to tell his part of the story — that was never gonna happen”.<sup>135</sup>

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<sup>132</sup> “Spanish judge asks Interpol to find wanted Eta terrorist living in Dublin”, *Irish Times*, 24.09.2008; “Spanish seeking Basque in Ireland”, [http://news.bbc.co.uk/2/hi/uk\\_news/northern\\_ireland/7634234.stm](http://news.bbc.co.uk/2/hi/uk_news/northern_ireland/7634234.stm) (last accessed 22 April 2020); “Basque pariah in exile”, *Irish Times*, 01.04.2009.

<sup>133</sup> Anonymous interview with the author.

<sup>134</sup> “Court backs Basque activist’s extradition”, *An Phoblacht*, 19.03.2009.

<sup>135</sup> “Basque pariah in exile”, *Irish Times*, 01.04.2009. Author interview with Pat Rice (Belfast, 2017).

Exactly three weeks after De Juana Chaos' interview was published in the *Irish Times*, on 22 April 2009, Arturo "Beñat" Villanueva was arrested in Belfast in connection with the outstanding charges against him in Spain. Unlike De Juana Chaos, Villanueva was, to all intents and purposes, completely unknown. Still, it did not take long for the two cases to become conjoined — not only in the media, but also in the solidarity campaign that was launched thereafter in Belfast: "Don't Extradite the Basques".<sup>136</sup>

At the heart of the "Don't Extradite the Basques" campaign was "F", a Sinn Féin activist who had recently moved to Belfast. Working alongside Villanueva, pickets, an online petition, and funding nights drummed up support in Belfast. High-profile republicans such as Danny Morrison and Bairbre de Brún also lent their support to the campaign.<sup>137</sup>

While publicly there was a united front, one anonymous source has suggested that, more privately, "it was becoming more and more difficult for Sinn Féin to support the situation — although they did". This was apparently "because of Iñaki's case [...] Sinn Féin didn't know how much he was hated in Spain".<sup>138</sup> According to the same source, the Belfast BSC was allegedly instructed from the Basque Country to reign in its activities out of fear that the broader BIA-IRM relationship could be damaged. It should be noted that other sources who spoke to this author rejected this thesis.

In February 2010, the Belfast High Court upheld a previous judicial decision to deny Spain's extradition request of Villanueva.<sup>139</sup> Following the judgement, Villanueva spoke to *An Phoblacht*:

"I am obviously relieved by the news that myself and my partner can now get on with our lives here in Belfast, without the threat of facing time in a Spanish jail for my political beliefs hanging over my head. [...] The case against me was motivated by malice and vindictiveness on the part of the Spanish authorities. There was no evidence provided that I had committed any crime, and it was obvious that I was

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<sup>136</sup> "Second Basque terror suspect arrested in Northern Ireland", *The Guardian*, 22.04.2009; "Don't Extradite the Basques Campaign launched", *An Phoblacht*, 11.06.2009, <https://www.anphoblacht.com/contents/20202> (last accessed 22 April 2020).

<sup>137</sup> Author interview with "F". "Don't Extradite the Basques campaign says thanks", *An Phoblacht*, 25.06.2009; "Protest demands rejection of Basque extraditions", *An Phoblacht*, 08.10.2009; "Stop Spanish Political Persecution - Don't Extradite the Basques", <https://www.gopetition.com/petitions/stop-spanish-political-persecution-dont-extradite-the-basques.html>; "Protest Against Basque Extraditions", <http://sinnfeinrepyouth.blogspot.com/2009/06/protest-against-basque-extraditions.html>; "Basque Conference Held in Belfast", [http://www.indymedia.ie/article/93501?userlanguage=ga&save\\_prefs=true](http://www.indymedia.ie/article/93501?userlanguage=ga&save_prefs=true) (sites last accessed 22 April 2020).

<sup>138</sup> Anonymous source.

<sup>139</sup> "High Court backs Basque extradition dismissal", [http://news.bbc.co.uk/2/hi/uk\\_news/northern\\_ireland/8534268.stm](http://news.bbc.co.uk/2/hi/uk_news/northern_ireland/8534268.stm) (last accessed 22 April 2020).



being pursued for my political beliefs in favour of independence for Euskal Herria”.<sup>140</sup>

De Juana Chaos would have to wait a little longer to discover his fate.

On 01 March 2010, a Belfast judge approved the extradition of De Juana Chaos to Spain. His defence team were given seven days to appeal this decision, which they duly did. On 25 March 2010, a day before his case was due in court, De Juana Chaos reported to police as usual. This would, in fact, be the last time that the Northern Irish authorities would see the *ex-etarra*.

At the end of April, a prosecution lawyer for the Spanish state told the Belfast High Court that the police had been unable to locate the whereabouts of De Juana Chaos for more than a month. The lawyer concluded by stating what most people probably already assumed: “There is good reason to believe that he may have fled the jurisdiction”.<sup>141</sup>

### **Ending ETA...**

“En Euskal Herria se está abriendo un nuevo tiempo político. Estamos ante una oportunidad histórica para dar una solución justa y democrática al secular conflicto político. Frente a la violencia y la represión, el diálogo y el acuerdo deben caracterizar el nuevo ciclo. El reconocimiento de Euskal Herria y el respeto a la voluntad popular deben prevalecer sobre la imposición. Ese es el deseo de la mayoría de la ciudadanía vasca. La lucha de largos años ha creado esta oportunidad. No ha sido un camino fácil. La crudeza de la lucha se ha llevado a muchas compañeras y compañeros para siempre. Otros están sufriendo la cárcel o el exilio. Para ellos y ellas nuestro reconocimiento y más sentido homenaje. En adelante, el camino tampoco será fácil. Ante la imposición que aún perdura, cada paso, cada logro, será fruto del esfuerzo y de la lucha de la ciudadanía vasca. A lo largo de estos años Euskal Herria ha acumulado la experiencia y fuerza necesaria para afrontar este camino y tiene también la determinación para hacerlo. Es tiempo de mirar al futuro con esperanza. Es tiempo también de actuar con responsabilidad y valentía. Por todo ello, ETA ha decidido el cese definitivo de su actividad armada”.<sup>142</sup>

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<sup>140</sup> “Villanueva speaks on extradition case”, *An Phoblacht*, 11.03.2010. Villanueva later returned to the French Basque Country. Arrested in 2012, he again successfully fought an extradition attempt from Spain.

<sup>141</sup> “Ex-ETA leader may have fled N. Ireland”, <https://www.reuters.com/article/us-irish-basque/ex-eta-leader-may-have-fled-n-ireland-court-told-idUSTRE63S36N20100429> (last accessed 22 April 2020). At the time of writing, the last reported sighting of Iñaki De Juana Chaos was in Venezuela in 2015. Spain continues to seek his extradition. “El Tribunal Supremo venezolano ordena localizar a Iñaki De Juana Chaos”, *El Correo*, 24.07.2016. Another Basque, Fermin Vila Michelena, was arrested in Belfast in 2010 on charges related to membership of ETA. After a lengthy legal challenge, he was finally extradited to Spain in 2014. See: “ETA suspect Fermin Vila Michelena arrested in Belfast”, <https://www.bbc.com/news/10410517>; “Fermin Vila Michelena extradited from Northern Ireland to Spain”, <https://www.bbc.com/news/uk-northern-ireland-27997493> (sites last accessed 11 April 2020).

<sup>142</sup> “Declaración de ETA”, <http://canales.diariovasco.com/documentos/comunicado.pdf> (last accessed 25 April 2020).

In October 2011, four years after the final round of negotiations had taken place in Geneva between ETA, Batasuna and the Spanish government; the Basque paramilitaries called a definitive ceasefire. What had happened in the intervening period? Why had ETA ‘ended’? Akin to a similar question posed in chapter five *vis-à-vis* the IRA, it is worth briefly outlining the main bodies of opinion on this issue. This is not only for the benefit of the reader, but also for the fact that Irish republican involvement in this process has yet to be analysed in any great detail. Indeed, as the reader will recall, in addition to the three core (*exploratory; explanatory; correlative*) questions that have guided this study, a supplementary inquiry was also earmarked in chapter one: to gauge if (and if so, how?) the accumulative weight of radical Basque nationalist–Irish republican relations may have partly lent itself to ETA’s definitive ceasefire in 2011.<sup>143</sup> This additional inquiry will be teased out in a later section (An accumulative influence?).

The first school of thought regarding the end of ETA is quite straightforward. ETA’s demise was, in the words of Diego Muro, a “clear case of defeat”, of which “[t]he counter-terrorist effort was the main explanatory variable”. Similarly, as its title suggests, Domínguez Iribarren’s “La agonía de ETA” provides perhaps the most detailed account of the increasingly asphyxiating pressure applied to the organisation in its twilight years by Spanish and French security forces.<sup>144</sup>

From a markedly different perspective, Julen Zabalo and Mikel Saratxo conclude that when ETA finally accepted the reality that its two principal aims had completely run aground (negotiating with the Spanish state; the creation of a national front), the organisation subsequently made a pragmatic decision to end its armed activities and explore new political opportunities. As an additional factor, the co-authors also highlight ETA’s mounting difficulty in justifying its armed actions as a means to these ends.<sup>145</sup>

Continuing with this same theme, a steady trajectory of declining public support has been judged by several commentators to have acutely and fatally undermined ETA. It is generally accepted that during the dictatorship, the Basque paramilitaries enjoyed a not insignificant degree of sympathy among the Basque population — if not necessarily open and active backing. By the late 1980s, however, a decade after the Transition and the

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<sup>143</sup> This inquiry was formulated in chapter one in the following way: “[...] a secondary aim of this study is to gauge if (and if so, how?) the Basque izquierda abertzale–Irish republican nexus may have lent itself to creating an “alternative” disposition from which a prevailing conflictive situation in the Basque Country has been transformed, akin to Northern Ireland, to one of relative peace”.

<sup>144</sup> Muro: “ETA during democracy, 1975–2011”, (quote on p. 50). Domínguez Iribarren: *La agonía de ETA*.

<sup>145</sup> Zabalo; Saratxo: “ETA ceasefire: Armed struggle vs. political practice in Basque nationalism”.

bedding in of the Basque government, support for ETA's armed campaign had seriously waned.<sup>146</sup> This process was accelerated in the 1990s when mass mobilizations against ETA's violence, organised by groups such as Gestos por la Paz (Gestures for Peace) and Basta Ya! (Enough Already!), became larger and more prevalent.<sup>147</sup> And while this probably consolidated izquierda abertzale support for ETA's armed campaign in the short term, even this internal movement foundation was not necessarily guaranteed to continue *ad infinitum*. It is to this internal social movement factor that we now turn.

As Murua comprehensively documents in "Ending ETA's Armed Campaign", in the wake of the failed "Zapatero process", a massive grassroots consultation took place across the entire izquierda abertzale regarding the strategic direction of radical Basque nationalism. Two proposals emerged from this process: "Argitzen", which was endorsed by Otegi *et al.*; and "Mugarri", which was supported by ETA. An internal struggle ensued. Otegi, Etxeberria and others argued that in order for the izquierda abertzale to succeed, it needed to "confront the state on its weak point, the political terrain". This would require a completely democratic and non-violent accumulation of forces. In other words, a strategy *sans* ETA.<sup>148</sup>

Although not explicitly couched in the following terms, the resulting consultation process effectively amounted to a plebiscite on ETA and its utility as an armed vanguard of a political movement in the twenty-first century. After intensive internal debate, "Argitzen" was backed by some 80% of more than 7,000 activists involved in the consultation process.<sup>149</sup> Support for ETA's heretofore dominant position as an armed vanguard of the movement had evidently vanished within its own community.

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<sup>146</sup> For brief overviews of favourable Basque public attitudes towards ETA during the dictatorship, see: Mees: *The Basque Contention*, pp. 108–110; Von Tangen Page: *Prisons, Peace and Terrorism. Penal Policy in the Reduction of Political Violence in Northern Ireland, Italy and the Spanish Basque Country, 1968–97*, p. 20; Sullivan: *ETA and Basque nationalism*, p. 277. Things began to change post-Franco. In 1978, 48% of the Basque public considered ETA to be either "Patriots" (13%) or "Idealists" (35%). In the same year, 18% described the group as either "Lunatics" (11%) or "Criminals" (7%). Eleven years later, in 1989, the first bracket had fallen to 23% ("Patriots 5%; Idealists 18%). Conversely, 32% of Basques now viewed the paramilitaries as either "Lunatics" (16%) or "Criminals" (16%). Figures cited in: Mees: *The Basque Contention*, p. 177. See also: Sánchez-Cuenca: "The Dynamics Of Nationalist Terrorism: ETA and the IRA".

<sup>147</sup> Mees: *The Basque Contention*, p. 186. Notwithstanding one-off sporadic protests against ETA in the late 1970s and early 1980s, the majority of Basque society did not openly reject ETA until the early 1990s. See: Murua: *Ending ETA's Armed Campaign*, p. 160.

<sup>148</sup> Whitfield: *Endgame for ETA*, pp. 216–217 (quote on p. 204).

<sup>149</sup> For details of the internal consultation, See: Murua: *Ending ETA's Armed Campaign*, pp. 80–89. In the same author's words: "ETA laid down its arms because its constituency withdrew its support for armed struggle" (quote on p. 203).

So as not to risk a split, the new departure was presented to ETA in the most palatable way possible: the organisation was essentially being asked to rescind the last of its agency by a democratic majority of its own constituency. It could refuse and face the ignominy of carrying on an increasingly self-defeating campaign, bereft of all but the most hardcore of supporters. Or it could accede to the mandate of the movement, and as it would later claim in 2018, “dissolve back into the people”.<sup>150</sup> ETA chose the latter.

Teresa Whitfield highlights an additional factor at play in the ‘ending’ of ETA: the “limited but essential assistance [played] by international actors”.<sup>151</sup> In this schema, the international community may be said to have provided a kind of soft ‘landing strip’ for the paramilitaries. For instance, the “Brussels Declaration” of spring 2010 made ETA and its process of winding down accountable to the international community rather than Madrid. In a more indirect manner, the endorsement of the “Mitchell Principles” by pro-“Argitzen” activists conveyed a similar message.<sup>152</sup> Finally, as the reader will recall from chapter one, ETA’s definitive ceasefire of October 2011 was actually framed as a direct response to a request made by international actors who gathered at the Palace of Aiete in Donostia, October 2011. As we shall see in the following first-hand accounts of those who took part at that said conference, the international figures understood the inherent benefit of ETA ending, intact, and as a whole, with the promise of a new “oportunidad histórica” on the horizon. The alternative: a completely demoralized and humiliated ETA, liable to split and still heavily armed, was of no use to anyone.

Marrying the above external and internal pressures on ETA, Ludger Mees has used the metaphor of an “externally induced suicide” to explain the organisation’s ceasefire and subsequent dissolution.<sup>153</sup>

#### **6.4. All roads lead to Aiete**

“El preacuerdo de Loiola se rompió y luego se fue a Ginebra. Durante todo ese periodo nosotros contábamos, y contamos, con un apoyo directo del movimiento republicano, del Sinn Féin y de gente del movimiento republicano que participó en el proceso de negociación de allí. Y contamos con un apoyo total, total. [...] En esa fase, en ese proceso de Loiola y de Ginebra la relación que tuvimos nosotros con la representación republicana fue muy intensa, muy muy muy intensa. Ese proceso se

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<sup>150</sup> “ETA anuncia su disolución”, *El País*, 03.05.2018, [https://elpais.com/politica/2018/05/03/actualidad/1525336524\\_523980.html](https://elpais.com/politica/2018/05/03/actualidad/1525336524_523980.html) (last accessed 30 April 2020).

<sup>151</sup> Whitfield: *Endgame for ETA*, p. 7. For an extremely critical take on the role of third parties in the processes of the 2000s, see: Alonso: “The International Dimension of ETA’s Terrorism and the Internationalization of the Conflict in the Basque Country”.

<sup>152</sup> Murua: *Ending ETA’s Armed Campaign*, p. 83, p. 179; Whitfield: *Endgame for ETA*, p. 224.

<sup>153</sup> Mees: *The Basque Contention*, p. 243.

rompió y a posteriormente esa relación la seguimos mantenido también con mucha intensidad [...]”.<sup>154</sup>

As the above quote from Rufi Etxeberria suggests, following the collapse of the Geneva talks in May 2007, Sinn Féin contact with the leadership cadre of Batasuna continued “con mucha intensidad”. As did communications with various international mediation figures.<sup>155</sup>

Speaking to this author, Etxeberria also reflected on an internal debate that he believed had been left pending (“sobre la mesa”) ever since the failed Lizarra-Garazi process of the late 1990s:

“El proceso de Loiola y de Ginebra la izquierda abertzale encaró ese proceso negociador sin haber previamente debatido y decidido sobre qué estrategia teníamos que seguir. Entonces llegamos a Loiola y a Lizarra [*Ginebra*] con el debate abierto y con posturas también diferentes sobre la lucha armada, sobre el proceso negociador, cuestiones muy importantes que luego tuvieron las consecuencias que tuvieron”.<sup>156</sup>

In a comparative study of the peace processes in Ireland and the Basque Country, the academic Philippe Duhart has pointed out a similar organisational and strategic weakness in the izquierda abertzale’s approach to their peace initiatives:

“In the Basque case, movement decentralization created persistent coordination problems between wings during peace efforts, while ETA’s unilateral reneging prevented political allies from establishing credibility as peacemakers”.<sup>157</sup>

Conversely, for Duhart, it was precisely the tight “inter-organisational centralization” of the Irish republican movement that gave Sinn Féin negotiators credibility as peacemakers. Imanol Murua also draws a similar contrast between the BIA and IRM in this regard.<sup>158</sup>

In the aftermath of Geneva, Otegi, Etxeberria, and other leading ‘politicos’ finally confronted the debate around the movement’s strategic direction (“sobre la mesa”). This would naturally have implications regarding the power dynamic of the movement, and by extension, run the risk of a damaging split.

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<sup>154</sup> Author interview with Rufi Etxeberria (Donostia, 2017).

<sup>155</sup> Powell: *Talking to Terrorists*, p. 272.

<sup>156</sup> Author interview with Rufi Etxeberria (Donostia, 2017). It is this author’s understanding that in the above quote Etxeberria intended to say “Ginebra” as opposed to “Lizarra”.

<sup>157</sup> Philippe Duhart: “Directing Disengagement Movement Centralization, Coordination, and Credibility in the Irish and Basque Peace Processes”, *European Journal of Sociology*, 57, 1 2016, pp. 31–63 (quote on p. 31).

<sup>158</sup> Duhart: “Directing Disengagement Movement Centralization, Coordination, and Credibility in the Irish and Basque Peace Processes”; Murua: *Ending ETA’s Armed Campaign*, p. 179.

It is with this thought in mind that we should primarily approach the radical Basque nationalist-Irish republican nexus from the summer of 2007 to the end of 2011. In other words, the main frame of the BIA-IRM nexus, post-Geneva, was now more akin to a “Sinn Féin mirror” (how to avoid an internal movement split) as opposed to the previous “Irish” one (advocating for self-determination and another “process”).<sup>159</sup>

In as much as the primary sources permit, the following descriptive account of the 2007 to 2011 process shall be interspersed with relevant references to the BIA-IRM nexus.

Within weeks of the breakdown of talks in Geneva, Arnaldo Otegi was back behind bars, accused of making apologies for terrorism. In October, he was joined by almost the entire political leadership of the *izquierda abertzale*.<sup>160</sup> Bairbre de Brún, Pat Rice and Fernando Barrena (one of a handful of the leadership cadre who had not been rounded up) visited Otegi in Martutene Prison (Donostia) on 05 October. Ahead of the visit, a Sinn Féin spokesperson stated:

“Today’s visit is at the request of the Basque party Batasuna. Sinn Féin is keen to express solidarity with Mr. Otegi, who has been a key player in promoting the Peace Process and a negotiated settlement in the Basque Country. He should be released immediately. [...] We have argued for some time that the banning of Batasuna and jailing of its political representatives is not conducive to the successful advancement of a peace process in the region. All legal restrictions against Batasuna should be lifted.”<sup>161</sup>

With increased juridical pressure across the movement, coupled with the “missed opportunity” of the Zapatero process, morale was low.<sup>162</sup>

Otegi was released from prison in September 2008. While careful not to sow divisions, the Gipuzkoan nevertheless publicly voiced the need for a new “effective strategy”. Supported by the likes of *Antxon* and Rafa Díez (a leading figure in LAB), Otegi’s coded initiative began to gain traction.

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<sup>159</sup> According to Murua, post 2007, the over-riding concern of the leadership cadre around Otegi was to avoid a split. Murua: *Ending ETA’s Armed Campaign*, p. 73. As the reader will recall from chapter five, and as documented by Ed Moloney in “A Secret History of the IRA”, this concern had also dominated Adams’ strategizing for more than a decade.

<sup>160</sup> “Spanish police arrest Basque leader”, *Irish Times*, 08.06.2007; “Protests after Spanish police arrest leaders of banned party”, *The Guardian*, 06.10.2007.

<sup>161</sup> “European Basque Friendship Bulletin, No. 1, November 2008”, <https://basquefriendship.files.wordpress.com/2011/06/basque-friendship-newsletter-1.pdf> (last accessed 18 April 2020).

<sup>162</sup> Author interview with Gorka Elejebarrrieta Díaz (Donostia, 2016).



Across late 2008 and early 2009, the aforementioned internal debate regarding the movement's strategic direction (i.e., political-military, or political) got underway. This debate apparently encompassed *all* components of the movement.<sup>163</sup>

Precisely halfway through the consultation process, the European Court of Human Rights (ECHR) upheld Spain's illegalisation of Batasuna.<sup>164</sup> For the Spanish judiciary, the ECHR ruling provided vindication for the hard line that it had taken in dealing with radical Basque nationalism. For the *izquierda abertzale*, this was yet another significant setback. How could it build towards its objectives or embark on a completely non-violent path without being able to legally form a political party to compete in elections?

Things got worse before they got better. In October 2009, once again, Arnaldo Otegi was arrested — this time on charges of attempting to rebuild Batasuna.<sup>165</sup> The subsequent “Bateragune Case” underlined the multi-layered difficulties that the ‘politicos’ faced. As well as trying to outmanoeuvre ETA, execute a significant strategic shift, and prevent a damaging split, Otegi *et al.* also had to deal with a Spanish judiciary that many commentators have judged to be highly politicised towards the Spanish right.<sup>166</sup> With or without Otegi, the internal consultation carried on regardless. By November, it had reached a fork in the road.

On 14 November 2009, in the small Navarrese town of Altsasu, about 100 people, claiming to represent the *izquierda abertzale*, endorsed the “Altsasu Declaration”. This declaration effectively affirmed the movement's adherence to the “Mitchell Principles”. Simultaneously, an international launch took place at an event in the Italian city of Venice, attended by Raymond McCartney, a Sinn Féin representative and former IRA hunger striker.

Adherence to the declaration and the implications of such a commitment around the (non-) use of political violence did not go unchallenged. Indeed, as Murua notes, it triggered a pointed moment of tension between the “Argitzen” and “Mugarri” factions.<sup>167</sup>

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<sup>163</sup> Murua: *Ending ETA's Armed Campaign*, pp. 70–71.

<sup>164</sup> “El Tribunal de Estrasburgo ratifica la ilegalización de Batasuna”, *El País*, 30.06.2009.

<sup>165</sup> Rafa Diez and a handful of others were also embroiled in the Bateragune case. “El fallo del Tribunal Europeo de Derechos Humanos sobre Bateragune ya es definitivo”, <https://www.eitb.eus/es/noticias/politica/detalle/6214798/caso-bateragune-el-fallo-tribunal-europeo-derechos-humanos-es-definitivo/> (last accessed 02 May 2020).

<sup>166</sup> Whitfield: *Endgame for ETA*, p. 143; “Spain's politicised legal system on trial”, <https://www.opendemocracy.net/en/can-europe-make-it/spains-politicised-legal-system-on-trial/> (last accessed 02 May 2020).

<sup>167</sup> Murua: *Ending ETA's Armed Campaign*, pp. 83–84; Whitfield: *Endgame for ETA*, p. 218–219.

Notwithstanding these challenges, by February 2010, the internal debate had finally concluded. “Argitzen” was confirmed as the new strategy.

In early March, a letter penned by Arnaldo Otegi was read out by Katalin Madariaga at the Sinn Féin Árd Fheis. This letter specifically referenced the influence of Irish “lessons” in the recently concluded consultation process:

“As you know the Abertzale Left have during recent months been involved in debating and defining the most effective strategy to advance our goal of national independence. In this debate the lessons of the Irish Peace Process have been very useful. The need for change to be brought about through a democratic process; a commitment to exclusively peaceful and political means; and the need for a process of dialogue and negotiation between all political forces governed by the Mitchell Principles — these are all taken from the road map laid out by Irish republicans over the past 16 years and more [...]”.<sup>168</sup>

For all the talk of peace, dialogue and the “Mitchell Principles”, ETA was not done yet. Less than two weeks later, on 16 March 2010, the group claimed its final victim when Jean-Serge Nérin, a French police sergeant, was shot dead on the outskirts of Paris in a “shoot-out” with ETA members at a checkpoint.<sup>169</sup>

Despite (or perhaps owing to) the killing of Nérin, momentum behind the new political initiative continued to gather. In June 2010, a strategic partnership was agreed between leading ‘politicos’ of the *izquierda abertzale* and Eusko Alkartasuna.<sup>170</sup> The alliance with the moderately nationalist and social democratic EA offered a glimpse of a potential accumulation of Basque “abertzale” forces in the permanent absence of the paramilitaries.

By autumn, ETA was finally ready to make a move. On 05 September, the organisation released a ceasefire statement. Shortly afterwards, Bairbre de Brún and Alex Maskey travelled to the Basque Country “at the request of the Abertzale Left” for a number of political engagements and meetings.<sup>171</sup> Speaking to this author, De Brún recalled that both she and Maskey were asked by a sceptical Basque whether the Sinn Féin representatives genuinely thought that “this thing [ETA’s ceasefire] was real?” De Brún recalls her response: “If we didn’t think it was real, we wouldn’t be here. We wouldn’t be wasting our time coming here and talking to you, thinking, well, this is going to fall apart”.<sup>172</sup> While ETA’s ceasefire was still, at this stage, neither “permanent” nor

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<sup>168</sup> “Impressions from Sinn Féin’s Árd Fheis in Dublin”, [http://archiv.info-nordirland.de/news/2010/new2010\\_105\\_e.htm#Kattalin%20Madariaga](http://archiv.info-nordirland.de/news/2010/new2010_105_e.htm#Kattalin%20Madariaga) (last accessed 26 April 2020).

<sup>169</sup> “ETA blamed for death of French policeman in shoot-out near Paris”, *The Guardian*, 17.03.2010.

<sup>170</sup> “EA y Batasuna pactan crear un ‘Estado vasco’ por vías pacíficas”, *Hoy*, 21.06.2010.

<sup>171</sup> “Sinn Féin in Basque Country after ETA statement”, *An Phoblacht*, 01.10.2010.

<sup>172</sup> Author interview with Bairbre de Brún (Belfast, 2016).

“definite”, a return to *sustained* violence—a “falling apart” of the process—seemed less likely by the day. Without social movement support, ETA simply had nowhere left to go.

In an article published in *The Guardian*, Gerry Adams referenced the “impressive internal process of strategy formulation [that] took place among Basque parties, trade unionists and political activists” in reaching this scenario. Additionally, he was not shy in speaking openly about his party’s role in recent years:

“This dialogue also involved senior Sinn Féin representatives, including myself. Sometimes the discussions were held in the Basque Country, sometimes in Belfast, and on a number of occasions in recent years Sinn Féin representatives travelled to Geneva for meetings with Basque representatives. Many in the Basque Country look to the Irish peace process for inspiration, and much of what has been attempted there in the last decade has been modelled on our experience”.<sup>173</sup>

In the new year, ETA called a “permanent and general ceasefire, which will be verifiable by the International Community”. Writing in *The Independent* this time, Adams implored Spain to release Arnaldo Otegi.<sup>174</sup> Although Otegi remained mired in legal difficulties, there would soon be better news for the *izquierda abertzale* on the judicial front.

On 05 May 2011, the Spanish Constitutional Court reversed an earlier decision by the Supreme Court to allow Sortu (Create)—the latest political incarnation of the BIA—participate in democratic elections as part of a broader coalition, Bildu (Gather). The new strategy could now be put to the test at the ballot box.

In subsequent provincial elections held on 22 May, Bildu received a stunning 26% of the popular vote.<sup>175</sup> One did not need to be an expert political scientist to see the result as a ringing endorsement of the *izquierda abertzale*’s strategic shift.

In late June, Otegi appeared in court in relation to the Bateragune case. During his defence, he publicly rejected “armed struggle” and referred to ETA as a “hindrance”. Prosecutors pointed to seized documents which purported to show that the *Gipuzkoan* had, in fact, been following ETA’s orders all along in fermenting a new political initiative. After nearly three months at trial, the Otegi was convicted and sentenced to 10 years imprisonment—later reduced to six.

A joint statement issued by Gerry Kelly, Alex Maskey and Bairbe de Brún condemned the conviction of the *izquierda abertzale* leader whose credentials as a peacemaker were

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<sup>173</sup> “ETA’s ceasefire is a political shift”, *The Guardian*, 06.09.2010.

<sup>174</sup> “They can make peace; but they should heed the Irish lesson”, *The Independent*, 11.01.2011.

<sup>175</sup> “Resultados electorales”, <https://www.euskadi.eus/ab12aAREWAr/resultado/maint> (last accessed 02 May 2020).

said to be “unchallengeable”. Meanwhile, a spokesperson for the Belfast Basque Solidarity Committee stated:

“There now must be international pressure brought to bear on the Spanish Government. This is a government within the EU that sees fit to outlaw opposition political parties and imprison democratically elected representatives. If it were happening anywhere else in the world there would be a public outcry”.<sup>176</sup>

Whilst Otegi’s case was in process, a “road map” towards the final act of ETA’s winding down —“ a permanent ceasefire”— was being privately arranged by various Basque political actors, senior ‘politicos’ in the *izquierda abertzale*, international figures, Lokarri (a successor to Elkarri), and elements of the Spanish government itself.

It would be an understatement to describe the details of this process as anything other than opaque and contested. Regardless of the actual minutia involved, by the end of September, everybody was seemingly on the same page.<sup>177</sup> ETA’s permanent ceasefire would come in October, in the aftermath of an international conference to be held at the Aiete Palace of Donostia.

One of the international guests, Bertie Ahern, “had been working away quietly since 2008 with Jonathan Powell and Alec Reid” on the Basque process. He recalls the lead up to the conference:

“Jonathan [Powell] was dealing directly with [the Spanish government] in the period up to it [Aiete]. They [the Spanish government] knew what we were up to. They knew we were involved. They weren’t going to come out and support us, but of course they were aware of it. They weren’t going to meet us, but they didn’t do anything to make things difficult for us either, which they could have done”.<sup>178</sup>

Despite the stand-off approach of the Spanish government, an arrangement was secured that would see outstanding technical issues around prisoners and decommissioning dealt with after ETA’s declaration of a permanent ceasefire.<sup>179</sup> In the meantime, a daunting Spanish election, scheduled for 20 November, loomed large on the horizon for PSOE. Given the collapse of the previous 2005–2007 process and the

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<sup>176</sup> “Otegi gets 10-year jail term for belonging to ETA leadership”, *El País*, 16.09.2011, [https://english.elpais.com/elpais/2011/09/16/inenglish/1316150448\\_850210.html](https://english.elpais.com/elpais/2011/09/16/inenglish/1316150448_850210.html); “Basque radical left refuse to view Otegi’s sentence as a stumbling block”, *El País*, 18.09.2011 (last accessed 02 May 2020). “Spain sentences Basque leaders at heart of peace process. Sinn Féin calls for release”, *An Phoblacht*, 30.09.2011. Rafa Díez was also sentenced to 10 years. As referenced in chapter one, in 2018 the ECHR found that Spain had breached Otegi’s right to an impartial trial — after he had served his six-year sentence.

<sup>177</sup> Whitfield: *Endgame for ETA*, pp. 249–254.

<sup>178</sup> Author interview with Bertie Ahern (Dublin, 2016).

<sup>179</sup> Murua: *Ending ETA’s Armed Campaign*, p. 210.

vehement opposition of the PP to any sort of dealings with ETA, this arrangement was kept private. In the view of Jonathan Powell:

“I think [the Aiete Declaration] was a success for the socialist government, but because of the way the socialist government approached the negotiations, they got very little credit for it. Because they were so busy trying to hide the negotiation from the public and pretend it hadn’t really happened, they got nothing for it. And I suppose that’s not surprising given the attitudes of the Spanish public in general, and socialist voters in particular — it’s not surprising I suppose [that ]they tried to hide it, because you had the failed negotiations of 2006”.<sup>180</sup>

With an agreement bagged with the Spanish government and the choreographed spectacle of ETA’s response to the international actors’ declaration at Aiete, Whitfield’s observation that the “scenography” of the ending of ETA “included an element of theatre” is difficult to argue with. Indeed, in interview with this author, Ahern described the back and forth communications as entirely “pre-cooked”.<sup>181</sup> Yet, for all its careful stage-management, which no doubt upset the group’s victims, those who organised and took part in Aiete highlight the pragmatic rationale for facilitating ETA’s own grandiose demise on the international stage. Simply put, it was a means of ensuring that the organisation would definitely, and definitively end, *intact*.<sup>182</sup> In the words of Gorka Espiau:

“Aiete was just a representation of a decision that had been taken two years before. So, what we did to help [was] setting up the scene for ETA to stop [...] we knew exactly what we were doing”.<sup>183</sup>

Notwithstanding ETA’s semi-dignified act of *harikari* in October 2011, the group was not so delusional as to present its ‘ending’ as a victory. Indeed, taking ETA’s stated objectives and weighing these against its advances, it is difficult not to agree with Richard English’s conclusion that ETA’s armed campaign was, by any objective measure, a failure. Even the pre-Aiete agreement reached with the PSOE administration to discuss technical aspects was, depending on one’s own interpretation, either reneged on or simply ignored, by the incoming PP government.

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<sup>180</sup> Author interview with Jonathan Powell (London, 2017).

<sup>181</sup> Author interview with Bertie Ahern (Dublin, 2016).

<sup>182</sup> Author interview with Bertie Ahern (Dublin, 2016). Author interview with Gorka Espiau (Leioa, 2017). Author interview with Jonathan Powell (London, 2017).

<sup>183</sup> Author interview with Gorka Espiau (Leioa, 2017). As well as Ahern, Adams and Powell, the international conference was attended by Kofi Annan (former Secretary General of the United Nations), Gro Harlem Brundtland (former Prime Minister of Norway), and Pierre Joxe (former Interior Minister of France). All six signed and presented the Aiete Declaration.

Despite these evident shortcomings, the reference to a “historic opportunity” in ETA’s permanent ceasefire final declaration transmitted the idea that the new political vista had come about precisely as a result of the actions and sacrifices that had gone beforehand. In this sense, ETA’s 2011 statement was uncannily similar to the IRA declaration of 2005.<sup>184</sup> Bertie Ahern underscores the importance of the internal movement optics in both cases:

“[The *izquierda abertzale*] presented it, as Sinn Féin did in the North, you know, kind of like, ‘we won; the others lost’. But in fairness to them [*izquierda abertzale*], and in fairness to any group that’s been involved in conflict, and in particular violent conflict... to pull their people in, the strategists and the men and women who give leadership, they have to present that, you know: certainly we weren’t defeated; we’ve suffered a lot; we can’t let down those who’ve suffered, the people who have died, their families and the people who are in prison. So therefore we have to present whatever it is in the best light to try and say, well, now, we have achieved all of this; we didn’t get everything, and now we see another plan of how we can get [what we want]. It isn’t blind loyalty; it’s more a kind of necessity to reign in the troops”.<sup>185</sup>

Reigning in the “troops” —a euphemism for neutralising the hardliners and dissenters— is precisely what Gerry Adams and his “kitchen cabinet” had done in the Irish case. As the reader will recall, the Sinn Féin leader had skilfully managed to keep the majority of the republican movement intact, and with a sense of forward momentum throughout the entire peace process and its aftermath. Perhaps Adams, more than any of the international guests present at the Aiete Conference, understood the importance of projecting a similar narrative in the Basque context.

The difference in both cases, however, was that while the Basque *izquierda abertzale* and the Irish republican movement both presented the end of their respective armed struggles in as favourable a light as possible, there was a clear distinction in terms of what the military components of ETA and the IRA had accumulated, or what they could reasonably argue had been achieved. As Ahern himself acknowledges:

“They’ve been doing that successfully enough in the Basque case [‘reigning in the troops’], but as I see it, the problem is they don’t have big cards to show. [...] [The republican movement] *have* things to show, and I think this is where the Basques are a long way short... they don’t...”.<sup>186</sup>

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<sup>184</sup> English: *Does Terrorism Work? A History*, p. 218; “Similitudes y diferencias entre el comunicado de ETA y el del fin del IRA”, <https://www.rtve.es/noticias/20111021/similitudes-diferencias-entre-comunicado-eta-del-fin-del-ira/469731.shtml> (last accessed 18 April 2020).

<sup>185</sup> Author interview with Bertie Ahern (Dublin, 2016).

<sup>186</sup> *Ibid.*



### **An accumulative influence?**

What of the republican movement's accumulative influence (or lack thereof) in the process that led to ETA's 2011 ceasefire? This is a difficult issue to gauge. As we have seen, there are at least five (mostly) overlapping factors that have been put forward by academics and commentators to explain ETA's demise: defeat, absence of public support, collapse of social movement support, rational choice, and international facilitation.

Regarding the "defeat", and "absence of public support" hypotheses, there is little credibility in any suggestion that radical Basque nationalist-Irish republican relations contributed in any way to these factors. *A priori*, it is in the areas of "international facilitation" and the interlinked hypotheses of "collapse of social movement support" and "rational choice", in which it would appear that the Irish republican movement *may* have played a role in facilitating the 'ending' of ETA. Let us briefly examine this proposition.

We have noted some of the public visits by Sinn Féin politicians such as Alex Maskey and Bairbre de Brún during the 2007 to 2011 period. Citing an interview conducted with a "Batasuna lawyer" in 2011, Teresa Whitfield states that Adams "sent" Eoin Ó Broin and Gerry Kelly "to discuss the *need* for change within the nationalist left".<sup>187</sup> While this may be stretching the reality of Sinn Féin's engagement in the Basque process, it highlights the difficulty in discerning the true depth of communications between BIA-IRM strands and actors at this moment.

According to a reliable source, in addition to the party level contacts, senior Irish republicans also engaged in private talks at a second, more underground, level: with ETA itself. These may have been directly facilitated via Father Alec Reid, who had already established a channel with ETA and had the blessing of Adams and Sinn Féin, or simply via senior republican republicans. Speaking to this author, Séanna "Breathnach" Walsh confirmed that "[i]n terms of the IRA at a senior level, there was certainly senior people [who] sat down with the Basques". It should be noted that the timeframe Walsh referred to was not completely clear.<sup>188</sup>

While the details are sketchy, and will probably remain so, that this channel almost certainly existed should not come as a surprise. In the same way that the political leadership of the *izquierda abertzale* utilised Sinn Féin as a sounding board on aspects of its movement transition, it would have made sense for ETA to do likewise with the IRA, and/or senior Sinn Féin figures. One senior republican with experience of dealing with

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<sup>187</sup> Whitfield: *Endgame for ETA*, p. 246. My stress on "*need*".

<sup>188</sup> Anonymous interview. Author interview with Séanna "Breathnach" Walsh (Belfast, 2017).

radical Basque nationalist actors offered his opinion on what *he* perceived to have been the primary concern for the *izquierda abertzale* at this juncture. The reader will note that movement cohesion is, once again, a dominant theme:

“Whenever it came to the second ceasefire [2011], they actually started at a lower ebb than they did in 2006. Now maybe they needed the extra five years to ensure that the majority of their former armed activists were on board for the project [...] they obviously felt that they hadn’t the support to maintain the cohesiveness, you know? Internal cohesion is the key in all of this, and if you don’t have that, well then, you ain’t got anything. Your organisation will splinter and fracture, and you’ll find guys running off in every direction”.<sup>189</sup>

The internal movement decision to follow a strictly political path, as outlined in “Argitzen”, was made by the grassroots between late 2008/early 2009 and the spring of 2010. With the exception of Alex Maskey in January 2009, no senior Irish republican appears to have visited the Basque Country during this period.<sup>190</sup> Nonetheless, it would be a mistake not to consider Sinn Féin as having a more intangible presence in this debate. Imanol Murua, the leading analyst on the process that led to the consultation and strategic change, notes that:

“[...]the prestige of the Irish Republican movement among the social base of the Nationalist Left made such a move easier on the grounds that their allies in Ireland made that move previously”.<sup>191</sup>

Indeed, In the words of Gorka Elejbarrieta Díaz, now a Senator in Madrid:

“I have to say that the Irish leadership and the Basque leadership have had over the years a very close relation, so in that sense this relation has helped us understand very well the situation in Ireland at every stage. And it has made then possible to understand our own situation very well. And of course, each process is different. There is no one size fits all situation, but in this private relation, we have always spoken very frankly with each other, and given our advice, and listened to their advice over the years. And I have to say, and I think it’s been said by different people, that during our last internal debate in 2008, 2009, 2010, when we decided to change the strategy of the *Abertzale Left*, well, we had a close relation with Sinn Féin and we have seen that helped us also to take this new path”.<sup>192</sup>

In Alex Maskey’s account of his engagement in the Basque Country, he gives an insight into the type of republican discourse that would have framed much of the *izquierda abertzale*’s considerations at this pivotal juncture:

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<sup>189</sup> Anonymous interview.

<sup>190</sup> “Cuando Londres decidió criminalizar a los presos o a Sinn Féin, el conflicto sólo empeoró”, *GARA*, 10.01.2009.

<sup>191</sup> Murua: *Ending ETA’s Armed Campaign*, p. 179.

<sup>192</sup> Author interview with Gorka Elejbarrieta Díaz (Donostia, 2016).

“I’ve sat in town halls, small meetings, big meetings in the Basque Country. I’ve done joint meetings with the ANC, with people like Robert McBride [*former member of Umkhonto We Sizwe, the armed wing of the ANC*], and other party colleagues have done likewise. And so, at times, the Basque leadership would’ve asked people like ourselves to go over and talk to some of their grassroots, their community. So, you were doing community meetings, you were doing press conferences, you were doing a lot of small localised meetings, which were allowing people to ask questions and engage. And personally speaking, I found it very positive, I found there was a great willingness for people to learn, and they were looking at Ireland as an example. So, I *do* think we played a role in terms of developing that peace process. [...] One of the things we were really trying to convey was that just because you’re right, doesn’t mean to say you’re get anywhere. Just because you have the right to self-determination, doesn’t mean to say you’re gonna be granted that. Just because you’re suing for peace, doesn’t mean to say you’re gonna get a partner, but you have to work at it. There’s no shortcut. You have to work at it. You have to look at what you’re dealing with. You have to address the issues which your opponents are throwing up at you, and some of them might be legitimate, and some of them might not be. You have to address them. I mean, our experience was [that] you hit one obstacle after another, and you just have to keep whittling away at the obstacles. And you have to try and build a positive alternative to the conflict. You can be part of that, and you need to be part of that. You need to drive that, but you need to get allies. So, there’s no shortcut to it, and building public support is your key thing. And that is what has driven us, and we can only basically explain what we think the benefits to what our process have been... and that is, we are saying: ‘yes, we are gonna have self-determination; but we’re [also] gonna have a peace process. We’re gonna end this conflict’. Aye, you have to end the conflict and you need allies and partners around that, but you need to build your own base. If you don’t have your own base, you become isolated and you won’t win. If you don’t win your own community over, you’re not gonna win anyone else. So, I suppose that would’ve been the argument that we would’ve been making all that time: ‘Listen: you will not get—in this instance, either the Spanish or French states— being overwhelmingly supportive of this because they’re gonna see that it’s a loss to them. So, you’re gonna have to work. You’re gonna need to get allies, internationalise it where you can... but you need to build support in your own country — that has to be your priority. Sometimes, you need to bring other influences to bear, yes, but no one is gonna make peace in your country other than the people in your country. All the rest of us can fly in, but at the end of the day we all fly out again [...]. The key message I think they would have got from us [was that] we came from what the world was told was an intractable problem, but we proved that it wasn’t by just sheer hard work and determination. And yes, you have to plan and you have to strategize, but for every plan and strategy you have, somebody will have a counter one. You have to decide that you wanna do it and that you’re gonna do it. And then you have to work at it, whatever obstacles they put in your way. That’s what we did, and I think that was a big encouragement to those in the Basque Country who felt ‘the Spanish aren’t gonna do this, the French aren’t gonna do that’, but you can’t let that determine your future either. Self-determination comes in different stages”.<sup>193</sup>

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<sup>193</sup> Author interview with Alex Maskey (Belfast, 2018).

From May 2007 to October 2011, the BIA-IRM nexus and its accumulative influence assisted the new strategic vision of the izquierda abertzale ‘políticos’ in two ways. First, republicans provided their experience (and advice, when requested) on movement cohesion, tactical goals, and the securing of minimum commitments on legacy issues from the Spanish government. Second, the perceived advancement of the republican movement’s project towards its ultimate objectives via *political* means only, offered a sort of visual reference from a trusted, respected and familiar international reference of what the end of ETA *could*, and possibly *would*, look like for the izquierda abertzale.

ETA’s armed campaign officially ended in October 2011, not as a result of anything to do directly with the Irish republican movement, but rather due to an interconnected mix of domestic *political*, *military*, and *social* movement factors that rendered its violence obsolete. Still, at all three levels, the account of the IRM’s experience and the perception of its transformative success, also offered the izquierda abertzale leadership a vital (*perhaps even necessary?*) narrative arc that could scaffold this journey in times of difficulty — in much the same way that the Irish republican movement had, at times, previously leaned on the reference of the ANC.

In short, the republican movement reference served to indirectly underscore the “rationale choice” that effectively *had* to be made from within the izquierda abertzale. Even Adams’s physical presence at Aiete (“international facilitation”) was, in the view of Gorka Elejbarrieta Díaz:

“[...] important in terms of the constituency he represents, and also what he represents in terms of the success the Irish peace process has been [...]. [He] represents the past, the present and the future in a sense”.<sup>194</sup>

As one Basque grassroots activist neatly put it, the Irish model, with Sinn Féin to the fore, served to “comer la decisión”.<sup>195</sup> In this sense, and as an answer to the secondary question outlined in chapter one, it may be said that the accumulative weight of radical Basque nationalist-Irish republican relations did indeed help to *facilitate* the conditions by which ETA’s ‘ending’ was made possible.

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<sup>194</sup> Author interview with Gorka Elejbarrieta Díaz (Donostia, 2016). Several other independent and izquierda abertzale actors elaborated on what they felt was the highly symbolic participation of Adams at Aiete: Author interview with Gorka Espiau (Leioa, 2017). Author interview with Paul Rios (Leioa, 2016). Author interview with Iñaki Soto (Donostia, 2016). Author interview with Iñaki Ruiz de Pinedo (Vitroia-Gasteiz, 2017).

<sup>195</sup> Author interview with “Y”.

## Shards of glass

“I feel republican. The strongest thing here [Belfast] has been that through all the involvement in the community, I really feel part of this struggle as well. I feel so close [to] the struggle here, because I see the basic aim is the same [...]”<sup>196</sup>  
(Basque political activist)

As the reader will recall from the methodological discussion in chapter one, the author signalled an intention to issue questionnaires to a sample of grassroots “nodes” who have traversed the BIA-IRM nexus. Questionnaires were also earmarked for grassroots activists from both movements who have had *no* direct contact with the fraternal movement or case (“non-nodes”). Without repeating the rationale behind the issuing of these questionnaires, or the exact criteria of the “(non-)node” demarcation, here it should suffice to remind the reader of the underlining objective: to generate “bottom up” grassroots data on perceptions of the fraternal movement, fraternal case, and some of the dynamics involved in this transnational social movement nexus.

The metaphor of a “mirror” has been used throughout this study as a device to explore what Irish republicanism and radical (but also at times, moderate) Basque nationalism sees in the other movement, and associated case. These perceptions have often underscored macro trans-“struggle” narratives and/or have been utilised to various domestic political ends. Another tendency worth highlighting is how perceptions and utilisations of the “mirror” are nearly always communicated and disseminated by movement “elites”, information “gatekeepers”, or significant nexus “brokers” (e.g., political representatives, spokespersons, newspaper editors). Given that the focus of the questionnaires is on grassroots activists who usually do not control or dominate movement discourse in this way, the metaphor of individual “shards of glass” has been employed.

While questionnaires, by their very nature, serve to gather quantitative data, the author was conscious of the highly nuanced and ‘open’ nature of some of the issues at hand (i.e., *not* simple “yes” or “no” matters). Accordingly, multiple options were provided for participants to tick (✓). Others were graded (eg., “strongly agree”, “agree”, “disagree”, “strongly disagree”; indicate 1, 2, 3...) in order to partially reflect some of the qualitative experiences and opinions of those who took part in the study.

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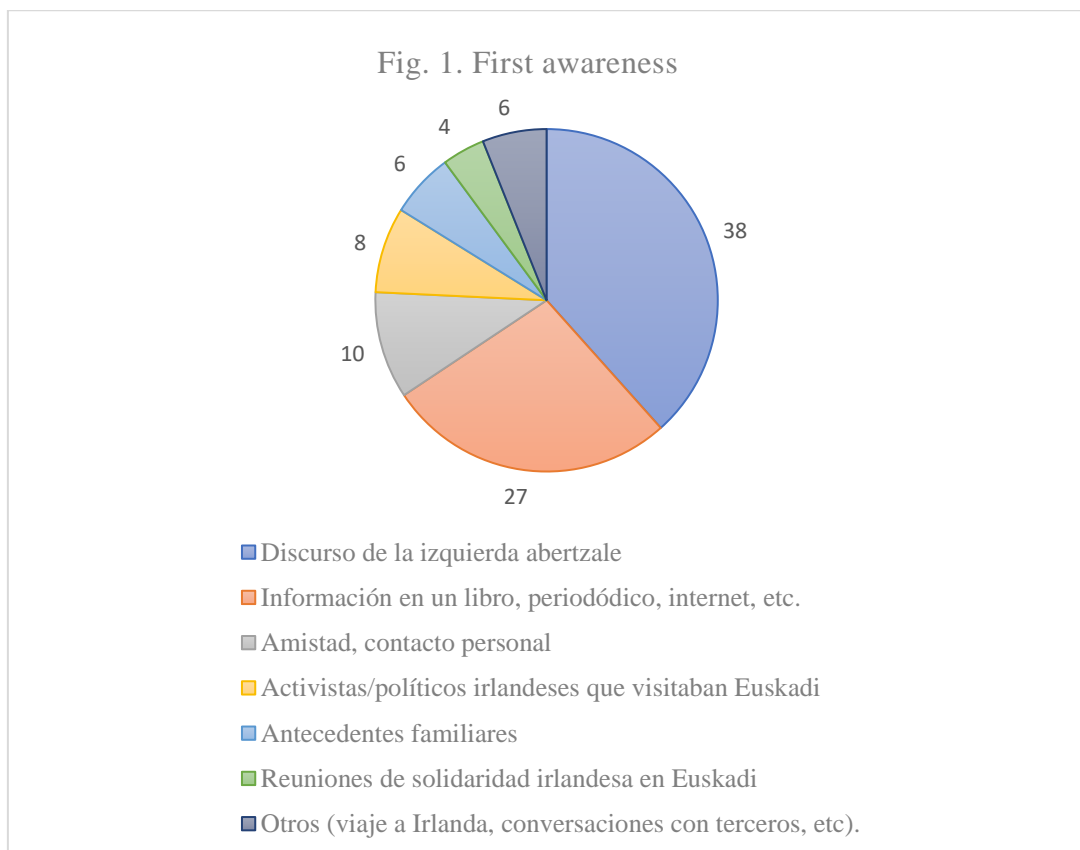
<sup>196</sup> Author interview with “O”.

### *Basque questionnaires*

Beginning with the Basque participants, 50 questionnaires were issued to 25 “nodes” and 25 “non-nodes” between 2015 to 2017. The gender breakdown was 32 men and 18 women. Twenty questionnaires were personally issued by the author, usually directly following interview or via email. After a degree of trust was established with personal contacts within the *izquierda abertzale*, it gradually became possible to pursue a more coordinated approach. Of the remaining 30 questionnaires, 18 were distributed and centrally returned from two separate Sortu offices, 4 from a *Langile Abertzaleen Batzordeak (LAB)* (Nationalist Workers’ Committees) office, and 8 from the radical Basque nationalist youth movement, *Ernai (Be Attentive)*.

Some of the results worth highlighting are as follows:

- *¿Cómo fue la primera vez que tomaste conciencia de conflicto de irlandés y más generalmente hablando de su historia y sociedad? (múltiples respuestas posible)*



As figure 1 illustrates, over 1/3<sup>rd</sup> of participant responses indicated that a first awareness and interest in the conflict in Northern Ireland and the broader Irish case context was garnered via literature and periodicals from the *izquierda abertzale*.



Given the sympathetic editorial lines towards “Provisional” republicanism and the framing of the Basque and Irish “struggles” as analogous within this body of literature, it would seem *likely* that a relatively symbiotic analysis of the Irish case and its apparent Basque reflection was rooted within a significant proportion of activists. Together with the responses related to “reuniones de solidaridad irlandesa en Euskadi” and “activistas/políticos irlandeses que visitaban Euskadi” (sources which would have disseminated a republican analysis of the conflict), one may suggest that a republican-oriented frame or macro-narrative of the Irish case is prominent within the grassroots of radical Basque nationalism.

While not represented in the data, some interviewees found that specific Irish historical/“Troubles”-related songs (e.g., *Baldin Bada: ‘Tatxer’*; *Hertzainak: ‘No Time for Love’*; *Askapena mix tape of Irish rebel music*), and films (e.g., *Hidden Agenda*; *In the Name of the Father*; *Michael Collins*) resonated strongly with their Basque experience when they were young. Others recalled specific moments (e.g., *the 1981 Hunger Strike*; *Gibraltar 3*; *shooting down of a British Army helicopter*) as having a similar impact.<sup>197</sup>

Of the 25 Basque activists who qualified as nexus “nodes” for this study, 9 spent between one and four weeks in Ireland, 6 between one and six months, and 9 over six months in total. Given the choice to indicate whether their time in Ireland had been “principalmente relacionado con, o como consecuencia de tu activismo y/o tu perspectiva ideológica” or “principalmente relacionado con el trabajo, estudio, relaciones, ocio, etc.”, there was a 10-10 split between activists. Five others (mistakenly) ticked both options — although this would indicate that a “mixed” motivation option should have been provided for in the questionnaire.

Notwithstanding this oversight and the small sample size, these results give quantitative support to the idea of Ireland as a sort of political ‘pilgrimage’ for grassroots radical Basque nationalist activists thirsty to learn of, and learn *from*, the Irish case at close quarters. The increasing availability of cheap flights and the opportunity to learn English were other major pull factors. The typical focal point of this experience was Belfast, where, to this author’s knowledge, 23 of the 25 “nodes” either visited or lived. What were their experiences?

Of the 25 “nodes” who completed the questionnaire, 19 indicated that whilst in Ireland, they had attended or participated “en una charla, conferencia o reunión en apoyo del

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<sup>197</sup> Author interview with “H”. Author interview with “I”. Author interview with “L”. Author interview with “E”. Author interview with “J”.

movimiento republicano irlandés”. Moreover, 15 indicated that they had “participado como activista político, tal como tú lo definirías, en apoyo del movimiento republicano irlandés”. These figures would indicate a high degree of engagement, and in the case of the latter, active participation in the republican movement.

While Dublin often “soprendió mucho, fue muy pro-inglés”; in Belfast, where “el país estaba en tregua, el IRA estaba en tregua, pero la gente no estaba en tregua”, activists usually lived “como en otros países, pero en el nivel político”.<sup>198</sup>

Preconceptions of Belfast as a radical hub often jarred with the social, political, and economic reality of the city on the ground. As one activist put it:

“The Basques expected, because of the IRA, the 30-year conflict, they expected to see more radical people when it came to social issues. They expected when they came to see something a bit more radical, and they didn’t”.<sup>199</sup>

A majority of all Belfast-oriented interviewees (dwellers and transient visitors), highlighted the community divisions in Belfast —physical evidenced in the city’s “peace walls”— as being particularly impactful.<sup>200</sup>

What effect did this “Belfast experience” have on radical Basque nationalist “nodes” and their perceptions of the “Irish mirror”? This is where the results of the other 25 “non-nodes” (those who have no first-hand experience of the Irish case) may prove to be useful in providing a comparative.

- *En política, las experiencias de otros países se plantean a menudo como ejemplo cuando se habla de la planificación de las políticas y estrategias de futuro. ¿Qué otros países crees que pueden representar y/o han representado una comparación útil para Euskal Herria? Por favor, elije los tres que consideres más útil, pon un “1” al lado del más útil, y así sucesivamente.*<sup>201</sup>

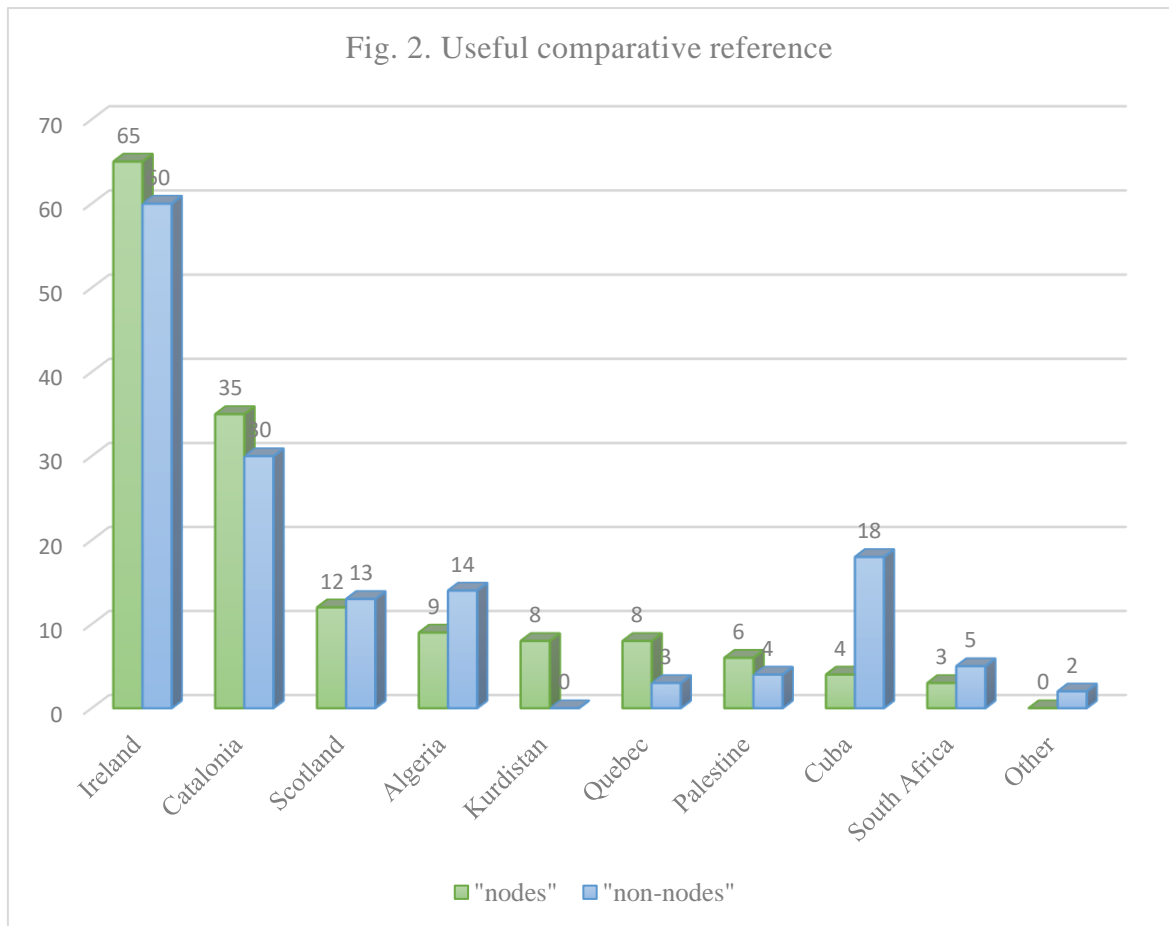
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<sup>198</sup> Author interview with “N”. Author interview with “P”. Author interview with “Q”.

<sup>199</sup> Author interview with “R”.

<sup>200</sup> Author interview with “E”. Author interview with “G”. Author interview with “S”. Author interview with “N”. Author interview with “Q”. Author interview with “J”. Author interview with “T”. Author interview with “O”. Author interview with “R”. Author interview with “U”. Author interview with “W”. Author interview with “X”.

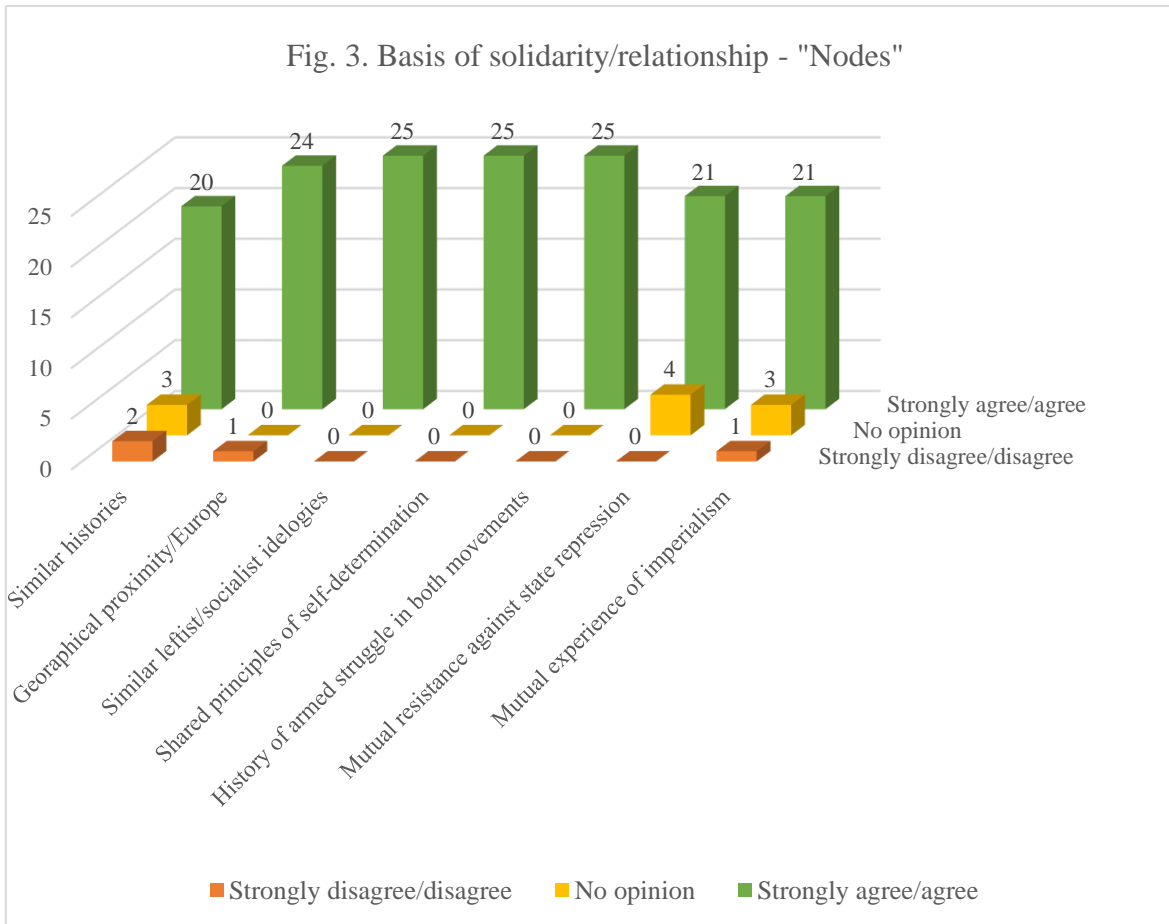
<sup>201</sup> This question was modelled on Cynthia L. Irvin’s 1989 survey of Herri Batasuna activists. It was the author’s hope that perhaps a comparative could be made with Irvin’s findings from three decades previously. However, it proved impossible to access this data. Given that all but one participant indicated at least 3 international references, the first three categories were weighted so that the first international reference would be allotted 3 points, the second given 2 points, and the third given 1 point, respectively. Figure 2 represents these accumulative scores.



Ireland was considered by both “node” and “non-node” participants to have been the most useful comparative reference for radical Basque nationalists. Given the unfolding Catalan crisis that was taking place whilst these questionnaires were completed, this is perhaps surprising — or at least the sizeable gap between the two cases. There was no significant difference between the attitudes of “nodes” and “non-nodes” (65 to 60) regarding the perception of Ireland as a comparative reference for grassroots activists.

In an attempt to dig down further into the underlying rationale of Ireland serving as a useful comparative reference for radical Basque nationalism, a complementary question was posed for participants that probed “la solidaridad/relación” between the two movements. This question probably should have been formulated more clearly and closely aligned to the above “comparative reference” question. Nonetheless, it still serves as a useful quantitative indication as to how Basque “nodes” and “non-nodes” conceptualise the underpinning of this transnational relationship:

- *En tu opinión, la solidaridad/relación que ha existido entre el Movimiento de Liberación Nacional Vasco y el Movimiento Republicano Irlandés se basa en:*



The principal result to note from figure 3 is that Basque activist “nodes” hold remarkably similar opinions in respect of the seven categories that were outlined as base factors of the BIA-IRM nexus. Between 80% and 100% of “nodes” either “strongly agreed” or “agreed” with every premise. The subdivision between “strongly agreed” and “agreed” also reveals a great deal of conviction behind these opinions, with 92 indications in the former category, and 62 in the latter.

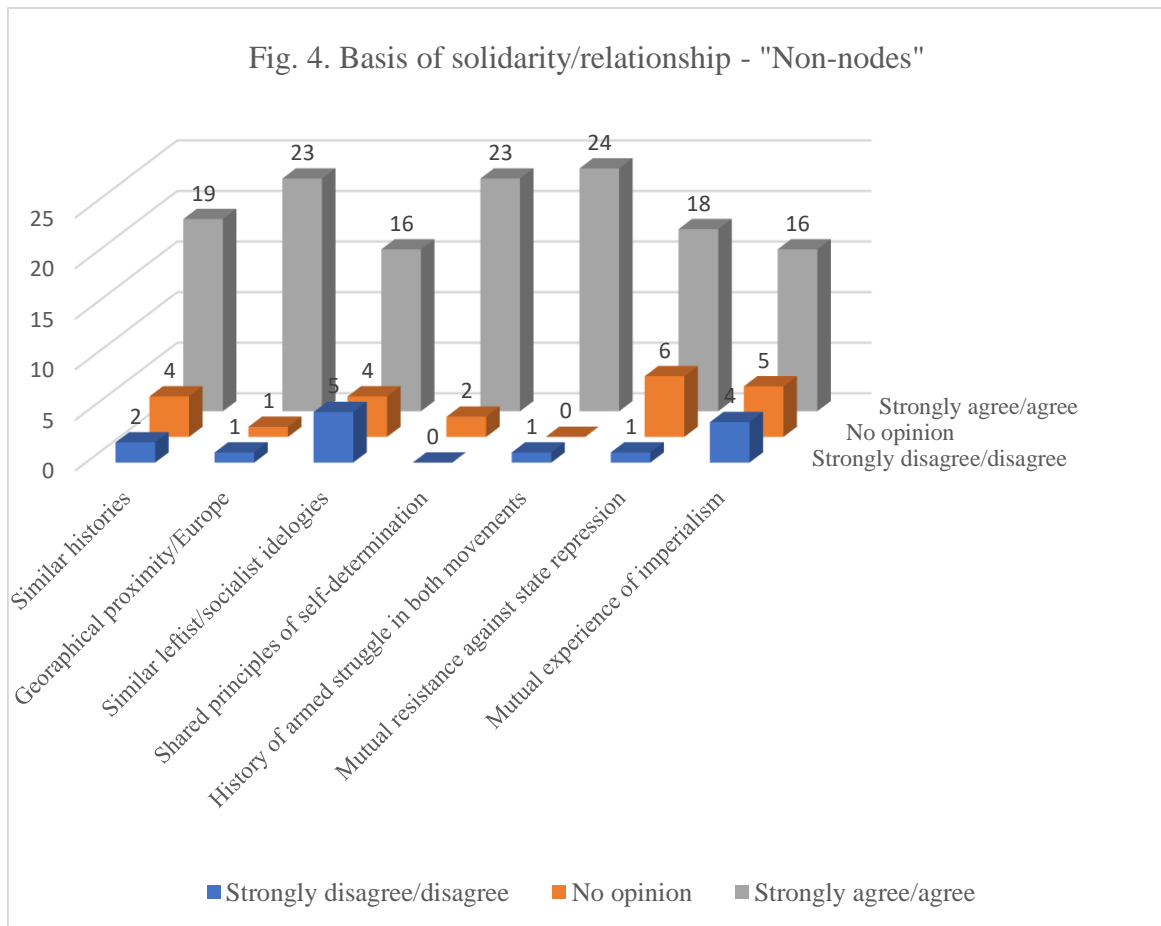


Figure 4 shows a more mixed range of opinion among “non-nodes” regarding factors that underpin radical Basque nationalist-Irish republican relations and solidarity. In contrast to figure 3, over 80% of respondents either “strongly agreed” or “agreed” with only 3 of the 7 premises: “history of armed struggle”, “shared principles of self-determination” and “geographical proximity/European context”. Moreover, if we break down “strongly agree” and “agree” responses, there is a 39 to 100 split. This is in contrast to the 92 to 62 split among “nodes”.

If we take the 50 activists who completed the questionnaire as broadly representative of radical Basque nationalist grassroots opinion, a number of *provisional* findings, subject to further research, may be extrapolated from this data. Firstly, for the reader, it will come as no surprise that radical Basque nationalist grassroots activists see Ireland as a “useful comparative reference” — far more so than any other case. Secondly, initial contact with, and likely perceptions of the Irish case, tend to be drawn from sympathetic Irish republican sources (directly and indirectly). Thirdly, a large majority of BIA grassroots activists identify and relate to multiple (apparent) analogous factors and parallels that have been drawn across both movements and cases. This presumably generates the kind

of interest that saw 15 of the 25 “nodes” attribute some sort of political motivation to their Irish forays.

Once in Ireland, a majority of Basque “nodes” tended to become active in the republican movement. They also *strengthened* their convictions regarding the case similarities that seemingly form the bases of “la solidaridad/relación” between radical Basque nationalism and Irish republicanism (as deduced from the comparative data in figures 3 and 4). One grassroots activist who first visited Belfast as part of an Askapena “brigade”, and later returned to live in the city, summarised this experience as follows:

“I think it was like a reinforcement of my ideas, seeing that in other places they had also similar national and social conflicts, inspirations, fights [...]. I felt like a Basque republican. I wasn’t Irish obviously, but my sympathy was with the republican [side]”.<sup>202</sup>

In short, the closer the contact between Irish republicans and radical Basque nationalists at grassroots level, the more that personal and ideological bonds were bolstered, and by extension, the macro narrative of “Dhá Chine Aon Choimhlint”/“Bi Herri Borroka Bat” [Two Peoples, One Struggle].

In this author’s opinion, these provisional findings give further credence to the previously referenced supposition of a radical Basque nationalist-Irish republican “shared culture” — a culture which one could even interpret as a sort of transnational Anderson-esque “imagined community”.<sup>203</sup>

### *Irish questionnaires*

Unfortunately, the author was unable to complete the issuing and retrieval of the Irish republican questionnaires. After informal enquiries were made with Sinn Féin contacts, it became apparent that issuing the questionnaires in small batches via local cumainn (branches) would not be possible. The author was advised to proceed directly via the party’s International Department in Belfast.

An objection was raised by the International Department in relation to the following sub-statement:

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<sup>202</sup> Anonymous interview.

<sup>203</sup> The academic Steven Howe has previously touched on this idea of a transnational “imagined community”: “The creation of imaginative solidarities, even among quite small groups and even retrospectively or fictively, might have powerful and unexpected long-term effects. If nations are always imagined communities, then transnations are still more so: clearly more fragile kinds of imagining, but by the very same token more dependent on the power of the imagination”. Stephen Howe: “AFTERWORD Transnationalisms Good, Bad, Real, Imagined, Thick and Thin”, *Interventions*, 4:1, 2002, pp. 79–88 (quote on p. 87).



- *In your opinion, the solidarity/relationship that has existed between the Basque National Liberation and Irish Republican movements is based on:*  
*e. Historical existence of an armed wing in both movements (Strongly agree / Agree / No opinion / Disagree / Strongly disagree)*

After some consideration, the above sub-statement was removed by the author, and a revised questionnaire forwarded to the International Department. Nine completed questionnaires were subsequently returned. This figure does not represent a sufficient sample size to draw analysis.

Finally of note, from the handful of Irish republican grassroots activists (nexus “nodes”) who were interviewed for this study, most cited the Basque language movement as having a significant positive impact on their own outlook towards Gaeilge:

“[...] to see Basque youth, how mobilized, motivated they were, and that passion about the language... and just how loyal they were to it, it had a very big effect on my attitude towards things”.<sup>204</sup>

“Even though they themselves may not think they’re far down the path of language revival, they are so much further down the path than we are; there’s so much we can learn from what they’ve done [...] To us it’s like a beacon on top of a hill — this amazing thing. It would be great if we could replicate something like that”.<sup>205</sup>

## 6.5. Conclusion

As with previous chapters, in what follows, we will briefly account for and explain radical Basque nationalist-Irish republican relations from this era and discuss some of the impacts that the nexus had on each movement and wider case.

The first thing to note is that with the signing of the Good Friday Agreement in 1998, a growing disparity of needs dictated that the IRM would assume an asymmetric position of seniority in its transnational dynamic with the BIA. In other words, the BIA stood to benefit a lot more from continuing associations with the IRM than was the reverse.

The glare of the “Irish mirror” was perhaps at its strongest. Already evident since the Downing Street Declaration of 1993, radical and moderate Basque nationalists, increasingly utilised and leaned heavily on the thesis that Irish nationalists (Fianna Fáil, SDLP and Sinn Féin) had gained recognition of self-determination from London. An accumulation of Basque pan-nationalist forces (“Foro Irlanda”/LGA) could perhaps similarly force Madrid to engage with the political dimensions of the Basque contention.

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<sup>204</sup> Author interview with “K”.

<sup>205</sup> Author interview with “V”. It should be noted that the successful reversal of the decline in Euskara over the last few decades has involved multiple social movement actors and governmental agencies.

With the subsequent breakdown of ETA's ceasefire and the Lizarra Garazi pan-nationalist front at the turn of the millennium, the main frame of Irish republican–*radical* Basque nationalist relations refocused slightly as the latter sought to broker talks with the Spanish government. To this end, the *izquierda abertzale* sought to learn from the republican movement's, by-this-stage, vast wealth of experience in dealing with the British government, unionists, and the SDLP, etc. It is little coincidence that Alex Maskey, Bairbre de Brún and Gerry Kelly, all three of whom were heavily involved in the negotiation of the Good Friday Agreement, would become senior BIA-IRM nexus figures during the “Zapatero process”. Speaking of his involvement since the early 2000s, Maskey recalls:

“As they [the *izquierda abertzale*] were moving towards a peace process, peace initiative, and suing for peace, people like myself and some other comrades were, I suppose, became more involved, because I was part of our party's negotiating team through the Good Friday [Agreement], and since then. And so, whenever the Basques were looking at a peace process and how they might, you know, develop that, then people like myself became more directly involved in discussions with them. It was around just sharing experiences, and you know, that would remain true to this very day”.<sup>206</sup>

Maskey's insight aligns with that of Fernando Barrena, who as a senior ‘politico’ and fluent English speaker, was perhaps the main radical Basque nationalist representative on the other side of this equation:

“They always tried to offer us tools and expertise and say ‘well, we did it like this, and it worked’, ‘and we found these problems’, ‘and be careful with this’, or ‘according to our experience, it's very important to do this’”.<sup>207</sup>

Negotiating skills would, of course, only be of some use in a negotiation. After the breakdown of ETA's ceasefire in early 2000, and with José María Aznar's Partido Popular in power, this was a distant prospect. Furthermore, on a broader international level, 9/11 and the Bush administration's so-called “war on terrorism” suddenly changed the macro context. Research has shown that non-state violence may be deemed appropriate and understandable at certain times and in certain contexts among the general public.<sup>208</sup> Post-9/11, and later 11-M, this was a more difficult argument to make. If it was

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<sup>206</sup> Author interview with Alex Maskey (Belfast, 2018).

<sup>207</sup> Author interview with Fernando Barrena (Donostia, 2017).

<sup>208</sup> Lorenzo Bosi, Niall Ó Dochartaigh, Daniela Pisoiu: “Contextualising Political Violence” in Bosi, Lorenzo; Ó Dochartaigh, Niall; Pisoiu, Daniela (eds.): *Political Violence in Context*, Colchester, ECPR Press, 2016, pp. 1–28.

not already the case, ETA was increasingly finding itself on the wrong side of history, even among its traditional support base.

The illegalisation of Herri Bastasuna/Bastasuna in the early 2000s, and practically the entire social movement, also appeared to undermine the alternative political route. The BIA became increasingly boxed in. Karmelo Landa recalls: “¿Qué hacemos nosotros al frente de esta situación? Obviamente, apoyarnos en el apoyo internacional”.<sup>209</sup> Accordingly, from the beginning of the “Zapatero process” until 2011, one could suggest that Sinn Féin served as a bridge for the BIA in its efforts to internationalise the Basque case to the (anglophone) international community. How successful or unsuccessful this endeavour was, is a separate, debatable matter.

The Barajas bombing in December 2006 and the breakdown of talks in Geneva in May 2007 effectively closed off the opportunity of another “process” emerging in the short to medium term — or at least one involving ETA. In response, the *izquierda abertzale* embarked on its own process of internal movement reform and tapering its immediate objectives to more modest technical advances (e.g., end to prisoner dispersion, demilitarisation). These new movement needs naturally triggered a reappraisal of relations with its closest external ally. The political leadership of the *izquierda abertzale* now sought to learn from senior Sinn Féin figures as to how the republican party had kept the IRM intact throughout a similarly transformative strategic shift (political-military to political). Conversations along the same lines may have also taken place between ETA and the IRA.

The reader will appreciate that in both this, and the previous chapter, politically favourable comparative analyses between the Irish and Basque cases have been drawn and utilised by nearly every stakeholder across the Basque/Spanish political context since the Downing Street Declaration of 1993. And while Basque nationalists heavily focused on the effective granting of a form of Irish self-determination (open to many interpretations) by London, Spanish “constitutionalists”/nationalists tended to reject any suggested parallel in the Basque/Spanish context as “distorted”. However, this did not mean that the “Irish mirror” could not occasionally be employed post-GFA for political expediency. For instance, when the IRA announced that it had begun to decommission its weapons in October 2001, the main Spanish parties and victims’ groups implored ETA

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<sup>209</sup> Author interview with Karmelo Landa (Bilbo, 2016).

to do the same. This overlooked the fact that IRA decommissioning was but one aspect of a greater peace process and settlement.<sup>210</sup>

Relatedly, Bairbre de Brún recalls that after initially encountering hostility from Spanish MEPs in Brussels on account of her interlocution with the *izquierda abertzale* and her work with the Basque Friendship Group, she later detected a sea change in attitudes:

“The longer it went on and the more the peace process here [in Ireland] developed, the more there was a kind of an ambivalence among the Spanish, even the Spanish conservatives towards us, because on the one hand they didn’t like the Friendship [Group] trying to bring this on to a European stage, but on the other hand they were trying to say at home to the Basques: ‘why don’t you do what the Irish did?’”<sup>211</sup>

Former Lehendakari Ibarretxe also perceived a sort of correlation at play between the longevity and close proximity of Herri Batasuna-Sinn Féin relations and an implication that the *izquierda abertzale* would, or should, follow a similar trajectory to their Irish partners:

“Yo creo que en los momentos en que yo viví como lehendakari, la influencia de Sinn Féin sobre Batasuna fue positiva, porque Sinn Féin fue por delante de Batasuna y muchas de las decisiones que Batasuna ha ido tomando en relación con ETA, en relación con las acciones de ETA, en relación con la violencia, en relación con hacer política y sólo política y no política-militar, en esos avances que a veces han sido muy tímidos, la verdad es que yo siempre vi la mano positiva desde el punto de vista de Sinn Féin. Recuerdo que cuando ETA rompe la tregua en el año 1999, después de la tregua 98. La reacción de Batasuna, aunque tímida, diciéndole a ETA ‘no puede ser... sobras, estorbas. Tienes que dejar esto’. Aunque fue tímida, sin embargo, fue traída como consecuencia de ¿qué? De lo que habían sido las reacciones que ya había tenido Sinn Féin en la relación con el IRA, como consecuencia de que los procesos de paz allí también fueron muy turbulentos. Y IRA en algunos casos atenta, pero la reacción de Sinn Féin había sido una reacción valiente, una reacción diciendo ‘no, no. Hay que hacer política’. [...] Hay una tensión en positivo por parte del Sinn Féin en la relación con Batasuna. ¿Por qué? Porque la reflexión desde un punto de vista político y social estaba más avanzada de hacer política y solo política en el Sinn Féin que en el Batasuna. Y ellos fueron ayudados en esa dirección. De hecho, yo creo que en los momentos posteriores también, a partir del año 2005, el año 2006, los posteriores después de la última declaración unilateral por parte de ETA [2011], en los últimos cinco años, han sido siempre en términos positivos. Yo siempre he visto al Sinn Féin en cosas tan molesto con Batasuna, cuando Batasuna no reaccionaba ante determinados episodios de verdad de ‘Kale Borroka’ o episodios de violencia, siempre Sinn Féin

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<sup>210</sup> For example, see: “Los políticos españoles advierten a ETA que se queda sola en Europa”, *La Voz de Galicia*, 24.10.2001. [https://www.lavozdeg Galicia.es/noticia/internacional/2001/10/24/politicos-espanoles-advierten-eta-queda-sola-europa/0003\\_801600.htm](https://www.lavozdeg Galicia.es/noticia/internacional/2001/10/24/politicos-espanoles-advierten-eta-queda-sola-europa/0003_801600.htm) (last accessed 09 April 2020).

<sup>211</sup> “McGuinness’s unlikely role as peace envoy”, *Irish Independent*, 16.06.2006. Author interview with Bairbre de Brún (Belfast, 2016).

fue trasladando durante estos años a Batasuna que tenía que moverse, que tenía que moverse más rápido, que tenía que moverse más valentía, sin duda. Claro que lo he observado. No solamente he observado, es que en mi época lo comentábamos [...]. Batasuna se ha movido evidentemente porque desde fuera ha tenido muchísimos argumentos que le han dicho, ‘no, no, tienes que transitar a la política y solo a la política, olvídate de cualquier otro camino’. Hasta que en un momento determinado, esa posición se ha hecho mayoritaria. En algún momento esa posición no fue mayoritaria dentro del debate interno pero con el paso de los años y recibiendo muchas informaciones, muchas de las cuales iban del proceso irlandés y de la propia amistad que tenían con líderes en los que tenían confianza de Sinn Féin, ah bueno, esa minoría fue ganado espacio hasta que se hizo mayoría”.<sup>212</sup>

The “mayoría” that Ibarretxe speaks of finally succeeded in wresting full control of the izquierda abertzale in 2010 through the mandate of the “Argitzen” initiative. As discussed previously, there is an argument to be made that the accumulative weight of radical Basque nationalist-Irish republican relations helped to facilitate this process, and by extension, the ‘ending’ of ETA.<sup>213</sup>

If the above explains the course of radical Basque nationalist-Irish republican relations from the summer of 1998 to 2011 from a BIA perspective, what of the Irish republican movement’s rationale in maintaining this relationship?

The explanation put forward by Agnès Maillot in her article “Comrades in Arms” speaks to the internal politics of the republican movement. In Maillot’s view, the party’s decision to stand by its Basque partners served as a reminder to the internal base that although the movement had faced and accepted extremely difficult compromises during the Irish peace process, it had “not softened its position on self-determination and reunification”.<sup>214</sup> A more convincing premise, in this author’s opinion, is that which is posited by Martyn Frampton. Frampton argues that Sinn Féin’s response to the GFA and its implications around the (non-)use of violence was to simply reinterpret the rationale of its radical external alliances, including its relationship with radical Basque nationalism: “whereas once [Sinn Féin] had been an ambassador for the virtues of the Armalite, now it sought to be so for the [Good Friday] Agreement”.<sup>215</sup> Ergo, a champion for dialogue and peace in other conflictive cases. Apart from the international “kudos” and prestige associated with being a facilitator of conflict resolution, what of other motivations?

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<sup>212</sup> Author interview with Juan José Ibarretxe (Leioa, 2017).

<sup>213</sup> It should be stressed that the author does not wish to imply republican agency and/or a causal link in any way.

<sup>214</sup> Maillot: *New Sinn Féin: Irish Republicanism in the Twenty-first Century*, pp. 136–137.

<sup>215</sup> Frampton: *The Long March: The Political Strategy of Sinn Féin: 1981–2007*, pp. 146–147.

Senior Sinn Féin figures have tended to cite motivations that reflect back on their experience with the ANC. For Maskey and De Brún, standing with the *izquierda abertzale* through difficult times was partly about repaying an outstanding debt of solidarity (from Basques and South Africans) owed since the 1980s. Similarly, Ó Broin stresses the genuine bonds of friendship that have become entwined through decades of transnational contacts and relations. While there is much merit and a great deal of truth in the rationale emphasised by Maskey, De Brún and Ó Broin, politics is not philanthropy. More hard-nosed instrumental factors must also be considered.

Based on the research conducted for this study, the following are three additional hypotheses that may partially account for continued IRM engagement with Basque comrades throughout this era.

Firstly, even though being associated with the *izquierda abertzale* post-GFA, in the words of Maskey, occasionally “caused us grief politically”, the republican movement was able to absorb any associated blowback relatively easily. Most of the criticism that came Sinn Féin’s way was from either unionist or right-wing (Progressive Democrats) sources. Even Florencio Domínguez Iribarren’s account of the ETA-IRA Paris meeting in 1999 was only ever covered, as far as this author is aware, by one Irish journalist — the former “Stick”, Eoghan Harris.<sup>216</sup> It is likely that the perception of Sinn Féin associations with ETA would have been taken more seriously by the party if criticism had come from a Fianna Fáil- or Fine Gael-led government, for example. At no time did the republican movement’s connections with radical Basque nationalism prove too hot to handle.

The one significant flashpoint for the party was Iñaki Juana de Chaos. However, even in this case, the ‘hook’ for the media was not necessarily ETA or De Chaos himself, but rather his indirect connection with one of the “Colombia 3”, James Monaghan.

Given the above, Danny Morrison’s assessment of the impact (or lack thereof) of external criticism on Sinn Féin’s decision to continue relations with the *izquierda abertzale* is probably close to the reality:

“The perceptions of the media or critics didn’t play a part in Sinn Féin’s judgement. Even if you thought the breakdown of a ceasefire in the Basque Country was a bad move, that would intensify your interest in trying to create a situation where they

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<sup>216</sup> Author interview with Alex Maskey (Belfast, 2018). “Provisionals also have Basque blood on their hands”, <https://www.pressreader.com/ireland/sunday-independent-ireland/20150607/282230894306995> (last accessed 09 April 2020).



would get justice. I wouldn't see it —I never saw it— as we have to move away [from the relationship]”.<sup>217</sup>

A second factor revolves around dissident” Irish republicanism. Upon his release from prison in September 2008, Arnaldo Otegi stated that he was:

“[...] absolutamente convencido de que este país va a conocer un proceso de negociación y diálogo político que conduzca a un escenario democrático y a un escenario en el que, aquí, en Euskal Herria, como en Irlanda, no haya más ni un solo preso político”.<sup>218</sup>

Perhaps unknowingly, Otegi had walked himself into a sensitive and emotive issue within Irish republicanism.

While republican prisoners who supported the GFA and its political dispensation were released within two years of the accord, “dissident” republicans remained behind bars. Since 2000, scores more “dissidents” have been convicted for paramilitary activities. Other republicans released under the terms of the GFA have had their licences revoked. In short, rightly or wrongly, the above consider themselves as “political prisoners”.

Meanwhile, Sinn Féin’s support for the izquierda abertzale’s prisoners has on occasion been turned against the party by those who claim that it has done comparatively little in highlighting the plight of “dissident” republicans in jail.<sup>219</sup>

The izquierda abertzale itself has not avoided criticism. For instance, after Katalin Madariaga read out Arnaldo Otegi’s letter at the Sinn Féin Árd Fheis in March 2000, Republican Sinn Féin released the following statement:

“Otegi once more steps into his role as international cheerleader of the cul-de-sac the Provisionals follow for the last 25 years. [...] Otegi is blinded by the lies that are told by the Provisionals. We urge the Basque people not to follow this path. It brought no solution to Ireland and it will bring no solution to the Basque country”.<sup>220</sup>

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<sup>217</sup> Author interview with Danny Morrison (Belfast, 2017).

<sup>218</sup> “Otegi habla de un «nuevo proceso de negociación» que culminará con la libertad de todos los presos de ETA”, *La Verdad*, 07.09.2008, <https://www.laverdad.es/murcia/20080906/espana/otegi-recibido-miles-personas-200809061949.html?ref=https:%2F%2Fwww.google.com%2F> (last accessed 10 April 2020).

<sup>219</sup> For example, see: “Baby Shinnors and the Election Machine”, <https://www.thepensivequill.com/2015/04/baby-shinnors-and-election-machine.html> “Interview With Michael McKeivitt Upon His Release From Portlaoise Prison March 28th, 2016”, available at <https://www.thepensivequill.com/2016/03/interview-with-michael-mckeivitt-upon.html> (sites last accessed 02 May 2020).

<sup>220</sup> The original source for this statement is no longer accessible online. For evidence of this statement and its content, see: “Republican Sinn Fein contradice a Arnaldo Otegi”, <http://euskalherriasozialista.blogspot.com/2010/03/republican-sinn-feinn-contradice.html?q=Dieter> (03 May 2020)

As “dissidents” increased their military capabilities in the late 2000s, culminating in a string of fatal attacks in 2009 (most notably the Massereene Barracks of two off-duty British soldiers), Martin McGuinness labelled the perpetrators as “traitors” to Ireland.<sup>221</sup> Yet Sinn Féin, at that precise moment, was still supportive of the *izquierda abertzale*, whose military wing remained active. As it had been for most of the 2000s, Sinn Féin was more open than ever to accusations of hypocrisy in its Basque dealings. Within this context, the opportunity to be involved in a Basque peace settlement—to turn all previous criticism into credit—must also be considered as a significant factor in the party’s steadfast commitment up to Aiete, and beyond.

Finally, as the historian Eunan O’Halpin has posited, and as Eoin Ó Broin freely admits in the book he wrote about his own party and its particular brand of “left republicanism”, Sinn Féin’s international approach has usually been geared exclusively towards its own domestic means and agenda.<sup>222</sup>

Internationally, the party now places itself within a European arc of non-violent, “progressive” and “pro-independence” movements, encompassing Scotland, Catalonia, and now the Basque Country. In assisting the *izquierda abertzale* through its difficult strategic shift, Sinn Féin has arguably evidenced both the kind of principled solidarity and coherent international approach that Ó Broin himself has long championed.<sup>223</sup>

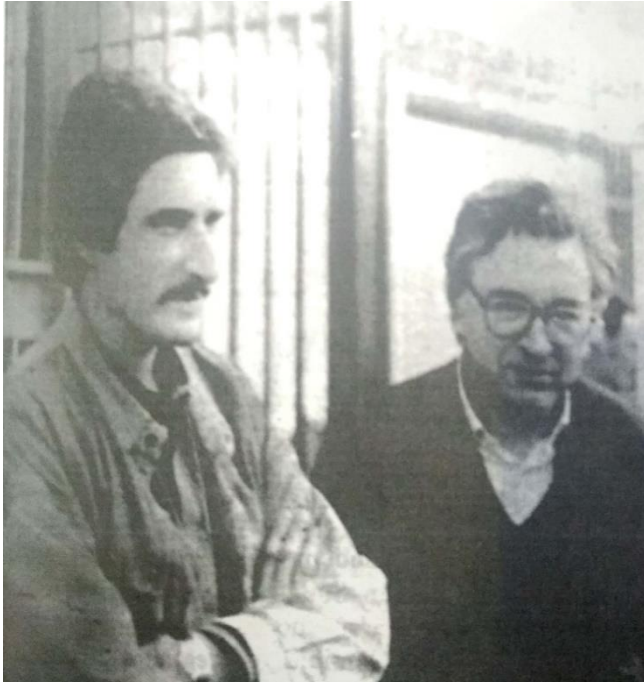
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<sup>221</sup> “Northern Ireland killings were an act of war, says hardline republican group”, *The Guardian*, 26.03.2009.

<sup>222</sup> Ó Broin: *Sinn Féin and the Politics of Left Republicanism*, p. 309; O’Halpin: “The Geopolitics of Republican Diplomacy in the twentieth century”.

<sup>223</sup> See: “Sinn Féin praises ‘enormous courage’ of Catalonia people”, *The Irish News*, 02.10.2017; “Sinn Fein sympathy for Scottish Yes vote, but it won't take sides”, *Belfast Telegraph*, 01.09.2014.





Juan Okiñena & Txillardegui at the Árd Fheis. 1986  
(Herri Batasuna. 20 años de lucha por la libertad)

“Revolution”.  
(Punto y Hora de Euskal Herria)



the Belfast man, who does not wish to be named, was arrested at his home in the early morning of Monday, July 29th, and taken to man told AP/RN: "The RUC tried to bribe me into acting as who, on release from Cast ately contacted his solicito Sinn Fein centre to inform t

● A Basque delegation will be visiting Belfast in August

## LEARNING ABOUT THE BASQUE STRUGGLE

A DELEGATION from the Basque country on the annual fact-finding mission to the Six Counties will host a discussion on the theme "The struggle in Euskadi" in Belfast's Conway Mill on Thursday, August 8th, at 1.30pm.

For a number of years Basque delegations, including representatives from Herri Batasuna have travelled to Ireland to attend meetings and express their solidarity with the struggle for Irish independence. This year the 18-person delegation is made up of representatives from various organisations in Euskadi, including cultural, political prisoners, youth and ecological groups. The discussion in the Mill will cover the long struggle in the Basque country for independence from Spain and is being seen as part of a mutual learning process in which Irish and Basque peoples can explore their respective experiences of oppression and history of struggle.

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Basques take to the streets in Belfast  
(An Phoblacht/Republican News)





Basque-Irish mural, Belfast (Kashmir Road). 1995  
 (Askapena Basque Brigade 95)



Eoin Ó Broin in Euskadi. 1997  
(Herria Eginez)



Pat Rice, Bairbre de Brún and Fernando Barrena  
(Basque Friendship Group)



Aiete Palace. 2011  
(Wikimedia Commons)





## CHAPTER SEVEN

### 7.0. Introduction

“The time of history is long. Fifteen years, twenty-five years, in the time of a human being, it’s a lot, but in the time of a country, of the history, it’s nothing — less than a page in a history book. So, we have to think that the Irish national liberation struggle is long, very long. It’s not over. Maybe the Irish are not fighting, but it’s not over. [Instead of] fighting with arms, they are fighting politically, as best as they can. As well as us, because... maybe we are in [difficulties], but here [the Basque Country], it has not end[ed], it’s not over, the national liberation struggle. So, [we] just have to take a look in the Irish history, the Basque history, the history of our countries. We have to think: which is the alternative? What can we do? Maybe the strategies we take, they need time to be implemented, to be developed. There is time for doing that”.<sup>1</sup>

The Basque and Irish cases, and their main protagonists, have lent themselves to almost constant *comparative* observation in academia, media, and by the actors themselves. However, despite firm evidence of the existence of *a relationship between* radical Basque nationalist and Irish republican actors since at least the early 1970s, there has been no serious or comprehensive attempt to account for this contemporary transnational nexus in the literature. In short, we know precious little of the emergence, evolution, function, and reciprocal impact of radical Basque nationalist-Irish republican relations, *especially* in their post-World War II guise.<sup>2</sup>

In the introduction to chapter one, three core, cumulative and interlinked guiding questions were posed: (1) *What* are the historical facts of the relationship between radical Basque nationalism and Irish republicanism? (2) *How* and *why* has this nexus developed in the manner that it has across a number of time periods, actors, and transnational “strands” (e.g., political, military, youth movements)? And (3): *Has* this nexus had any tangible impact (and if so, *how?*) on the historical development of each movement and wider associated conflict? This final core question was accompanied by an ancillary inquiry in relation to the possible accumulative influence of this nexus in facilitating ETA’s “definitive” ceasefire of 2011. It was the author’s contention that in addressing

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<sup>1</sup> Interview with Basque source.

<sup>2</sup> As discussed in the literature review of chapter one, many of the historical facts and relationship dynamics of the *early* pre-World War II nexus phase have been accounted for by Xosé M. Núñez Seixas, Cameron Watson, Alexander Ugalde Zubiri, José María Lorenzo Espinosa, Kyle McCreanor, and Pere Soler Paricio.

these inquiries through appropriate research methods, one could subsequently account for the “essential constitution” of the radical Basque nationalist-Irish republican relationship. That is, one would be able to comprehend how and why this relationship exists. One would be able to comprehend how and why it has *historically* existed. We would thereby arrive at a much more satisfactory outcome than the customary resort to axioms of “solidarity” and the ahistorical notion of “inevitability”. Via the author’s utilisation of an extensive range of primary sources and mixed qualitative and quantitative data, this gap in our knowledge has now been largely addressed on a chapter by chapter, era by era, basis.

In addition to these core research objectives, a number of previously unknown and/or opaque historical episodes and aspects of radical Basque nationalist-Irish republican relations have been illuminated for the first time from primary source material: e.g., Ambrose Martin’s 1925 [IRA] “furniture polishing” Bilbo plot; the Iker Gallastegi-led trip to Ireland in 1960; the ‘Polimil’-‘Provo’ “cuadrilla” of the late 1970s and early 1980s; Sinn Féin-Herri Batasuna relations since 1983, and dozens more nexus details. Meanwhile, broader thematic lines of research have also been developed (e.g., state responses to sub-state transnational cooperation; transnational “shared culture”; utilisation of a transnational social movement partner).

Taking the above into account, it is the author’s considered view that this study represents an original contribution of knowledge to the (historical) social sciences.

In what follows, the core guiding research questions and some of the most relevant findings and conclusions shall be discussed. A short “Research review” section will follow accordingly. Finally, the author will offer some concluding reflections on the Irish republican movement, Basque *izquierda abertzale*, and their respective cases.

## **7.1. Research findings and conclusions**

- (1) *What are the historical facts of the relationship between radical Basque nationalism and Irish republicanism?*
- (2) *How and why has this nexus developed in the manner that it has across a number of time periods, actors, and transnational “strands” (e.g., political, military, youth movements)?*
- (3) *Has this nexus had any tangible impact (and if so, how?) on the historical development of each movement and wider associated conflict?*

In posing question (1), the author sought to establish the historical “facts” (the *what?*) of radical Basque nationalist-Irish republican relations as a research prerequisite for more analytical explications as to *how* and *why* (2) this nexus emerged and evolved, and its *correlative* (3) impacts. In this sense, it would appear more appropriate to discuss findings pertaining to question (1) in the “Research review” section.

For the main body of the study, the author chose to use a chronological approach to address the analytical questions. It was felt that this would best demarcate, illustrate, and reflect the shifting rationale of the nexus and its distinctive material phases.

For this concluding chapter, the author considers a non-chronological approach as a more effective and appropriate means of engaging with these same questions. In the following series of statements (findings) and accompanying conclusions, the author seeks to highlight some of the interrelated nexus characteristics that have been borne out through this investigation.

➤ 1. *The emergence, evolution, and sustainment of the historical relationship between Irish republicanism and radical Basque nationalism was not a historical fait accompli. On the contrary, it was dependent on the contingencies of three key ingredients:*

For radical Basque nationalists and Irish republicans, the suggestion of a “natural” or “inevitable” shared historical movement nexus may be inviting —romantic even—, but it is not a satisfactory explanation. An alternative basis for the *broad* historical trajectory (emergence, evolution, and sustainment) of radical Basque nationalist-Irish republican relations is described in what follows.

Echoing Tricia Bacon’s research findings on militant “dyads” and “hubs”, there would appear to be three ingredients evident in this *long durée* process.<sup>3</sup> First, within both political cultures, the shared ideology of “nationalism” —but also at times “socialism”, “anti-imperialism”, and more recently “feminism”— guided and constrained transnational initiatives and gravitation towards potential ‘allies’. In this respect, “nationalism” acted as a root common denominator and catalyst for discursive-led engagement (eg., *fin-de-siècle* Basque-to-Irish interest) and initial transnational interactions (eg., attendance of international meetings in the 1970s) between Irish republicans/nationalists and radical/moderate Basque nationalists.

Second, party, paramilitary, youth, prisoner, other nexus strands, and overall movement (material and/or learning) *needs* and *objectives* tended to dictate the realisation

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<sup>3</sup> Bacon: *Strange Bedfellows or Brothers-In-Arms*, p. 26.

and scope of a more advanced level of transnational organisation-to-organisation relations (negotiating expertise; military training; youth wing mobilisation and education; collective prisoner organisation; strategic movement shift, etc). As such, while shared nationalist ideology acted as a magnet between the two political cultures, the actual development of more advanced contacts and relations was almost always geared towards specific movement *needs* and/or *objectives* (see researching finding 2).

Third, the combination of shared ideology and the interlocking of relationship strands via specific movement needs and objectives created the conditions for the growth of a ritualised cross-movement “shared culture”. This “shared culture” provided (and still provides) a solid undergirding and platform for the sustainment of all other nexus interactions (see researching finding 4).

The above may explain the common ideological grounding, motivation, and process of the development of radical Basque nationalist-Irish republican relations in broad historical terms. In *practice*, there were a vast array of macro, meso and micro factors and contingencies that constantly shaped, impinged, accelerated, and at times, completely upended the nexus. These independent variables ranged from the circumstances of personal relations (e.g., Eli Gallastegi-Ambrose Martin), to the stark implications of domestic political considerations and international *realpolitik* (e.g., De Valera’s approach to Basque nationalists in the 1930s), to wholesale regime change (e.g., Spanish Transition).

Consisting of two complex social movements actors, the nexus was just as susceptible to the chaotic vagrancies of extraneous and intrinsic dynamics as any other entity-to-entity relationship. In this sense, the premise that it was somehow “inevitable” or “natural” is a misplaced *post-hoc* truism that ignores individual/movement agency and a multitude of historical contingencies.

➤ 2. *The Irish republican-radical Basque nationalist nexus served as a powerful instrumental and learning tool towards movement objectives and needs:*

As referred to in the previous finding, the evolution and development of closer and more advanced movement and/or individual nexus “stands” tended to be motivated by specific movement *objectives* and *needs*. This ‘harnessing’ of the radical Basque nationalist-Irish republican nexus was aimed towards both internal movement learning purposes, and as a blunt instrumental tool to meet certain objectives.

For instance, from 1916 to c.1968, radical Basque nationalists utilised the nexus towards ideological, strategic and material learning outcomes and needs (e.g., Jagi-Jagi's steadfast adherence to an orthodox nationalist position in the 1930s; Ekin/ETA's strategic approach; the Iker Gallastegi-led 1960 trip to Ireland). In the more contemporary era, one could suggest that the armed campaigns of *both* the IRA and ETA in western Europe and the nexus *between* the two organisations, had a mutually legitimising agency — or at least among the respective social milieus. This is before one ponders the exact scope and nature of military-oriented exchanges (e.g., arms, training, sanctuary). From the late 1980s onwards, the nexus was utilised as a means to mollify movement isolation. Finally, during the 2000s, the nexus was utilised by the *izquierda abertzale* towards the specific needs of negotiation, strategic shift, and as an emulative beacon of hope in difficult moments.

While the above speaks to the utilisation of radical Basque nationalist-Irish republican relations for movement learning needs, the “Irish mirror” era represents the explicit deployment of the nexus (and the broader Irish case) as a powerful instrumental tool towards a political goal.

When news of the Downing Street Declaration broke in December 1993, the instant reaction of leading ‘politicos’ in the Basque *izquierda abertzale* was to achieve something similar with Spain.<sup>4</sup> Radical (and moderate) Basque nationalists subsequently utilised this “Irish mirror” and its implications regarding the right of a nation to self-determination as a rhetorical battering ram aimed at heaping pressure on Madrid. In the words of Arnaldo Otegi: “If it could happen in Ireland, why not in the Basque Country?”<sup>5</sup>

Responding to the challenge posed by the “Irish mirror”, right and left-wing parties in Madrid, the mainstream Spanish press and academics attempted to turn IRM-BIA analogisations on their head. They pointed to the structural differences in both cases and implored ETA to lay down and decommission its arms as the IRA had done. Another Spanish state strategy, as intriguingly revealed in Teresa Whitfield's interview with the late Alfredo Pérez Rubalcaba, was the Minister of the Interior's desire to complicate relations between Batasuna and Sinn Féin.<sup>6</sup> If this is testimony to the effectiveness of the BIA-IRM nexus as a political tool, it is further corroborated by both movement's careful guarding of the exclusivity of their relationship with respect to other Basque and Irish

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<sup>4</sup> Author interview with Pernando Barrera (Donostia, 2017). Author interview with Karmelo Landa (Bilbo, 2016).

<sup>5</sup> “Basque leader sees peace process as the way forward”, *Irish Times*, 31.10.1998.

<sup>6</sup> Whitfield: *Endgame for ETA*, p. 182.



political organisations. As with most of the transnational relationship dynamics between radical Basque nationalists and Irish republicans, these utilisations were heavily asymmetric (see research finding 5).

Finally, in as much as the Irish republican-radical Basque nationalist nexus served as a powerful instrumental and learning tool towards movement objectives and needs, here it is timely to underscore the fact that any “demonstrative effects” accruing from this nexus were always subordinate and encompassed within the more significant domestic political dynamics of the Basque Country/Spain and (Northern) Ireland/UK.<sup>7</sup>

➤ 3. *The expressed basis of transnational “solidarity” was dynamic and tended to closely align with historical context, movement needs, and objectives:*

“Relations between the Irish and Basque people and between Sinn Féin and Batasuna is based on mutual solidarity for the fight that both peoples carry out for self-determination and independence”.<sup>8</sup>

(Gerry Adams, 1994).

The reader will recall from chapter one that defining or gauging what “solidarity” means or entails *within* the cosmology of radical Basque nationalist-Irish republican relations has been an additional research aim. How did radical Basque nationalist and Irish republican actors conceptualise the notion of trans-movement solidarity themselves? — as distinct from the ‘outside’ critical approaches to each movement’s external initiatives (O’Halpin, Guelke, Alonso, Domínguez Iribarren, etc).

Via “grassroots” data collected for this study and “elite” level statements such as Adams’ above, it is clear that the mutually shared principle of “self-determination” has scaffolded the expressed basis of radical Basque nationalist-Irish republican “solidarity” over the last two to three decades. However, the historical basis of “Basque-Irish solidarity” has been more dynamic. It has tended to align with political context.

For instance, in addition to the fitful development of personal relationships, visits, meetings and even plots, the *radical* post-1916 nexus tended to be underpinned by grandiose nationalist rhetoric, the “echoes” of the Irish Revolutionary Period, and the anti-imperialist and ‘anti-fascist’ “solidarity” of Republican Congress during the Spanish Civil War.

Following a distinct lull in transnational relations in the 1950s and early to mid-1960s, a new modern nexus of contacts and relations (PSF, PIRA, OSF, ETA-m, ETA-pm, EIA,

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<sup>7</sup> As per Conversi’s research. Conversi: “Domino Effect or International Developments?”.

<sup>8</sup> *Evening Herald*, 07.05.1994.

HB) emerged on the crest of third wave “international terrorism” and the congruent outbreak of political violence in Northern Ireland and the Basque Country. Basque-Irish “solidarity” was now principally centred on the IRA and ETA’s respective armed campaigns to overthrow the political and economic order in their homelands, and for national and social liberation (e.g., evident in the organisation’s multiple joint statements of the 1970s). These expressions of Basque-Irish solidarity were also often encased within broader leftist international revolutionary rhetoric.

As the third “wave” began to recede and the prospect of military victory in either case had been practically nullified by the mid-1980s, the political relationship that emerged between Sinn Féin and Herri Batasuna was grounded in the more political (and less militaristic) rhetoric of shared principles of “self-determination” (e.g., chapter five statements by Karmelo Landa, Txema Montero, Alex Maskey). This tendency was turbo-charged by the disintegration of the USSR and Yugoslavia. “Self-determination” became the keystone of nexus “solidarity”. It was also precisely what both movements sought to achieve in future negotiations.

According to Sinn Féin and the IRA’s own public analyses, the Good Friday Agreement of 1998 satisfied a minimum threshold for Irish self-determination. Consequently, the IRM’s hitherto objective of securing “self-determination” as a means to Irish reunification, pivoted towards amassing sufficient political power and public support to win a border poll via the GFA mechanism. In contrast, the Basque *izquierda abertzale* was still looking to achieve a similar constitutional mechanism in the Basque context. The IRM and BIA were now, as the Batasuna activist Esther Aguirre put it: “at different stages”.

In the absence of an alignment of strategic objectives (mechanism for self-determination) and associated needs, the hitherto expressed basis of “solidarity” around the issue of “self-determination” no longer had the same implication — or at least not for the IRM. It is probably for this reason that many interviewees struggled to articulate the contemporary basis of “solidarity” on the Irish side of the nexus equation. Senior republicans have spoken of a feeling of obligation or debt owed towards the *izquierda abertzale*. In this sense, and as alluded to in the conclusion of chapter six, Sinn Féin’s stance vis-à-vis the Basque *izquierda abertzale* from 1998 to 2011 may perhaps be indicative of a more principled and less needs-driven approach to its international relations.

➤ 4. *Radical Basque nationalists and Irish republicans developed a “shared culture” partly around, and in response, to a shared enemy:*

A prominent theme since chapter five has been the idea of a “shared culture” between radical Basque nationalists and Irish republicans, orbiting and emanating out from core nexus “brokers” and “nodes”. The author has placed the first stirrings of this “shared culture”—a sort of transnational “imagined community”—in the late 1980s. As with any “imagined community”, it required an “other”. Even prior to the emergence of this “shared culture” in the late 1980s, radical Basque nationalist and Irish republican actors had identified London and Madrid as mutual hubs of political, social, economic, and cultural repression via the joint ETA-PIRA communiques of the 1970s, the Brest Charter, and EIA and PSF commentary during the “cuadrilla” period. In the Sinn Féin-Herri Batasuna era (from 1983 onwards), shared movement threats such as extradition, criminalisation and the “Dirty Wars” in both territories further underscored the relevance of this shared enemy thesis, and by extension, fraternal movement empathy, and understanding. Indeed, the commencement of the “shared culture” era, which coalesced around the first annual Basque influxes to Belfast, may be seen as a response to the states’ political isolation of the IRM (Anglo-Irish Agreement of 1985) and BIA (Ajuria-Enea Pact of 1988), respectively.

Within the hub of this developing “shared culture”, neither “grassroots” activists nor “elites” had to justify who they were or their political views. Cross-mobilisation encouraged cross-fertilisation of values and ideas. As indicated in the questionnaire data, most grassroots Basque “nodes” even became stakeholders in the Irish case. Political meetings were usually followed by social gatherings. Young groups of Irish republicans began annual visits to the Basque Country towards the late 1990s. “Bonds become personal as well as political”.<sup>9</sup> Clear differentials in Basque and Irish history tended to be glossed over for the narrative of “Two Peoples. One Struggle”.

Another indication of the “shared culture” was how the language of each movement and struggle bled into the other. An Ertzaintza officer killed by ETA could be likened to the “equivalent of the RUC Special Branch”. The main Spanish parties of the PP and PSOE became “unionists”. In republican discourse, the Spanish Constitution was rejected in the Basque Country, and the Transition “so-called”. “Polimilis” were “Sticks”.<sup>10</sup>

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<sup>9</sup> Author interview with Eoin Ó Broin (Dublin, 2015).

<sup>10</sup> “Basque struggle remains vibrant”, *An Phoblacht/Republican News*, 28.03.1996. Iñaki Iriondo, Ramón Sola: *Mañana, Euskal Herria. Entrevista con Arnaldo Otegi*, Bilbao, Baigorri Argitaletxea, 2005, p. 76;

There were also misunderstandings across radical Basque nationalist-Irish republican discourse. For instance, radical Basque nationalist literature would occasionally refer to *Northern* Ireland as a “nation” and/or express the territory’s right to “self-determination” — notions completely alien to Irish republican ideology.<sup>11</sup> Going in the opposite direction, a 1985 report in *An Phoblacht/Republican News* that referred to the Basques having “Home Rule” was quickly corrected by a letter from Herri Batasuna.<sup>12</sup>

If similar experiences informed the BIA-IRM nexus, this was mirrored in a “transnational” British-Spanish (and to a lesser extent, Irish) coordinated state nexus response as illustrated in chapter four (c.1970–c.1983). In this schema, domestic anti-terror strategy and threat discourse (via the mainstream media) dovetailed with the spectre of two organisations working in cahoots as part of an “international terrorist” network — a spectre that was often sensationalized by the media, and played up by the states. Any political rationale behind the armed campaigns of ETA and the IRA was invalid. They were naturally evil, “almost exoticized”, terrorists.<sup>13</sup>

Two sets of state and non-state *weltanschauungen*, complete with their own ideologies, language, and tactics, revolved around and fed off each other. Living in separate universes, with mutually intelligible political outlooks and normative values, it is no surprise that Irish republicans and radical Basque nationalist actors increasingly took solace in each other’s politics. Internal British/Spanish state sentiment and cooperation around the BIA-IRM from the mid-1980s onwards will only be revealed with time and further research.

➤ 5. *The radical Basque nationalist-Irish republican nexus was mainly asymmetric, reciprocal, and ad hoc:*

The most defining characteristic of the trajectory of radical Basque nationalist-Irish republican relations is the asymmetric axis of interest, engagement, and utilisation that runs through its entire history — even prior to the emergence of a post-1916 *radical* dynamic. The only time this asymmetry narrowed to any considerable extent was

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Fernández Soldevilla, López Romo: *Sangre, Votos, Manifestaciones: ETA y el nacionalismo vasco radical, 1958–2011*, p. 285. “An elusive peace”, *An Phoblacht*, 01.12.2005; “Jon Idígoras. Farewell to a figure of a Basque Country”, *An Phoblacht/Republican News*, 16.06.2005.

Author interview with Séanna “Breathnach” Walsh (Belfast, 2017).

<sup>11</sup> For example, see: “El otoño caliente del IRA”, *Punto y Hora de Euskal Herria*, 19.10.1984; “El derecho inalienable...”, *Punto y Hora de Euskal Herria*, Cuaderno April 1985.

<sup>12</sup> “Herri Batasuna”, *An Phoblacht/Republican News*, 13.06.1985.

<sup>13</sup> For “almost exoticized” and related discussion, see: Watson: “Imagining ETA”, pp. 94–95.

when the IRM and BIA pursued largely congruous political-military strategies in the 1970s and 1980s. Even then, Sinn Féin still carried far greater international heft. Meanwhile, given the IRA's power characteristics as "the most sophisticated urban terrorist organization in the world",<sup>14</sup> associations with the Irish paramilitaries in the international press afforded ETA a certain 'prestige' or 'gravitas'. It also indirectly amplified the existence of a Basque conflict to the anglophone world. With the signing of the Downing Street Declaration in 1993 and the ensuing "Irish mirror" period, asymmetry became even more pronounced. One striking exception was at youth movement level, where Sinn Féin Youth was heavily influenced by its Basque counterparts in Jarrai.

Notwithstanding the broad asymmetry in transnational dynamics, nexus exchanges across different radical Basque nationalist-Irish republican "strands" were egalitarian and reciprocal. In general, each movement placed great store in their relationship with the other. Although there was never any formal arrangement, there existed an understanding that the nexus was exclusive and likely to continue. To this author's knowledge, there is no evidence of any public criticism whatsoever of the nexus partner in any of the movement's related periodicals and publications — even after notorious killings and ceasefire breakdowns.

With the exception of the annual visits to the *Árd Fheis* and exchanges of grassroots activists, the BIA-IRM nexus remained fundamentally *ad hoc*. That is, there was never any tendency towards a more formal working relationship. On military matters, one could speculate that there was perhaps an element of resource pooling on the continent in the 1970s and early 1980s. Equally, Domínguez Iribarren's "La Agonía de ETA" suggests a more integrated level of transactional cooperation occurring in the 1990s. In the absence of evidence from multiple sources, however, this is not conclusive.

## 7.2. Research review

The historical details ("facts") of this nexus were extrapolated from state documentation, multiple movement propaganda organs, key "brokers", "nodes", political party, and other strands of both political cultures.

As expected, senior "elite" interviewees rarely discussed the content of cross-movement conversations; however, most were happy to discuss the *types* of conversations

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<sup>14</sup> Cited in: "Hearing before the Committee on International Relations House of Representatives. One Hundred Seventh Congress. Second Session. April 24, 2002, Serial No. 107-87", p. 104. P14,913. LLB.

that were usually had across nexus strands. Erring on the side of caution, the author decided to anonymise all Basque “grassroots” interviewees (i.e., those who are/were not public representatives, public or well-known individuals, and/or senior figures in a relevant organisation). A handful of exemptions were made for figures who bordered both distinctions and/or whose identity was of narrative value. Some information and quotes from “elite” sources, and others from “elite” and “grassroots” sources not acknowledged in the list of interviewees, were made anonymous.

While the lack of an Irish republican equivalent to Basque “grassroots” quantitative data was disappointing, it is doubtful that such data would have thrown up major surprises.

As anticipated, access to relevant state documentation in Spain was impossible. Analyses of Spanish state perceptions of BIA-IRM was nevertheless indirectly carried out via British and Irish state archives.

Perhaps the most intriguing line of research arising from this study is that which centres around the shared intersection between Irish republican and radical Basque nationalist political cultures.<sup>15</sup> Other aspects of this topic could also be developed with further research. For instance, the case of the mercurial Ambrose Martin and his relationship with Basque nationalists is deserving of a more focused study.<sup>16</sup> As are the international relations of both movements in the 1970s and early 1980s — and not just in respect to each other.

### **7.3. Final reflections**

Throughout this study, I have tried to represent the political cultures of the Irish republican movement and the Basque *izquierda abertzale* in a detached and impersonal manner. Similarly, I have endeavoured to convey the divergent rationales and approaches of the principal (state and non-state) actors on keystone issues (e.g., Irish partition/reunification, Spanish Transition, Irish peace process, “Irish mirror”) without necessarily ascribing my own analysis and opinions. Having largely fulfilled the research objectives, the reader will perhaps permit one brief reflection on the two cases.

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<sup>15</sup> The author is currently formulating a proposal along these lines for the UPV/EHU research group: “Sociabilidad, identidad y culturas políticas en la España contemporánea. Un estudio de caso en perspectiva comparada”

<sup>16</sup> The author and the Canadian researcher Kyle McCreanor have agreed to conduct further research and collaborate on a text about Ambrose Martin.



The idea that ETA and the IRA's respective armed campaigns were a justified, inevitable, or "necessary" means to their respective political objectives is one that I personally reject. Most of the time, in both contexts, other channels of struggle were available. However, it is myopic to ignore or play down the structural democratic, political, economic, social, and cultural deficiencies that, to varying degrees, bred political violence in both contexts.

In this sense, and to invert a phrase used by my colleague Gaizka Fernández Soldevilla: nationalist myths *do not* kill.<sup>17</sup> Nationalism may have provided a cloak of justification for ETA and the IRA; but it did not necessarily motivate them to pick up arms. For all those who did choose the armed option, reflecting on and recognising that this may not have been the best option, need not be a moment of ignominy. On the contrary, it is only through the process of honest dialogue with the past that both societies can ultimately move forward.

Finally, as I write these words in early June 2020, Sinn Féin is the most popular party on the island of Ireland, having won 24.5% of the vote in the recent Irish General Election.<sup>18</sup> North of the border, the party is in government, leading the Northern Ireland Executive alongside the DUP. Notwithstanding the unpredictable nature of politics, most independent commentators would agree that the party's strategic objective of obtaining power in the North and South of Ireland is within Sinn Féin's grasp. Moreover, as the reader will no doubt be aware, Sinn Féin's increasing electoral strength, the UK's decision to leave the EU ("Brexit"), and changing demographics in Northern Ireland, have all *arguably* made the prospect of Irish reunification more likely.

If and when the first, or both, of these scenarios occurs, it will be compelling to see how a Sinn Féin Taoiseach approaches the issue of Basque (or Catalan) self-determination with his or her Spanish counterpart.

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<sup>17</sup> Gaizka Fernández Soldevilla: "Mitos que matan. La narrativa del 'conflicto vasco'", *Ayer*, 98/105 (2), 2015, pp. 213–240.

<sup>18</sup> "33rd Dáil Election",

[https://data.oireachtas.ie/ie/oireachtas/electoralProcess/electionResults/dail/2020/2020-05-01\\_33rd-dail-general-election-results\\_en.pdf](https://data.oireachtas.ie/ie/oireachtas/electoralProcess/electionResults/dail/2020/2020-05-01_33rd-dail-general-election-results_en.pdf) (last accessed 26 May 2020).



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