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Television narratives about ETA made after the cessation of violence. Fiction, docuseries and documentary reportage (2019-2020)

El relato televisivo sobre ETA después del cese de la violencia. Ficción, docuseries y reportajes documentales (2019-2020)

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Abstract: During the 2019-2020 season, six television programs about the terrorist organization ETA were broadcast in Spain. The aim of this research is to analyze the “television narrative” that has been constructed about ETA almost ten years after the cessation of violence. As the programs had different formats, a qualitative methodology based on textual analysis was used. The conclusions show a new narrative which recalled some historical facts and gave the victims a clearly prominent role. This resulted in a renewed discourse that builds collective memory in order to learn some lessons and move forward for the sake of coexistence and reconciliation.

Keywords: television; ETA; fiction series; docuseries; victims of terrorism; Spain.

RESUMEN: Durante la temporada 2019-2020 se emitieron en España seis programas de televisión sobre ETA. El objetivo de esta investigación es analizar el relato “televisivo” que se ha construido sobre la banda terrorista casi diez años después del cese de la violencia. Para ello se utiliza una metodología cualitativa basada en el análisis textual por tratarse de formatos independientes. Las conclusiones muestran un nuevo relato donde coincide la recuperación de determinados hechos históricos y el protagonismo ostensible de las víctimas. El resultado es un discurso renovado que construye memoria colectiva para aprender y avanzar en aras de la convivencia y la reconciliación.

Palabras clave: televisión; ETA; serie de ficción; docuserie; víctimas terrorismo; España.

1. Introduction

On 20 October 2011, the digital edition of the Basque nationalist newspaper *Gara* published a video, two minutes and thirty-seven seconds long, which featured three hooded individuals who represented the terrorist organization ETA. They used the Spanish language to announce “the definitive cessation of its armed activity”. At the end of their speech, they raised their left

fists and shouted in Basque “Long live the independence of *Euskal Herria*” (the name by which ETA refers to the Basque Country, Navarre and the French Basque Country).

This succinct staging ended 43 years of terrorist activity that had left 853 people dead, more than 7,000 wounded, and was a subject of constant and intense political and social debate.¹ Seven years later, ETA handed in its weapons and announced its definitive disbandment. Representatives of the political spectrum reacted by toning down their statements, dozens of prisoners asked for forgiveness from prison, and a new era began in the Basque Country. When the first Spanish generation that had grown up without ETA terrorism (and was therefore unfamiliar with its history and key players (Nieto, De la Rúa and Gosálvez, 2021)) voted in a general election for the first time, this marked the beginning of a completely new stage in terms of the assessment of terrorism. Violence was then completely rejected by society (Aizpeolea, 2021). There is a shared recognition of almost all the victims, especially the best known. The political climate had eased—with some exceptions—and identity debates had been replaced by other more pressing problems. In short, Basque society was exploring normality and even ran the risk of forgetting what had happened.

Shortly over a decade after the cessation of its terrorist activities, the public debate about ETA has waned. However, it has been revived by television, which has become the main forum for reflection and discussion on the issue. Television is a social agent that appeals to the viewer, preserves memory and raises a debate on what ETA meant and what is expected after its disbandment. However, it also has considerable power to turn developments in the opposite direction, that is, to impose other agendas or even seek to ensure that a particular version prevails, however biased or subjective. One of the functions of television is to serve as a social reference and a source of cultural identity (Gordillo, 2009), because the public identifies the television content they watch (including fiction) as history, which helps fill the gaps they have in historical terms (Lacalle, 2001).

Several streaming platforms and generalist television channels have proposed new approaches and have delved into and reflected on different aspects of ETA. In total, six television productions with different formats and belonging to different genres have been premiered in recent years and have had a significant impact in terms of audience and media presence. *La línea invisible* (Movistar, 2020) and *Patria* (HBO, 2020) fictionally reconstructed the beginning and the end of the terrorist organization. These productions, which are ‘the greatest efforts ever made to bring the history of ETA to the screen’ (De Pablo, Mota and López de Maturana, 2019, p. 198), were created from hitherto unseen viewpoints, such as the origin of the organization, and the consequences of terrorism for ordinary people. Some non-fiction productions were also produced, specifically, two docuseries entitled *ETA, el final del silencio* (Jon Sistiaga, Alfonso Cortés-Cavanillas, Movistar, 2019) and *El desafío: ETA* (Hugo Stuenkel, Amazon Prime, 2020). Two journalistic documentaries were also released: *Lagun y la resistencia frente a ETA* (Belén Verdugo, TVE, 2019) and *El instante decisivo* (Teresa Latorre, ATRESplayer, 2020). The latter four shared the same news-based treatment, identified and developed key milestones in the process, were produced with the intention of preserving memory, and notably reclaimed the center of the narrative for the victims in order to offer them reparation.

Until recently, television productions about ETA had been unusual, scarce and insignificant from the point of view of criticism and audience following.² Given the obvious change in trend,

¹ As for the number of casualties, there is some disparity between the different sources providing the figures. Thus, while the Ministry of Internal Affairs of Spain reported 853 dead, other researchers have put the number at 845 (López Romo, 2015). De la Calle and Sánchez-Cuenca (2004, p. 61) reported that there were 829 casualties. As for the number of people injured in terrorist attacks, this figure is even more in dispute, as some investigations only take into account the most seriously injured and not those with more minor injuries.

² Some research has reported that, from the point of view of cinema criticism, there have been successful movies on the ETA theme that have been the exception: *La muerte de Mikel* (Imanol Uribe, 1984) was seen by 1,169,384 spectators in cinemas; *Días contados* (Imanol Uribe, 1994) by 688,232 spectators in cinemas and won eight Goya awards. Subsequently, *Maixabel* (Iciar Bollain, 2021) was seen by 517,842 spectators in cinemas, and it is assumed that the figure will increase after being shown on television platforms such as Netflix.

this paper raises some questions: what is this new narrative about ETA that television productions are proposing nine years after the cessation of armed violence? What are the most represented historical events? And ultimately, who are the protagonists?

2. ETA on Spanish television. Programs and research

ETA terrorism has been one of the most concerning issues for Spanish society. Television has reported on attacks, arrests, trials and negotiations with the organization, but has rarely fictionalized the story, as cinema that had taken on this role (De Pablo, 2017). In total, there were 70 films centered on ETA from 1977 (when *Comando Txikia*, also known as *Muerte de un presidente* (José Luis Madrid, 1977), was released), until 2022. These evolved from exalting and mythicizing terrorists to condemning their actions. However, filmography on ETA is not known for its quality, commercial success or depth of reflection, unlike literary production on the subject, notably including the critical and public success of the novel *Patria* by Fernando Aramburu.³ Although there are some exceptions, the fact is that most of the feature movies addressing this issue have gone unnoticed, as they had little audience support and critical acclaim.

Television fiction began to pay attention to ETA in the 21st century. The productions were grouped into two: those that dealt mainly with Basque separatist terrorism, and those which had ETA as a backdrop to the story. The former include: *Zeru Horiek* (TVE, Aizpea Goenaga, 2005); *48 horas* (Antena 3, Manuel Estudillo, 2008); *Una bala para el rey* (Antena 3, Pablo Barrera, 2009); *El asesinato de Carrero Blanco* (RTVE, Miguel Bardem, 2011); *El precio de la libertad* (ETB, Ana Murugarren, 2011); *Umezurtzak* (ETB, Ernesto del Río, 2013); *Le sanctuaire* (Olivier Masset-Depasse, 2015); *El Padre de Caín* (Telecinco, Salvador Calvo, 2016); and *IID. Una mañana de invierno* (Aragón TV, Roberto Roldán, 2017). These television series revived specific characters while also recreating and interpreting events from the past. ETA also appeared tangentially in other television fiction, such as in *Cuéntame cómo pasó* (TVE, 2001-2022), which contained allusions to several milestones (the Burgos Trial, the murder of Captain *Alberto Martín Barrios* and the attack on the *Hipercor* supermarket in Barcelona), and the comedy *Los hombres de Paco* (Antena 3, 2005-2010) which devoted several episodes to the plot of an undercover policeman and the negotiations between the Spanish government and the terrorist organization. Other series have used this topic as a resource to entertain rather than to reflect, such as the comedy *Aúpa Josu* (ETB, Borja Cobeaga, 2014) and the thrillers *Presunto Culpable* (Antena 3, 2018) and *Ihesaldia* (ETB, Jabi Elortegi, 2019).

The analysis of terrorism in nonfiction television examines three events. One is the assassination of Admiral Carrero Blanco (President of General Franco's government) in 1973, which constitutes "a glaring example of an information vacuum" (Sánchez, Rueda and Coronado, 2009, p. 55) that "never ceases to amaze" (Eser and Peters, 2016, p. 16). For Eser and Peters, the reasons for this gap may be due to the "controversial nature of the attack" and its ensuing "limited presence in memorial representations [, which] perpetuates the lack of political debate around the issue" (2016, p. 17). The second event was the kidnapping and subsequent assassination of Miguel Ángel Blanco (a *Partido Popular* local councilor in the town of Ermua) which, unlike the previous event, was broadcast on television minute by minute. And the third of the events featured in nonfiction television was the jihadist attack in Madrid on 11 March 2004, which produced multiple and disparate television accounts. These events had greater presence through special news programs which featured retrospective analyses that mixed images of the events with the protagonists' testimonies. The recurrent genre is the journalistic documentary, which TVE has used in numerous episodes of *Informe Semanal*. Eighty-five reports on ETA terrorism were broadcast until the announcement of the definitive ceasefire (Rueda and Coronado, 2009, p. 215). Private broadcasters have also produced journalistic documentaries and used a

³ For a more in-depth study of *Patria*, both the novel and the series, we recommend reading Álvaro Abellán-García Barrio's book *Mundos posibles poéticos. El caso de Patria: el pueblo, la novela, la serie* (Ediciones Catarata, 2023).

more sensationalist approach. Examples of this include Telecinco with *Diario de...*, presented by Mercedes Milá, and Antena 3, with *7 días, 7 noches*, a late-night program, presented by Teresa Viejo and produced by El Mundo TV, which combined interviews, talk shows and social commentary. Telemadrid also produced its own program focusing on ETA. The documentary series *Víctimas: la historia de ETA*, directed by Manuel Aguilera and also produced by El Mundo TV, was broadcast in 2006. This series was more political and propagandistic than informative. Not surprisingly, its broadcasting coincided with the dialogue between ETA and the socialist government of former Spanish President Rodríguez Zapatero.

Research on ETA television fiction only appeared recently and offered only partial and restricted conclusions in scholarly articles. These include a paper that analyzed the character of Arantxa in *Patria*, which considered it an element of interaction and nonviolent ideology within the conflict (Quiroga, 2021); an article which concluded that *Presunto Culpable* lacked credibility, due to its poor documentation and the desire to realistically represent what was narrated (Mota, 2020); another paper which argued that the series *Cuéntame* “only explored highly significant and symbolic events” (Mota, 2019, p. 158); and a piece of research that discussed the representation of Gipuzkoa in audiovisual fiction (De Pablo, 2022). The studies by De Pablo, Mota and López de Maturana (2019) and Marcos Ramos (2021) provided more in-depth insights into the subject matter. One analyzed the representation of Basque political violence and its victims in “non-informative television”, and another covered all fiction television productions about ETA.

The presence of ETA in nonfiction has been studied by Rueda and Coronado (2009), who devoted a chapter to terrorism in their review of the historical representation of Spain on television. De Pablo, Mota and López de Maturana (2019) examined how the story of ETA has been told in the documentary productions by TVE, ETB and Telemadrid, with an approach that included the role of the victims. And Herrero (2021) investigated TVE’s news coverage during the *lead years*, when it was debated whether or not to report on terrorism.

No academic study to date has investigated the television discourse on ETA since the organization renounced violence. This includes both fiction and nonfiction programs broadcast by linear platforms and channels. A study that discusses this content is needed in order to be able to identify which narrative is given priority on television productions and, above all, who the protagonist is. This paper aims to help ensure that the debate sparked by the media does not fade away.

3. Methodology

The aim of this research is to discover the television narrative about ETA in the productions broadcast as more than a decade has elapsed since the organization’s ceasefire was announced. To this end, the paper seeks to identify which events were dealt with and who the protagonists of the stories were.

The object of study was all television programs based on ETA that were released in 2019 and 2020. The date is significant because it establishes a temporal framework and brings together a simultaneous, profuse and disparate set of production titles. The corpus comprised two fiction series, *Patria* (8 episodes and 440 minutes) and *La línea invisible* (6 episodes and 270 minutes); two docuseries: *ETA, el final del silencio* (7 chapters and 420 minutes) and *El desafío: ETA* (8 chapters and 480 minutes); and two TV journalistic documentaries, *Lagun y la resistencia frente a ETA* (85 minutes) and *El instante decisivo* (85 minutes). These are heterogeneous productions, featuring different programs and formats by different broadcasters: national, private, public and VOD platforms. The approach is novel because it analyses a set of productions broadcast to a mass audience. Moreover, the fact that all of them had been broadcast within such a specific time frame justified the selection of fictional and nonfictional productions, because the format should not prevent studying the overall story and its protagonists.

A qualitative methodology and a research technique based on textual analysis was used, since the sample consisted of narrative constructions that independently covered the same symbolic material and produced different meanings. The textual approach made it possible to interpret their overall meaning, assess the themes that were discussed and analyze the way the different discourses were enunciated (Cassetti and Chio, 1999, p. 251). This tool was chosen in order to address the formal differences between fiction and news formats. Fiction materials and docuseries were considered to be hybridized (Gómez Tarín, 2008), a concept that applied to the mixed formats and interwoven formal, narrative and expressive patterns elicited from different sources and distilled into an audiovisual text (Bort Gual, 2010, p. 11).

A flexible analysis tool was designed to systematize the information, which was gauged to adapt to different formats. The concern here was to reconstruct the structure and processes of the productions in qualitative terms. The following categories of analysis were envisaged:

1. Themes: primary and secondary;
2. Thesis of the story: driving thread, main plots;
3. Characters: who, how many and viewpoints;
4. How it tells the story: (a) Structure; (b) Techniques: interviews, images, etc. (c) Historical context: what period(s) is/are represented. (d) Facts referenced and represented.

An analysis of the victims was also carried out. The categories provided by Bilbao and Sáez de la Fuente (2015, pp. 65-88) were used to determine their typology. These authors distinguished between *radical victims*, those who were killed; *surviving victims*, those who were injured, kidnapped, extorted or harassed; *direct victims*, who suffered from terrorist actions; *indirect victims*, such as family members; *intended victims*, identified as possible targets; and *incidental victims*, those who were collateral to terrorism.

Finally, an approach to the interpretation of the data was proposed that assesses the six productions. This includes the ways of revising the past from the perspective of the present, whether the representation of the objective and the subjective had any overlapping, the interests of the enunciator, the ideology and the current developments triggered by these issues.

4. Results

4.1. History. The protagonists. Their stories

La línea invisible tells the story of how the terrorist organization started and explores the motives that led a group of young people to take up the armed struggle. It was deliberately written in a documentary style with historical background, as it used documentation and statements from people related to the origin of ETA⁴, based on an original idea of Abel García Roure.

The series revolved around three real characters who underpin the main plots: Txabi Etxebarrieta, who was the first person to kill in the name of the organization; the civil guard José Antonio Pardines, the first victim of ETA; and the policeman and torturer Melitón Manzananas, head of the *Brigada Político Social*⁵ of Gipuzkoa, who was the object of the first attack planned by the terrorist organization. Etxebarrieta plays a key role in the story because he was the first to cross this imaginary line. He was shown as a brilliant student who refused to continue his

⁴The credits list the researchers who were involved in the development of the series, namely, Gaizka Fernández Soldevilla, as historical advisor; Gurutz Jauregi, José Antonio Pérez, Josemari Lorenzo Espinosa and Pau Casanellas, as historians; anthropologist Paco Etxeberria; and journalists Javier Marrodán and Eugenio Ibarzábal.

⁵The official name of the institution was Brigada de Investigación Social (BSI); however, the name that was used to refer to it was Brigada Político Social (BPS), as it was also called in *La línea invisible*.

doctorate at Oxford University and joined ETA instead. After the 5th Assembly, he became the organization's first leader and called for a change from a trade union approach to an identity-based approach: he proposed the use of violence. He was the first to kill, but he was also the first to die, thus becoming a martyr and a mythical figure of radical Basque nationalism, as he put his life at the service of the cause.

The main event represented in the series was the murder perpetrated on a civil guard called Pardines on 7 June 1968, which occurred by chance when he asked the driver of a car occupied by two ETA members at a roadblock in Aduna (Gipuzkoa). While he circled the vehicle to check if the license was in order, Etxebarrieta and Sarasketa (another member of his terrorist unit) left the car, took out a gun and, while Pardines had his back facing them, shot him first in the head and then four more times in the chest. He was the first ETA fatal victim that was featured in this fiction series.

The story recreated the first assemblies held in the Gipuzkoan town of Deba, which heralded the outset of the organization, and gave an insight into the debates, ideologies and political positions held in connection with the identity issue. The first ETA members were portrayed as idealistic, bourgeois youths who did not question whether they were engaged in terrorism because they were fighting against the dictatorship. They referred to Marxism, revolutionary fighters such as Che, Algeria and Vietnam, and used symbolic objects such as the Palestinian scarf. ETA's initial actions were also reconstructed: graffiti, explosives on Franco's monuments and newspaper headquarters, bank robberies to finance themselves, etc. These actions were carried out more for propaganda and subversion purposes than for terrorist purposes. After the 5th Assembly they started calling themselves the *Movimiento Socialista Vasco de Liberación Nacional* (Basque Socialist Movement for National Liberation), adopted armed struggle as a main strategy, and perpetrated attacks against people.

The series shows the role played by institutions such as the police and the Catholic Church in the creation and early development of ETA. While the police was the organization's enemy, the Church was its ally, because it sheltered militants, provided them with venues for their meetings, advised them on how to act and forgave their sins.

Patria used several timelines: the past-past, which narrated the lives of the characters before the death of Txato, a Basque businessman extorted by ETA; the past, what happened after his death, which focused on the repercussions of this event for all the characters; and the present, when the characters received the news of the cessation of armed activities. The events in the past, before and after Txato's murder, took place in the 1980s. This period was recreated as normalizing terrorism in Basque society. It was shown through the character of Joxe Mari (a terrorist and son of Txato's best friend) who rose to become a member of ETA after participating in the street fighting movement (*kale borroka*). The series reflected the decadence of the organization, which coincided with the fate of the ETA protagonist. *Patria* discussed the destruction of coexistence, personalized in the characters of Miren and Bittori, mothers of two families who were once close, and whose friendship was torn apart by terrorism: one housed an ETA member, the other his victim. Bittori, after her husband was murdered, was singled out, persecuted, and abandoned by the people in her village and by her best friend. The story presented a range of victims that resulted from the conflict: the widow, the orphans, the terrorists' families, and those who lived with terrorism in their daily lives. It depicted a society of victims, terrorists, and silent people, those who did not object to ETA's actions. This melting pot illustrates the ostracism reported by victims, who had little emotional, social, and political support.

Patria also showed the workings of ETA. For example, the riots of the youths of the *kale borroka*; the training of novice ETA members; the tasks involving informing and spying on targets carried out by the so-called *patxis* (sympathizers of the separatist left); the extortion of businessmen; the tributes to ETA members in the streets and town halls; and the support of the Basque Catholic Church. It also showed the tortures suffered by terrorist prisoners at the hands of

the State security forces; the prison policy of dispersal promoted by the government in order to provoke dissidence among ETA inmates and encourage their reintegration into society, which undermined the morale and economic resources of their families and allowed them to be perceived as victims of the State. Special importance was attached to the idea of restorative meetings in prison, held between victims and perpetrators on a voluntary basis.

Lagun y la resistencia frente a ETA focused on the San Sebastian bookshop of that name founded in 1968 by Ignacio Latierro and the couple José Ramón Rekalde and María Teresa Castells. *Lagun* (meaning “friend” in Basque) was considered a cultural symbol, an example of the democratic struggle against totalitarianism and of social mobilization against terrorism because it was attacked on many occasions (shop windows and furniture were smashed, it was graffitied, had books burned, was set on fire) both by the extreme right during Franco’s regime and by ETA sympathizers in the democratic period. Its owners suffered coercion, threats, and attacks, but kept the bookshop open until its final closure for business reasons on 31 August 2023.

While the story of *Lagun* was narrated, the plot reviews events when civil society was confronted with terrorism. To reinforce the documentary nature of the production, statements by protagonists and activists were combined with archive footage. The first citizens’ rally against ETA violence was held after the attack on José María Portell (1978), the first journalist murdered by the organization, who “had internalized the idea of acting as a bridge between ETA and the government due to his ‘solid’ contacts between the organization and the government” (Landaburu, 2008). Demonstrators walked silently through the streets of Portugalete holding a banner which read: “We are fed up with violence and killings. *Askatasuna eta bakea*” (freedom and peace). The beginning of the *Gesto por la paz* movement (1985) showed the small but important actions carried out by groups of people who gathered for 15 minutes at different points in Bilbao holding up posters that claimed: “*Pakea zergaitik ez. Egin bat*” (Why not peace? Join in). An initiative “*Dilo con tu silencio*” (Say it with your silence) by the *Asociación por la Paz de Euskal Herria* (Association for Peace in the Basque Country), created by Cristina Cuesta (1986), the daughter of a Telefónica director who was murdered by ETA, was also included. Their protests involved taking to the streets the day after an attack or kidnapping and gathering silently around a banner which read: “*Denon artean*” (approximately meaning “all of us together”).

These citizens’ initiatives and other ETA actions—the kidnapping of José María Aldaya and the murder of Gregorio Ordóñez—intersected with the various attacks on the bookshop. The night-time attack in which the violent attackers burned books, smashed the shop window and poured red and yellow paint all over the premises was particularly striking. Support for the victims was shown when, the next morning, hundreds of people came to the shop to buy the books—burnt, broken, smeared with paint and glass as they were—to help and show an unprecedented degree of solidarity with the bookshop. The attack on Francisco Tomás y Valiente in his office at the Universidad Autónoma de Madrid was linked to the initiative by *Manos Blancas*, in which young university students painted their hands white, and occupied the public space to shout for justice. Another assassination, that of Miguel Ángel Blanco (1997), mobilized thousands of people against terrorism in the Basque Country. Emblematic details were highlighted in *Lagun y la resistencia frente a ETA*. These included the time when *ertzainas* (Basque regional police officers) took off their protective masks, revealing their faces; when demonstrators took up a position in front of the headquarters of the main party supporting ETA (*HB*), causing this party’s sympathisers to ask, paradoxically, for the protection of the Basque police; and when women from Ermua put their hands behind their heads and shouted: “ETA, shoot, here’s the back of my head”. The last action that was presented was by the organization *iBasta Ya!*, which brought together people from diverse political persuasions to oppose terrorism, support victims and defend the Constitution. The documentary concluded with ETA announcing the cessation of its armed activity and images of demonstrators applauding, shaking hands, kissing behind a banner which read: “*Lortu dugu*” (We did it). Latierro, founder of *Lagun* and activist in the fight against terrorism, emphatically said: “It is not the police that have put an end to ETA, but the popular movement, and *Lagun* has contributed something, we have done our bit”.

El instante decisivo was a dramatized documentary that provided a detailed narrative of how prison officer José Antonio Ortega Lara was released and of the assassination of Miguel Ángel Blanco. Both events took place in 1997. It described the operation to free Ortega Lara after he had been held captive in a cell for 532 days in subhuman conditions. This segment provided previously unseen footage showing how the release was carried out and the tense atmosphere surrounding the operation. It relied on key witness statements, such as the judge in charge of the investigation, Baltasar Garzón, the then *vicelehendakari* (vice-president of the Basque government), Ramón Jáuregui, and the then Minister of Internal Affairs of Spain, Jaime Mayor Oreja. It then focused on the kidnapping and murder of Miguel Ángel Blanco and used the device of a countdown to describe how ETA locked horns with the government during the 48 hours that the organization's ultimatum lasted. It recounted the police operation, the position of Aznar's government and the impressions of the Blanco family during the process, but, above all, it highlighted the citizens' movement in the municipality of Ermua, which demanded the release of its councilor, and the general anguish of Basque society in the wake of the event. Media images and eyewitness accounts were used to re-enact the events. The documentary highlighted the turning point that this assassination represented in the subsequent development of ETA. The epilogue underlined that the event united society with politicians and everyone against the terrorists, as shown by the images of the demonstrations in Bilbao, San Sebastian and Ermua.

ETA, el final del silencio used a different approach. It recalled the past from a personal point of view, interweaving memory with facts and testimonies. The series dealt with issues that explained the conflict from multiple perspectives, sometimes mediated by the victims and sometimes by other protagonists, such as journalists, police officers or politicians. Thus, it looked into topics such as extortion, forgiveness and the future, among others. The following events were also highlighted: the assassination of Miguel Ángel Blanco, the murder of Juan María Jáuregui, and the Hipercor bombing.

It started by building *Zubiak*⁶ (bridges in Basque) between Maixabel Lasa, widow of Juan María Jáuregui, civil governor of Guipúzcoa murdered by ETA (2000), and Ibon Etxezarreta, a convicted ETA member who in the unit that took part in her husband's murder. In the first hour we were told who Jáuregui was: a multifaceted man, who used to be a member of the terrorist organization when it was first created, he was a prisoner during Franco's regime and a member of the Spanish Communist party (PCE). The documentary recounts that he had used his political position to promote the investigation of the *Lasa and Zabala case*⁷. His widow worked for peaceful coexistence in the Basque Country and invited the ETA member to lunch 19 years after Jáuregui's assassination. This is the backdrop of a moving conversation she had with him in which reflections and subtexts appeared referring to repentance, forgiveness and the transfer of prisoners to locations closer to their families.

Another issue addressed in the docuseries was extortion, as the revolutionary tax was the group's main source of funding. ETA murdered more than 40 businesspeople, kidnapped 20, and an estimated 100,000 people were extorted. The testimony given by Miguel Lazpiur, a businessman who refused to pay, and that of another, Jesús Mari Korta, who paid ETA after seeing other businesspeople die, were used as examples. The idea was to present the viewer with the dilemma of giving in to blackmail and financing terrorism or refusing to do it and becoming a target of the organization.

This was a striking and original approach, as it focused on younger victims, on what ETA meant for the second generation and for those indirectly affected by terrorism. With this aim in mind, a meal was held in a society, a symbol of brotherhood in the Basque Country. In order to encourage dialogue, it puts to the test the bridges built between the children of those killed

⁶ *Zubiak* is a documentary film directed by Jon Sistiaga and Alfonso Cortés-Cavanillas that was presented in the "Made in Spain" section of the 67th San Sebastian International Film Festival and served as the seed for the complete documentary series.

⁷ About this case, review: <https://www.irishtimes.com/news/old-bones-reveal-dark-side-1.262790>

by ETA, and of victims of the GAL and militants. They all explained how ETA had determined their future and that of their families.

One episode was also dedicated to Miguel Ángel Blanco, by reconstructing the 48 hours between his kidnapping and murder. The event is considered a key moment in the history of Spain and to illustrate this, they showed that Spanish people were able to remember where they were or what they were doing on that day. Another perspective in the docuseries was shown through the mistakes that ETA made along the way and what they meant for the future of the organization. The first killing (that of Pardines), the first civilian victim (Fermín Monasterio), and the first victim in democracy (Javier Ybarra) were mentioned. Reference was also made to the elimination of the group's dissidents (such as the ETA members Pertur and Yoyes); to police operations (such as Bidart, Sokoa and Santuario); and ETA's bloodiest actions (the Hipercor bombing); - and possibly the most significant, the murder of Gregorio Ordóñez. While the GAL case was also analyzed, it was not extensively developed. However, it did at least appear as the other side of the coin of the fight against terrorism, alluding to state terrorism.

El desafío: ETA followed the book *Historia de un desafío: cinco décadas de lucha sin cuartel de la Guardia Civil contra ETA*, written by the *Guardias Civiles* Manuel Sánchez Corbí and Manuela Simón. It was structured around ETA's chronological stages and the point of view is that of the *Guardia Civil* and its fight against terrorism. Police operations are therefore narrated. All are accompanied by the testimonies of ETA victims, especially those linked to the *Guardia Civil*. The story was illustrated by various media materials (newspapers, radio broadcasts, television footage) and unpublished material provided by this military police corps.

The episodes covered the ETA's activities exhaustively: Pardines; *Operación Ogro*, which ended the life of President Luis Carrero Blanco; the kidnappings of Ortega Lara, the person held by ETA for the longest time (532 days living in a cell), and Emiliano Revilla; the assassination of Miguel Ángel Blanco and the spirit of Ermua; the period in which ETA perpetrated car bombings; the attacks against the barracks in Zaragoza and Vic; the bombing of the Hipercor shopping mall; the thwarted attacks on the journalist Gorka Landaburu and the politician José María Aznar; and the assassinations of the politicians Gregorio Ordóñez, Ernest Lluch, Fernando Buesa, José Luis López de Lacalle and Isaías Carrasco.

The series elaborated on some new ideas, such as the collaboration with the French police; ETA's contacts with the IRA; and the informants of and infiltrators in the organization. Police operations against ETA leaders, ETA members or units; internal dissent (Pertur, Yoyes); and negotiations and truces between ETA and the government were explained in detail. The documentary did, however, tiptoe over the questionable actions of the Guardia Civil, such as the dirty war by the GAL, the responsibility of General Enrique Rodríguez Galindo in the *Lasa and Zabala case*, and the events of Foz de Lumbier.

4.2. Victims to the fore

The analysis of the people who appear in the programs reveals recurrent names. Some of them on account of their political positions, such as Jaime Mayor Oreja, Carlos Totorika (who was the socialist mayor of Ermua during the kidnapping and murder of Miguel Ángel Blanco), etc.; others for being journalists, such as Iñaki Gabilondo, José Antonio Zarzalejos; and others for belonging to social movements, such as the founders of *Gesto por la paz* and *Denon artean*.

The docuseries featured some consistent participants. Of the almost 200 people who appeared in both productions (163 participated in *El desafío* and 33 in *ETA, el final del silencio*), eight were in both, which represented 24.2% of overlap. In both cases, the interviewees talked about radical victims (those who had been murdered) and about surviving victims. The most popular due to media exposure were Gorka Landaburu and Irene Villa, but other victims less known to the public were also featured, such as Roberto Manrique, José Vargas and Rosa María Peláez, who were injured in the Hipercor bombing. Direct victims also appeared, those whom the

organization intended to attack, including Javier Rupérez, a diplomat, Ignacio Latierro, a bookseller, and Miguel Lazpiur, a businessman. Secondary victims were a constant presence, especially relatives of victims, such as Maixabel Laxa and Pili Zabala, sister of Joxi Zabala, kidnapped and murdered by the GAL. The presence of the latter encompasses victims of the dirty war. There were also testimonies of incidental or collateral victims, such as those injured in the Hipercor attack and Alberto Muñagorri, who suffered the amputation of a leg when he kicked a garbage bag that contained a bomb. There was also a significant large contingent of journalists who were threatened by ETA, such as Gorka Landaburu, Iñaki Gabilondo, José María Calleja and José Luis López de la Calle. The latter also appeared as a radical victim, as he was assassinated. Both docuseries featured named/targeted victims and neutral victims; the latter were called “collateral damage” by ETA, and in this way they were brought to the fore after having been unrecognized for years. The greatest repetition was found in testimonies by politicians.⁸ *El desafío*: ETA was the most pluralistic, because it collected the largest number of viewpoints from different spheres: politics, security forces, the media, victims and, to a lesser extent, former ETA militants. The uniformity was more striking among actual participants, as victims appeared in both productions.

The statements by perpetrators with varying degrees of involvement in the organization were prominently featured, including some of ETA’s founders or those who were there in the early years, such as Gorka Landaburu, Lourdes Azurmendi and Ibon Etxezarreta (who denounced police violence).

Some of the children of victims of the ETA conflict participated in *ETA, el final del silencio*. Sandra, the daughter of socialist councilor Isaías Carrasco, said: “Each story is different, but we are united by the same pain. None of us deserved to suffer, but it was our turn”. Peru, son of Kepa del Hoyo, an ETA member who died in prison in Badajoz, says that society does not accept that he is a victim, to which Josu, son of Froilán Elespe, the murdered PSE deputy mayor, replied: “With all due respect, I would draw a line between those who are victims of terrorism and those who have suffered the consequences of terrorism”. Thus, Josu warned Peru that there can be no comparison, an argument that is commonly found in the discourse of the Basque radical separatist left. In this regard, Etxebarria introduced the concept of “asymmetrical footprint” to indicate that “violence creates such an asymmetry that overcoming it cannot be resolved through a new symmetry, but through an equal form of citizenship that considers a decisive asymmetrical footprint” (2012, p. 221).

The *Lagun* bookshop was also a surviving victim of attacks. Some direct victims were featured, such as Latierro, Landaburu, Calleja and Roberto Lertxundi, and indirect victims (relatives), including Luis Castell, Txomin Alkorta and Consuelo Ordóñez who, in addition, was a double victim, as she was also a target of the organization due to her active fight against ETA after the assassination of her brother. Other victims singled out for their fight against the group were Fernando Aramburu, Cristina Cuesta, Peio Aspiazu and Fernando Sabater.

El instante decisivo brought together the testimonies of Baltasar Garzón, Juan María Atutxa, Jaime Mayor Oreja and Ramón Jáuregui, among others. Because of their work, they were named/targeted victims, and even suffered attacks, so they are also surviving victims. There were also some secondary victims, such as Nerea Garrido, Miguel Ángel Blanco’s cousin.

Patria focused on the victims and included characters that fell into almost all categories, such as Bittori and his children. This type of victim establishes a dichotomy between those who had overcome the feeling of victimization, survivors, and those who had not (like Bittori, who needs Joxe Mari to ask for forgiveness). Fictional works contained a representation of direct victims, such as Txato; and indirect victims, such as his relatives. All the victims shown were intended (Txato for economic reasons) and there were no collateral victims. Paradoxically, Joxe Mari went from being a perpetrator to being a victim when he was arrested and tortured.

⁸ Jesús Eguiguren, Ignacio Latierro, Margarita Robles, Juan María Atutxa, Jaime Mayor Oreja, Imanol Rodríguez, Teo Uriarte, Lourdes Auzmendi, María San Gil and Sandra Carrasco.

In *La línea invisible*, Pardines and Melitón Manzanos were both radical and direct victims. The difference was that Manzanos was also an intended victim, whereas Pardines was an incidental victim and was targeted because he was a Guardia Civil. Secondary victims (relatives of both victims) were also featured, but their views were not reflected. Once again, the terrorist Etxebarrieta shifted from being a perpetrator to being a victim when he was shot, according to this classification.

The quantitative analysis categorizing all victims in the different⁹ productions showed that there were no radical victims in the nonfiction formats, although they were constantly alluded to. In fiction, on the other hand, there were frequent victims in this category (Table 1). Moreover, the surviving victims were at the center of the story more than ten years after the cessation of violence. The best-known victims, usually politicians, received the most attention. However, in the new narratives, the collateral victims became more prominent after years of being overshadowed.

Table 1. Breakdown of the number of victims by television program

		Category	First		Second		Third			Fourth	
			Radical	Surviving	Direct or primary	Indirect or secondary	Intended		Collateral	Innocent	Perpetrat or victim
							Ideologically-based target	Neutral			
		Title									
Format	Documentary	El instante decisivo		6	7	5	7			7	
		Lagun y la resistencia frente a ETA		12	12	4	7	5		12	
	Total		0	18	19	9	14	5	0	19	0
	Documentary series	El desafío: ETA		24	24	27	16	1	7	24	10
		Eta, el final del silencio		13	13	10	8	3	2	13	6
	Total		0	37	37	37	24	4	9	37	16
	Fiction series	La línea invisible	3		3		1	1	1	1	2
		Patria	1		1	3		1		1	1
	Total		4	0	4	3	1	2	1	2	3
	TOTAL		4	55	60	49	39	11	10	58	19

Source: Developed by the authors based on the categories proposed by Bilbao and Sáez De La Fuente (2015).

5. Discussion and conclusions

We agree with Reyes Mate that “the cessation of violence is not enough for everything to be forgotten” (Muñoz, 2016). For this reason, both a rigorous examination of and critical reflection on ETA are essential to understand what happened and to safeguard its memory in the present.

⁹ It should be noted that there were victims who may be in two subcategories, having suffered a terrorist action and also being a co-worker or relative of a radical victim of ETA.

One wonders why it has taken so long for television to deal with Basque terrorism so extensively and with such depth of reflection. Letting a sufficient amount of time elapse in order to take a step back and have enough perspective for this kind of analysis may have been necessary. Another influential factor seems to have been, at least in fiction, the difficulty in building stories based on the suffering caused, a complex undertaking that requires a mature, critical and unprejudiced society. While all of this is true, it is clear that in recent years television has become an essential medium for talking about terrorism, which has also had an impact on its analysis in the academic sphere (De Pablo, 2022; Jiménez, Castrillo and Labiano, 2022; Mota, Cañas, and Moreno, 2022).

These television programs are seen to contribute to public debate, as they provide different points of view and act as collective memory pills that help reconstruct a shared history: they make stories, people, events and ideas visible. Viewing the sample as a set leaves a sediment of learning, of reflection, of knowledge obtained through new re-readings of the past. The prominent place of the victims, the evocation of those missing and the detailed explanation of the highlights are also noticeable.

The analysis shows that these stories are interpretative in nature and seek to investigate ETA terrorism and its consequences. In some cases, such as *El instante decisivo*, commissioned by Atresmedia, the influence of the channel's editorial leaning can be clearly seen. The proselytizing approach of the *Guardia Civil* can also be recognized in *El desafío: ETA*. The rest, however, offer more personal views with a view to gaining a better understanding of what happened from different perspectives: the questioning of the beginning of the armed struggle in *La línea invisible*; the reflections by the victims in *ETA, el final del silencio*; the struggle of civil society in *Lagun y la resistencia frente a ETA*; and from the focus on social harmony proposed at the end of *Patria*.

It should be noted that some events took precedence over others in these productions. The most crucially represented was the kidnapping and subsequent assassination of Miguel Ángel Blanco, due to its dramatic and emotional load, and also because it resulted in an aversion toward ETA in social and political spheres. Among the collective attacks, the Hipercor attack stood out for the huge number—and randomness—of the dead and wounded. Among the personal attacks, the most frequently mentioned were those on Gregorio Ordóñez, Juan Mari Jáuregui, Francisco Tomás y Valiente and José Luis López de Lacalle, for different reasons, although all of them had something to do with their activism against the terrorist group. Regarding the first two, it is necessary to highlight the activist role played later by Consuelo Ordoñez, spokesperson for groups of victims of terrorism, who had to leave the Basque Country and suffer the constant desecration of her brother's grave, and Maixabel Lasa, who was the director of the Office for Attention to Victims of Terrorism, as well as being one of the first to agree to participate in the meetings for restorative justice (which is why she met her husband's murderers) and inspired the film *Maixabel* (Iciar Bollain, 2021). As for the others, after the assassinations of Tomás y Valiente and Fernando Múgica, mass demonstrations were held throughout Spain, especially by university students, giving rise to the *Manos Blancas* movement. Following the murder of journalist José Luis López De Lacalle, a manifesto was created: *No nos callarán* (We will not be silenced), signed by the editors of the main Spanish newspapers.

In addition, these new programs brought back some of the traditionally forgotten victims in order to exalt them in the public eye. This was the case with José Antonio Pardines, who had a sustained presence even in fiction. However, the majority of ETA's 800 fatal victims (mainly civilians, bodyguards, military and police) were rarely mentioned in the stories, thus reproducing one of the complaints historically made by this group of victims: their invisibility in the Spanish public and social spheres.

Other events depicted were the extortion of businessmen and the revolutionary tax, the fight against terrorism and, within this, the arrests of ETA leaders, dissidence within the organization

and the dispersal of terrorist prisoners throughout the whole of Spain. Other more sensitive issues involving political, or police responsibilities received little attention. This was true for the *GAL case*, and included state terrorism and police abuses, in particular, the *Lasa and Zabala case*.

In addition to having overlapping approaches on these aspects, all of the television programs analyzed gave the victims a more prominent role in their narratives than previous productions had. These programs were a new milestone in television productions on ETA by prioritizing the victims over political, police or terrorist figures. In fact, one of the differences between these new stories and previous productions is that the latter departed from the mystique surrounding the stories centered on the so-called “good ETA”, that is, those young people who committed themselves to the struggle against Francoism or against the police abuses of that historical period, above all promoted by the radical separatist left. In the programs produced nine years after ETA's ceasefire, a space was created where the victims shared their experiences and their emotions. These were statements in which, more than the narration of the facts, it was the people's modes of enunciation that stood out. There was an emphasis on emotional impact in the narratives, which meant that the viewer could not remain indifferent.

This reorientation towards placing the victims at the center was the innovation here, since traditionally “more attention (not only from the media but also from social and political realms) has been paid to those who perpetrated violence than to those who suffered it” (Bilbao and Sáez De La Fuente, 2015, p. 67). This inertia brings into debate the problem of placing *memory*—as a life experience—and history—as a treatment of real events—on the same level. For this reason it is not only interesting to see what was narrated, but also to know who the narrators were, because it is on their discourses that the stories were built. The outcome was a narrative invested with memory based on the testimony of the victims, which was upheld and placed in the foreground of the story. This forms a more plural and heterogeneous diegesis, which helps us to understand how ETA affected Spanish society and, specifically, Basque society.

With regard to the individuals featured in the programs, it is worth dwelling on a few issues. For example, the docuseries and the documentaries portrayed similar—or even the same—political actors, which means that there was no symmetry between the victims of ETA, and that they did not all have the same social recognition, since “the victims belonging to the Armed Forces and the State security forces have suffered particular neglect and, conversely, priority attention has been given to those who held political posts” (Bilbao and Sáez De La Fuente, 2015, p. 67). The negligible presence of collateral victims is noticeable. The testimonies in this category are residual and do not result in them being a part of the television narrative; however, there are some exceptions, such as the case of Irene Villa who, due to her later career, is known by part of the older viewers.

Evidently, there are some victims who have more of a media presence than others because their attack had a greater impact on society, as was the case with Miguel Ángel Blanco, or because they were unique individuals who decided to take a different step in the fight against ETA, such as the aforementioned Consuelo Ordóñez and Maixela Lasa. There was a small presence of women being interviewed in these productions. This absence may have been due to the fact that they depict a society of the past, and at that time few women held positions of responsibility. It may also be due to the *machismo* with which the terrorist group and its struggle have always been portrayed (Alcedo Moneo, 1996, Reinales, 2001, De Pablo, 2017, Marcos Ramos, 2019). This, too, seems to be changing and, to a greater extent, has been reflected in fiction programs, which are increasingly inclined to represent female protagonists (Marcos Ramos, 2019). It may also be related to the fact that only the television documentaries (*Lagun y la resistencia frente a ETA* and *El instante decisivo*) were directed by women, while the rest of the productions analyzed were created (including the script, production and direction) by mostly male teams.

It is clear that, after the dissolution of ETA, new voices have become incorporated into the story, some of them unknown to the general public until now, and others that even belong to

the sphere of ETA itself. This gives a more comprehensive, multifaceted and varied discourse. It is considered useful to compose a balanced account, free of political allegiances and focused on the improvement of a society that is still calling for a new way to live together after years of unrest. The plurality of voices helps us to understand that each story is different, that they are all part of the process and that they deserve to be told and acknowledged. In addition to the diversity of the testimonies, in the account on ETA it is striking to note the new representations of the recent past. These narratives display a wide range of registers, including fiction, documentary, journalistic documentary, and persist in recalling the traces of the past.

Supporting Agencies

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