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Pieces that don't fit together? The awkward figure of perpetrator-victim in the narrative of terrorism

Abstract

We consider perpetrator-victims to be those persons who first violated the fundamental human rights of other individuals through the use of illegitimate violence and then suffered illegitimate violence themselves, resulting in their death. This is a complicated and controversial figure, more so in the context of the recent history of terrorism in Spain. The aim of this article is to distinguish and examine the different typologies of perpetrator-victims through illustrative examples of each of them. After analyzing such cases, we will try to answer two essential questions. On the one hand, how to fit the perpetrator-victimizer into a rigorously elaborated historical account of terrorism? On the other hand, what memory policy should be followed with this figure?

Keywords: Perpetrator-victim, victim, terrorism, Francoism, political violence

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1. Introduction¹

On 2 March 2022, the gymnasium of the Arles prison in France was the scene of a brutal attack. Franck Elong Abé, a Cameroonian serving a sentence for jihadism, beat up another inmate, Corsican Yvan Colonna, who was badly injured. The assailant claimed that his victim had blasphemed against Mohammed. As a result of his serious injuries, Colonna died on 21 March. The crime caused Corsica to be shaken by mass protests organised by the nationalist movement, which blamed Colonna's death on the French authorities. In Spain, certain media adopted such a discourse, presenting the deceased as a "pro-independence prisoner" and/or "political prisoner" (Naiz, 2022). However, Colonna had not been imprisoned for his nationalist ideology, but for a crime of bloodshed: in February 1998 he had shot dead the prefect of Corsica, Claude Érignac.

In Yvan Colonna, two apparently contradictory facets coincided: that of a terrorist and that of a victim of a terrorist. His case fits into the category of perpetrator-victims: those who first violated the fundamental human rights of other individuals through the use of unlawful violence (whether as perpetrators or masterminds) and then suffered unlawful violence themselves, resulting in their death². This is not an anomaly. Anyone who dives into contemporary history will find more or less similar examples. While any form of political violence generates its own perpetrator-victims, perhaps the area in which they are most clearly distinguished is that of terrorism. Between 1971 and 1972 the Japanese Unified Red Army, an extreme left-wing group, killed almost half of its own members (fourteen out of thirty) as unworthy subjects. In Northern Ireland, republican and loyalist terrorists killed each other and sometimes, when accused of treason, members of their own gangs. Something similar happened in the settling of scores between the various violent groups operating in Palestine, although the level of lethality of the current global 'civil war' between Al Qaeda and Daesh franchises has probably never been reached (González Calleja, 2013, Keefe, 2020, and Avilés, Azcona and Re, 2019)³.

Terrorists are not only victims of other terrorists. They can also be victims of police abuses (such as torture, for example) or illegitimate institutional violence. After the kidnapping and murder of eleven Israeli athletes and coaches during the 1972 Munich Olympics, the Mossad hunted down and killed the alleged perpetrators of the massacre, which had been claimed by Black September (Igualada, 2021: 57-65). This is just one example of the Israeli government's counter-terrorism operations that have gone beyond international legality, although it is not the only state entity to do so.

Although there are hardly any academic works on the subject, with the exception of Galo Bilbao (2009) in his pioneering work *Jano en medio del terror* (Janus in the midst of terror), victim-victims related to terrorism have also been present in Spain's recent history. However, it is a figure that is so uncomfortable that, with some exceptions, it has either been overlooked or has been the subject of a treatment that has resulted in

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2 For further definitions of the terms "victim" and "perpetrator", see: <https://glosariomt.com/>

3 On the dramatic consequences of jihadist violence in recent years, see the yearbooks published by the International Observatory for Terrorist Studies, all of which are available at: <https://observatoriorterrorismo.com/anuarios-del-terrorismo-yihadista/>

bitter controversies that have reached the present day. On the one hand, legislation has been passed at national level that allowed certain types of institutional tributes to be paid to Francoist perpetrators-victims of terrorism such as Melitón Manzanás, who was awarded the Royal Order of Civil Recognition to Victims of Terrorism posthumously in application of Law 32/1999. On the other hand, radical Basque nationalism has instrumentalised Manzanás himself and Luis Carrero Blanco to tarnish the image of the collective of victims of terrorism while glorifying (and continues to glorify⁴) the terrorist perpetrators of Euskadi ta Askatasuna (ETA) “fallen” in one way or another considered *gudaris* (warriors) martyrs (Casquete, 2009).

Although each perpetrator-victim has a different individual story, we can classify them into various typologies. In the first part of this article, without any intention of being exhaustive, illustrative examples of each of them will be presented as a taster. The analysis of the different cases will help us to establish some characteristics and problems common to the whole group.

In the second and final part of the work we will try to answer two essential analytical-reflexive questions. One is on how to fit the perpetrator-victim into a rigorous historical narrative⁵ and the other is on what memory policy should public institutions follow with such a thorny figure.

2. Perpetrator-victims in the context of terrorism in Spain

Perpetrators of the Franco regime-victims of terrorism

The first group of perpetrator-victims is made up of civil servants who held positions of high responsibility during the dictatorship and who were assassinated by a terrorist gang. Although they are not the only ones, there are two who stand out above the rest: Manzanás and Carrero Blanco.

Melitón Manzanás, head of the Social Investigation Brigade in San Sebastián, had a well-deserved reputation as a torturer. This was precisely what led the ETA leadership to choose him as the first target for a deadly attack, along with his Bilbao counterpart, José María Junquera. However, on 7 June 1968, Txabi Echebarrieta got ahead of the organisation's plans by assassinating 25-year-old Galician civil guard José Antonio Pardines. Finally, after reactivating Operation Sagarra, on 2 August 1968 a gunman assassinated Manzanás in his house in Irún. The attack was welcomed by an important sector of anti-Francoism, especially when it became clear that, as ETA had predicted, the regime reacted with clumsy, ferocious and often indiscriminate repression (Fernández and Domínguez, 2018).

The other Francoist perpetrator-victim of terrorism was Admiral Luis Carrero Blanco, a key player in maintaining Franco's anti-democratic system: he was the dictator's right-hand man and had a long career, first in the military and then in politics, culminating in the vice-presidency (1967-1973) and the presidency of the Government (1973). On 20 December 1973, a bomb exploded under Carrero Blanco's official vehicle, killing him, his driver, José Luis Pérez Moga, and one of his bodyguards, police inspector Juan Antonio Bueno

4 See data from Covite's Radicalisation Observatory at <https://covite.org/observatorio/>

5 On the term “story” see <https://glosariovt.com/glosario-vt/relato/>

Fernández. The attack also wounded seven people, two of them children. The death of Carrero Blanco was celebrated by a sector of the Spanish public and further increased the popularity that ETA had gained during the Burgos trial, which meant that some anti-Franco political parties took some time to openly take a stand against terrorist violence (Tusell, 1993, and Fernández and García, 2022).

2.1. *Perpetrators of terrorism-victims of the dictatorship*

The second class of perpetrator-victims that we identify are the terrorists who, during Franco's regime, were sentenced to death by courts martial, which did not usually comply with the minimum legal guarantees (Fernández and Briones, 2020). Despite the mobilisations to save their lives that were called throughout and outside Spain, four of them were executed during the last years of the regime. We are not referring here to the activist of the *Directorio Revolucionario Ibérico de Liberación* (Antonio Abad Donoso) nor to the two members of the anarchist *Defensa Interior* (Joaquín Delgado and Francisco Granado) executed in the early 1960s, since they had no homicides behind them, but to those who were sentenced for alleged blood crimes during the convulsive late Francoist period (Fernández, 2021).

On 2 March 1974 Salvador Puig Antich, a former member of the Iberian Liberation Movement (MIL), was arrested in Barcelona after being convicted of the murder of sub-inspector Francisco Anguas Barragán in September of the previous year. On 27 September 1975, three members of the *Frente Revolucionario Antifascista y Patriota* (FRAP) were shot in Hoyo de Manzanares: José Humberto Baena (sentenced to death for the murder of policeman Lucio Rodríguez Martín), José Luis Sánchez Bravo and Ramón García Sanz (convicted of the murder of Guardia Civil lieutenant Antonio Pose Rodríguez). At the same time, members of ETA politico-military (ETApm) Ángel Otaegi (convicted of the murder of sergeant in the Civil Guard Gregorio Posadas Zurrón) and Juan Paredes Manot (Txiki) (convicted of the murder of sergeant in the Armed Police Ovidio Díaz López) were executed. All of them were members of terrorist gangs, but there was only solid evidence that some of them were guilty of the blood crimes for which they had been sentenced. Moreover, Franco's military justice system lacked legitimacy and the minimum guarantees (Casanellas, 2014, and Fernández, 2019 and 2021).

2.2. *Perpetrators of terrorism-victims of illegitimate police violence*

Inflicting pain on suspects arrested to obtain information or a confession was a common police practice during Franco's regime, but it did not suddenly disappear on 20 November 1975. Like other inertia inherited from the dictatorship, it was difficult for the rule of law to put an end to this phenomenon. Thus, during the Transition (and beyond), an indeterminate number of detained terrorists were subjected to brutality and ill-treatment by certain agents of the State Security Forces and Corps (FCSE) (Casanellas, 2014, Baby, 2018, and Ballester, 2022).

One of the most tragic cases was that of ETA military member (ETAm) Joseba Arregi Izagirre, who died in February 1981 as a result of the torture to which he had been subjected by some police officers in the General Directorate of Security in Madrid (El País, 1981). He is therefore a terrorist perpetrator-victim of illegitimate police violence.

2.3. *Perpetrators of terrorism-victims of vigilante terrorism*

Vigilante terrorism⁶ sought to wrest the monopoly of force from the state and substitute the security forces in the fight against terrorism, bypassing legal channels, which it believed were too limited for effective policing. Moreover, vigilante violence on French soil sought to deprive ETA of its “sanctuary”.

From 1975 until the consolidation of democracy, camouflaging itself with acronyms of convenience (such as the Triple A or the Basque-Spanish Battalion, BVE), vigilante terrorism caused between 25 and 30 deaths. And from 1983 to 1987, attacks by the Anti-Terrorist Liberation Groups (GAL), the quintessential expression of vigilante terrorism in Spain, took the lives of 27 people, to which should be added another two deaths in 1989, when these acronyms had already disappeared (López Romo, 2015).

Although its aim was to fight terrorists with their own weapons, vigilante terrorism killed, by mistake or for other reasons, many citizens who were not members of clandestine organisations. Thus, for example, Raúl López Romo (2015) has calculated that 11 of the 27 fatalities of the GAL (40% of the total) did not belong to ETA. Among these 11 fatalities are some members of the political wing of the terrorist group⁷.

In other cases, the victims of vigilante terrorism were terrorists. In December 1978, a pipe bomb killed José Miguel Beñaran (Argala), the undisputed leader of military ETA, and therefore ultimately responsible for the crimes that this organisation had committed since its birth at the end of 1974. Someone claimed responsibility for the crime in the name of the BVE (Casals, 2020), although it seems that the perpetrators were certain military personnel who had decided to avenge the death of Carrero Blanco, since Argala had been one of the material authors of the assassination (Rubio, 2003). The BVE acronym was used again in June 1979 after the assassination in Paris of two members of the *Grupos de Resistencia Antifascista Primero de Octubre* (GRAPO), Francisco Javier Martín and Aurelio Fernández (Castro, 2000).

The first fatal victims of the GAL, a plot in which the leadership of the Ministry of the Interior was involved, were ETA members José Antonio Lasa and José Ignacio Zabala, who were kidnapped, tortured, murdered, and buried in October 1983 (López Romo, 2015). Subsequently, more members of the gang were subjected to vigilante attacks. In December 1983, GAL terrorists killed Juan Ramón Oñederra (*Kattu*) in Bayonne and wounded ETA leader Miguel Goicoechea (*Txapela*), who died the following month. In February 1984 vigilante terrorism caused more casualties for ETA. First, Bixente Perurena and Ángel Gurmindio. On

6 For more information on this term, see: <https://glosariovt.com/glosario-vt/terrorismo-parapolicial/>

7 Unless a rigorous investigation has been carried out to prove their status as collaborators with the terrorists, we do not include in the category of perpetrator-victims the victims of vigilante terrorism who were members of the political wing of the GRAPO, such as the PCE (r), or of ETA, such as Herri Batasuna (HB).

the 25th of the same month, Eugenio Gutiérrez Salazar (*Tiger*) was killed by a sniper.

2.4 Perpetrators of terrorism-victims of their own terrorism

Ferdinand Lassalle wrote to Karl Marx: ‘Internal struggle gives the party strength and vitality; the greatest proof of a party’s weakness is amorphousness and the absence of clear-cut boundaries; the party strengthens itself by purging itself’ (Lenin, 2010). Although without reaching the suicidal level of the Unified Red Army, to which reference has already been made in the introduction, ETA has also purged some of its aspirants, members, and former members.

In November 1978, the gang assassinated former ETA member Joaquín Azaola Martínez (*Jokin*), who four years earlier had foiled a plan to kidnap the then Prince Juan Carlos de Borbón and his family on the Côte d’Azur. The subsequent communiqué made clear the exemplary purpose of that reprisal: “Let us hope that the execution of Jokin will serve as an example and a warning to those who are tempted to follow his path in the belief that ETA has no means of doing justice” (De Otálora, 2018) .

In June 1980, three months after his release from prison, a gunman shot former ETA member Tomás Sulibarria Goitia (*Tomi*) in the back of the head. The organisation accused him of having been an “infiltrator” (Alonso, Domínguez and García, 2010, and Fernández Soldevilla, 2016).

From the perspective of the self-styled “*izquierda abertzale*”, there were many forms of treason. José Luis Oliva Hernández was one of the members of ETA’s *Orbaiceta* commando, which had successfully robbed a bank. His comrades considered him guilty of having spent part of the loot on drugs. He was sentenced to death, a sentence carried out by the terrorists in January 1981. However, as at that time the gang was promoting a campaign of assassinations of alleged drug traffickers, they preferred not to risk their image and claimed that Oliva had been “executed for infiltration” (Alonso, Domínguez and García, 2010, and García, 2020).

Two are the best-known cases of ETA military ETA perpetrator-victims. Mikel Solaun was a former ETA member who had returned to Spain after the 1977 amnesty. Seven years later, in February 1984, when he had rebuilt his life, he was murdered for avoiding a massacre: he had indicated to the Guardia Civil the location of a bomb that the gang had forced him to hide in a barracks that his company had built and which was about to be inaugurated (Alonso, Domínguez and García, 2010, and Zuzen, no. 41, 01/1985).

Dolores González Katarain (*Yoyes*) was Argala’s right-hand woman and the first woman to reach a position in the leadership of ETAm, an organisation whose internal functioning was male-dominated (Fernández Soldevilla, 2021). After the assassination of her mentor in 1978, she disassociated herself from the terrorist group and emigrated to Mexico, where she studied philosophy and sociology, worked, and raised a family. In 1985 she returned to Spain, something which was publicised in the press, although she refused to make any statements. She was going to rebuild her life. The following year she enrolled in doctoral courses in philosophy at the University of the Basque Country. It was not long before threatening graffiti appeared accusing *Yoyes* of being a “traitor” and a “snitch” (González, 1987).

In September 1986, Dolores González was walking with her three-year-old son and another young child in Ordizia, her home town, which was holding a fair. In the Avenida del Gudari, next to some tractors, they were approached by Antonio López Ruiz (Kubati). “Are you Yoyes?” he asked. She said yes. “Do you know who I am?” “No”, was Dolores González’s reply. “I’m from ETA and I’ve come to execute you,” Kubati announced before shooting her twice, wounding her in the leg and chest. Once on the ground, the gunman finished Yoyes off with a shot to the head. She was 32 years old. She was accused of treason, although she had done nothing different from hundreds of other *exetarras* without pending cases who had returned to Spain since 1977 (Alonso, Domínguez and García, 2010, and Fernández Soldevilla, 2021).

2.5 Perpetrators of terrorism: victims of their own terrorism

In the summer of 1975 ETApM was practically dismantled. The death of the dictator in November of the same year and the foreseeable democratisation brought about a new scenario. The ideological leader of the *polimilis*, Eduardo Moreno Bergaretxe (*Pertur*), promoted the renewal of the radical Basque nationalism linked to ETA. On the one hand, he promoted mass organisations that were to be joined by a Bolshevik-style party. In order to achieve its ultimate goals, an independent and classless Euskadi, it should act as the leading vanguard of the entire “nationalist left” in order to instrumentalise “bourgeois democracy” by means of an alliance with the extreme left. On the other hand, he proposed that ETApM should become a rear-guard subordinate to the new political force (Alonso, Domínguez and García, 2010, and Fernández Soldevilla, 2013).

This turn of events provoked the most militaristic sector of the organisation, the *Berezis*, who branded *Pertur* a “liquidationist” traitor. At the end of April 1976 they had kidnapped him on the grounds that *Pertur* had failed to comply with certain security measures. They intended to put him on trial and apply the sentence of their own choosing. Only the determined intervention of the rest of the *Polimilis* prevented them from doing so. In a letter from *Pertur* to his family, one could read: “These beasts have created such a climate in the organisation that they have transformed ETA in the northern Basque Country, not into a collective of revolutionaries, but into a police state where everyone suspects their neighbour and the neighbour suspects the other” (Fernández Soldevilla, 2013).

Pertur was last seen on 23 July 1976 in the French Basque Country. According to an eyewitness, that morning, in Saint-Jean-de-Luz, he got into a car with Francisco Mujika Garmendia (*Pakito*) and Miguel Ángel Apalategi (*Apala*), precisely the most prominent leaders of the *Berezis*. Both declared that they had met *Pertur* by chance and that he had asked them to take him to a point near the border with Spain, where he had a mysterious appointment. They allegedly left him there. He was never heard from again (Fernández Soldevilla, 2013).

José Miguel Etxeberria Álvarez (*Naparra* or *Bakunin*), a prominent leader of the *Comandos Autónomos Anticapitalistas*, had a long career that had taken him through the Trotskyist *Liga Comunista Revolucionaria* (LCR), ETApM and ETAm. Disagreements between the authoritarian leadership of the organisation and Etxeberria’s libertarian ideas led him to leave the *milis* and join the *autonomos* at the end of 1978. In 1980,

Naparra, who was looking for new sources of supply, contacted an international arms dealer who was already supplying ETA. To resolve this conflict of interests, the *milis* summoned Etxeberria on 11 June 1980. One of his colleagues took him to the meeting place, Saint-Jean-de-Luz (French Basque Country). He was never seen again. The self-employed denounced that the military branch of ETA had repeated with *Naparra* what it had already done with *Pertur* (Zirikatu, 1999). The possible link was obvious: two of those suspected of having murdered Eduardo Moreno Bergaretxe were Francisco Mujika Garmendia (*Pakito*) and Miguel Ángel Apalategi (*Apala*), former *Berezis* who had joined ETA.

Despite the accusations of their colleagues, there is no conclusive evidence as to what the purpose of these ETAp and CAA leaders was. Nor can we rule out the possibility that *Pertur* and/or *Naparra* were victims of vigilante terrorism or some other type of violence.

3. How to deal with the figure of the perpetrator-victim?

Perpetrator-victims make up the most problematic and controversial category of those that can be found in the historical account of terrorism (Pablo et alii, 2012). They represent an enormous challenge at the academic, memorial, institutional and ethical levels that must be faced seriously, as Galo Bilbao (2009) had done at the moral level.

What to do with them? Let us start with the simplest: the consensus that the right to life is a universal human right that has no exceptions. From this perspective, it is clear that, regardless of their background, whether they had been torturers, high-ranking members of the dictatorship or terrorists, no one had the right to “judge”, “sentence” and murder the people we have mentioned in these pages.

In that sense, it would be a mistake to distinguish between one perpetrator-victim and another depending on what ranks they belonged to or who killed them. Whether they kill in the name of Allah, revolution, reaction, race or homeland, the essence of all terrorist organisations is the same. The same applies to the acts of violence resulting from Franco's dictatorship. Absolutely none of them were legitimate.

The second thing is to establish that in order to classify a victim as a perpetrator-victim, the justifications put forward by Francoist institutions, terrorists or their apologists must never be uncritically assumed. On the contrary, before taking such a transcendental step, it is essential to carry out serious and academic research beforehand, carried out by historians or other social scientists on the basis of verified documentary sources. Only in this way, based on the most scrupulous rigour, will we be able to produce a solid, honest, and truthful account.

Does the fact that a human being suffers a violent death erase - if any - the shadows of his or her past? Do these shadows exclude him or her from being recognised as a victim? From the historian's point of view, the answer to both questions is in the negative. When there is solid evidence that an individual has the dual status of perpetrator and victim, the researcher must record both, assuming the *chiaroscuro* of the character, the blurred boundaries between the different categories and the complex historical conjuncture.

If it does, we do not have the right to erase the black pages of an individual's past. It would be a lie and, ultimately, this distortion could lead to their being transformed into martyrs for a political cause, whatever it may be, and thus into the seeds of new violence. This is precisely what radical Basque nationalism has done with its "fallen" *gudaris*, such as *Txiki* and *Argala*, to name but two, whom it has used as symbolic pieces to construct a political religion that Jesús Casquete (2009) has called *gudarismo*.

What to do with the politics of memory? As Reyes Mate (2013) has argued, each and every one of the victims must be recognised. And this maxim includes the perpetrator-victims. It also seems appropriate to carry out this work with an explicit mention of the acts of violence in which these people lost their lives, stating the facts as they happened and without ignoring their problematic past. This can be done, for example, on social networks, in teaching units or in exhibitions (López Romo, 2022).

However, certain limits must be set. Given that it is completely impossible to separate the two facets that they combine, institutions should avoid commemorative monuments, medals or acts in honour of the perpetrator-victims (as well as the victimizers themselves). Paying homage to Manzanos or Carrero can be interpreted as a glorification of the Franco dictatorship. Paying homage to *Argala* or *Txapela* can be interpreted as a glorification of ETA. Paying tribute to Francisco Javier Martín and Aurelio Fernández can be interpreted as a glorification of the GRAPO. Paying tribute to José Humberto Baena could be interpreted as glorifying the FRAP. And honouring the perpetrator-victims not only means hiding the shadows of these characters and revictimizing their victims, but also an exercise in anti-democratic pedagogy, especially harmful for young audiences.

However, there are some questions that raise doubts that are difficult to resolve. First, would it be appropriate to distinguish between personal and corporate responsibility, that is, between those who had specific blood crimes and those who belonged to the leadership of a dictatorship or a terrorist organisation? The second prevention is related to individuals who were killed not when they were active perpetrators, but when they had already left that vital stage behind, either because they had been released from prison after serving time for the crimes they had committed or because they had benefited from the Amnesty Law of October 1977, which annulled the crime itself, extinguishing all responsibility (Parra, 2021, and Rivera, 2021). Or should they be required not only to have served their sentence or been granted amnesty, but also to have expressed repentance? Finally, is it defensible that, as is now the case, certain terrorists who have been killed in vigilante attacks should be denied the financial compensation due to the victims of terrorism? These questions raise an interesting debate that is far from exhausted.

4. Conclusions

We will return to the two questions with which this paper opened. One on how to fit the perpetrator-victim into a rigorous historical account, and the second on what memory policy should public institutions follow with such a thorny figure.

We must remember the perpetrator-victims, but we must remember everything. We can neither hide their uncomfortable presence nor deny either of the two apparently contradictory faces they present. Like Janus, both form an essential part of such historical figures, who in turn occupy a modest but undeniable place in the narrative of terrorism.

As for the policy of memory, I believe that institutions should recognise the perpetrator-victims, but memorials, medals or acts of homage to those who in life were high-ranking officials of the Franco dictatorship or members of a terrorist gang should be avoided. Such initiatives could lead to the re-victimisation of their victims, as well as sending an undemocratic and dangerous message to new generations: that the violence they perpetrated or encouraged during their lifetime was okay.

Finally, it should be stressed that perpetrator-victims are only a tiny minority of cases. They are by no means representative of the 1,453 fatal victims of terrorism currently recognised by the Ministry of the Interior of Spain.

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