

# The reception of the novel *Patria* and the memory of terrorism in Spain: coverage, treatment, and assessment in the national press and in the regional Basque press

## *La recepción de la novela Patria y la memoria del terrorismo en España: cobertura, tratamiento y valoración en la prensa nacional y regional vasca*

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**Roncesvalles Labiano Juangarcía.** She holds a PhD from the University of Navarra with a thesis on the representation of *ETA* victims. She teaches Oral and Written Expression, Genres and editing of newspapers and magazines and Authors' Genres in the Faculty of Communication at the University of Navarra (UNAV). She is co-author of the book *Relatos de plomo. Historia del terrorismo en Navarra. La sociedad contra ETA* and several articles and book chapters on *ETA* terrorism and its cultural representation.

University of Navarra, Spain

rlabianoj@unav.es

ORCID: 0000-0002-4649-884X



**Victoria Hernández Ruiz.** Extraordinary Doctorate Award in Humanities, Master's Degree in Teaching and Master's Degree in Humanities. She studied German Philology. She coordinates the Degree in Humanities at the Universidad Francisco de Vitoria where she teaches Style, Ancient and Medieval Literature and Modern Literature, as well as Great Books in the Master's Degree in Humanities. She belongs to the Research Group "Imagination and possible worlds" from which she develops the Research Project *Mundos posibles poéticos: fundamentos filosóficos, teoría y prácticas hermenéuticas*, of the call 2022 in which this publication is framed.

University Francisco de Vitoria, Spain

victoria.hernandez@ufv.es

ORCID: 0000-0002-9562-0952



**Íñigo Urquía Uriaguereca.** Master's Degree in Humanities. Degree in Advertising and Public Relations. Lecturer in Introduction to University Studies and Audiovisual Creativity in the Faculty of Communication at the Francisco de Vitoria University. PhD student in the Advertising and Audiovisual Communication programme at the Complutense University of Madrid. He belongs to the Research Group "Imagination and Possible Worlds" from which he develops the Research Project *Mundos posibles poéticos: fundamentos filosóficos, teoría y prácticas hermenéuticas*, of the 2022 call.

University Francisco de Vitoria, Spain

i.urquia@ufv.es

ORCID: 0000-0002-0313-2709

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### Abstract:

Fernando Aramburu's novel *Patria* (*Homeland* in English) (2016), about terrorism in the Basque Country, has transcended fiction and has entered public opinion, becoming part of the conversation on current Spanish political and social affairs. Based on studies that relate journalism and memory, our aim is to offer a map of the reception of the novel in the national and regional Basque press, to examine to what extent there is a relationship between the coverage, treatment and assessment in the press and the territorial and ideological scope of the newspapers, in order to observe the contribution of the press to the collective memory of terrorism in Spain. The study was carried out on 167 journalistic pieces by means of a content analysis.

### Keywords:

*Patria*; reception; terrorism; memory; press.

### Resumen:

La novela *Patria*, de Fernando Aramburu (2016), sobre el terrorismo en el País Vasco, ha trascendido la ficción y se ha introducido en la opinión pública, entreverándose en la conversación sobre la actualidad política y social española. Partiendo de los estudios que relacionan periodismo y memoria, nuestro objetivo es ofrecer un mapa de la recepción de la novela en la prensa nacional y regional vasca, examinar en qué medida hay relación entre la cobertura, tratamiento y valoración en prensa y el ámbito territorial e ideológico de las cabeceras, para, de ese modo, observar la contribución de la prensa a la memoria colectiva sobre el terrorismo en España. El estudio se ha realizado sobre 167 piezas periodísticas mediante un análisis de contenido.

### Palabras clave:

*Patria*; recepción; terrorismo; memoria; prensa.

## 1. Introduction

The novel *Patria* (Fernando Aramburu, 2016) (English language version *Homeland* (2019), translated by Alfred J. MacAdam), about terrorism in the Basque Country, has become an editorial landmark and a certified best-seller. It has achieved numerous accolades, including the *Premio Nacional de Narrativa* [National Literature Prize for Narrative] (2017), *Premio Euskadi de Literatura* [Basque Prize for Literature] (2017), *Premio Francisco Umbral* [Francisco Umbral Award] (2017) and *Premio Nacional de la Crítica* [National Critics Prize] (2017). It remains top of the best-seller charts in Spain five years after its publication, has been translated into over thirty languages, and has recently been adapted into a television series (HBO, 2020).

However, the '*Homeland* phenomenon' has transcended editorial and cultural barriers and made its way into current social and political debate. Beyond literary acclaim, it has received praise from notable figures such as the former Spanish Prime Minister, Mariano Rajoy, as well as from ETA victim associations, who are grateful to see how it has helped fill what they consider, despite some efforts to the contrary, to be a void in the collective memory (Labiano, 2020). Nevertheless, it has also received harsh criticism, mostly expected, from the radical nationalist front together with those known as the 'third space', who usually identify with the Basque Government's stance on peace and coexistence since 2012 (De Pablo, 2016).

*Homeland* has found itself in the middle of a debate known as the 'battle of the narrative' which in reality, is a fight to reconstruct the memory of terrorism, which debates the impression this traumatic period has left on the majority of Basque and Spanish society (Dominguez Iribarren, 2012). In this 'battle', several paradigms or political narratives are usually recognised. However, it is important to bear in mind that we are not talking about enclosed spheres, and that rather there are points of contact between them and standpoints which occupy the middle ground.

To begin with, there is a narrative of the victims, who consider ETA as the main terrorist organisation principally responsible for the political violence experienced in Spain. This is centred around its victims, abandoned for so long, praising them for not

nurturing an escalation of violence. They recognise the existence of other violent acts, but deny and try to downgrade the idea of a ‘conflict’ between two equal sides; a framework which served ETA to justify its acts. This narrative has been associated with political groups on the extreme right of the spectrum, hostile to Basque nationalism. However, it also includes initiatives by victims which are unrelated to partisan influences. Perhaps the most pertinent example is the Centre for the Memory of Victims of Terrorism with several administrations of differing political affiliations involved in its patronage.

The other extreme is the narrative of the perpetrators, located on the radical nationalist left. Their supporters consider that the organisation arose as an inevitable response to the oppression suffered by the Basque people. They argue that there was equal violence on both sides and that the actions of ETA were legitimate in the framework of a still-open historical ‘conflict’ in which the main guilty party was and remains to be the Spanish state.

Somewhere between these two perspectives, we find what is called the ‘third space’. The term comes from a concept coined by Elkarri, an organisation founded by Jonan Fernández (ex-General Secretary of Human Rights, Coexistence and Cooperation of the Basque Government) in 1992, who saw himself as a mediator and sought to contribute to solving the ‘conflict’ between the ‘Spanish state’ and violent organisations by recurring to conflict resolution policies. It is a paradigm which is based on the ideals of reconciliation, coexistence, overcoming confrontation, and recognising the suffering of all victims, but sustained by the idea of the ‘infinite draw’ (Fernández, 2006: 218-222). This has been interpreted as an approximation to legitimising the violence of the State Security Forces and Organisations and of ETA. Some historians highlight its ahistorical character, despite its good intentions (De Pablo, 2016: 31). In his work, Castells (2014: 338) explains that, by placing all the victims in the spotlight and centring on the need to overcome the ‘confrontation’, this narrative “leads to an implicit acceptance of the reasoning behind the two types of violence” and carries a discourse leaning towards “generic expressions, to shunning political judgements and towards the use of a convoluted and elusive language” and puts forth a vision which is neutral and accommodates the past. This narrative has been associated with the peace and coexistence plans carried out by the Basque Government since 2012.

In this dispute about the narrative, fiction has undoubtedly played a part (Rodríguez Fouz, 2021a), and *Homeland* is among these novels. Hence, the study of its reception serves to underline the political and ideological starting points from which the topics addressed in the novel are viewed (Navascués, 2019).

Up until now, the novel has aroused academic interest for its narrative structure (Alonso-Rey, 2019) the presence of topics such as forgiveness or silence (Bezhanova, 2019; Delannoy, 2018; Jiménez Torres, 2019), its ethnographic and linguistic character (Cid Abasolo, 2020) or the relationship between history and fiction (Martínez Arrizabalaga, 2017, 2018; Navajas, 2019; Casas Olcoz, 2019). Its reception, however, is a subject which has been scarcely explored, although an initial approach which analyses three negative reviews of the novel already argues that they are marked by “readers’ horizons of expectations<sup>1</sup> influenced by reviews which have little to do with the literature” (Navascués, 2019).

We attempt a broader analysis of the reception which focuses on the press given that, to a large extent, *Homeland* has become a topic for public debate because of its exposure in the newspapers. Together with Zelizer (2008), we consider that the press is

1 The concept of “horizon” was developed by Gadamer (1975) and reinterpreted by Jauss (1977) in his ‘Reader-response criticism’, alluding to the “fusing of horizons”, defined as the connection between the expectations expressed by the author in the literary text and the experiences of those readers present at any given time. A common horizon which may encompass both art and history.

one of the most influential institutions in how contemporary society records and remembers events, and therefore significantly contributes to the collective memory.

Collective memory is the process whereby a group of people, a community, or a society reconstruct shared experiences of the past (Halbwachs, 1992). Different groups hold different memories, which give rise to different ways of living and behaving. Therefore, it is not simply a case of directly recovering facts related to the past, but rather constructing a narrative closely linked to the needs of the present. Halbwachs differentiates between two types of memories which make up the collective memory depending on their origin: autobiographical, based on personal experience; and historical, based on indirect knowledge of a historical event. Sources of indirect memories vary, ranging from history books to commemorations, taking in all types of cultural artefacts. However, neither Halbwachs nor other classical collective memory theorists such as Le Goff (1992) include journalism among the agents of remembrance.

This void is recognised and certain authors such as Zelizer (1992, 2008) or Edy (1999) are starting to correct it by working on the relationships between journalism and remembrance, and the press and the past. Zelizer (2008: 85) maintains that journalism operates as one of the main institutions contemporary society uses to record and remember events. In her opinion, the press exercises a type of cultural authority and journalists make up an interpretative community which provides narratives that defend collective values (1992). Edy (1999) directly argues that journalism contributes to the construction and sharing of collective memory. This contribution, which we propose here, depends as much on the desire or not to cover certain information, as the approach they take towards them and the implicit or explicit evaluation of them, in such a way that matters as varied as length of the piece, journalist genre or linguistic elements acquire importance.

As noted previously, since ETA laid down its arms, we find ourselves in a fight to reconstruct collective memory around terrorism in Spain, which is known as the “battle of the narrative”. The difficulty in constructing a memory which is shared and accepted as fair is clear (Rodríguez Fouz, 2021b), not to mention the ethical implications. Collective memory has the ability to bring the past to justice and, above all, to avoid it repeating itself (Rodríguez Fouz, 2021b; Mate, 2016).

This is the framework in which *Homeland* is published and received and in which this research study is relevant. The aim is to map the coverage, treatment and evaluation of *Homeland* in the national and Basque regional press, taking into account the different ideological trends, with the objective of deepening our understanding of the collective memory of terrorism in the Basque Country and the role the press plays in its creation and sharing.

The hypothesis we propose is that the press’ reception to *Homeland* shows how they take a stance which goes beyond the scope of literature and can be seen to contribute towards the memory of terrorism.

## 2. Methodology

We used a content analysis methodology for this study (Piñuel Raigada, 2002; Ruiz Olabuénaga, 2013), which we applied to a sample of journalistic texts published by flagship national and Basque regional newspapers chosen according to audience criteria and ideological representation during the years this study encompasses. Starting with the data available from the General Media Study (EGM) (AIMC, 2016) for national press, and the Consortium for Economic and Social Research (CIES) (2018)

for regional press, we chose four leading national newspapers : *El País*, *El Mundo*, *La Vanguardia* and *ABC*; and four regional papers : *El Correo*, *El Diario Vasco*, *Gara* and *Deia*. The samples included texts published in the cultural supplement pages of the newspapers, the results of which were evaluated together with those from the main section of the paper. We only took into consideration paper-based editions.

Although there is no authoritative classification of the press regarding their political inclination, some authors offer approximations to this, both for the national press (Nastasescu, 2017; Nogales Bocio y Mancinas Chávez, 2014) and regional (Murua y Ramírez de la Piscina, 2017). Broadly speaking, these are how the selected newspapers are oriented:

- *El País*: edited in Madrid, progressive, centre-left. Grupo Prisa.
- *El Mundo*: Madrid, centre-right, liberal. Grupo Unidad Editorial.
- *La Vanguardia*: Barcelona, conservative beliefs and with autonomous orientation but not inclined towards independence. Grupo Godó.
- *ABC*: Madrid, conservative, monarchist and catholic. Grupo Vocento.
- *El Correo*: Bilbao, conservative and anti-Basque nationalism. Grupo Vocento.
- *El Diario Vasco*: San Sebastian, conservative and non-nationalist. Grupo Vocento.
- *Gara*: San Sebastian, radical left-wing nationalist. Founded after the Government closure of *Egin*.
- *Deia*: Bizkaia, moderately Basque nationalist. Grupo Noticias.

To choose the texts, we performed a search for the keywords “*Patria*” and “Fernando Araburu” in MyNews. The analysis period considered was limited to the six months after the publication of the novel (6 September 2016) and the five months subsequent to it receiving the National Prize for Narrative Literature (17 October 2017). We ruled out any events schedules, advertising, and best-seller lists in the search results as they are not considered journalistic texts. In total, we collected a sample for analysis consisting of 167 journalistic texts.

To ensure greater accuracy and objectivity in the recording and data analysis procedure, we created an analytical file with 13 variables (Table 1). After the search, we performed quantitative frequency analysis and qualitative analysis of the most relevant aspects for the study, particularly for those associated with the discourse contained in the texts (approach and author’s opinion), which allowed us to extract more thorough and substantiated conclusions.

Table 1. Analytical file for the reception of *Homeland* in the press

Technical File	
Mean	<i>El País/El Mundo/La Vanguardia/ABC/El Correo/El Diario Vasco/Deia/Gara</i>
Sphere	National/regional
Date	Date of publication

Headline	Headline of journalist piece
Journalistic features	
Length	1/8, 1/4, 1/2, 3/4, 1, 2, more than 2 pages
Genre	News/feature/report <sup>2</sup> /interview <sup>3</sup> /column/forum/review or specialist critique/letter to the editor <sup>4</sup>
Signature	Signed/not signed
Image	With/without image
Discourse analysis	
Topic	<i>Homeland</i> is the central topic/ <i>Homeland</i> is mentioned in the text or as a footnote in addressing another matter <sup>5</sup>
Lexical and semantic features	Use of: demonstrative nouns or those used in evaluation and positive/negative adjectives on <i>Homeland</i> or the Basque issue; expressions of obligation; attributive structures; forms of expression (metaphor/simile, metonymy, personification, hyperbole, enumeration, repetition, euphemism)
Use of terms	Presence of elements of the lexical families of: “conflict”; “assassination”; “terrorism”; “victim”; “armed struggle”
Approach	Informative/evaluative
Author’s opinion of the text	The novel suitably reflects the events in the Basque Country regarding terrorism: yes/no/does not say
	The novel helps different ideologies to understand the view of ‘others’: yes/no/does not say
	The novel is biased or partisan: yes/no/does not say

Source: compiled by author

2 In the case of reports, we have only considered ideas which can be attributed to the journalist.

3 The analysis distinguishes between interviews with Aramburu and other interviews. With regard to the interviews with Aramburu, we only considered the input from the interviewer.

4 Although there is no consensus regarding whether letters to the editor constitute a journalistic genre, we have included them here following the criteria established by Córdova (2011). Contesting claims by authors who believe the opposite, Córdova argues that although the letters are not written by a journalist, this is not enough reason for them to be omitted from the field of journalism. These claims are based on the fact that there is no debate regarding columns or forums, which do not have to be signed by a journalist either. Likewise, Córdova does not consider non-adherence to stylistic rules as reason for exclusion: newspapers submit these texts to editing and this ensures that they meet the requirements. Furthermore, this writer considers that letters to the editor are transcendental in the world of journalism, which needs the exchange of views with readers.

5 In those texts in which *Homeland* is not the central topic, we only analyse the part in which it is referred to.

3. Results

3.1. Coverage

The novel *Homeland* receives general coverage (Table 2) which is slightly greater in the national press (95 pieces) than in the regional (72). On a national level, *El Mundo* is the paper which returns the most results. Regionally, the papers which address the novel most belong to the Vocento group, followed by *Deia* and *Gara*. These observations remain consistent even when dealing solely with articles in which the novel is the central topic. Regarding the conservative/progressive divide, on a national level, we can observe an equal amount of attention devoted to the novel. However, regional analysis shows that the non-nationalist press (*El Correo* and *El Diario Vasco*) gave much more attention than the press which sympathises with moderate Basque nationalism (*Deia*) and the radical left-wing nationalists (*Gara*).

Table 2. Coverage by number of journalistic pieces

Mean	Pieces related to <i>Homeland</i>	Pieces in which <i>Homeland</i> is the central topic
<i>El País</i>	21	11
<i>El Mundo</i>	36	14
<i>La Vanguardia</i>	20	6
<i>ABC</i>	18	5
<i>El Correo</i>	26	14
<i>El Diario Vasco</i>	33	14
<i>Deia</i>	9	6
<i>Gara</i>	3	4

Source: compiled by author

Regarding the temporal distribution of the articles published, on a national level, we observe that *El Mundo* and *El País* start to write about the novel before its launch. From that moment, the four national newspapers maintain a consistent frequency of articles published during the first time period studied. Their attention is concentrated around the month it appears (September 2016) and resurges during the first three months of 2017. However, the Basque regional press shows differences depending on the ideology of the newspaper in question. The non-nationalist regional press follow the lines of the national press and maintain a stable level of attention given to the novel from September 2016 to February 2017. Nevertheless, *Deia* only published two articles

on the novel in the first two months after its publication and does not address the topic again until February 2017. *Gara* waited until December 2016 to mention the novel.

During the second period studied (after it was awarded the National Prize for Narrative Literature in 2017), all the papers gave it similar attention in the first month. However, while the national press continued to write about it over the following months, the regional reaction is more inconsistent. *El Correo* and *El Diario Vasco* continue to regularly publish articles on the novel. *Deia* maintains a consistent frequency, but only mentions it once a month. *Gara*, however, mentions the news event at the time it happened, but does not mention it again.

Use of image to illustrate the pieces (Table 3) is similar among all the national press. However, in the regional press, *El Correo* and *El Diario Vasco* stand out above *Deia* and *Gara*.

**Table 3. Use of image in the pieces referring to *Homeland* per paper**

Mean	Use of image
<i>El País</i>	42.8%
<i>El Mundo</i>	41.6%
<i>La Vanguardia</i>	45%
<i>ABC</i>	44.4%
<i>El Correo</i>	50%
<i>El Diario Vasco</i>	42.4%
<i>Deia</i>	33%
<i>Gara</i>	25%

**Source: compiled by author**

As to the space on pages the content dealing with *Homeland* as the central topic occupies (Table 4), the national press stand out with an average of 55.5% articles filling a full page or more, compared to 28.9% in the regional press. On a regional level, *El Correo* is the paper which dedicates most space to *Homeland* while *Gara* does not dedicate an entire page in any of its pieces. It is worth highlighting that some newspapers include references to the articles on *Homeland* on their front page. This is the case with *El Correo* (4), *El Mundo* (2), *El Diario Vasco* (1), and *El País* (1).



Table 4. Length of articles referring to *Homeland* per paper

Mean	One or more pages
<i>El País</i>	54.5%
<i>El Mundo</i>	64%
<i>La Vanguardia</i>	33.3%
<i>ABC</i>	60%
<i>El Correo</i>	42%
<i>El Diario Vasco</i>	28.5%
<i>Deia</i>	16.6%
<i>Gara</i>	0%

Source: compiled by author

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3.2. Approach

Secondly, we deal with the type of approach each paper has towards the novel and its possible relationship with the geographical scope of its coverage or its ideology. We observe two variables: a) genre of the journalistic article, and b) if the approach is informative or evaluative in the articles in which *Homeland* appears as the central topic.

Since the invention of the ‘journalistic genre’ in the 19th Century, the binary distinction between facts (objective) and evaluation (subjective) has remained the dominant discourse, even in academic work. For example, Lorenzo Gomis (2008), structures his theory of journalistic genres around two blocks depending on function: facts (news, report, interview, feature) and commentaries (review, letters to the editor, article of importance to the author, columns, editorials and so on). However, a more mature epistemology warns us that this distinction is insufficient (Núñez Ladevéze, 2004; Abellán-García, 2012: 442-445) and the differentiation between facts (objective) and opinions (subjective) becomes artificial. Genres such as reports or interviews contain a more interpretative content than news, for example. Beyond the academic debate, professionals usually abide by more specific formal criteria, of the type: news, report, review, critique, opinion column, and so on, in accordance with the media style book. This criteria offers a reading pact which is more or less evident to readers.

Therefore, this analysis takes into account both the specific genre and the informative or evaluative content in each piece analysed, as we believe that even a news item can have an interpretative aspect and contain an implicit or explicit evaluation. To simplify things, hereinafter, we group news, features, reports and interviews under the umbrella of informative and interpretative genres; and columns, forums, reviews, critiques and letters to the editor under opinion-oriented genres.

To consider whether the approach is evaluative or informative, we look for the presence of markers: positive or negative adjectives and nouns referring to the novel; use of positive or negative attributive structures; use and context of nouns with connotations such as “terrorism”, “assassination”, “victims” or “conflict”; and the direct presence of the article author’s opinion.

**Table 5. Number of articles with *Homeland* as the central topic according to journalistic genre per newspaper**

Mean	News	Feature	Report	Interview	Review	Critique	Forum	Column	Letter to the editor
<i>El País</i>	2	0	2	2	0	1	2	2	0
<i>El Mundo</i>	3	0	0	5	2	0	2	2	0
<i>La Vanguardia</i>	2	0	0	1	1	1	0	1	0
<i>ABC</i>	0	0	0	2	2	0	0	1	0
<i>El Correo</i>	2	2	2	1	3	0	3	1	1
<i>El Diario Vasco</i>	5	0	0	2	1	0	3	1	2
<i>Deia</i>	1	0	0	1	0	0	0	3	1
<i>Gara</i>	1	0	0	0	1	0	1	1	0

Source: compiled by author

No major differences are observed in the national press, as far as the editorial policy is concerned, in the distribution of articles belonging to the informative and interpretative genres and genres of opinion. In the conservative press (*El Mundo*, *La Vanguardia*, and *ABC*), the informative and interpretative genre makes up 33.3% of the total articles while opinion corresponds to 66.6%. In the progressive *El País*, the percentages are 43% and 57%, respectively. However, we observe some peculiarities when it comes to specific genres. The only national newspaper which publishes reports focusing on *Homeland* is *El País*, which also dedicates news about and interviews with the author. On the other end of the spectrum, the *ABC* only includes interviews with Aramburu. *El Mundo* interviews the author on up to five occasions, a clear sign of how interested this newspaper is in giving him a voice. The four newspapers publish reviews and critiques which relate to *Homeland* as a literary product and all four included opinion columns focused on it. It is also striking that in *El País*, *El Mundo*, *La Vanguardia* and the regional *El Diario Vasco*, there are a significant number of columns which are not centred on *Homeland*, but which mention the book or use it as a footnote to address a different topic. Its appearance suggests that the columnists presuppose that their readers share a common awareness of the book.

The regional press shows distribution differences between the papers. *El Correo* and *El Diario Vasco*, the two non-nationalist newspapers, make a more balanced use of the informative and interpretative and opinion-based genres: 46% of articles belong to the first group, 54% to the latter. Both papers include news about *Homeland* and interviews with Aramburu, while *El Correo* also publishes features and reports. In opinion-based genres, both papers show a greater number of forums signed by external

collaborators than columns. They also publish reviews of the book, although there are no specialised critiques. Maybe the greatest peculiarity is they are interested in their readers’ opinions about *Homeland*: both publish letters to the editor about the novel, something which is not seen in the national press, which they share with *Deia*.

Both *Deia* and *Gara*, the two nationalist newspapers, show greater emphasis on the opinion-based genres (70% of the articles) over informative and interpretative (30%). The difference is particularly apparent in the case of the newspaper with close links to the separatist left, which publishes one news feature (25%) compared to a column, forum and review (75%).

Beyond these genres, we observe the informative and evaluative perspective adopted in the articles (Table 6).

**Table 6. Number of articles with *Homeland* as central topic per newspaper according to approach**

Mean	Articles with informative approach	Articles with evaluative approach
<i>El País</i>	2	9
<i>El Mundo</i>	8	6
<i>La Vanguardia</i>	3	3
<i>ABC</i>	0	5
<i>El Correo</i>	4	10
<i>El Diario Vasco</i>	5	9
<i>Deia</i>	1	5
<i>Gara</i>	1	3

Source: compiled by author

Generally, in the national press, the approach is more evaluative than informative and in this case, we do not see differences according to ideology. Both in *ABC* and *El País*, almost all the articles (all in *ABC*, 82% in *El País*) have some form of evaluative element, even in the news pieces. In the case of *El Mundo* and *La Vanguardia*, the separation is more defined: the informative approach corresponds greatly with the pieces belonging to the informative and interpretative genres, with the evaluative approach a feature of opinion-based genres.

The regional press follow a similar pattern. The approach is generally evaluative in all cases, although there are nuances. In *El Correo* and *El Diario Vasco*, the pieces included in the informative and interpretative genres are divided quite equally between those with a merely informative perspective (57%) (89% of those news features) and those which include some evaluative element on *Homeland* (43%), among which we find news features, reports, and interviews. In the case of *Deia*, 50% of the pieces in the informative and interpretative genre maintain a neutral stance, while the other half includes a judgement. In *Gara*, the evaluative

approach is reserved for opinion articles which, as we have stated, are in the majority. Both in *Deia* and *Gara*, the few news features about the novel are strictly informative in nature.

### 3.3. Assessment

Thirdly, in the pieces with *Homeland* as the central topic, we analyse the variables associated with the lexis used by the author of the journalistic text and its connotative value: lexical and semantic features, relevant terms used, and author's opinion.

We searched for the presence and frequency of semantic features which provide an opinionated or disparaging value to the text, even in those which presuppose objectivity in their aforementioned pact with the reader. We must state that these elements are not always used in the same sense. A good example is the noun "victim" –although its meaning in its denotative sense is negative because it refers to a person who has suffered some damage, we consider that its appearance in the text is positive as it serves to reflect reality and not silence or hide it. Something similar occurs with words such as "terrorism" or "assassination", which really refer to a negative reality but their use can be considered positive as it does not hide the responsibility of ETA for its actions; a responsibility which would be diluted by using expressions such as "armed struggle" or "conflict". To do this, we start with an initial count of the terms (Table 7) and subsequently dedicate our attention to the contextual use of certain lexical and semantic features which are particularly significant: "conflict", "armed struggle", "terrorism", "assassination" and "victims".

**Table 7. Frequency of appearance of the most repeated nouns and adjectives which are opinionated or disparaging in the sample pieces**

Opinionated				Disparaging			
Nouns	Freq.	Adjectives	Freq.	Nouns	Freq.	Adjectives	Freq.
Victim	26	Good/better	12	Terrorism	36	Terrorist	12
Phenomenon	8	Great	8	Violence	19	Bad	8
Family	7	Moral	5	Silence	15	Painful	7
Forgiveness	7	Brave	4	Assassin	9	Broken	7
Coexistence	6	Moving	4	Fanaticism	8	Hard	4
Memory	5	Essential	3	Pain	8	Violent	4
Peace	5	Ethic	3	Conflict	8	Totalitarian	3
True	4	Accurate	3	Hate	8	Armed	3
Responsibility	4	Human	3	Wounded	7	Cursed	3
Hero	4			Death	6	Turbulent	3
Friendship	4			Tragedy	6	Infamous	3
				Suffering	5	Brutal	3

				Assassination at- tempt	4	Coward	3
				ETA member	4		
				Fight	4		
				Prisoners	4		
				Extortion	4		
				Threat	4		
				Executioner	4		

Source: compiled by author

We observed that these terms, whether positive or negative, refer to similar realities. The first mostly refer to the consequences of physical and moral harm as a result of the violence; the second refer both to the desire for recovery and understanding proposed by the novel, on a fictional level, and the critical and public acclaim the book has received.

With regard to the contextual use of key words (“conflict”, “assassination”, “terrorism”, “victims” and “armed struggle”) found in the analysis, we focus only on those pieces in which *Homeland* is the central topic.

Table 8. Presence/absence of significant terms per newspaper in the articles in which *Homeland* is the central topic

Mean	conflict		assassination		terrorism		victims		armed struggle	
	yes	no	yes	no	yes	no	yes	no	yes	no
<i>El País</i>	3	7	4	6	6	4	8	2	3	7
<i>El Mundo</i>	2	11	7	5	8	5	5	8	0	13
<i>ABC</i>	3	2	3	2	3	2	2	3	1	4
<i>La Vanguardia</i>	2	3	3	2	3	2	3	2	3	2
<i>El Correo</i>	0	13	9	3	10	4	6	8	0	14
<i>El Diario Vasco</i>	1	8	3	6	2	7	1	7	1	8
<i>Deia</i>	0	6	0	6	1	5	1	5	1	5
<i>Gara</i>	2	2	0	4	0	4	0	3	0	4

Source: compiled by author

In the 74 pieces studied, the word “conflict” appears 13 times: 10 in the national press and 3 in the regional. If we consider the use of this term with connotations which help palliate the harsh reality of fifty years of ETA violence (Rivera, 2019), we can see in *ABC* that the word is accompanied by expressions like “poorly defined...” (Pozuelo Yvancos, 2016a and 2016b), or “they recognise the euphemistic use of the word ‘the conflict’ by the party responsible for the assassinations” (Lafuente, 2016). In other words, the traditionally conservative national newspaper does not only underscore the use of the term as a euphemism, but also highlights its incorrect use in describing the reality. For their part, the progressive paper *El País* uses the term occasionally in a context similar to that mentioned above as follows: “hypocrisy leads to us calling it...” (Mainer, 2016) and: “Not the author, but if an interviewee [...] speaks about the “matter of the Basque conflict”” (Hermoso, 2017). However, on other occasions, it uses the term without this subtlety: “Digs down deeper to the roots of a conflict which has poisoned Basque society” (Ruiz Mantilla, 2017). The same happens with *La Vanguardia*, in “as what is there called the ‘conflict’ over the Basque homeland” (García, 2017) and in “Aramburu had already written about the victims and the conflict in a memorable book of stories” (Fernández, 2016). The first example, mentions the term “conflict” in a context which rejects its poor use, but in the second case, it is used as a euphemism. Other uses of this key concept in the rest of the articles are not relevant as they do not appear with the connotation in question. However, in the four pieces referring to *Homeland* in *Gara*, the context in which the term appears is: “The Basque conflict now has its best-seller” (Zurimendi, 2017) and “the problem the characters face is that they try to represent universal stereotypes with regard to the conflict but end up being converted into hyperbole. And anyway, can we say “conflict” now that the battle is about the narrative?” (Pradilla, 2016). The ideological weight in the use of the term is evident.

The noun “assassination” is found on 29 occasions: 17 in national newspapers and 12 in regional ones, but none of these incidences are in *Deia* or *Gara*, which seems significant. When the term appears, it is used unequivocally. Some examples of context are the following. In *El Mundo*: “Travels to the past to show the lives of families who once friends, are now separated as a result of an assassination by the group” (Sanz Ezquerro, 2017) or in *El Correo*: “It does a good job of describing the ill feeling, tension, and suffering of the two families because of an alleged Basque homeland to be achieved by means of assassination, extortion and shame...” (Monge Ugarte, 2016).

The word “terrorism” appears on 33 occasions with a similar distribution to the above: 20 in the national press and 13 in the regional. Once again, it is interesting that there is no mention in *Gara* and only one in *Deia*. On this occasion, its use is simply in its purest sense: “In the long fight against terrorism in the Basque Country” (Agencia, 2017), we read in *El País*: “Five years after ETA laid down their arms, there is a conviction that terrorism has been defeated” (Rusiñol, 2016), in *La Vanguardia*; or “there are still some citizens who try to justify terrorism in the interest of a utopian state which will always remain elusive” (Monge, 2016), in *El Diario Vasco*.

We find the term “victim” 26 times, distributed as follows: 18 in the national press and 8 in the regional. Along the lines of how the previous nouns were used, we find that *Gara* does not use it once. With regard to the contexts in which it appears, we see in *El País*: “The rupture of the victims” (Seisdedos, 2016) and in *Deia*: “The opposite ends of Euskadi, one of violence and the other of the victims. It is tremendously futile. Here, there aren’t two groups, they haven’t survived” (Blázquez, 2017).

Appearing much less than the aforementioned nouns, the presence of “armed struggle” only appears 9 times: 7 in the national press and twice in the regional, none being in *El Correo* or *Gara*. The use of this word can help disguise historical reality, as

happens with “conflict”, and is observed in this way in *El País* in: “There they all are: the people of the armed struggle and the imprisonment of their heroes...” (Mainer, 2016). We find a use without nuances in *Deia*: “History takes off since the day that the organisation announced the end of the armed struggle” (Razkin, 2016) or in *El Diario Vasco*: “And around the end of the armed struggle is this other confession made between brothers” (Escalada, 2016).

We now move on to observations of the authors’ opinions expressed in the pieces we have analysed regarding certain aspects which link the novel’s publication to the socio-political repercussions in its reception (Table 9).

**Table 9. Presence of the author’s opinion: number and percentage of pieces which contain that opinion per total number of pieces in which *Homeland* is the central topic**

Mean	The novel accurately reflects what happened		The novel helps different ideologies to understand the view of ‘others’		The novel is biased or partisan	
	Yes/%	No/%	Yes/%	No/%	Yes/%	No/%
<i>El País</i>	8/ 73%	0/ 0%	0/ 0%	0/ 0%	0/ 0%	1/ 9%
<i>El Mundo</i>	6/ 43%	0/ 0%	2/ 14%	0/ 0%	0/ 0%	1/ 17%
<i>ABC</i>	5/ 100%	0/ 0%	2/ 40%	0/ 0%	0/ 0%	4/ 80%
<i>La Vanguardia</i>	3/ 50%	0/ 0%	0/ 0%	0/ 0%	0/ 0%	2/ 33%
<i>El Correo</i>	9/ 64%	2/ 14%	3/ 21%	0/ 0%	0/ 0%	7/ 50%
<i>El Diario Vasco</i>	7/ 50%	1/ 0%	2/ 14%	0/ 0%	1/ 7%	5/ 36%
<i>Deia</i>	2/ 33%	2/ 33%	1/ 17%	1/ 17%	3/ 50%	1/ 6%
<i>Gara</i>	0/ 0%	3/ 75%	0/ 0%	2/ 50%	3/ 75%	0/ 0%

Source: compiled by author

Regarding whether the author believes that the novel accurately reflects what happened, we find that in 74 pieces, 41 authors believe so: 22 in the national press and 19 in the regional. In 23 cases, also very equal in terms of distribution (12-11), the authors do not offer a viewpoint. There are more noticeable differences between newspapers, as can be seen in Table 9: the percentages made up by the pieces with that opinion out of the total range from 100% in *ABC* to 0% in *Gara*. The lowest percentages appear in the Basque regional press. Furthermore, the opinion that the book does not accurately reflect reality appears 8 times, always in the regional press, and particularly in those more aligned to the separatist left: this belief is seen in 75% of the pieces published in *Gara*.

We find different forms of expressing the opinion that the novel accurately reflects what happened: “It’s much more than a simple novel about ETA. It addresses everybody, gives them all a voice and allows us to navigate the meticulous and shocking portrait of

a wounded and divided society” (García Calero, 2016), in *ABC*; “In the future, if anybody wants to understand what happened, all they need is to read this novel” (Redondo Terreros, 2017), in *El Mundo*; or “It is at once a true chronicle of the harsh social reality in the towns of Euskadi during the final decades of ETA campaigns” (García, 2017), in *La Vanguardia*, all in the national press. However, there are also examples in Basque newspapers: “*Homeland* should be essential reading for whoever wants to learn about recent Basque history. It recreates a realist fiction of the state of social anomie which sheds light on ideological fanaticism” (Urrutia, 2016), in *El Diario Vasco*. Or, in *Deia*:

(...) we find the painful reconstruction of something which, to our regret and shame, is all too true. El Txato, Bittori (...) and all the other characters, including the nauseating Patxi, are true reflections, taken from our natural environment, from the flesh and blood which we have had the pleasure and misfortune of dealing with in our surroundings (Vizcaíno, 2016).

In *Gara*, the reference to the idea that *Homeland* truly reflects what happens has an ironic and critical tone:

If one was any of the stereotypes orchestrated by Spanish unionism to explain what happened in the Basque Country over the past few decades and does not appear in *Homeland*, the latest novel by Fernando Aramburu, they should be outraged and question their existence. He doesn’t miss anyone (Pradilla, 2016).

Regarding whether the author considers that the novel helps one party to understand the views of another (constitutionalists, nationalists, separatists), our results show this to be the case on 10 occasions: 4 in the national press and 6 in the regional. There are three authors who take the opposite point of view - all of them in the nationalist regional press. It is noteworthy that 57 authors do not comment on this, a trend which is evenly distributed between the two groups (30-27). In the national press, there are examples such as this from *El Mundo*: “And what’s more, a text cleverly written, which opens the way to reconciliation despite the wounds which still remain open” (Tadeu, 2017). In the regional press, most of the positive outlooks are found in the non-nationalist press such as *El Correo*: “From there, we see the need to see each side as equals, reflecting the questions, fears, and misunderstanding of one side towards the other” (Coca, 2016); in nationalist press like *Deia*: “There is little clumsy Manichaeism in almost 650 pages of a tale which I sincerely hope will lead the way for many others to enter, without making concessions, the realm of that past which many wish to either polish or bury” (Vizcaíno, 2016). In contrast, it never appears in *Gara*, which only shows examples of the opposite viewpoint: “In other words, reading this book will not move anybody from their comfort zone” (Pradilla, 2016).

We conclude with the consideration that the novel is biased or partisan and observe that on only 7 occasions do the authors believe that this is the case, all in the regional press (particularly the nationalist papers), compared to 21 who believe that the novel is not biased or partisan, which appear in both national and regional press. We find examples like these in the national press: “With *Homeland*, he has managed to unite critics, readers... and politicians” (Martín Rodrigo, 2017), in *ABC*; “*Homeland* gets involved without taking sides” (Redondo Terreros, 2017), in *El Mundo*; “Opportunity, credibility, empathy with the victims, and the absence of political bias seem to form the basis of its success” (Aizpeolea, 2017), in *El País*; or “There are no political prejudices, just an ethical point of view” (Masoliver Ródenas, 2016), in *La Vanguardia*. The few similar opinions found in the non-nationalist regional press go along the same lines: «(...) its total lack of Manichaeism” (Coca, 2017) and «But the author, with impeccable moral decency, leaves it to each reader to decide where they stand with regard to each character’s motives” (Bengoa, 2016). In the nationalist press, however, we find opinions of this type: “My impression is that *Homeland* wants to intervene, in



its own particular way, in the writing of a narrative, the fixation of those who are afraid of losing this stupid battle of history” (Blázquez, 2016) or “The Basque reality was and still is much more complex and transcends the crude duality contained in *Homeland*” (Blázquez, 2016), in *Deia*. *Gara* also stands out in this regard:

And the success of *Homeland* is not a coincidence. Simply put, someone wanted a glorified tale of constitutionalism at the same time demonising independence. A novel to win the battle of the narrative. We are talking of the political establishment (PP-PSE-UPyD) (Zurimendi, 2017).

#### 4. Discussion and conclusions

The wide reception *Homeland* garnered in the press is proof that the story penned by Aramburu has transcended literary fiction and has found its way into public opinion. As Navascués (2019) predicted, the analysis shows that there seems to be a non-literary backdrop surrounding its reception which to a large extent revolves around politics, which is discerned above all in the realm of the regional press.

The main national papers pay similar, timely and consistent attention to the novel and all of them tend towards an evaluative approach over informative, even in pieces such as news features or reports. This fact is reinforced by the appearance of columnists who broach the subject when referring to matters of Spanish politics even in texts which are not centred around *Homeland*, which suggests that the columnists presuppose a shared awareness of the novel by their readers. In general and irrespective of the ideological ideals of the newspapers, in the national press, they receive the novel in a very positive light and particularly praise its ability to accurately reflect what happened regarding ETA, making the novel a great place to start to learn about the events of this time. In alignment with this, it is significant to see the use of terms such as “terrorism”, “assassination”, or “victim”, which directly single out the responsibility of the terrorists and in some way places the discourse of the press close to what is known as the narrative of the victims, or, at the very least, distances themselves from the perpetrators.

It is also worth noting when they use terms such as “conflict” or “armed struggle” (expressions commonly used in the nationalist environment which diminish ETA’s responsibility), the national press usually add a nuance to highlight they do not accurately reflect what happened. There is however, certain discordance regarding this last point. For example, while the most conservative newspaper *ABC* always includes this subtlety, the most progressive *El País* on occasions does not, thus approving its use to refer to what happened. This difference may point to certain influence from the ideological tendency of the paper when broaching the topic, but above all, it is a sign of how the language driven by the nationalist world has permeated public opinion even outside of the Basque Country.

However, in the national press in general, we observe a more or less homogeneous discourse with regard to *Homeland* and its contribution to the memory of terrorism.

This differs from the Basque regional press, where we can observe significant differences which give rise to three viewpoints. Firstly, the reception by the non-nationalist papers *El Correo* and *El Diario Vasco* coincide to a large extent with that written in the national newspapers: wide coverage, similar evaluative approach, and eminently positive opinion regarding the novel. Secondly, the paper *Deia* holds the middle ground somewhat in its reception to *Homeland*. Its coverage has been more or less stable, a lot

more evaluative than informative, but with a less-defined evaluation of the novel: in this paper there is an equal proportion of opposing ideas, such as a belief that the novel accurately or inaccurately reflects what happened, or that the novel may or may not help open the doors to “reconciliation.” Finally *Gara*, the paper closely aligned to the radical left-wing nationalists, stands out from the rest of the papers in almost every way. Its content related to *Homeland* is limited to the minimum, with a brief news feature which was strictly informative. The opinion they have published about the novel, which is similarly scarce, appears to be reactive, almost addressing the topic out of obligation due to its public notoriety. This opinion is also negative. They claim that *Homeland* is a biased novel, which hinders opportunities and understanding in Basque society rather than promoting it, and does not truly reflect what happened. It is also significant that this paper is the only one in which the terms such as “assassination”, “terrorism” and “victim” never appear, the connotations of which have been addressed above.

This three-fold perspective on the reception of *Homeland* in the Basque regional press could be linked to three main paradigms which dispute the space of the memory of Basque terrorism in the post-terrorist era: that of the victims, of the perpetrators, and that known as the ‘third space’, which was discussed in the introduction to this article. The narrative of the victims could be found in non-nationalist papers: *El Diario Vasco* and *El Correo*. The perspective of the perpetrators, politically situated on the radical left-wing nationalist side, would explain the totally negative reception that *Gara* gave Aramburu’s novel, which brings the victims of ETA to the fore and distances itself from the discourse of a ‘conflict’, even though it does recognise the suffering which members of the organisation may have experienced and the environment they lived in. The perspective called ‘the third space’, which is based on the idea of ‘conflict’ but distances itself from the above because it differentiates between the victims and the perpetrators, could be associated to the reception given by *Deia*.

All of the above suggests that the reception of *Homeland* in the Basque Country has been marked by non-literary interests, in particular by the different approaches to ETA which are involved in the ‘battle of the discourse’ or memory of terrorism. It shows that Aramburu’s work has been read as much more than a novel and also shows that the newspapers try to exercise their role as creators of public opinion regarding relevant social and political matters, even from texts which are dedicated to cultural items. Convinced the press exercises a type of cultural authority and that journalism contributes to the creation and sharing of collective remembrance, we conclude that the coverage, approach and opinion the papers have given to *Homeland* could reflect their stance on the issue of remembering terrorism in the Basque Country, a matter they mediate in with their texts on Aramburu’s novel.

The limitations of this content analysis prevent us from drilling down deeper into the qualitative aspects, something which would be of interest in more in-depth future research. The study could be extended with a more detailed discourse analysis on a smaller sample of texts, such as interviews with some of the authors of the journalistic pieces which were analysed to see how they believe the press contributes to the memory of terrorism.

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6. Specific contributions from each

	Name and Surname
Conception and design of the work	Roncesvalles Labiano Juangarcía, Victoria Hernández Ruiz and Íñigo Urquía Uriaguereca
Methodology	Roncesvalles Labiano Juangarcía, Victoria Hernández Ruiz and Íñigo Urquía Uriaguereca
Data collection and analysis	Roncesvalles Labiano Juangarcía, Victoria Hernández Ruiz and Íñigo Urquía Uriaguereca
Discussion and conclusions	Roncesvalles Labiano Juangarcía, Victoria Hernández Ruiz and Íñigo Urquía Uriaguereca
Drafting, formatting, version review and approval	Roncesvalles Labiano Juangarcía, Victoria Hernández Ruiz and Íñigo Urquía Uriaguereca

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