

“No Time for Love”: Radical Basque Nationalist-Irish Republican Relations and the Emergence of a Shared Political Culture (1981-98)¹

“No hay tiempo para el amor”: Relaciones entre nacionalistas vascos radicales y republicanos irlandeses y el surgimiento de una cultura política compartida (1981-98)

Niall Cullen²

Universidad del País Vasco (España)

ORCID: <https://orcid.org/0000-0002-9400-0284>

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Abstract

Following the deaths of ten Irish republican hunger strikers in 1981, radical Basque nationalists and Irish republicans of the Basque *izquierda abertzale* (‘patriotic left’) and Irish republican movement respectively, began to develop ever closer ties of transnational “solidarity”. In addition to the relationship between Herri Batasuna and Sinn Féin, more *ad hoc* organisational links in areas such as youth, prisoner, and language advocacy, fostered a shared political culture at the intersection of both movements, which was periodically reflected through

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² (niall.b.cullen@gmail.com). Niall Cullen holds a PhD in Contemporary History from the University of the Basque Country (2020). His research centres on the historical relations between Irish republicanism and Basque nationalism. His publications include: “‘Dangerous Friends’: Irish Republican Relations with Basque and Catalan Nationalists, 1916–26”, (with Kyle McCreanor), *The International History Review*, 2022, DOI:10.1080/07075332.2022.2045339. “‘Oh Ireland! What a Disappointment You Have Been to the Basque People’: Irish Non-Intervention in the Spanish Civil War”, *Society*, lvii, May 2021, pp. 104–11. “Héroes patrios irlandeses y vascos: una mirada transnacional” in Ludger Mees (coord.): *Héroes y villanos de la patria. El Nacionalismo Vasco en Perspectiva Comparada* (Madrid, Tecnos, 2020), pp. 93-125.

the prism of cultural expression (e.g., music, political art [murals], literature, audiovisual media). Utilising a wide array of primary sources, this article explores and analyses the emergence and development of this transnational nexus, from the hunger strikes of 1981 to the signing of the Good Friday Agreement in 1998.

Keywords: Irish republicanism, Basque nationalism, IRA, ETA, Sinn Féin, Herri Batasuna.

Resumen

Tras la muerte de diez republicanos irlandeses en huelga de hambre en 1981, nacionalistas vascos radicales y republicanos irlandeses de la *izquierda abertzale* y del movimiento republicano irlandés respectivamente, empezaron a estrechar cada vez más, lazos de “solidaridad” transnacional. Además de la relación entre Herri Batasuna y Sinn Féin, otros vínculos organizativos más *ad hoc* en los ámbitos, por ejemplo, de la juventud, de la defensa de los presos y de la lengua, fomentaron una cultura política compartida en la intersección de ambos movimientos, que se reflejaba periódicamente a través del prisma de la expresión cultural (música, arte político [murales], literatura, medios audiovisuales). Utilizando una amplia gama de fuentes primarias, este artículo explora y analiza el surgimiento y desarrollo de este nexo transnacional, desde las huelgas de hambre de 1981 hasta la firma del Acuerdo de Viernes Santo en 1998.

Keywords: republicanismo irlandés, nacionalismo vasco, IRA, ETA, Sinn Féin, Herri Batasuna.

1. Introduction

TO: THE E.T.A., Basque Country – 9.2.81

Comrades and Brothers in the [c]ommon [cause] of Liberty[,] Greetings!
From within the subhuman confines of the H Blocks, Long Kesh, I, one of 500 protesting prisoners writes to you, our Comrades and Co. soldiers imploring your assistance with our up-and-coming Hunger Strike which will commence on March 1st.

Written by Irish Republican Army (IRA) member Raymond McCreesh in February 1981, ‘comms’ such as the above were often smuggled out of Northern Ireland’s Long Kesh (HM Prison Maze) on cigarette paper. They were then typed up and sent by republican supporters to their intended recipients—in this case, the Basque terrorist group Euskadi ‘ta Askatasuna (ETA).

As signalled by McCreesh, the 1981 Hunger Strike commenced on 1 March when a former Officer Commanding (OC) of the IRA prisoners, Bobby Sands, refused food. Twenty-two of his republican comrades followed suit. In the prophetic words of McCreesh, the 1981 Hunger Strike would ultimately “be to the death”³.

Despite the dramatic election of Bobby Sands as a Member of Parliament on 4 April, British Prime Minister Margaret Thatcher refused to accede to the republican prisoners’ central demand: to re-establish their ‘Special Category Status’ (rescinded in 1976). As tensions escalated in Northern Ireland, the saga of Sands and his subsequent death on 5 May, after sixty-six days on hunger strike, garnered enormous political and media attention for the Irish republican movement (IRM) on the international stage⁴.

In the Basque Country and Navarre, protests in support of the Irish hunger strikers were organised in provincial capitals. Meanwhile, Iñaki Ruiz de Pinedo, an abstentionist Herri Batasuna (HB) representative for Álava and an English-speaking party compatriot, Juan Okiñena, were among a raft of international revolutionary and leftist nationalist figures who travelled to Belfast to pay their respects to Sands’ family. Reflecting on this trip more than thirty-five years later, Ruiz de Pinedo recalls what, in hindsight, was perhaps its most significant consequence: “We established a series of contacts which, as I understand it, were to later serve the posterior relations [with Sinn Féin]”⁵.

Beginning with the 1981 Hunger Strike and ending with the Good Friday Agreement (GFA) of 1998, this article tracks the development of radical Basque nationalist-Irish republican relations (in the shape of the Basque *izquierda abertzale* [BIA] and IRM) across the same period. It explores how the transnational relationship between radical Basque nationalists and Irish republicans gradually developed a shared political culture, and how this changing dynamic was periodically reflected through different forms of cultural expression (e.g., music, political art [murals], literature, audiovisual media). Finally, the author suggests that the shared political culture that emerged at the intersection of these two movements could be described as a sort of transnational “imagined community”—to borrow the terminology of Benedict Anderson⁶.

³ McCreesh to ETA, 9 Feb. 1981, Personal correspondence with Danny Morrison. Underline of “death” in original.

⁴ Ed Moloney, *A Secret History of the IRA* (2nd ed.), London, Penguin, 2007, p. 209.

⁵ *Egin*, 06.05.1981; Herri Batasuna, *Herri Batasuna. 20 años de lucha por la libertad*, San Sebastián, Herri Batasuna, 1999, p. 408; Author interview with Iñaki Ruiz de Pinedo (2017) [All interview and print translations by the author unless otherwise stated].

⁶ For Benedict Anderson, the nation is essentially an “imagined political community”. Benedict Anderson, *Imagined Communities* (revised ed.), London, Verso, 2006, p. 6. The academic Steven Howe has previously touched on the idea of transnational “imagined communities”: “The creation of imaginative solidarities, even among quite small groups and even retrospectively or fictively, might have powerful and unexpected long-term effects. If nations are always imagined communities, then

2. “Our Day Will Come; Your Day Will Come. We Will Win!” (1981–8)

Last Revolutionaries Standing

They call it the law, we call it apartheid, internment, conscription, partition and silence,

It’s the law that they make to keep you and me where they think we belong,
 They hide behind steel and bullet-proof glass, machine guns and spies,
 And tell us who suffer the tear gas and the torture that we are in the wrong,
 They took away Sacco, Vanzetti, Connolly and Pearse in their time,
 They came for Newton and Seal, Bobby Sands and some of his friends,
 In Boston, Chicago, Saigon, Santiago, Warsaw and Belfast,
 And places that never make headlines, the list never ends, No time
 for love if they come in the morning, No time to show tears or for
 fears in the morning, No time for goodbye, No time to ask why,
 And the sound of the siren is the cry of the morning⁷.

Notwithstanding the prevailing negative disposition towards Sinn Féin (SF) and the IRA’s armed campaign in the early 1980s across nationalist Ireland (North & South), the bitter-sweet victory and death of Sands triggered an immense emotional response that echoed the hunger strikes of the Irish Revolutionary Period (1912–23)—something the IRM was not slow in taking advantage of⁸. Moreover, and as alluded to in the above excerpt from *No Time for Love* (1981) by the Irish folk group Moving Hearts, Sands’ death also conjured up a more universal sentiment: that of an imagined collective, stretching from Boston to Saigon, Santiago to Warsaw and Belfast, all united by a common feeling of persecution and struggle.

Originally penned by the American folk singer Jack Warshaw and released under the title *If They Come in the Morning* (1976), Moving Hearts’ 1981 version of Warshaw’s song replaced the words “Blank Panthers” with “Bobby Sands”, directly emphasising the 1981 Hunger Strikes continuity with other social and national struggles, and more indirectly, reflecting the tendency of political songs, slogans and chants to transcend borders, contexts and time periods (e.g., *We Shall Overcome; Power to the People; ¡No Pasaran!*). Such themes, of a mutual sense of persecution and struggle, and of context equivalence, would become increasingly evident across radical Basque nationalist-Irish republican discourse and relations from the early 1980s onwards. As we shall see, they are also themes that would appear in another updated *Basque* version of *No Time for Love*.

transnations are still more so: clearly more fragile kinds of imagining, but by the very same token more dependent on the power of the imagination”. Stephen Howe: “AFTERWORD Transnationalisms Good, Bad, Real, Imagined, Thick and Thin”, *Interventions*, 4:1, 2002, pp. 79–88 (quote on p. 87).

⁷ <https://www.bobbysandstrust.com/multimedia/songs-lyrics/#7> (02.08.2021).

⁸ *An Phoblacht/Republican News (AP/RN)*, 09.05.1981; *AP/RN*, 20.06.1981; *AP/RN*, 04.07.1981.

Following Bobby Sands’ death, coverage of the IRM became more pronounced, and pointed, in the radical Basque nationalist-oriented *Punto y Hora de Euskal Herria* (PHEH). For example, an editorial published in late May 1981 remarked how:

[t]he death of Bobby Sands, and probably a few more of his comrades as you read this, is one of the most remarkable acts of institutional terrorism in recent times. [...] The IRA political prisoners are being mistreated, tortured ... and the iron woman, the Thatcher—madam would be a title that does not correspond to her—lets them die in cold blood, and takes advantage of the legality of state terrorism. But freedom always wins, and the Irish are ready to achieve it⁹.

Interviews were carried out the same month with IRA leader Seamus Twomey and SF’s ‘Roving Ambassador’ in Europe, Richard Behal, with a PHEH journalist noting how “[t]alking to Richard Behal, given the theme of Northern Ireland, is like talking about home, it’s like talking about our own country...”. Extracts of Bobby Sands’ prison diaries would also appear in PHEH later that year, as well as an interview with Sands’ brother, Sean, who was invited to the Basque Country to speak about the strike¹⁰.

As the hunger strike continued, José Ramon Peñagarikano of Eusko Iraultzarako Alderdia (EIA)—the de facto political wing of ETA-pm (political-military) and HB’s direct rival on the Basque nationalist left spectrum—invited his party comrades to mount a campaign of support and to petition British diplomats¹¹. Peñagarikano, as an able French, Italian, German and English speaker, had naturally gravitated towards the international relations department of EIA. He had also, in October 1977, become the first Basque party representative to officially attend and address a SF *Ard Fheis* (Annual Assembly), receiving a standing ovation. Together with Richard Behal and SF President Ruairí Ó Brádaigh, Peñagarikano helped to forge what he describes as a “cuadrilla” (gang) of sorts between the two parties in the late 1970s and early 1980s¹².

In November 1981, after the deaths of ten of the hunger strikers, Peñagarikano attended a rather more sombre *Ard Fheis*¹³. Tributes paid to the hunger strikers aside, this *Ard Fheis* was to be remembered for the senior republican Danny Morrison’s famous “armalite and ballot box” speech, in which the Belfast man signposted the IRM’s post-hunger strike strategy of marrying SF electoral gains with political violence¹⁴.

⁹ PHEH, 15–22.05.1981.

¹⁰ PHEH, 08–15.05.1981; PHEH, 15–22.05.1981; PHEH, 25.09–02.10.1981; PHEH, 04–18.09.1981.

¹¹ *Hitz*, no. 12, May 1981.

¹² *An Phoblacht*, 26.10.1977; Author interview with José Ramón Peñagarikano (2017).

¹³ *AP/RN*, 05.11.1981.

¹⁴ Moloney, *A Secret History of the IRA* (2nd ed.), pp. 208–15.

1981 would also be Peñagarikano's last (documented) attendance at a SF *Ard Fheis*. As he and others from the EIA orbit recall, with the winding down of ETA-pm and EIA's de facto acceptance of the Spanish Transition, the strategic direction of EIA increasingly ran contrary to the IRM's dual political-military approach. Consequently, EIA's relationship with SF was let slide¹⁵.

While EIA and ETA-pm were accommodating themselves to the Spanish Transition, HB's firm rejection of said agreement had been supported by 15% of Basque voters at the 1979 Spanish General Election—a multiple of the EIA-led coalition Euskadiko Ezkerra (EE) across the Basque Country and Navarre. Also doubling down in its resolve was ETA-m (military), with the organisation claiming eighty-one mortal victims in 1980 alone¹⁶. Akin to the prevailing relationship dynamic between SF and the IRA, Herri Batasuna (as the political component of the *izquierda abertzale*) was to act as the political wing of ETA-m (hereafter simply ETA).

It was within this context—that of the IRM and BIA's respective, emerging political-military 'Long War' strategies—that a HB delegate, the aforementioned Juan Okiñena, attended and spoke at the SF *Ard Fheis* of November 1983¹⁷. In the grand scheme of things, a new international Basque delegate (and party) was hardly a big deal for SF; however, in terms of the trajectory of radical Basque nationalist-Irish republican relations, the changeover was significant.

Drawing Basque-Irish Parallels

The early 1980s saw something of a generational shift in SF with Gerry Adams and his "kitchen cabinet" ascending to power within the party. Broadly coinciding with Adams' replacement of Ruairí Ó Brádaigh as party president, Richard Behal (the other hitherto leading Irish-Basque node within the IRM) stood down as head of SF's Foreign Affairs Bureau (FAB). Under new leadership, SF began to primarily ally itself in discursive terms to the South African and Palestinian struggles¹⁸. Meanwhile, in the Basque Country, both

¹⁵ Author interview with José Ramón Peñagarikano (2017); Author interview with Eduardo "Teo" Uriarte (2016); Author interview with Javier Olaverri Zazpe (2017).

¹⁶ <https://app.congreso.es/consti/elecciones/generales/resultados.jsp?fecha=01/03/1979> (01.08.2021); Gaizka Fernández Soldevilla, "¿Al Borde del Abismo? La Violencia Política (y sus Víctimas) durante la Transición" [in Gaizka Fernández Soldevilla, María Jiménez Ramos (coords.), *1980. El Terrorismo Contra La Transición*, Madrid, Tecnos, 2020], pp. 19–48 (specifically p. 26).

¹⁷ *AP/RN*, 17.11.1983; Moloney, *A Secret History of the IRA* (2nd ed.), pp. 150–1; Gaizka Fernández Soldevilla, "The origins of ETA: between Francoism and democracy, 1958–1981" [in Rafael Leonisio, Fernando Molina, Diego Muro (eds.), *ETA's Terrorist Campaign. From Violence to Politics, 1968–2015*, London and New York, Routledge, 2016], pp. 19–34 (specifically p. 30).

¹⁸ SF's "kitchen cabinet" is a term used by commentators to describe Gerry Adams' close allies and associates. See: Brian Feeney, *Sinn Féin. A Hundred Turbulent Years*, Dublin, O'Brien Press, 2002, p. 383. On SF's international relations from this period, see: Martyn Frampton, "'Squaring the circle': the foreign policy of Sinn Féin, 1983–1989", *Irish Political Studies*, vol. 19, 2, 2004, pp. 43–63; Adrian Guelke, "The Peace Process in South Africa, Israel and Northern Ireland: A Farewell to

HB and ETA tended to look towards Latin America for international references and support¹⁹.

The above paragraph notwithstanding, there was still plenty to unite radical Basque nationalists and Irish republicans throughout the early-to-mid 1980s in discursive terms around their respective struggles and experiences of state persecution. Some examples from 1984 alone should suffice in illustrating this case. For instance, a BBC documentary titled “The Basques”, aired in March 1984, was wryly noted in the IRM organ *An Phoblacht/Republican News (AP/RN)* as exposing “many similarities” between the Irish and Basques cases—a sentiment echoed in a *PHEH* review of the same programme²⁰. Basque-Irish parallels were also drawn between a recent assassination attempt on Gerry Adams and the “Dirty War” (1983–7) of the Spanish-government-backed *Grupos Antiterroristas de Liberación (GAL)* in the Basque Country:

The dirty war is also present in Northern Ireland. The Northern Irish situation and that of the Basque Country, although with logical differences, seem to run parallel from one corner of Europe to the other. Even this week the media highlighted the exchange between Minister [José] Barrionuevo and British experts in the fight against Northern Ireland’s ‘terrorism’²¹.

Having fully recovered from the recent attack on his life, Adams gave an “exclusive” interview to *PHEH* at the SF *Ard Fheis* in November 1984, in which he reflected on the republican movement’s “great sympathy” for the Basque people and “their struggle”:

We view the Basque people and their struggle with great sympathy as there are many characteristics that unite us. Both peoples suffer similar forms of repression, as can be seen in regard to extraditions. [...] Both peoples are on the road to liberation and the progress of one gives strength to the other; the victory of one people is the victory of all peoples²².

Also appearing at the 1984 *Ard Fheis*, for the second year in a row, was HB’s Juan Okiñena. Reportedly joined by “an unnamed ETA member”, during his intervention Okiñena echoed Adams in speaking out against the French extradition of ETA militants to Spain and the forced expulsion of others. Finally, rounding off the year, and reflecting mutual concerns around the Irish and Basque languages, SF FAB representatives Denis Donaldson and Bairbre

Arms?”, *Irish Studies in International Affairs*, vol. 5, 1994, pp. 93–106.

¹⁹ Author interview with Joseba Álvarez (2017); Author interview with Alexander Ugalde Zubiri (2017); Florencio Domínguez Iribarren, *Josu Ternera: Una Vida En ETA*, Madrid, La Esfera de los libros, 2006, p. 90.

²⁰ *AP/RN*, 15.03.1984; *PHEH*, 16–23.03.1984.

²¹ *PHEH*, 16–23.03.1984.

²² *PHEH*, 23–30.11.1984; *AP/RN*, 20.12.1984.

de Brún spoke at a conference on minority languages in Italy, where they were joined by a HB delegation²³.

The following year, SF participated in Northern Ireland local elections for the first time since proscription of the party had been lifted in 1974. Exceeding all expectations the party won fifty-nine seats on a vote share of 12%²⁴. One of the newly elected SF councillors was Pat Rice. Born in south Armagh in 1941, Rice took up an opportunity in 1968 to teach English in the Basque city of San Sebastián, where he lived and worked until 1971. Returning to Northern Ireland, he had become active in the republican movement; by the mid-1980s he was working in SF's international and cultural departments. As a Spanish-speaking SF councillor with personal experience and knowledge of Basque affairs, Rice became a sounding board for all things Basque-related within the party. He would also become the main SF interlocutor with HB—a status reflected in him receiving an award from Sortu (a HB successor party) in 2017 in recognition of his decades of “solidarity”²⁵.

One of Rice's first overseas trips as a SF councillor was to a Conference of Western European Stateless Nations (including Basque representation), held over three days in Barcelona in December 1985. According to a subsequent report in *AP/RN*:

On the final day of the conference, in an act of solidarity with the Irish national struggle, a telegram was sent to Margaret Thatcher protesting against the arrest of 18 Sinn Féin members; and the whole international committee with the flags of the various nations, demonstrated outside the British consulate in Barcelona where the text of the telegram was handed in²⁶.

As the ultimate *bête noire* of Irish republicanism, the IRA had attempted to assassinate Margaret Thatcher (and as many of her cabinet ministers as possible) in the ‘Brighton hotel bombing’ of October 1984. While not quite achieving the same level of infamy she acquired in Ireland, Thatcher was similarly excoriated in *PHEH* and other radical Basque nationalist publications throughout the 1980s as the global figurehead (alongside US President Ronald Reagan) of deregulated capitalism. Perhaps inevitably, she would also end up targeted in song by a Basque ‘radical rock’ group, with Baldin Bada's anthem *Tatxer* (1986) containing the following lyrics:

²³ *AP/RN*, 08.11.1984.

²⁴ <https://www.ark.ac.uk/elections/gallsum.htm#lg> (04.08.2021).

²⁵ <http://erria.eus/elkarriketak/an-cara-eireannach-el-amigo-irlandes-de-losas-vascosas> (11.08.21); Author interview with Pat Rice (2017).

²⁶ *AP/RN*, 09.01.1986.

Mrs. Tatxer, child of a whore
Great Britain, land of liberty
You can shit as much as you want
Belfast — very typical
Belfast — a thorn
Belfast — in your dirty pussy
IRA! Republican Army — IRA!
You escaped from the hotel
But tomorrow?²⁷

In July 1986, SF publicly demonstrated its solidarity with “Basque political prisoners” in Dublin when the party tried to disrupt a wreath-laying service led by the Spanish King Juan Carlos I. In what *AP/RN* referred to as “a dignified tribute to the Basque people”, SF members attempted to stage a parallel service of their own, during which they reportedly “carried the national flag of Euskadi and placards in Basque, Irish and English” and “laid [a] wreath, which bore a tribute to all who have fought and died in the freedom struggle of the Basque people of Euskadi [and] in opposition to the Spanish state’s occupation of Euskadi [...]”²⁸.

In November 1986, Okiñena and the “historic” ETA founder José Luis Álvarez Enparantza (*Txillardegí*) appeared at SF’s *Ard Fheis*²⁹. It was the fourth year in a row that a HB delegate had attended and spoken. In tandem with the bedding down of party-political relations between SF and HB—usually channeled through Pat Rice or FAB head Ted Howell, “who [Rice] always consulted”³⁰—the first hints of more *ad hoc* organisational links between radical Basque nationalist and Irish republican actors were also beginning to emerge across prisoner, European (and later still, language, women and youth) relationship strands.

Towards a Shared Political Culture

Although Sinn Féin has links with the Basque national liberation movement, in the form of the patriotic coalition, Herri Batasuna, represented now for a number of years at the *Ard Fheis*, this was the first year [1987] that a substantial Basque contingent took part in the annual international [Anti-Internment] commemoration. More than 50 people from Euskadi arrived in Belfast on Saturday to take part in Sunday’s parade in West Belfast in which they marched behind the green, white, and red flag of their country, the *Ikurriña*. The Falls Road echoed to the cries in Basque of support for their struggle and ours and the

²⁷ *PHEH*, 04-11.11.1983; *PHEH*, 27.04-04.05.1984; *PHEH*, 19.10.1984. I am grateful to AF for a very literal translation of the lyrics of *Tatxer*.

²⁸ *AP/RN*, 03.07.1986.

²⁹ Herri Batasuna, *Herri Batasuna. 20 años de lucha por la libertad*, p. 407.

³⁰ Author interview with Pat Rice (2017).

crowd applauded warmly. Most of the group were members of Herri Batasuna, which has the same political objectives as the Basque guerrilla army, ETA. The Basques were billeted locally, taken on a tour of points of political interest, met members of the United Campaign Against Plastic Bullets, besides attending and contributing to a number of very enjoyable social functions³¹.

From the late 1970s onwards, the constellation of sectors that orbited around ETA (e.g., HB, Koordinadora Abertzale Sozialista [KAS], Jarrai, Gestoras pro Amnistía, Askapena) tended to style themselves as forming part of a broader Movimiento de Liberación Nacional Vasco (MLNV)³². Operating outside the Basque political mainstream, the MLNV helped to partly insulate ETA—the MLNV’s vanguard—from mounting external criticism³³. Similarly, and to borrow the Chinese revolutionary Mao Tse-tung’s famous “fish and water” analogy on guerrilla insurgents, the IRA also required a certain degree of social movement undergirding and/or local support to survive as a relevant organisation. Indeed, this was arguably even more pertinent to republicans given that blanket censorship completely starved SF of publicity until the 1990s³⁴. How did the broader social movement cosmologies of radical Basque nationalism and Irish republicanism begin to interlock from the late 1980s onwards?

We have seen how the 1981 Hunger Strike sparked an increasingly prominent and sympathetic interest in the IRM across radical Basque nationalist discourse. This trajectory continued into the mid-to-late 1980s with reporters from *PHEH* regularly filing articles from Belfast on the Irish republican experience, including a sixty-page *Cuaderno* special published in December 1986³⁵. Instead of simply reading about the republican heartlands of Northern Ireland, a new initiative (described in the above extract from *AP/RN*) saw a large, organised group of HB-led radical Basque nationalist activists arrive in Belfast, for the first time, in the summer of 1987. As well as participating in smaller local events, the Basque group took to the streets to march alongside their republican comrades in marking the controversial introduction of ‘Internment without Trial’ (1971) in Northern Ireland.

The following year, in August 1988, a similar Basque group returned to Belfast. This time their visit coincided with the first ever *Féile an Phobail*

³¹ *AP/RN*, 13.08.1987.

³² Jesús Casquete, *En el nombre de Euskal Herria. La religión política del nacionalismo vasco radical*, Madrid, Tecnos, 2009, p. 65.

³³ Imanol Murua, *Ending ETA’s Armed Campaign. How and why the Basque armed group abandoned violence*, London and New York, Routledge, 2017, p. 25.

³⁴ Mao Tse-tung, *On Guerrilla Warfare*, New York, Dover Publications, 2005, p. 93; Agnès Maillot, *New Sinn Féin: Irish Republicanism in the Twenty-first Century*, London and New York, Routledge, 2005, pp. 74–6.

³⁵ *PHEH*, December 1986 Cuaderno. See also: *PHEH*, 01–08.10.1987; *PHEH*, 19–26.11.1987; *PHEH*, 03–10.03.1988.

(Festival of the People), a weeklong community celebration of West Belfast arts and culture, closely associated with SF. This second Basque contingent, consisting of a "party of 17 Basque activists, members of the KAS coalition [...] a broad front for Basque national liberation", spent five days in Northern Ireland, meeting housing and language activists, as well as former "H Block" prisoners, before again participating in the anti-internment rally in Belfast³⁶. A former ETA member, who was also a significant node in radical Basque nationalist-Irish republican relations during the 1980s and 1990s, has suggested that annual Basque "solidarity" trips to Belfast (and usually Derry) of this kind, aimed at alleviating SF's political "isolation", first came about as a practical response to a SF councillor's request³⁷.

One of the Basque visitors to Belfast in 1988 was a young HB councillor, Pernando Barrena. Reflecting on the trip almost thirty years later, Barrena recalled the "feeling of a very close, *shared political culture* between republicans and people in the Basque *abertzale* left" at the time³⁸. This sentiment was also reflected in a new, updated version of *No Time for Love*, released by the seminal Basque group Hertzainak in 1988. As well as direct references to four of the 1981 hunger strikers (Hughes, McElwee, O'Hara, Sands), Hertzainak's lyrics added "Gasteiz" (Vitoria-Gasteiz) to the rolloff of social and political activists united by a common sentiment of struggle and imagined collective solidarity from Santiago to Saigon³⁹.

Meanwhile, far removed from the streetscapes of Belfast and Gasteiz, HB's Member of the European Parliament (MEP) Txema Montero (elected in June 1987) presented the case for Basque *and* Irish self-determination at European Parliament level. With SF having no European deputies of their own at the time, one leading party figure, Alex Maskey, wryly referred to Montero as "our representative" during an interview with a Basque publication: "[...] [H]e is the voice of an oppressed nation who speaks as well for my nation in front of the entire European community"⁴⁰.

Inexplicably, within days of Montero's impressive 1987 electoral achievement, a bomb left by an ETA commando in the boot of car at a Barcelona supermarket killed twenty-one people, incinerating many of the victims in a huge fireball. ETA's 'Hipercor' terrorist attack caused outrage across the Spanish political spectrum and drew condemnation from some quarters within the BIA, including from Montero⁴¹.

³⁶ *AP/RN*, 18.08.1988; Author interview with Irish source.

³⁷ Author interview with Basque source. Further research is needed to verify this claim.

³⁸ Author interview with Pernando Barrena (2017). Italics by author for emphasis.

³⁹ <https://www.cancioneros.com/letras/cancion/1742029/no-time-for-love-hertzainak> (05.08.21).

⁴⁰ Author interview with José María "Txema" Montero (2016); *Azkatzen*, No. 12, November 1990.

⁴¹ Murua, *Ending ETA's Armed Campaign*, p. 164.

Later that same year, Montero attended SF's *Ard Fheis*, where he was welcomed on stage to "thunderous applause". A subsequent report in *AP/RN* of the European deputy's speech once again reflected the mutual concerns around prisoners and extradition that had underscored much of the reciprocal BIA-IRM discourse since 1981:

Like Irish republicans, the Basque freedom movement is now threatened with the wholesale extradition of political refugees, in their case from France to Euskadi. Montero's final message brought delegates to their feet as he told them: '*Tiocfaidh ár lá, tiocfaidh bhur is, beirimid bua!*' [Our day will come; your day will come. We will win!]⁴².

Days after Montero's intervention at the *Ard Fheis*, an IRA bomb placed close to a war memorial cenotaph in Enniskillen, Co. Fermanagh, killed eleven people. Akin to ETA's 'Hipercor' attack, the Enniskillen atrocity resulted in widespread condemnation of the IRA across Ireland and Britain⁴³.

Rounding off 1987 on a similarly bleak note, a huge ETA car-bomb killed eleven people, including five children, at a Guardia Civil barracks in Zaragoza on 11 December 1987. Following the attack, the Spanish government called off informal talks that had begun with ETA in Algiers. Moreover, one month later, the "Ajuria-Enea Pact" was signed in Vitoria-Gasteiz. This agreement, between all the major Basque parties apart from HB, effectively drew a *cordon sanitaire* between those who renounced violence and strove for their objectives within the established political framework, and those who did not.

Foregrounded by HB attendance of Bobby Sands' funeral in May 1981 and beginning with the annual attendance of HB representatives at the SF *Ard Fheis* in 1983, HB and SF developed and consolidated a public, political-party relationship throughout the 1980s. More broadly, parallel movement 'Long War' strategies (political-military) and a shared sense of juridical and political persecution (extraditions, "Dirty War") acted as a catalyst for discursive-led engagement (in print), the beginning of annual group visits (1987 onwards), and the gradual development of more *ad hoc* transnational contacts and relations across the BIA and IRM. Increasingly isolated towards the late 1980s, Irish republicans and radical Basque nationalist activists were to find solace in each other's politics and outlook, laying the groundwork of a nascent shared political culture at the intersection of the BIA and IRM that would become much more evident in the 1990s.

⁴² *AP/RN*, 05.11.1987.

⁴³ Moloney, *A Secret History of the IRA* (2nd ed.), pp. 340–2.

3. “Two Peoples, One Struggle” (1989–98)

Self-Determination

In March 1988, three unarmed IRA members were controversially shot and killed close to a service station in Gibraltar by the British Special Air Service. The case of the “Gibraltar 3”, coupled with the subsequent “Milltown Cemetery Massacre” and “Corporals Killings”, amounted to what for many was a two-week nadir in the seemingly intractable Northern Ireland “Troubles”⁴⁴. Yet despite this sense of hopelessness, secret backchannel communications of what would become known as the ‘Irish Peace Process’ were already taking place⁴⁵. More publicly, in November 1989, the Northern Ireland Secretary of State Peter Brooke stated that the IRA could not be defeated militarily. Brooke also refused to rule out comprehensive talks with SF in the absence of IRA violence⁴⁶.

While commentators differ on the motivation behind Brooke’s remarks, his statement clearly signalled to the IRM the potential for a new, negotiated resolution (inclusive of SF and, by extension, the IRA) to the conflict in Northern Ireland. Looking at these developments and the broader emerging post-Cold War context, radical Basque nationalists may have wondered if a new political dispensation could also be achieved with Spain? Within days of Brooke’s comments, *PHEH* published an article titled “El Espejo Irlandés” (The Irish Mirror):

The latest political developments in the UK are highly significant and deserve calm and serious reflection from all spheres of politics, both from the state and the Basque [Country]. [...] This story has strong analogies—with different nuances, of course—with respect to the Spanish-Euskadi dispute. [...] It is no coincidence that the path of negotiation is open in more and more areas of conflict, Sahara-Morocco, Palestine-Israel, FMLN-Government of El Salvador, FSLN-Contra, French State-Kanak people, British Government-IRA... The time has come to solve the ‘Basque question’ by the same means, since the political and military defeat of those in Euskadi who defend the elementary and simple solution of a fairer and more rational legal-political framework is impossible⁴⁷.

Speaking at a republican rally in Belfast a few months later, HB’s European deputy Txema Montero expressed his desire to see the Basque and Irish peoples “decide their own destiny”. In May he was joined by party colleague Karmelo

⁴⁴ *Irish Times*, 19.03.2018.

⁴⁵ Moloney, *A Secret History of the IRA* (2nd ed.), pp. 261–86, p. 406, pp. 677–9.

⁴⁶ <https://cain.ulster.ac.uk/events/peace/pp8893.htm> (05.08.2021).

⁴⁷ *PHEH*, 30.11–14.12.1989.

Landa for a four-day visit to Ireland, during which the former affirmed his belief that:

[w]ith events in Eastern Europe and South Africa grabbing headlines and becoming an issue of great debate in Europe, the question of self-determination and democracy for all peoples has come to centre stage. We are still raising the issue of Basque and Irish self-determination. I believe the 1990s will see those questions resolved⁴⁸.

Continuing with the same theme, in October 1993 SF's Alex Maskey was presented at a HB rally in Pamplona as part of an "Initiative for a Social Debate on the Right to Self-Determination". Maskey, who one journalist referred to as "the star attraction", addressed the crowd:

You who have inspired us for so long [...] The many forms of oppression used by the Spanish state are similar to those used by the British state to deny us our rights. Many of your forms of struggle, too, are similar to ours. The independence struggle in Ireland has reached a new stage of intensification. We have told the British state 'We will never allow you to govern us in peace'. A negotiated settlement is the only chance for peace. Without negotiation, there will be no peace⁴⁹.

Provoked by the emerging post-Cold War context and the evolving Irish Peace Process, as Montero's and Maskey's comments exemplify, HB and SF discourse around their own and each other's struggles became increasingly grounded in the rhetoric of "self-determination" throughout the early 1990s.

Two months after Maskey's trip to the Basque Country, the "negotiated settlement" that SF sought moved a step closer. The Downing Street Declaration (DSD), signed between the British and Irish governments in December 1993, lent itself to various malleable interpretations of Irish "self-determination". It also, eventually, led to an IRA ceasefire the following year. Whilst acknowledging some of the crucial differences in both cases, for the remainder of the 1990s, radical (and moderate) Basque nationalists tended to draw attention to Britain's effective granting of the *principle* of Irish self-determination. In this way, the "Irish mirror" was regularly utilised as a tool to leverage the Spanish government towards similar ends⁵⁰.

Six months after the DSD, in May 1994, the real "star attraction" of the IRM, Gerry Adams, arrived in the Basque Country for the first time. Landing in Bilbao, Adams was taken on a whistle-stop tour of the Basque Country before holding a press conference in Madrid. Speaking to reporters, he affirmed his

⁴⁸ *AP/RN*, 08.02.1990; *AP/RN*, 10.05.1990.

⁴⁹ *The Independent*, 13.10.1993.

⁵⁰ Niall Cullen, *Gora Rebeldiak! A History of Radical Basque Nationalist-Irish Republican Relations* (PhD dissertation, University of the Basque Country, 2020), pp. 319–30.

view that “lasting peace will be reached in the near future in Ireland as well as in Euskadi”⁵¹. Within weeks of Adams’ visit, a sizeable 10,000 strong “Sinn Féin/Herri Batasuna rally of solidarity” took place in San Sebastián. Led by Karmelo Landa and Pat Rice, the crowd marched from the city centre to Anoeta Stadium, where tributes were reportedly paid to Basque and Irish prisoners⁵².

Symbolising the increasingly warm party relations between SF and HB, a HB-SF declaration was signed in October 1994 in the republican social club of Felons in Belfast. Unlike the revolutionary rhetoric of joint IRA-ETA declarations of the early 1970s, the ‘Felons Declaration’ was grounded in the prevailing post-Cold War and Irish Peace Process metanarratives of “self-determination”, conflict resolution and dialogue:

We fully support the development of the peace process in Ireland and all the measures which make a positive contribution to its achievement. We express our wish that in the conflict that Euskal Herria [Basque Country] is experiencing with the Spanish state, it will be overcome through dialogue⁵³.

Outside of the SF-HB political party dynamic, other relationship strands across the BIA-IRM nexus concerning prisoner advocacy, language and women also became more pronounced from the early 1990s onwards. For instance, in February 1990, a motion was passed at the SF *Ard Fheis* in support of Basque prisoners. Months later, Brendan Hughes, a former OC of the IRA’s ‘Belfast Brigade’ and prominent leader of the hunger strikers, embarked on a ten-day trip to the Basque Country to “gain experience of how broad front politics translate into everyday organisational reality, and of course to offer our experience to and solidarity with the Basque struggle”⁵⁴. In the realm of culture and language, Bairbre de Brún, a then SF activist in the international, cultural and women’s departments (and later, an MEP), recalls:

The Basques, at that stage, in those years, had an MEP [Txema Montero, followed by Karmelo Landa], and we didn’t. So, at that stage, it would have been they who were inviting me into the European Parliament as a way of meeting with other people.

Returning the favour, de Brún helped to launch an English-to-Basque translation of Bobby Sands’ prison writings during a ten-day tour of the Basque Country in 1991⁵⁵. That same year, the BIA’s de facto publishing house Txalaparta

⁵¹ *AP/RN*, 19.05.1994.

⁵² *AP/RN*, 09.06.1994.

⁵³ “Declaración conjunta de las mesas nacionales del Sinn Féin y de Herri Batasuna”, 21 October 1994, Elkarrri, Lazkaoko Beneditarren Fundazioa.

⁵⁴ *AP/RN*, 21.06.1990; *AP/RN*, 06.12.90; *The Captive Voice/An Glór Gafa*. Winter 1990.

⁵⁵ Author interview with Bairbre de Brún (2016); *AP/RN*, 3 October 1991.

translated and produced a Spanish version of Gerry Adams' *The Politics of Irish Freedom*. Fernando Barrena, who was working in Txalaparta at the time, highlights the importance of Adams' book in knitting together the glut of hitherto disparate Irish republican references, figures, events and imagery for a Basque audience:

At the moment [2017], it's easy to get any information in the world in two seconds; but at that time, the Irish reality—we're talking about the early 90s—it was not so easy to know what was happening in a place two-thousand kilometres from here. And you know, the references from here were so few... Ireland, the IRA, the Hunger Strike, the 'Troubles', Gerry Adams... *what else?* [...] When we had the opportunity to publish Gerry Adams' book, I remember that for a small publishing house, for us, it was important [...] it was important to offer information about what was going on [in Ireland], because the feeling of sympathy was quite significant⁵⁶.

By August 1991, the number of radical Basque nationalist activists attending the annual *Féile an Phobail*/Anti-Internment double-header in Belfast had swollen to 150, "made up of representatives from organisations in Euskadi, including cultural, political prisoners, youth and ecological groups"⁵⁷.

1992 continued in a similar vein. In February, HB staged a protest outside the British Consul in Bilbao after three SF activists had been gunned down in Belfast by a loyalist paramilitary group. Askapena—a sort of international relations/outreach wing of the MLNV—extended its solidarity with the "relatives and friends of those killed" and encouraged SF to continue in its "struggle for Irish freedom". The following year, Askapena sent its first official 'Brigada' to Northern Ireland. Subsequent encounters between Askapena and Irish republicans, which typically brought language activists and ex-prisoners together, were apparently "set out months in advance" by an Irish "intermediary" in the Basque Country and "centred on Sinn Féin guidance". Interestingly, several grassroots activists interviewed by this author have cited an audio-tape collection of Irish 'rebel songs', issued by (or possibly *through*) Askapena, as triggering an interest in the Irish case⁵⁸.

In March 1992, the MLNV women's group Egizán invited Aine Connolly of SF's international department to speak in the Basque Country. Connolly also met with the families of ETA prisoners dispersed in jails across Spain. Later that month, the *AP/RN* editor and SF FAB representative Mícheál Mac Donncha attended a prisoner-themed conference in Aránzazu, Guipúzcoa, while in June, SF activists picketed the Spanish Embassy in Dublin in solidarity with Basque prisoners⁵⁹.

⁵⁶ Author interview with Fernando Barrena (2017).

⁵⁷ *AP/RN*, 01.08.1991; *Azkatzen*, December 1991; *AP/RN*, 08.08.1991; *AP/RN*, 15.08.1991.

⁵⁸ Author interviews with various Basque sources; Author interview with Irish source.

⁵⁹ *AP/RN*, 27.02.1992; *AP/RN*, 19.03.1992; *AP/RN*, 09.04.1992; *AP/RN*, 11.06.1992.

Reflecting on the ever-closer relations between both movements over the previous few years, HB representative Karlos Rodríguez spoke to a large crowd in Belfast in August 1992:

For many years, Ireland and the Basque Country have shown a real and sincere solidarity [from] one to each other. This solidarity between Irish and Basque people comes from the fact that our fights as nations towards freedom have many things in common. It is a natural feeling between two countries in struggle. During our stay in the north of Ireland, we the Basque people have been visiting many republican prisoners in British prisons. We have had the opportunity to learn more about the repression here, which is very similar to Spanish repression of our people⁶⁰.

Unlike the routine visits of HB political representatives to the SF *Ard Fheis*, which, begun in 1983, usually took place in the leafy environs of Dublin city’s Mansion House, the Basque-Irish relations outlined since the first annual Basque pilgrimage to Belfast in 1987 increasingly occurred across more loosely organised prisoner, language, international and women’s strands, in an arguably more conducive social space for transfers of ideologies, strategies, tactics and “solidarity”. Ideas shared, knowledge exchanged and personal relationships forged and/or reinforced, this emerging and overlapping, shared BIA-IRM political culture was symbolised by way of a Basque-Irish mural in August 1992.

Painted by “members of the Basque delegation” and “Sliabh Dubh Sinn Féin cumann” (a local SF branch) on Rosssnareen Avenue, Belfast, the mural consisted of silhouetted figures standing in front of Irish and Basque flags. Written in the Irish and Basque languages was “Dhá Chine Aon Choimhlint” and “Bi Herri Borroka Bat” [Two Peoples, One Struggle]. Commenting on the simple message, a reporter for *AP/RN* surmised the theme of the mural as:

[...] straightforward: the Basque and Irish struggle is the same for both people. That this message is on a wall in West Belfast is testimony to the links of solidarity and respect that has built up over the years between the republican people in Ireland and the people of Euskadi⁶¹.

The Basque Mirror

Coinciding with the annual influx of radical Basque nationalist activists to Belfast and the painting of a second Basque-Irish mural in the city in August 1995, *AP/RN* contributor Brian Campbell penned an article titled “Learning

⁶⁰ *AP/RN*, 13.08.1992.

⁶¹ *AP/RN*, 27.08.1992.

from the Basque Struggle”. Breaking with the usual republican coverage of the BIA’s juridical and political “oppression”, Campbell cited conversations he had recently had with several *Alfabetatze eta Euskalduntze Koordinakundea* (a Basque language group) and *Askapena* activists in San Sebastián and Vitoria-Gasteiz. In the view of Campbell, there was much more to learn from the “Basque struggle”:

A characteristic of the Basque struggle has always been that it ranges across all aspects of political and cultural life. Organisations of women, youth, environmentalists, organisations to promote Euskera, the Basque language, to build links with foreign struggles, to campaign on behalf of political prisoners, to combat drug abuse, to organise festivals, all exist independently. Some are members of KAS, a coordinating forum which includes ETA and Herri Batasuna. But it is the large number of organisations which touch every area of life and essentially their independence, that makes for a political culture bursting with energy. [...] In the modern world the political party is only one element in a political project that touches every area of life. In the Basque Country, Herri Batasuna has a definite role but not an all-encompassing one. By having a freedom movement made up of many diverse elements, the desire to see everyone having their part to play in the struggle can be fulfilled⁶².

According to Pat Rice, elements within SF had, since the 1980s, periodically looked towards the MLNV with a view to building up a similar “umbrella movement” to their Basque counterparts. Such ideas had amounted to little, however. Whether by coincidence or not, two months after Campbell’s piece appeared in *AP/RN*, Barry McElduff, a SF representative, organised a youth initiative known as *Glór na nOg* (Voice of the Youth) in the small northern town of Carrickmore. A follow-up debate was held in Belfast, during which youth concerns around education, homelessness, unemployment and drug abuse were raised⁶³. Among this group was a young SF republican from Dublin named Eoin Ó Broin.

According to Ó Broin, it became apparent that “the party was quite open to some sort of youth-led initiative”. Ó Broin and others decided to “set up a youth-led, youth wing”. Eager to avoid aping the youth wings of mainstream Irish parties (specifically Fine Gael and Fianna Fáil), the young republicans looked abroad to see “where else can we learn from that might provide us thoughts, ideas and experiences”⁶⁴.

In the spring of 1996 Ó Broin unexpectedly received a phone call from an activist in the international office of Jarrai. On the other end of the line

⁶² *AP/RN*, 10.08.1995.

⁶³ *AP/RN*, 26.10.1995.

⁶⁴ Author interview with Eoin Ó Broin (2015).

was Josetxo Otegi Arrugaeta. He and his comrades were in the final stages of organising a Gazte Topagunea (Youth Encounter)⁶⁵. Ó Broin recalls:

[Otegi Arrugaeta] said they’d like to establish a relationship [...] it came out of nowhere, it was completely coincidental, but it was, at the same time... we were doing all this stuff ourselves [organising a youth movement], and we said ‘great’⁶⁶.

A notice published on 28 March 1996 in *AP/RN* carried information on the upcoming event as well as a direct phone number to Jarrai’s office: “Jarrai has extended an open invitation to young Irish republicans. Bring your tent”⁶⁷.

By the end of 1996 the nascent SF youth initiative *Glór na nOg* had “ceased to function”. In early 1997 the remnants of the group came together to discuss how best to progress. According to the group’s own account of what happened next:

A Basque youth organisation called Jarrai had come to our attention and we felt that it may be appropriate for us to make contact with them to see if there was anything to be learned from them. In March 97 a delegate was sent to Euskal Herria for 3 weeks to learn as much as possible about their youth movement⁶⁸.

This delegate was Eoin Ó Broin. In March 1997 Ó Broin travelled to the Basque Country. He was, in his own words, “blown away” by the experience⁶⁹. The Dubliner subsequently catalogued details of a Mendi Martxa (Mountain March), the controversial death of an ETA member Jose Zabala, and documented radical Basque youth movement culture more generally across a series of articles that appeared in *AP/RN*:

For three days we were completely independent, from the police, from the government, and from a culture of consumption and apathy which across Europe is working to pacify more and more young people. The Mendi Martxa was more than just an event, it was an investment in the future, the future of both the left-nationalist and Basque society as a whole⁷⁰.

On Ó Broin’s return from the Basque Country, a strategy document combining aspects gleaned from the now-defunct *Glór na nOg* initiative and new ideas picked up from Jarrai was proposed to Belfast SF. The proposal

⁶⁵ Author interview with Josetxo Otegi Arrugaeta (2016).

⁶⁶ Author interview with Eoin Ó Broin (2015).

⁶⁷ *AP/RN*, 28.03.1996.

⁶⁸ “Sinn Féin Youth. 1st National Congress. Annual Report”, 17 October 1998, PH1607, Linenhall Library (LL).

⁶⁹ Author interview with Eoin Ó Broin (2015).

⁷⁰ *AP/RN*, 27.03.1997; *AP/RN*, 03.04.1997; *AP/RN*, 05.06.1997.

envisaged the city becoming a testing ground for the construction of a new republican youth movement. When Belfast SF agreed to the proposition, Sinn Féin Youth (SFY) formally came into existence in August 1997. Three representatives from Jarrai attended its inauguration⁷¹.

While the formation of SFY was an internal republican initiative, it is clear that Jarrai heavily informed SFY's approach. Indeed, one of the chief criticisms of *Glór na nOg* had been that "it was focused primarily on discussion, [gaining] a reputation for being too elitist and at times too academic in approach". Ó Broin's trip to the Basque Country in March 1997 opened up a radical new vista for young republicans as to how a youth movement could be organised and run⁷². In *AP/RN*, Ó Broin stated:

[...] although earlier youth initiatives such as *Glór na nOg* have failed, we have learned from those mistakes and are building that understanding into our work. Our focus will be on generating as much street activity as possible, whether in the form of protests, militant actions, stickers or posters. Bringing young people onto the street and using politics to reclaim those streets for ourselves will be our primary aim⁷³.

As one former, prominent republican youth activist put it: "Ó Broin went there, came back and implemented what he saw". Ó Broin would later document the enormous influence that aspects of radical Basque nationalist and youth culture (e.g., *Gazte Topagunea*, Basque 'radical rock', *Gaztetxeak* [Youth Houses], political art/street campaigns) had on him in his first book, *Matxinada*, published in Spanish by Txalaparta, and later in English⁷⁴.

The following Easter (1998), a group of seventeen SFY activists visited the Basque Country. For Ó Broin: "the purpose of the trip was to give our activists the opportunity to learn some new ideas from Jarrai". A "core group" was also tasked with "learning the internal mechanics of Jarrai from local and provincial to national level". Whilst these youths were high up in the Basque mountains, breaking news from Belfast of the signing of the GFA began to filter through⁷⁵.

Foregrounding the development of a more intense and asymmetrical dynamic (Irish-to-Basque influence) in post-GFA Basque-Irish transnational relations, a five-strong delegation from Jarrai embarked on a nine-day trip to Ireland in July 1998, "to make a youth orientated analysis of the Irish peace

⁷¹ "Sinn Féin Youth. 1st National Congress. Annual Report", 17 October 1998, PH1607, LL; *AP/RN*, 28.08.1997.

⁷² Author interview with Eoin Ó Broin (2015).

⁷³ *AP/RN*, 28.08.1997.

⁷⁴ Author interview with Irish source; Eoin Ó Broin, *Matxinada: Historia del Movimiento Juvenil Radical Vasco*, Tafalla, Txalaparta, 2004.

⁷⁵ *AP/RN*, 02.04.1998; *AP/RN*, 09.04.1998; *AP/RN*, 30.04.1998.

process to see if there are lessons to be learned for the ongoing conflict in Euskal Herria”. That same month, and indicative once again of the shared political culture at the intersection of these movements and its periodic reflection through the prism of cultural expression, a video production on the “struggle of the Basque prisoners”, titled with the republican slogan “Tiocfaidh ár lá” (“Our Day Will Come”), was disseminated among young Irish republicans⁷⁶.

From the beginning of the ‘Irish mirror’ period in 1989 to the GFA in 1998, the Irish Peace Process context increasingly reflected and impinged upon the dynamics of Basque (and indeed, Basque-Spanish) politics. Largely departing from the 1980s metanarrative of solidarity in the face of isolation and persecution, radical Basque nationalists sought to utilise the ‘Irish mirror’ and in particular the ostensible achievement of Irish “self-determination” as a tool to put pressure on Madrid. In this sense, ever-deepening SF-HB relations in the 1990s perfectly aligned with BIA movement objectives, encapsulated in the words of the then-emerging HB figurehead, Arnaldo Otegi: “If it could happen in Ireland, why not in the Basque Country?”⁷⁷. Good relations with SF also amplified the Basque contention and equivocated both cases within an otherwise largely disinterested anglophone international community. Otegi, for instance, was (and is still) often referred to as the “Basque Gerry Adams”⁷⁸. Alongside the instrumental value of HB-SF relations (to HB), mutual areas of interest and specific movement needs around prisoner advocacy, language rights and youth issues (particularly the formation of SFY) also stimulated and deepened more advanced relations throughout the 1990s, contributing to a ritualised, shared political culture at the intersection of both movements.

4. Conclusion

This article has explored the slow emergence and development of a shared political culture at the intersection of radical Basque nationalism and Irish republicanism from the early 1980s to the late 1990s. In its first phase, as the ‘last revolutionaries standing’ in Western Europe, shared *movement threats* such as extradition, political isolation and “Dirty Wars” in both territories underscored transnational empathy and encouraged the establishment of nexus links. As we have seen, the subsequent intensification and diversification of these relations throughout the 1990s were usually provoked by more specific *movement needs* and *objectives*.

⁷⁶ AP/RN, 02.07.1998; AP/RN, 18.06.1998.

⁷⁷ *Irish Times*, 31.10.1998.

⁷⁸ <https://www.politico.eu/article/arnaldo-otegi-the-basque-gerry-adams/> (17.08.21).

In addition to annual HB attendance at SF *Ard Fheiseanna*; the August influx of radical Basque nationalist activists to Belfast (begun in 1987); and reciprocal trips at youth level around Eastertime (from 1997 onwards); visiting radical Basque nationalist activists to Belfast and others who took up longer residence in the city usually partook in republican rallies, political workshops, visited republican prisoners or were taken to see local community initiatives in areas such as language and housing. In this sense, republican Belfast was the main physical space for the socialisation of this shared political culture. Moreover, recent research reveals that a majority of MLNV activists who have spent time in the city over recent decades (from a controlled sample), became active stakeholders in the IRM's struggle⁷⁹. From attending republican marches to becoming full SF members, Basque activist participation in Irish republicanism also served to emphasise the universal scope of the BIA's struggle and, by extension, reinforce a sense of commitment and legitimacy⁸⁰.

Given that there was already a great deal of symmetry in each movement's respective nationalist political cultures (e.g., commemorations, annual events, heroes, villains and martyrs)⁸¹ and broad consensus around political approaches, the fact that a ritualised Basque-Irish political culture emerged (built around key nexus 'nodes' and 'brokers' such as Okiñena, Rice, Montero, Maskey, Barrena, Ó Broin), should not come as a major surprise. Within this shared intersection, neither 'grassroots' activists nor political 'elites' had to justify who they were, their political views, or outlooks regarding political violence. Cross-mobilisation encouraged cross-fertilisation of normative values and ideals. Moreover, as interactions increased, "bonds become personal as well as political"⁸². Meetings were usually followed by social gatherings, and the differentials in Basque and Irish history glossed over for the narrative of "Two Peoples, One Struggle".

Another indicator of this shared political culture was the way in which the language of each movement and struggle bled into the other. For example, an Ertzaintza officer killed by ETA could be likened to the "equivalent of the RUC [Royal Ulster Constabulary] Special Branch" in republican discourse; the Spanish Constitution "rejected"; and the Spanish Transition "so-called". Meanwhile, on the other side of this transfer, the main Spanish parties (Partido Popular and Partido Socialista Obrero Español) became "unionists"

⁷⁹ Cullen, *Gora Rebeldiak!*, pp. 421–35.

⁸⁰ Pascal Pragnère, "Exporter la guerre – importer la paix. Dimensions transnationales de deux conflits nationalistes. Irlande du Nord, Pays Basque" [in Catherine Maignant (ed.), *La France et l'Irlande: destins croisés 16e-21e siècles*, Lille, CECILLE – Université Lille, 2012], pp. 195–210.

⁸¹ Casquete, *En el nombre de Euskal Herria*, pp. 19–21, pp. 106–8; Raúl López Romo, Gaizka Fernández Soldevilla, "Deuda de sangre. La visión del pasado de ETA y el IRA", *APORTES. Revista de Historia Contemporánea*, vol. 33, no. 97, 2018, pp. 267–94.

⁸² Author interview with Eoin Ó Broin (2015).

in radical Basque nationalist literature⁸³. There were also misunderstandings. For instance, radical Basque nationalist literature would occasionally refer to Northern Ireland as a “nation” and/or express the territory’s right to “self-determination”—notions completely alien to Irish republicanism. Going in the opposite direction, a 1985 report in *AP/RN* that referred to the Basques as having “Home Rule” was subsequently corrected by a letter from HB to the republican periodical⁸⁴.

At the outset it was suggested that the shared political culture that gradually emerged at the intersection of radical Basque nationalist and Irish republican actors across the 1980s and 1990s could be described as a sort of Benedict Anderson-esque, transnational “imagined community”. Periodically reflected in cultural expression, this statement may be said to be true in the following three ways. First, the BIA-IRM nexus was a largely imagined collective. As vividly communicated in *No Time for Love*, or in the bombed-out imagery of Belfast transmitted in *PHEH*, most Basque and Irish activists could read (or even sing) about a greater overarching struggle that was one and the same without ever knowing or visiting the other territory. Second, as an imagined community, the BIA-IRM nexus developed its own patterned rituals (annual encounters at the *Ard Fheis*, August visits from 1987, Easter visits from 1997); symbols (Basque-Irish murals in 1992, 1995, 1997, 2002); slogans (“Two Nations, One Struggle”); and a common metanarrative of struggle in print. Finally, like any imagined community, the BIA-IRM nexus required an “other”—in this case, the Spanish, British, French and Irish states. With mutually unintelligible ideologies, strategies and *praxis*, the very nature of these diametrically opposed non-state and state *weltanschauungen* would have also, undoubtedly, contributed to and insulated the shared political culture at the intersection of the BIA and IRM.

⁸³ *AP/RN*, 28.03.1996; Iñaki Iriondo, Ramón Sola, *Mañana, Euskal Herria. Entrevista con Arnaldo Otegi*, Bilbao, Baigorri Argitaletxea, 2005, p. 76; *AP/RN*, 01.12.2005; *AP/RN*, 16.06.2005.

⁸⁴ *PHEH*, 19.10.1984; *PHEH*, Cuaderno April 1985; *AP/RN*, 13.06.1985.

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